



CHAIRMAN'S UPDATE

The Official Newsletter of DC Council Chairman Phil Mendelson



Memorial Day Weekend 2025

BUDGET UPDATE

Last week the city's Chief Financial Officer issued a letter stating that the Bowser Administration "completed the formulation of the Mayor's Proposed FY2025 Supplemental Budget and Proposed FY2026 - FY2029 Budget and Financial Plan on Wednesday, May 14, 2025." The CFO will now take 10 days to process and print it.

This means that finally the Council will receive the budget for our review and public comment. This is scheduled to begin next Tuesday, May 27th. Per the Home Rule Act, the Council has only 70 days to consider and act upon the proposal, and since the Council must vote twice (as we do with all legislative bills), the first vote must occur in less than two months. The Council is publishing its schedule for our work on the [DC Council Budget Office's website](#). Hearings will begin immediately: May 29th and conclude June 18th. Committees will mark up their recommendations June 23-25. The first vote of the Council will be Monday July 14th and the final vote will be Monday July 28th. If necessary, final vote on the Budget Support Act will be July 31st.

I have candidly told the Mayor that the two-month delay in her budget submittal is disrespectful of both the public and the legislative branch. Committee work has stalled on other, important legislation because hearings couldn't be scheduled, not knowing when the budget process would begin. And I have said the delay should not be blamed on the Congressional screw-up of this year's FY25 budget because contingency planning to fix that mistake could have begun almost three months ago when the Continuing Resolution was adopted - as I discussed with the Mayor March 12th.

We will not know what the Mayor is proposing until next week, but we do know that the budget for next year will be based on revenue estimates that are approximately \$340 million per year less than this year, while costs have gone up, so there will have to be budget cuts. We therefore should expect few if any new programs or expansion of existing programs.

LATEST ON THE STADIUM

Although the Mayor announced April 28th that the Commanders would be coming back to RFK, she still has not sent the necessary legislation to the Council, and we are still awaiting important details of the multi-billion dollar proposal.

Disturbingly, the Mayor negotiated with the Commanders a deadline for the Council to act: July 15th. This was done without any consultation with the Council, and probably was negotiated two or three months ago when it was expected that the Council would receive the proposed budget (and funding for the RFK rebuild) on April 2nd. The Mayor continues to insist that the Council act no later than this July even though it is her own doing that submittal to the Council has been delayed.

My last newsletter broadly outlined the proposal: approximately \$1.2 billion in payments/subsidies from the District plus hundreds of millions of dollars more in benefits (such as development rights) to the Commanders.

In my community meetings, what I have heard over and over is that citizens want the Council to do due diligence over this proposal -- broad support for a stadium, but the terms should be favorable and reasonable. I am committed to the Council analyzing the proposal - once we get it - thoroughly and as quickly as possible, and ensuring that the public has an opportunity to comment.

I do not see how this can be completed by July 15th, especially when work on the budget (always a full time endeavor) must be completed first. I will note that the Council's approval of the Washington Nationals Ballpark took over a year; and approval of DC United's stadium took seven months.

[An excellent article](#) advocating the need for careful review was written by Washington Post columnist Barry Svrluga and two useful (but biased) viewpoints can be found on the Greater Greater Washington website [here](#) and [here](#).

COMMUNITIES IN SCHOOLS

Remarks Given at a Recent Reception for Communities In Schools (a local nonprofit working with schools)

As you know, the mission of Communities in Schools is to surround students with a community of support, empowering them to stay in school and achieve in life. Individualized student support, combined with family engagement, is a proven approach to improving academic success.

As you know, too many of our children come to school with social-emotional needs, almost always correlating with poverty. Often, these needs interfere with their learning. Sometimes they interfere with other students' learning. Just when we need public education to break the cycle of poverty, the forces of poverty are getting in the way.

Last year's statewide assessment showed improvement in both English and Math. Yet while 33.7% of students who took the ELA assessment met or exceeded grade-level expectations, 45.4% – almost half – did not even approach grade-level expectations. The numbers were worse for math: 22.5% met or exceeded grade-level expectations, 56.6% did not even approach grade-level expectations.

More starkly: in 2024 23.5% of Black students who took the ELA assessment met or exceeded expectations while 81.7% of White students did – an achievement gap of 58.2 points; In math it was 11.8% compared to 73.5% – an achievement gap of 61.7%.

If this was a private sector corporation whose sole product is educated people, we would file for bankruptcy.

The challenge is not unique to the District. All large school systems are struggling just as we are. It is tough educating kids living in poverty, and in violent communities. But the achievement gap is embarrassing, and it is not much different that it was six years ago.

Education, public education, is supposed to be the great equalizer in our society. It enables the opportunity of America for everybody. It empowers people to help themselves. It is the best job training program. It is the solution to our social justice ills.

Poverty does not thrive among the well-educated. Nor does crime.

I used to think that solving our problems through better schooling was so long term, and indirectly relevant. But I've come to realize the opposite. As Frederick Douglass said: "It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men." Quality education is not solely about learning. It is about jobs, wealth building, better health, better public safety, a creative economy, and so forth. Oh, and ending poverty.

To improve educational outcomes, I believe our government should focus especially on four areas: attendance, literacy, reducing teacher & principal turnover, and budget stability.

Communities in Schools of the Nation's Capital is the local affiliate of the nation's largest dropout prevention program. And although I listed four focus areas, arguably attendance is the most important because only if students stay in school do they have the chance of academic achievement. Academic achievement, in turn, makes school more interesting which, in turn, reinforces attendance and improves the chances of graduation and even for post-secondary education.

Year after year, for about 15 years, I have held public hearings on improving attendance in our schools. Always, folks act like there is some mystery to solving our high absenteeism rates. To give you a sense, last year the overall rate of chronic absenteeism (missing 20 days or more of school) was 39.2%. This was the average for all of our public schools – 116 DCPS plus 134 charters. Ballou High School had the worst record: 82% of its students missed 21 or more days.

But really, there isn't mystery to the work. Work early – early in the school year and early in the K-12 continuum. Work individually – identify students struggling with attendance and identify their needs. Work with families – family engagement makes a big difference in a child's success. Identify resources – to meet an individual student's needs, or to help with his or her family's needs. It could be life skills, mental health, behavioral interventions, or just basic needs. And this is the kind of work that Communities in Schools brings to the 11 DC schools it serves.

Imagine this: kids go to school because they enjoy going to school. And those who come from difficult environments find their school to be a safe place. And an interesting place. It's exciting what they're learning and, besides, they see their friends. And so they're learning, and when they go from grade to grade they are grade-ready.

Every child is born with this ability. And if we can realize this, it will hold true that for all of our children public education is the great equalizer, and every child has a shot at the American Dream.

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