

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)**



Public Oversight Roundtable  
on  
Reopening District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)

Testimony of  
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Before the  
Council of the District of Columbia  
Committee of the Whole  
The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairperson

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Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Dr. Melissa Kim, Deputy Chancellor for Social Emotional and Academic Development for the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). In this role, I oversee the district's schools as well as all programs including academics, interventions, innovations, human capital development, and equity initiatives, with the goal of ensuring that DCPS provides rich and rigorous experiences for all students. I appreciate the opportunity to share an update on DCPS' plans to build on our strong academic foundation and accelerate student learning in response to the current pandemic.

As we shift our focus to recovery and begin to plan for Summer and Fall, I want to highlight the tenacity of our young people. While we see a clear need to accelerate learning, the pandemic has also shown us DCPS students' ability to adapt and thrive no matter the circumstances. We have full confidence in our families, teachers, and most importantly, our students and their ability to thrive after this year of learning differently. Our students have accelerated their digital expertise by figuring out how to navigate, communicate, and demonstrate their learning in new ways and we are eager to tap their new set of skills as we work to chart a path for recovery and transformation.

As you know, DCPS has engaged students through both virtual and limited in-person opportunities throughout the District's Health Emergency. When we analyze early assessment data, our youngest students came into this school year less prepared than in previous years. On the DIBELS assessment, we see an 11-percentage point reduction in the percent of students meeting or exceeding beginning of year literacy benchmarks compared to last year. Approximately 22 percent of K-2 students who were meeting our benchmarks pre-COVID-19 fell below the benchmark at the start of this school year. Additionally, the early literacy gap between Black and White students has grown from 28% points to 35% points. We know that gaps in early literacy, social emotional development, and access to quality learning experience have long term impacts on the education of our students.

Prior to the current health emergency, our results from the 2019 Trial Urban District Assessment (TUDA) demonstrated that DCPS continues to be the nation's fastest improving urban school district. On the TUDA, DCPS has also seen steady gains in performance over time for black students and for students who receive free and reduced lunches in both subject areas and grade levels.

For these reasons, in addition to the lessons we've learned from countless cities across the nation, DCPS has remained grounded in the firm belief that a safe and healthy in-person learning opportunity is the best way to teach and reach students who are facing barriers to success with virtual learning. We are proud to provide opportunities for students to return to school and receive the critical supports they deserve.

First, DCPS must continue to build on our proven strategies. Providing a strong learning experience is about ensuring that our students have access to a strong curriculum and have smart and caring teachers who love them. We also value partnering with families to make sure that we leverage each other's knowledge of our young people. Specifically, we have invested heavily in creating a rigorous student-centered curriculum, which provides our students with joyful learning like our recent *Living through History* cornerstone. We continue to value outstanding educators and invest in their learning and excellence through our nationally recognized LEAP professional development. And finally, DCPS has offered over 40 different Parent University topics since last Spring spanning Mental Health, College and Career, Technology, and launched our Family Cornerstone, which provides a roadmap for families from Pre-K to Graduation that highlights key shared learning experiences.



At the same time, we see a clear need to adapt and engage our communities around the current need. DCPS is working quickly to establish a new vision for recovery and transformation, grounded in the strong foundation we have established in recent years. With community input, our goal is to:

- ***Reimagine the Student Experience:*** We believe students learn most, and most deeply, when their learning is relevant, connected, and purposeful, elevating student voice and agency.
- ***Reinvest in our Teachers and Leaders:*** We believe educators are our greatest resource. Their understanding of students' natural development will boost learning because they create the learning environments that foster safety and connection, essential conditions for students to thrive. We are proud to have retained over 90% of our effective and highly effective teachers in recent years.
- ***Re-envision our Systems and Policies:*** DCPS is committed to becoming an anti-racist learning organization that will examine all of our systems to improve learning experiences for all students, especially those of color.

As we look towards the future, we know that we must build on our programming and provide a suite of tools for schools to meet diverse student and family needs. In the Spring, we will look to establish school-based community corps, modeled after our recent Reopening planning process, that provides feedback on interventions and resources that best address the needs of their school. We are in the process of finalizing both our FY22 budget and the funding we will receive through the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, which will inform the final approach.

Across DCPS schools, we plan to continue to expand DCPS' Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS), our evidence-based intervention system that aligns social-emotional and academic development to address the needs of the whole child. MTSS is a student-centered framework that will guide our recovery work and provide a tiered response based on student-needs, including wellness supports, intervention programs, and mental health development. Based on the needs of each student, we will provide a variety of supports, including:

- ***Individualized Tutoring:*** Research is pointing to high intensity targeted tutoring as one of the most effective ways to accelerate learning. We plan to integrate high intensity tutoring into existing summer school sites for students in need and allow schools to choose among tutoring approaches during the school year with their teachers or trusted partners.
- ***Accelerator Academies:*** Schools will design tailored learning experiences plans to engage students in learning and spark their excitement in summer 2021.

We also want our virtual learning period to serve as a catalyst for further learning innovations. We have digitized our curriculum and modernized our virtual learning management systems. In response to the pandemic, DCPS has distributed approximately 32,000 devices. Teachers and students will continue to rely on technology for academic content, enrichment, and the development of 21st-century skills.

DCPS has re-committed to working to overcome systemic racism and intersectional forms of oppression. Equity at DCPS means creating an environment in which we eliminate opportunity gaps, interrupt institutional bias, and remove barriers to academic and social success, particularly for students of color. At the district level, we are continuing to prioritize anti-racism learning and work, grounded in the Science of Learning and Development.

This includes the recent launch of DCPS' own Anti-Racist Educators' University, which provides monthly professional learning opportunities to build teacher and other school-based staff's capacity to improve



learning experiences for students from historically marginalized groups. For the student experience, this past summer, racial equity fellows conducted an equity audit to make bold changes to the curriculum from an equity lens to ensure cultural responsiveness. This work is continuing our efforts to expand enrichment and leadership opportunities for students of color through our Reign and Educating Males of Color initiatives.

In the coming months, we will ensure that all DCPS students have a healthy and safe return to in-person learning while working diligently to accelerate student progress. We appreciate the support of Mayor Bowser and the DC Council's partnership in these critical endeavors. In a year like no other, we have consistently seen the value of our community and the resilience of our youth.

I also want to share my appreciation for DCPS teachers, school leaders, and staff and highlight their work to provide quality programming options for Term 3. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today and share our early thinking on DCPS' road to recovery and transformation. I look forward to answering any questions at this time.

