

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE STATE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION



Fiscal Year 2022 Budget Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
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Interim State Superintendent of Education

Before the

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

Zoom Virtual Meeting
June 8, 2021

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Shana Young, the Interim State Superintendent of Education. I am pleased to testify before you today on the Fiscal Year 2022 (FY22) Budget for the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE).

Last week, Mayor Bowser presented her FY22 Budget and Financial Plan. The past year and a half has been a time of unprecedented challenges, but we are coming back from the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic together as a community. We have been able to continue our work to deliver critical services to our residents and protect our most vulnerable neighbors. The Mayor's budget makes vital investments in education, affordable housing, health and human services, economic opportunity, and public safety to ensure that we can recover stronger than ever.

OSSE works with child development providers, local education agencies (LEAs), including public charter and DC Public Schools, community-based organizations (CBOs), and education partners to ensure success for all District residents from birth to adulthood. OSSE works urgently and purposefully, in partnership with our education and community partners, to sustain, accelerate, and deepen the progress for DC students. The Mayor's FY22 budget supports the work necessary to maintain a high-quality education for all District residents- from infants and toddlers to adult learners.

OSSE's total operating budget for FY22 is approximately \$687.8 million across both federal and local sources. Most of this funding is passed through to our LEAs, child development facilities, and other partners. The FY22 budget makes the investments required to meet our statutory obligations, to move forward on meeting the ambitious goals outlined in our strategic plan, and to make significant impact in our District-wide efforts to recover from the pandemic.

Addressing Learning Loss & Sustaining Our Academic Gains

The shift to remote learning was critical in our response to the public health emergency, but the student experience was uneven. Students are best served in our school buildings with our educators, and the proposed budget makes significant strides in welcoming them and their families back safely. It also makes investments needed to meet academic and social needs.

Just over a week ago, I was pleased to testify before you on our efforts to recover and accelerate learning loss. At that time, I shared with you many of the efforts we are undertaking at OSSE as well as many of the investments we will be making through the set-aside for state education agencies through the Elementary and School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Fund. Through the \$56 million set aside to OSSE through the two most recent federal laws funding ESSER, OSSE supports our priorities of safe reopening, student and staff well-being, and accelerated learning.

Allocations made to OSSE through ESSER will be added to other citywide federal coronavirus relief funds to maximize impact. We have heard clearly that we must provide students with additional instructional time and support to help them catch up on valuable content missed over the past year. To that aim, OSSE will invest \$3 million of its ESSER III funds with just over \$10 million from the city's federal Coronavirus Relief Funds in both FY21 and FY22 in high impact tutoring. This funding will be used to establish standards for tutoring services, make subgrants to



partners, and monitor academic progress. We believe that this effort combined with the efforts to improve curriculum and instruction with our ESSER funds will make a real difference in helping our students make up lost learning.

Rebuilding Early Childcare System

From day one, the Bowser Administration has prioritized affordable, accessible, and quality infant and toddler care. We set a high bar for quality through our health and safety regulations, raised subsidy rates consistently over time, and provided an array of supports to help childcare workers improve their practice, comply with health and safety requirements, and support business operations.

The pandemic has certainly tested the early childcare sector, and we have taken numerous steps to stabilize the childcare market. To date, the District has allocated and is currently distributing nearly \$25 million in local and federal relief funding for child development providers--for those who participate in our subsidy program and those who do not. And our investment will continue as we recover from the pandemic. We have also leveraged the District's existing investments in childcare subsidy to create a stabilization subsidy rate for subsidy child care providers during the public health emergency and invested in shared services supports to improve the sustainability of the child care sector.

The Mayor's budget makes a series of enhancements that will ensure that the early childcare sector returns stronger than ever. Using Coronavirus State Funds, the Mayor will invest nearly \$8 million in Back-2-Work Childcare grants, which will support childcare facilities in areas most affected by the public health emergency. These grants will preserve the supply of childcare seats and limit price increases for families who are returning to work. Further, through Coronavirus State Funds, the Mayor will make another \$5 million investment into the successful Access-2-Quality Grants, which are capital grants to build or expand facilities and increase the supply of infant and toddler care providers in shortage areas. These grants are estimated to create 500 more childcare seats.

To ensure that child care providers have the staff they need to operate and grow, the Mayor's budget provides a \$1 million enhancement from local funds for the Childcare Worker Recognition and Retention Fund to support early childhood educators in meeting credentialing requirements. These funds will be matched with federal dollars from the Childcare and Development Fund (CCDF) to provide retention and/or education bonuses for early childhood teachers.

The budget also makes a one-time, \$4.2 million enhancement in the Pre-K Enhancement and Expansion Program (PKEEP) which supports CBOs providing pre-K services that meet a high bar for quality. This appropriation will update funding to reflect increases in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula.

We will further build upon these investments with the \$68 million in federal childcare relief funds that will be used to help providers remain in operation during and beyond the public health emergency. Further, we look to provide enhanced supports for the early childhood workforce and



to update subsidy rates to comply with federal requirements. We have recently completed stakeholder engagement on the use of these funds and look forward to distributing them later this year. With all of this support, the District of Columbia will remain a leader in the nation for our efforts to provide high quality childcare to our residents.

Investments in Higher Education

Economic downturns, like the one that we are experiencing, have the power to disrupt the lives of workers making it harder to afford rent, utilities, food, and other necessities of life. That's why the Bowser Administration has prioritized creating pathways to the middle class because we know that good paying jobs in today's economy require education past high school. In our most recent strategic plan, OSSE set the ambitious goal that 1,100 more students would enroll in higher education, on a path to complete a two- or four-year degree, and the FY22 budget makes a historic investment toward this effort.

Last week, the Mayor announced The DC Future: Tuition Assistance program which will leverage \$12.8 million in Coronavirus Relief Funds to provide awards for residents to attend community college and some local four-year institutions of higher education. The awards may be used to pay for tuition, fees, books, and other support services and aim to support up to 8,000 residents. The Mayor also announced the College Rising Program which will provide "to and through" mentorship for 300 low income high school students and first-time college goers each year as well as fund 250 new dual enrollment opportunities for students. The program is intended to help students who show strong potential to succeed in college but need the additional exposure, support, and mentorship to make it happen. This \$1.5 million investment will come from \$1.3 million from revenue replacement for government services and \$200,000 from ESSER II. We were also pleased to see that the President's proposed budget includes \$40 million towards DCTAG and proposes increases to the annual and lifetime maximum amounts for grants.

Pathways to the middle class depend on making sure that students are prepared and aware of in-demand jobs, and the Mayor's FY22 budget makes a significant investment in that effort through Reimagining High Schools: Work Based Learning Environments. This \$29 million, four-year investment begins with a \$11.5 million investment in FY22. Through this program, we aim to support 1,200 high school seniors enrolled in college and technical education with internships. Further, we will expand early career and technical education programming to 20 middle schools over three years. And we will launch an Advanced Technical Center, a regional hub of CTE programming and innovation that will be able to serve up to 600 students in programs of study such as licensed practical nursing and cybersecurity.

Student Supports

Many of our students face tremendous obstacles in their lives, and they have the power to adversely impact their academic outcomes and future endeavors. Sadly, the pandemic has exacerbated those obstacles for far too many. We must do everything that we can to reduce those obstacles so students can have an easier time accessing education. The FY22 budget includes a \$500,000 federal enhancement aimed at supporting students in crisis by investing in additional staffing to expand capacity at the Department of Behavioral Health for mobile psychiatric



services. The budget also includes a \$83,500 enhancement to support the School Based Mental Health Program with evidence-based curricula and programming to support responding to trauma. Further, the FY22 budget sustains important programs that address barriers to education including the school climate fund created through the Student Fair Access to School Act. It also maintains funding for Restorative DC, early literacy grants, community schools, 21st century schools, and the Healthy Schools Fund. These long-standing programs combined with the supports from ESSER funding will go a long way towards making sure our students have the tools and supports they need to return to school and learn at their highest potential.

Improving Access to Accurate, Accessible, & Actionable Data

OSSE has a deep belief and commitment to ensuring access to accurate, accessible, and actionable data, and it has been a key pillar of our strategic plan over the past six years. In March, we were pleased to be afforded the opportunity to share OSSE's story of growth and progress in our education data system, for it's a story that we are excited and proud to share. Our data processes and systems have leapt forward significantly, but these systems will never be perfect or finished. They will continuously be improved to meet our needs. That is why the FY22 budget includes a \$4.1 million capital investment to continue work to improve our data infrastructure and respond to the significant public interest in more access to data on our schools. The FY22 budget also includes a \$225,000 enhancement for My School DC to support data improvements necessary to upgrade systems and continue high quality service to families in the school lottery.

Non-Public Tuition and Special Education Transportation

OSSE administers the Non-Public Tuition program, which provides funding and oversight for special education and related services for children with disabilities who are placed in non-public settings. The FY22 non-public tuition budget is approximately \$59.5 million, which is a net decrease of \$784,000 due to fewer students being served in non-public institutions. This reduction preserves the spending level for individual student payments and will not impact services. OSSE remains committed to ensuring that students can be appropriately served in the least restrictive environment.

OSSE's Division of Student Transportation (OSSE-DOT) is charged with providing safe, reliable, and efficient transportation services that positively impact learning opportunities for eligible District students. OSSE-DOT never stopped providing service for students that needed transportation during the pandemic, and we are anxiously waiting and prepared for all students to return to school in-person. OSSE-DOT provides services for more than 3,100 students to schools along nearly 500 bus routes, traveling more than 27,000 miles per day. The FY22 budget includes approximately \$116.8 million for OSSE-DOT, which reflects a \$3.8 million decrease when compared to the prior fiscal year. This decline reflects savings attributed to vacancies, and OSSE is committed to continuing our work without interruption. Further, the capital budget continues to support the program through the renovation of a bus terminal at W Street NE and provides funding for our routing and scheduling system that will finally allow for parent tracking of our school buses. This budget will allow OSSE-DOT to ensure quality transportation services in FY22 and beyond.

Conclusion

The Mayor's FY22 budget positions OSSE to make significant, strategic, and impactful investments in education for our residents, from birth through adulthood. Collectively, these



investments will support our efforts to get our students back in school safely where they belong and ensure that we have the vital support services needed to ensure that our hard-fought progress in increasing academic outcomes is not lost. Thank you for allowing me to testify today. I look forward to answering your questions.

