



New Education Bill Proposes Additional Funding for Low-Income Students

By Soumya Bhat

The District's school year is coming to a close in a few weeks, but the DC Council's interest in transforming our education system is not taking a summer break. Last week, Councilmember David Catania, who chairs the Committee on Education, introduced [seven education bills](#). The proposals range from education funding and facilities to student assessment and a unified lottery for DCPS and public charter schools. Today, we take a closer look at one of the funding bills, the "[Fair Student Funding and School-Based Budgeting Act of 2013](#)."

This bill would boost resources to schools with students who face high barriers to achievement. It would increase local funding for three groups: students who are low-income, who attend schools with low graduation rates, and who are enrolled in career and technical education programs. The bill adds new weights for these groups to the per-pupil-funding formula that is used to fund DCPS and each charter school. The District already has supplemental weights for students with special education needs and English language learners.

The changes to the funding formula would take place over two separate school years, starting in 2014-2015. The new weights would be cumulative, so if students qualify under all three categories, their base per-pupil funding would increase due to all three factors.

DCFPI is very encouraged by the Council's proposal to invest more funds into the education of our low-income students. Research shows us that children who grow up in poverty face a number of challenges outside the classroom – from housing instability to low levels of parent engagement – that affect their ability to learn in the classroom.

However, the bill doesn't address how much weight to give each of these factors. This is a critical decision that shouldn't be made hastily. We recommend that the mayor and Council wait for the results of the [DC Public Education Adequacy Study](#), a year-long examination of the funding needed to support an adequate education, to be released this fall.

We encourage our readers to learn about these and other key features of this bill, including:

- **Direct Funding to School Budgets:** Right now, DC Public Schools spends approximately 77 percent of its local funds directly on individual schools. The bill would require DCPS to increase that funding to at least 80 percent.

- **School-Based Budgeting:** The bill would alter how local school budgets are put together, giving principals more control of their school dollars while requiring them to conform to a set of standards set by the Chancellor. Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, principals would have to report how their proposed budget will boost student achievement and address student needs, and they would be evaluated based on their performance.
- **School Budget Stabilization:** The bill would not allow any DCPS school to see more than a 5 percent loss in local funds from the previous fiscal year due to application of the funding formula.
- **Transportation Subsidies:** Starting in the 2015-2016 school year, all DC high school students that qualify for free and reduced meals would be fully subsidized for public transportation costs. (Note: Last week, Councilmember Muriel Bowser introduced separate legislation that would fund Metro bus transportation costs for all DC public school students, including those in private schools, regardless of income level.)

DCFPI looks forward to the public hearings on these education bills in the coming months, with several expected before the Council begins their summer recess. You can read our summary of all seven bills [here](#).