

Committee of the Whole's hearing on DCPS Initial School Level Budgets  
April 2, 2021  
The Ward 3 – Wilson Feeder Education Network  
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When you look at DCPS's initial budget allocations for FY22, the story is much the same as any other year. Schools are being asked to do more with less. During a time when schools, teachers and students will need more support than ever, we find ourselves in the same conversations we have every year.

Allocations are essentially based on projected enrollment and special populations of students. As a result, collectively, FY22 allocations show many schools are losing money due to pandemic-related declines in enrollment that are likely temporary, and schools are gaining or losing staff based on expected changes in special education and ELL students. And, importantly, just like other years, budget allocations are not keeping pace with rising staffing costs. Many schools are facing outright budget decreases, but even those schools with nominal increases mask the actual loss of spending power in real terms. Through the lens of a typical year, FY22 allocations are generally inadequate.

And yet, FY22 will be unlike any other year. As we continue to emerge and recover from this historic pandemic, the academic and social-emotional needs of our school communities are greater than ever before. Additionally, pandemic-driven disruptions in student enrollment turn typical budgeting techniques into guess-work, with consequences for the well-being of our schools and our children. The Mayor's office itself, in its own 2020 update to the Master Facilities Plan, recognizes the impracticality of using enrollment from this school year for planning purposes.

The specific examples of school budgets I will give you are from Ward 3, but the story is the same, and in many cases worse, in other parts the city. DCPS projects a loss of enrollment in 12 of 15 schools in the Wilson feeder pattern in FY22, with ensuing effects on budget allocations. Within the feeder pattern, elementary, middle and high schools all face cuts to staff.

At Stoddert Elementary, enrollment was down this year due to the pandemic, and DCPS has projected a loss of 59 students for FY22. This is what we hear from Stoddert's LSAT: "In conjunction with and with support from the PTO, Stoddert developed an approach that enabled us to meet our objective of retaining all grade level teachers. The PTO voted to contribute up to \$60K to cover non-personnel expenses, which freed up that amount from the DCPS-allocated budget to cover some staffing expenses. This allowed Stoddert to avoid cutting a grade level teacher, which it almost certainly would have been required to do, as our budget shortfall was approximately \$118,000. Despite the generous support from the PTO, Stoddert was forced to eliminate positions, and cut our two school-wide instructional aides."

It is important to note that PTOs should never have to fund school's basic needs, and DCPS forcing decisions like this raises equity issues across schools.

At the secondary level, I'll share with you from Deal Middle School. "Deal's budget allocation presents a significant challenge for our school in terms of our ability to meet the academic and social-emotional needs of our students. Our FY22 budget allocation was negatively affected by a pandemic-related decline of 44 students. Deal expects to be fully enrolled at 1,500 students in the fall. Deal will lose 3 to 4 existing positions, including a business manager and a custodian, who are essential for Deal to be able to return to in-person-learning in the fall. To preserve academic and social-emotional positions, we were forced to reallocate funds within the budget. As a result, Deal lost all of its discretionary funds for FY22.

Based on the initial FY22 budget allocation, Deal will lose \$138,000 in total funding. This is a nearly 3% reduction in inflation-adjusted dollars. This reduction masks the true reduction in our General Education funding. Due to increasing numbers of ELL and Special Ed students, our funding for these needs-based students increased by \$270,000. Accounting for this, our funds available for General Education will fall by over \$400,000. Deal suffered the exact same problem in last year's budget. In fact, over the past two years, our General Education funding has fallen by \$650,000, an 8.7% reduction including inflation. Consequently, our effective purchasing power has fallen by over \$1.1 million."

No school should be losing staff following this pandemic. Given the more-robust-than-expected local budget situation, coupled with federal stimulus funds, the city should be adding staff and resources to our schools. At a bare minimum, all schools should be held harmless from a budgetary standpoint going into FY22. And special attention should be given to those school communities most seriously affected by the pandemic.

One might hope that stimulus funds will suffice to compensate for inadequate initial budget allocations. DCPS and the DME have already stated clearly that schools will not be allowed to use federal stimulus funds to hire staff. Thus, we urge the Council not to assume that the additional academic and mental health support students will require during the coming academic year will be provided outside of the DCPS initial budget allocations.

Every year, DCPS schools are asked to do more with less. During this highly unusual time, that is less acceptable than ever. A business-as-usual approach to DCPS budgets and staffing is simply insufficient and ultimately, it is the city's children who will pay the price.