



# Washington Teachers' Union

Jacqueline Pogue Lyons, *President*

1239 Pennsylvania Avenue, SE | Washington, D.C. 20003 | 202-517-1477 | [www.WTULocal6.net](http://www.WTULocal6.net)

## Council of the District of Columbia Fiscal Year 2022 Budget

June 3, 2021

Testimony of

Jacqueline Pogue Lyons, *President*  
Washington Teachers' Union  
AFT Local 6

Good afternoon. I am Jacqueline Pogue Lyons, President of the Washington Teachers' Union (WTU). I have taught in public schools across Washington, D.C. for twenty-eight years. My last teaching assignment was as a kindergarten teacher in Savoy Elementary. As president of the WTU, I am committed to fighting for social and educational justice for the students of the District of Columbia as well as the well-being of District teachers.

The last year has been trying for us all. Teachers were thrust into new learning environments, required to learn and adapt to new technologies on a dime with minimal training or preparation. With the suspension of the District's seat time requirement, we're seeing DCPS report strong attendance data; however, in many school communities teachers are reporting to the WTU that their classroom attendance is miniscule, whether their students are supposed to be attending in-person or virtually. We recognized that we will have a lot of work ahead of us.

As we look at the Fiscal Year 2022 budget put forth by the Bowser administration, I'd like to thank her for increasing investments in per-student funding and at-risk weights for our students. We know that schools will need additional resources, not less, to combat the gaps that face our students. However, the city's education budget continues to suffer from the lack of a comprehensive plan for education. It is long past time that we end competition for limited dollars and work to coordinate across sectors to ensure that every student in the District receives a high-quality education. Until we have a coordinated, cross sector plan, we will continue to see funds diverted from our classrooms to administrators and fail to see the long-term, sustained investments our students need to thrive regardless of their zip code or lottery results.

As we look ahead to the fall and plans to reopen our school buildings for the 2021-2022 school year, the WTU believes that our city needs to make three key investments to help our students regain lost learning and close the long-standing and growing achievement gaps (see Appendix 1) that plague our city. Smaller classrooms. Co-teaching models. And, School Librarians. I hope this committee will urge DCPS to reconsider its budget priorities and invest in these solutions using both local and federal funds, for which these priorities are allowable uses.

First, **Reduced Class Size**. Research shows that students in smaller classes perform better in all subjects and on all assessments when compared to their peers in larger classes. In smaller classes, students tend to be as much as one to two months ahead in content knowledge, and they score higher on standardized assessments. ***The Washington Teachers' Union believes that class size should be capped at 20 students in elementary schools that serve more than 65% students who are classified as "at-risk." In Middle and High School ELA classes should be capped at 20 students in schools that serve more than 65% of students who are classified as "at-risk."***

Second, **Adoption of Co-Teaching and Collaborative Teaching Models**. Collaborative teaching is a process where educators plan together either by subject or in an interdisciplinary way and it brings together teachers to provide additional support in classroom settings. By establishing collaborative models, DCPS will ensure that student learning is placed into context that helps them make connections to other elements of the curriculum and the real world. ***DCPS should expand the amount of planning time available to educators to allow for the adoption of co-teaching and collaborative teaching models in all school communities. In settings where more than 80% of students qualify as at-risk, co-teaching models should be implemented.***

And third, a **Librarian in every school**. Librarians partner with classroom teachers to provide equitable access to reading materials and co-teach resource-rich literacy. When schools have high-quality library programs and librarians who share their expertise with the entire school community, student achievement gets a boost. Librarians close the Information Literacy Gap with high school students. ***DCPS should ensure that all schools have a full-time librarian. Additionally, schools with an enrollment of more***

**than 800 students shall be required to fund additional librarian positions to ensure all students have equitable access to the resources and programming school librarians provide.**

In addition to helping to close achievement and opportunity gaps that face many of our students, these three key investments will also help our schools meet key health and safety requirements that must be in place to safely reopen our schools in for the 2021-2022 school year.

### **Overall Funding, Budget Transparency, & Other Key Investments in the FY2022 Budget**

The Washington Teachers' Union supports the Mayor's 3.6% increase in the base amount of the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula, plus increased weights for English Language Learners and At-Risk Students. However, **we do not believe that these investments will go far enough to close our city's opportunity and achievement gaps** and we believe that more funds need to be transferred from DCPS central office positions to our local schools.

According to testimony to the Council by DCPS budget guru Mary Levy in February, 49 DCPS schools were slated to receive budget cuts. The impact was that numerous schools proposed the elimination of school librarian positions, and many schools had to balance larger class sizes with providing students the social-emotional supports their students need as they return to in-person learning. While the Chancellor, in testimony before this council in early April, indicated that he used his budgetary discretion to close gaps at approximately 10 schools and the Mayor invested an additional \$14 million to close school budget gaps, unfortunately, this does not go far enough. As in previous years, school buying power is down, by 2.2% for FY 2022, meaning that schools even after their budgets were restored to last year's levels are being asked to again do more with less.

I wish I could sit here today and tell you exactly what is in each schools' budget and whether or not our schools are seeing cuts to instructional staff that interact daily with our students. However, as of 4pm on Tuesday, June 1, DCPS had not yet published the approved local school budgets nor had they published amended funding amounts that indicate their full funding levels after intervention by the Chancellor or Mayor.

It is the WTU's position – and I hope that this Council agrees – that students and educators deserve to know what is in their local school budget in a timely manner that allows them to make informed decisions about enrollment and employment. The current budget process fails on this very basic measure. **I want to be clear, the DCPS local school-by-school budget process is broken beyond repair and lacks in transparency.** Each year, local schools are left to scramble to find funds to maintain their current staffing and programs, pitting members of school communities against each other to save needed staff or programming. And, while a ruling in August 2019 from the Board of Ethics and Government Accountability found that LSATs are public bodies subject to the Open Meetings Act, LSATs often continue to operate outside of the District's OMA requirements regarding the publication of school budgets. I hope the Council will mandate that DCPS works with community school budget experts and local school stakeholders to design a budget process that is transparent and ensures adequate local school funding.

On specific initiatives included in the Mayor's Budget proposal, the WTU strongly supports the investment of **\$8M to expand school-based mental health services to all remaining DC Public and DC Public Charter Schools.** Comprehensive school mental health services are essential to creating and sustaining safe schools and supporting student and staff social and emotional wellness. We look forward to understanding more about how this model will be implemented and working with DCPS to ensure this investment supports and does not replace school psychologist, social workers and other members of school –based mental health teams.

The WTU also supports the city's **\$6.1M investment to launch new microtransit routes serving 20+ elementary, middle, and high schools in Safe Passage areas in Wards 7 & 8.** I hope that the Council

can explore work to bring this initiative to additional communities outside of Wards 7 & 8 where there is a substantial need for this type and level of investment.

The WTU **cannot take a position on the specifics of the \$1.57B the Mayor plans to spend over the coming six years for school modernizations, small capital projects, and school expansions.** We certainly recognize that many DC school buildings are overcrowded and lack in modern technology and amenities that our students need. However, across the District, there are more than 20,000 empty public school seats and the executive has failed to provide the Council a Master Facilities plan to provide agencies, school leaders, stakeholders, and the community with the information needed to support current and future school facilities planning in Washington, D.C. Decisions on how to spend \$1.57 billion dollars should not be made in absence of a master facility plan.

The WTU also seeks information on how the administration will preserve and protect the investments it made in improving the air quality in our school facilities. Air quality is critical for the health of those who occupy a school building at all times, not just during the public health emergency. Research has long shown that students and staff in schools with antiquated or out-of-date HVAC systems miss a disproportional amount of school time to chronic respiratory diseases, including asthma. **I encourage the Council will move legislation requiring annual air quality testing and public reporting of our city's school facilities** to ensure the investments we've made stand the test of time and continue to benefit the health of our students.

As I stated earlier in my testimony, the WTU believes that we can best overcome the city's long-standing and growing achievement gaps by investing in high-quality, licensed educators to reduce class size, implement co-teaching and collaborative teaching models, and ensure a high-quality librarian in every school. As such, **the WTU opposes the spending of \$13M for high-impact tutoring.** High-impact tutoring requires students to be pulled out of their usual learning environment for a minimum of 90 minutes each week, limiting the student's exposure to other subjects and content.

Again, let me be clear. The WTU supports efforts to close our city's achievement gaps – the test results of our students, though we also recognize that standardized tests are often racially biased and achievement scores are often a proxy for poverty. However, we cannot close achievement gaps by increasing the opportunity gaps our students face. In other words, we cannot improve student test scores by limiting their ability to engage in and receive a well-rounded education rich in the arts, science, and other subjects.

### **Ensuring the Safety of Our School Communities**

The WTU supports a full-reopening of our schools for in-person learning in the fall. We are cognizant that many students, especially those 12 and under who are not yet eligible to receive a vaccine, are likely not to be fully immune. Additional, at this time, the District has not provided any information on the number of school –based employees or residents under the age of 18 who have received the COVID-19 vaccine. These facts mean that we need to prepare for a number of reopening scenarios that likely include reducing class size to maintain social distancing and investing in additional classroom space.

As we begin to reimagine the school day in an environment where not all students and staff are immune to COVID-19, our school system may need to re-think entry and exit as well as classroom transition procedures for both students and teachers to prevent unnecessary exposure. The District needs to provide additional guidance around sick leave and quarantine procedures should individual educators or students be exposed to the virus, possibly necessitating an increase in funding for substitute teachers or the hiring of additional licensed educators. The WTU also believes we will need to budget for asymptomatic testing in our schools.

It is unfortunate that DCPS has not engaged the WTU and other union partners in planning at this late stage and before they submitted their FY2022 budget proposal. Despite a formal request, DCPS has not yet come to the table to negotiate with the WTU the health and safety conditions that will be in place when full in-person learning resumes.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

While my testimony has largely focused on the DC Public School budget, I do want to take a moment to acknowledge the work the DC State Board of Education has done around teacher turnover. The WTU continues to see DCPS' teacher evaluation system, IMPACT, as a major factor in the high rate of teacher turnover first identified through the board's work. In Fall 2019, DCPS Chancellor Lewis Ferebee announced a partnership with American University's School of Education to provide an evidence-based, independent and objective analysis of IMPACT, DCPS' longstanding performance evaluation system for teachers. However, this report has not yet been made available and no substantive reforms have been proposed. We, again, call for this report and related information from DCPS' use of Insight Surveys of educators on IMPACT and teacher turnover to be immediately released.

I hope that the Council recognizes the valuable work that the Board is doing in elevating conversations about teacher turnover, our city's school rating system and other public education issues and ***ensures that the DC State Board of Education has the staff and resources needed to continue their important work.***

The WTU recognizes that challenges that COVID-19 has created. We view this year's budget as an opportunity to reopen better by investing educators to reduce class size, implement innovative, research based models of education, and ensure equitable opportunity for all students.

I'd like to thank you for taking time to listen to me today. I'd be happy to answer any questions.

Appendix 1.

District of Columbia PARCC Results	State ELA % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	26.7%	30.5%	33.3%	37.1%	10.4%
White	74.3%	82.0%	82.1%	85.0%	10.7%
Black	19.3%	22.0%	24.7%	27.8%	8.5%
Hispanic	24.7%	28.9%	32.0%	37.3%	12.6%
Asian	55.7%	66.2%	71.6%	74.0%	18.3%
At-Risk	13.2%	15.8%	18.4%	21.1%	7.9%
English Learners	13.8%	1.5%	18.8%	19.7%	5.9%
Students with Disabilities	5.4%	4.8%	5.7%	7.9%	2.5%

PARCC Scores	State Math % 4+				4-year Growth
	2016	2017	2018	2019	
All Students	24.8%	26.9%	29.4%	30.5%	5.7%
White	71.0%	75.5%	78.8%	78.8%	7.8%
Black	17.4%	18.6%	20.7%	21.1%	3.7%
Hispanic	22.0%	28.2%	28.2%	30.5%	8.5%
Asian	59.7%	64.5%	69.8%	69.4%	9.7%
At-Risk	12.9%	14.2%	15.7%	16.3%	3.4%
English Learners	18.5%	21.2%	20.9%	22.7%	4.2%
Students with Disabilities	6.4%	5.3%	6.4%	7.2%	0.8%

Source: <https://osse.dc.gov/parcc>