

Brianna McGowan
Committee of the Whole
DCPS Initial School-level Budgets
April 2, 2021

Thank you for the opportunity to testify at today's hearing. My name is Brianna McGowan. I am a Ward 5 resident and the communications officer for the Ward 5 Education Equity Committee. My testimony is informed by our organizations' communication with State Board of Education President and Ward 5 Representative Zachary Parker, local budget experts like Mary Levy and Qubilah Huddleston, and the local school advisory teams, parents, and school leaders at Ward 5's 14 DCPS campuses.

In Ward 5, we heard from several schools that are facing staff cuts. Even if overall budgets increased, buying power, particularly for personnel has decreased. Some of these schools have lowered enrollment projections compared to last year, but given the disruptions associated with COVID, it would be appropriate this year to hold school budgets harmless for enrollment fluctuations.

In conversations with members of the local school advisory teams from some of these schools, it is clear that staff cuts will be painful. At Langley, a Director of Strategy and Logistics who played a vital role in the school's implementation of distance learning and COVID mitigation will be lost as the school makes up for their budget shortfall by changing the position to a lesser-paid Manager of Strategy and Logistics. Meanwhile, Browne EC will have to take a full-time language instructor down to half-time and lose a paraeducator (likely a reading specialist) and a behavior tech outright.

Dunbar High School enrolled 665 students last year, and despite multiple years of growth and anticipated growth next year, the school's budgeted projection count was lower than last year's enrollment — meaning less buying power. Dunbar's real anticipated enrollment next year is closer to 700. Even still, with the school's budgeted projection, Dunbar has to make difficult decisions between keeping culture and climate staff and teaching personnel. As a result, Dunbar is slated to only have four math teachers (on average 165 students per teacher) when they need five or six.

Langley Elementary also has some rather dire facilities needs. They have problems with hot water in bathrooms, poor ventilation, and lack of working bathrooms on one level. DCPS has made some short-term fixes, but particularly in the context of COVID mitigation, permanent fixes are greatly preferable.

We also heard several concerns about the budget process from LSAT members and school leaders.

- LSATs have only a few days to review, process, convene, and sign-off on school budgets.
- LSATs are not getting the information they need from DCPS to see how their actual expenditures compare to their projections and thereby make accurate projections for the following year.
- LSATs also need to be able to itemize COVID-related costs such as PPE, quarantine areas, deep school cleanings, and to incorporate them over several years. They also

need to be able to negotiate discounts on COVID-related spending by contracting with other schools

- LSAT needs more transparency and detailed information from DCPS on the budget, not just high-level information.

Many of these issues were heightened due to additional planning associated with COVID mitigation and distance learning amid uncertainty about additional federal funds that might be coming and how those funds could and could not be used.

Therefore, we recommend the following:

- **Appropriately account for inflation and salary increases** in budget projections to ensure that schools are adequately funded. Yes, many schools *look* like they are receiving more money next year, but as you know, because of inflation and rising salaries, many schools have less buying power.
- Please consult school principals to ensure **alignment between enrollment and projection numbers published on DCPS' website and those received at the school level**. As has been widely reported, there appears to be two sets of books, and some of the numbers provided in DCPS' published budgets seem to differ from what we are hearing from some school leaders.
- **Ensure that no school is funded lower than last year's enrollment numbers**
- **Create an emergency facilities fund** to provide schools — like Langley and Langdon and others — the necessary building updates to ensure students are comfortable and safe as they return to school buildings
- Ensure that DCPS allows schools to **use American Rescue Plan Act funds for all authorized purposes**, including to prevent layoffs/staff cuts.
- Ensure that DCPS makes **no further cuts to certified librarians**, which has been the trend in recent years since DCPS has allowed principals to “excess” these positions. In fact, **like nurses, we recommend the Council require schools to have a set number of librarians**.
- Finally, the pandemic has impacted school communities unevenly, heightening existing inequities, **equity (not equality) must be the guiding principle for our budgets and the expenditure of supplemental federal funds**.

In short, the proposed DCPS budgets are insufficient and will translate to our community schools receiving less at a time when they and our students need so much more. Ward 5 neighbors are calling on the Council to intervene.

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate on behalf of Ward 5's public schools, students and families.