



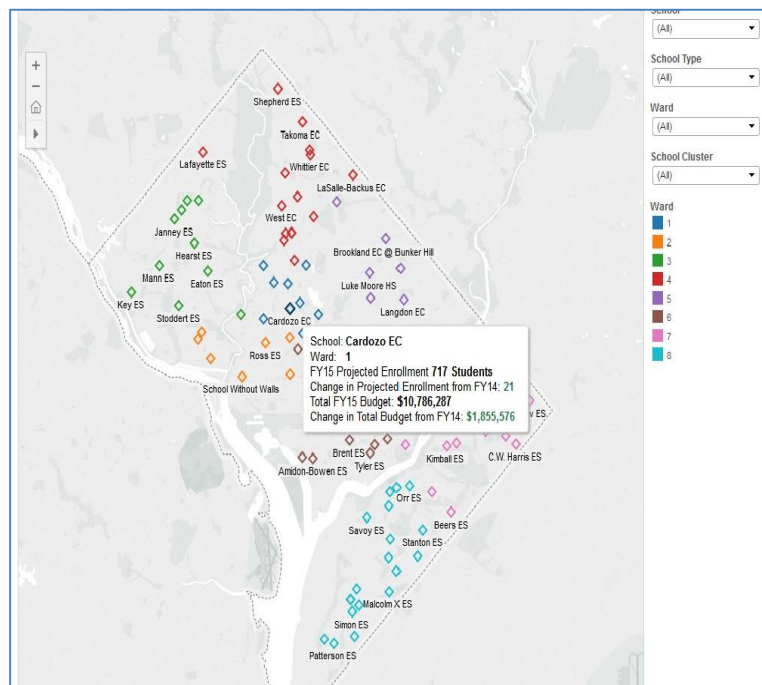
New Data Center for Schools Could Help Parents Even More With a Few Tweaks

By Soumya Bhat

With the city's budget season fast approaching, particularly for education, parents should have an easier time this year seeing how their schools are funded, thanks to a new [interactive data center](#) available on the DCPS website. But that data could be even more useful with just a few adjustments.

The data center lets parents see how their schools are funded for the current school year (fiscal year 2015) or to make comparisons with other DCPS schools. For example, the site shows what percentage of a school's budget is to be spent on early childhood education staff, and also how that figure compares, on average, with other DCPS elementary schools in the city. Users can also see trends in student enrollment and funding in key budget categories, such as special education or afterschool programs, between 2013 and 2015.

DCFPI knows it's no easy task to show budget information in appealing and interactive ways, but we do have a few ideas for how the site could be improved:



Source: DCPS Interactive Data Center

- The data center should use actual expenditures that would show parents how much of the budget actually gets spent on various things. It currently uses allocated budget figures, or what the schools *intend* to spend on staff and different budget categories.
- Showing budget and/or expenditure information on a per-student basis would also be an effective way to create clear comparisons between schools.
- Additional detail would also be helpful to understand the source of funding for certain budget categories. For example, a new source of funding for students considered at-risk of failure is included in two budget categories, “FY 2015 priorities” and the “DC Council supplement.” Also, there is no breakdown of the source of funds – whether federal or local dollars – in any category.

Initial decisions about how much goes into each DC Public School budget are made in March. Therefore, it is critical for DC parents to be able to understand their school's budget for the current year to help them advocate for better budgets next year.

In addition to the new data center, when schools receive their initial FY 2016 budgets and principals make funding decisions with their Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs) to produce final budgets, the key budget files are expected to be available online like usual, under the [Budget and Finance](#) tab of the DCPS website.

DCFPI encourages our readers to take a look at the new site and offer feedback using the ["Contact Us" tab](#).