

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**



Public Roundtable
on
“Student Learning Loss: What’s the District’s Plan?”

Testimony of
Paul Kihn
Deputy Mayor for Education

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

February 26, 2021
Live via Zoom Video Conference Broadcast

Good afternoon, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. Thank you for reconvening us all on this important topic. Joining me today for questions are Interim State Superintendent of Education, Shana Young, Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools, Dr. Lewis Ferebee, and Executive Director of the DC Public Charter School Board, Michelle Walker-Davis.

We remain in the throes of a serious health emergency. Over 40,000 residents have contracted the virus, and tragically more than one thousand residents have lost their lives. We are all working around the clock to try and stay ahead of the virus and protect our community. Due to Mayor Bowser's leadership and DC Health's extraordinary work, the District has been recognized as a national model for our efforts related to testing, health care capacity, contact tracing, and now vaccinations.

I also want to acknowledge that due to the ongoing circumstances of the pandemic, we still have a challenging local budget. As you will recall, last year, we were forced to strip over \$500 million from our FY20 local budget. Across government, we continue to identify budget reductions in the current year, at the same time as we develop a more constrained FY22 budget than any of us would like. These are real cuts to programs that impact residents and represent difficult choices about program options across District agencies.

These difficult choices have undoubtedly created delays in spring and summer planning for many families across the District. We recognize and understand the hardships we are all facing as a city and appreciate the grace of the DC community as we work together to rise up from this crisis.

That is why a vital part of the FY21 reappropriations and the FY22 budget will be focused on our recovery and planning efforts, which we are approaching in three phases: an immediate Response phase, a Recovery phase, and a longer-term Re-imagine phase.

I cannot emphasize enough that the most critical part of our long-term strategy to recover from the pandemic and accelerate learning is occurring right now, in schools, throughout our city. Our best approach to mitigating learning loss is ensuring students receive the highest quality

teaching and learning experiences we can provide in their current school. This is our current Response phase. In it, we continue to focus our attention on ensuring that all students experience high-quality virtual schooling by providing innovative online curriculum and much needed access to technology; supporting our teachers' transition to virtual teaching; partnering with families as they take a larger role in their students' learning; and working to get students safely back into school buildings – especially students who need to be in person the most.

As of today, DCPS has welcomed almost 10,000 students back for Term 3. Our public charter community is currently providing in-person learning activities for more than 3,800 students, with plans to expand to 9,000 by the end of March. Of course, months of planning and significant investments went into making this possible:

- In DCPS, this included a \$24 million investment in medical grade HVAC enhancements, PPE for every student and staff member; a comprehensive safety MOA negotiated with our partners in the Washington Teachers Union; the launch of community reopening corps at every school to guide planning for Term 3; and safety walk-throughs at every school to test each element of our safety plans.
- Comparable work has gone on across the Charter sector to prepare buildings and deeply engage communities and the city has launched a \$10 million reopening fund to support our charter schools.
- In addition, the District is providing regular, on-site symptomatic and asymptomatic testing for students, teachers, and staff across all public schools.
- Lastly, we have made extraordinary, collaborative efforts to vaccinate more than 7,000 teachers, staff, and leaders working in our child care, public, and independent schools since the end of January. This has included two dedicated partnerships with One Medical and Children's National and reflects the Mayor's commitment to prioritizing educators returning in person. We will continue working with our schools to identify teachers who want to resume in-person teaching and will commit to getting teachers vaccinated as quickly as our supply of vaccine allows.

During the Response phase, we have also prioritized ensuring students have access to the resources they need to stay connected to their virtual programming, which remains the reality for many of our families. To date, our efforts to support learning at home have included:

- As many as 74,000 learning devices were made available to public school students at the start of school and as many as 63,400 students received assistance getting access to the internet;
- Specifically, DCPS distributed over 32,000 devices (laptops and tablets) and 10,000 hotspots to every student who needs one;
- Mayor Bowser invested \$3.3 million as part of the Internet for All initiative, led by our partners in OCTO, to provide free internet access for up to 25,000 disconnected low-income students and families from DCPS and public charter schools; and
- DCPS and OCTO established a multilingual Family & Student Tech Call Center to support students with technology issues directly.

Our Response work has also focused on strengthening early childhood education, knowing that we must prevent our youngest learners from falling behind. The Bowser Administration has taken many steps to stabilize the early child care sector. These include:

- Distributing \$5 million in locally funded emergency relief grants for child care through the DC Child Care Relief Fund, which reached nearly all licensed providers;
- Providing \$400,000 in Access to Quality Emergency grants to support newly licensed or expanded providers to maintain the supply of infant and toddler care;
- Continuing to pay child care subsidy providers based on pre-pandemic enrollment through October 2020; and
- Implementing a Public Health Emergency subsidy rate in December 2020 to increase payments to subsidy providers in recognition of the increased costs of delivering child care during the public health emergency.

As we move into the summer and toward our Recovery phase, youth safety, well-being, and re-engagement will be foundational to our work. We will intensify our collective efforts to re-connect with chronically absent and disengaged students through a variety of summer

experiences. We will plan ahead to make sure all students have the mental health supports they need, that Safe Passage to and from campus is in place, and that we are engaging in evidence-based work to proactively prevent youth violence. We will invest to continue and expand existing behavioral health supports for students and adults, including focus areas identified by LEAs such as telehealth services, emergency response, and curation of high-quality referrals and resources for school communities.

Our academic acceleration Recovery plan will also focus on extending time for learning through Accelerator Academies and expanded summer school programming; establishing innovative partnerships to infuse student programming with academic and social-emotional support, including DPR summer camps, expanded “Earn & Learn” summer school programs through the MBSYEP with schools as host sites, OST summer programs, and expanded Library services; and providing individualized attention to the students who need it most. This will include launching high-dosage tutoring for students who will meet weekly with qualified tutors in groups of one to three.

We currently have summer programming available to serve more than 23,000 youth city-wide and are adding more seats through expanded offerings with individual LEAs and non-profit partners each week. Recovery will continue into the new school year, grounded in schools, which are already planning to provide extensive re-engagement, additional time, intensive tutoring, re-arranged schedules, and after-school recreation. This includes an expansive partnership with CityBridge Education, which is launching a city-wide tutoring corps in partnership with my office and others and providing expertise to LEAs and CBOs who want to set up high intensity tutoring models for their students. The work will begin in early March with “design sprints” to pilot tutoring in more than a dozen schools. Lessons learned from these sprints will be invaluable to creating effective tutoring models for the summer and upcoming school year.

I also want to note, as you may recall from our last hearing, the Bowser Administration has taken advantage of two levels of federal funding to support our Recovery efforts. Federal legislation authorized the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER)

through the CARES Act in March 2020. Federal funds were appropriated to ESSER on two separate occasions - for ESSER I in March 2020, and for ESSER II through the Omnibus and COVID Relief and Response Act in December 2020. OSSE applied and received approximately \$42 million from ESSER I, and about \$172 million from ESSER II. Schools already have their ESSER I funds, and OSSE has announced preliminary allocations of ESSER II funds, with 90 percent of the total award, or about \$155 million, to flow directly to LEAs. These critical funds have not only enabled us to prepare school facilities for re-opening but will be a significant part of our Recovery as we invest in learning acceleration, mental health supports, and other essential programs.

Finally, for our Re-imagine phase which will follow in years to come, we are exploring opportunities to bring the lessons learned from the pandemic into the new way we serve our students and families. This will involve a continuation of innovative virtual learning platforms, greater flexibility for teachers and students in their coursework, schedule, and delivery model, and school communities co-creating programs that best meet the unique needs of their particular school campus.

These are not challenges that we will solve quickly or easily overcome. But through these evidence-based, data-driven strategies, and by working collaboratively with partners across our city and with the communities we serve, we can heal and recover together.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today, and I along with my colleagues are happy to answer any questions you may have.