



# The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute blog  
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## Sign-On To Urge Mayor Gray to Invest in At-Risk Students

By Soumya Bhat

The recently released education adequacy study commissioned by Mayor Gray recommends major changes in the way the District allocates resources to publicly funded schools, through adjustments to the per-pupil funding formula. There is general agreement that using the formula to compensate for the impact of poverty should be a top funding priority. DCFPI, along with a number of education advocates, explains this to Mayor Vince Gray in a [letter](#), and we ask you to add your name to the sign-on list.

On the other hand, the adequacy study includes recommendations that make less sense, including one that would but underfund DCPS for maintenance of buildings but overfund public charter schools, and another that could put school nurses and mental health resources at risk by moving them within the formula.

At-risk students face more educational challenges than their peers in the classroom. A new study shows that giving these students additional resources might not only be helpful for their individual educational progress but for all students. The University of Pennsylvania [study](#) found that schools with high concentrations of children with “risk factors,” such as homelessness or abuse, had negative impacts on the academic performance of all children – not only those with those risk factors.

The idea of a new weight for “at risk” students was blessed by the DC Council in [legislation](#) adopted last fall. That law authorized additional monies for the 30,000 students who are homeless, in foster care, or eligible for food stamps or welfare benefits. It also requires that 90 percent of these funds go directly to schools, with autonomy for principals on how best to use those funds. The education adequacy study largely agreed, recommending adding one-third to base level of per-student funding for at-risk students.

Now it's up to Mayor Gray to include the monies needed in his fiscal year 2015 budget. We urge him to do so, and your signature on the letter will be helpful in persuading him and his budget staff as they make these critical decisions.

We also urge you to tell Mayor Gray that making maintenance costs part of the per-pupil formula is not the best way to make sure our schools are adequately maintained. Taking this approach would underfund the maintenance needs of traditional DC public schools. DC public school buildings tend to be older than those of DC public charter schools, and due to the continuing shift of students from DCPS to charters, the buildings are not always at capacity. Still, no matter if there are 20 students or 30 students in a classroom a boiler or roof needs to be fixed. That's why it makes more sense to fund maintenance outside the per-pupil funding formula, based on actual need.

The same holds true for other services, such as school nurses and social workers, which are currently managed outside of the school formula by other DC government agencies. Some schools may choose not to use funds for these and other purposes if they are moved within the school formula, which gives both DCPS and charter schools great flexibility over the use of formula funds.

There's another principle that should be applied universally, however – transparency in each school's budget. It shouldn't matter whether a child goes to a DCPS school or a charter school; how much the school spends on teachers, classroom materials, and even supplies should be knowable and understandable to everyone.

If you agree with these points, we urge you to sign-on to the letter to Mayor Gray before this Friday. Over 30 education advocates across all wards of the city have already signed on to the letter. To add your name to the list, e-mail [bhat@dcfpi.org](mailto:bhat@dcfpi.org).