



# Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Hearing Testimony

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Emily Gasoi, Vice President & Ward 1 Representative  
Allister Chang, Ward 2 Representative  
Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3 Representative  
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Jacque Patterson, At-Large Representative  
Alexander O'Sullivan, Student Representative  
Shayla Dell, Student Representative



Good morning Chairman Mendelson and Members of the Council. My name is Zachary Parker and I have the honor of serving the residents of Ward 5 on the DC State Board of Education. Today, I am testifying in my role as President of the State Board about our fiscal year 2022 budget request. The mayor’s proposed budget for the State Board is inadequate and we would appreciate the Council’s assistance in restoring the funding eliminated by the mayor.

The State Board has a unique place in the development of the mayor’s budget each year. By law, we are required to submit a “Need for Appropriations” (NfA) to the mayor for inclusion in her budget. In order to do so prior to the mayor beginning her internal process, we usually adopt the NfA in September, over a year before the budget is set to begin. Unfortunately, the agency is still required to participate in the dependent agency process, trying to justify a Maximum Allowable Ceiling Request (MARC) that has no connection to our NfA. To be frank, the process is overly complicated, confusing and incredibly opaque. In our opinion, the DC Official Code is clear that the mayor is expected to include our NfA, with any recommendations she might want to make, without change in the budget submission. I would like to ask the Council to provide language in this year’s budget support act or accompanying report making clear the intention of the DC Code provisions.

The State Board works tirelessly to elevate and amplify the voices and experiences of District residents to improve equity and educational outcomes from students. As we noted in our performance oversight hearing, the State Board has produced a number of reports based on surveys of stakeholders, as well as issues of importance, and striven to update education standards. As the Council is aware, our constituents have long demanded greater clarity and improved communication from the city’s education stakeholders. That is why we spend a great deal of time ensuring that we provide the public and our sister agencies (OSSE, DCPS, PCSB, DME, etc.) a wealth of information—from surveys to reports to proposals—focused on pressing educational matters.

Earlier this year, the State Board conducted a survey of more than 1,000 DCPS and public charter school teachers, representing every single DCPS school and the majority of public charter schools. Teachers responded to questions on topics such as their experience in a virtual setting and their reflections on the student experience (inclusive of the experiences of special populations), their comfort level in returning to in-person instruction, the support they need in both virtual and in-person postures, and items related to well-rounded education and teacher retention. This survey measured a specific moment in time when District teachers were beginning to return to in-person learning for Term 3, receiving their first doses of the COVID-19 vaccine, and reflecting on nearly a full year of virtual learning practices. It was our intention that the survey results guide the identification of strategies and policies that ensure teachers are supported and retained, and, more broadly, to promote stakeholder engaged solutions to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

We recently released our Principal Survey Report which captured the opinions of DC public-school principals and school leaders about how to best spend federal funding allocated to states





due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The survey captured information from nearly a quarter of the District’s principals and school leaders. Just over 40 percent of responses said they would have to reduce school-based staff without federal funds. The Council heard last week from public witnesses that schools are preparing to cut vital positions like librarians, reading specialists, art and music teachers, and more. Principals and school leaders—even with an influx of federal funding—are still having to make choices now that rob Peter to pay Paul. I have attached a copy of the principal survey report to our testimony so that the Council can review the findings.

In a few weeks, we will be releasing the most recent update to our groundbreaking teacher retention research. We found astounding rates of teachers leaving classrooms in the first report (published in October 2018) and were pleased to find those rates lowering in the second edition (published in October 2019). Prior to the COVID pandemic, it was clear that DC Public Schools was focusing on the issue. When the third report is made public, we will share a copy with the Council. We also look forward to sharing information with the public and Council on the State Board’s future research efforts, including DC’s educational governance structures, proposed changes to our DC School Report Card, and more.

I am pleased to report to the Council that the two-year process to rewrite the District’s social studies standards is now in the writing phase. I want to thank the team at the Office of the State Superintendent of Education for their continued partnership and commitment to this work and especially the District teachers that are doing the writing. The mayor provided a new Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) for the State Board in the FY22 budget proposal, but very little funding for the position. It is our intention to use the position to establish a dedicated employee to review and supervise updating education standards, but in order to do so, we will need an additional \$80,000 in PS funds from the Council to supplement the \$30,000 provided by the mayor to cover the full salary and benefits for this ES-5/6 position. It is incredibly important for students to learn more about history and culture—moving beyond a “heroes and holidays” model with lists of dates based in a white, European mindset. We owe it to students to not only ensure that what they are learning reflects their own culture, a mirror, but also helps them to understand other cultures, a window. Fully provisioning this position will help ensure that we are able to fulfill this promise to our students.

Finally, I want to take make clear that the budget requests of the Ombudsman and the Chief Student Advocate have the full support of the State Board. Both offices are severely limited in their ability by a lack of staff and appropriate technology. We urge the Council to find the funding requested to fill those needs as these two offices will be critical resources to families as students return to classrooms and parents work to navigate our new normal.

Mr. Chairman, I want to express our gratitude on behalf of the State Board for the strong support the Council has given the agency. We are confident that the product of your support, a vibrant independent agency working on behalf of District residents, is worthwhile. We have a lot of work planned in the coming years and look forward to our continued partnership in that work.





I am proud of the State Board's work this year. It was made possible due to the tireless work of my elected colleagues and student representatives, and because of the support of our amazing staff. I want to thank our staff for their dedication and work during the pandemic. Alexander Jue, Dr. Darren Fleischer, Milayo Olufemi, Caitlin Peng, Rhoma Battle, and John-Paul Hayworth enabled the State Board to meet the needs of our students and families over this past year.

This has been a strange year and I am hopeful that the lessons we learned about what worked and what did not will inform our decisions for years to come. At the end of the day, we must ensure that our students have every opportunity to recover from the effects of the pandemic, academically, physically, and mentally. The State Board will do all it can to make sure that happens.

I am happy to answer any questions you might have. Thank you.

