



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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The DC Public Education Adequacy Study's Draft Recommendations: What You Need to Know

By Soumya Bhat

The much-anticipated DC public education adequacy study has made an initial splash. The 13-month project, completed for the District by two education finance consulting firms, was tasked with making recommendations on how the city can more sufficiently and uniformly fund the needs of DC Public Schools and public charter schools. A [draft of the executive summary](#) was released last week. One of the biggest and most wide-reaching findings: local per-student spending needs to increase by 18 percent to support an adequate education.

The full report is expected to be released shortly, and DC's Deputy Mayor for Education is asking for public feedback. The first opportunity to do that is tonight from 6:00 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. in room 527 at the Wilson Building, 1350 Pennsylvania Ave. NW. RSVP to Tara.Lynch@dc.gov.

The adequacy study proposes a roadmap, but for any changes to take effect, legislation will need to be passed by the DC Council and signed by the mayor. So, it's important for parents, educators, advocates and members of the community to weigh in on the proposals.

Key recommendations are below, as well as some questions raised by the proposals:

Recommendation: Increase local per-pupil funding formula by 18 percent.

The study found that DC schools need more funding. The 18 percent increase includes a number of proposed changes to the funding formula, including an increase to the base level and changes to the supplemental weights. The study recommends a \$2,050 increase to the base funding level attached to each student, from \$9,306 to \$11,356. Increased weights are also suggested for adult and alternative students, Level 1 and 2 special education students, and English language learners. Other weights, such as for special education students with the most serious needs, would be reduced from the current level. And two existing supplemental weights would be eliminated, for summer school and for special education extended school year. The full adequacy study, which contains the technical details and rationale behind these numbers, will hopefully offer more explanation.

DCFPI's Questions:

- What is the rationale to why some weights increased while others decreased?
- How are funds for summer school and special education extended school year incorporated into the other weight categories?

Recommendation: A new supplemental funding weight to address needs of at-risk students.

The study suggests 33 percent more funding to schools for students deemed at-risk, which echoes

recommendations made by the Public Education Finance Reform Commission. Students who are homeless, in foster care, or whose parents are TANF recipients would be counted in this category and eligible for the additional funds.

DCFPI's Questions:

- Does this method adequately capture students who are truly at-risk?
- Does this weight create a negative incentive for schools who successfully bring at-risk students up to grade level?

Recommendation: Switch calculation of maintenance and operations (M&O) to a per-pupil cost.

The proposed base level of \$11,356 per student is meant to cover instructional costs (\$10,285) as well as the cost of maintaining and operating school facilities (\$1,071). The study acknowledges that this is more than what the typical charter school spends on maintenance (\$759 per pupil) and far less than what DCPS spends (\$2,097 per pupil). The substantial DCPS spending reflects the fact that DCPS enrollment has fallen dramatically and that the school system has many underutilized schools despite closing nearly 40 schools in recent years.

DCFPI's Question:

- Does it make sense to apply the same amount per pupil to both sectors when that means that DCPS would be underfunded while charters would be overfunded for maintenance costs?

Recommendation: Shift outside agency functions to responsibility of each local educational agency (LEA).

This means that DCPS and each charter school would need to enter into agreements with other DC government agencies to arrange for services like school nurses, mental health practitioners, and technology services for their students. Currently, these agencies provide services to DCPS and public charter schools out of their agency budgets. The study recommends that school resource officers and crossing guards should continue to be paid for all allocated by the city agencies, not by schools.

DCFPI's Questions:

- Are individual LEAs best equipped to determine the level of resource allocation for these types of services?
- Is there a risk that some schools will choose not to contract for services, such as mental health, as a budget-saving measure?

Recommendation: Increase budget transparency for both DC public schools and charters. Public charter schools should adopt a standardized chart of accounts, and the city should adopt an online system that will show annual budget information.

These recommendations will make it easier to compare actual costs between DC public schools and charter schools.

DCFPI's Question:

- How does the capital facilities allotment for charter schools impact funding needs? The study does not address the charter school capital allowance, which is currently set at \$3,000 per student. There is a strong need for better data on the actual spending of this money by charter schools – many charter leaders say this amount is inadequate for their capital needs, while others have found data indicating the charter school sector is overfunded for their capital costs.

The District's Dime will unpack more of the full study. Stay tuned and get involved!