



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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Longer School Days in the FY 2015 Budget

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School districts around the country are experimenting with lengthening the school day or school year to help close achievement gaps. DC Public Schools (DCPS) Chancellor Kaya Henderson is trying out this approach, too, as part of the city's effort to lift the 40 lowest-performing schools by 2017. Citing improved test scores from a recent pilot program at some DCPS schools, the proposed fiscal year 2015 budget includes \$5.7 million to expand the strategy to half the school system.



Extending the school day holds promise, but DCPS should complement existing programs and carefully evaluate outcomes to make sure those resources are used as effectively as possible.

Nine DCPS schools currently offer the extended day program – five elementary schools, one education campus, two middle schools, and one high school. According to the proposed FY 2015 budget, a total of 52 schools, or half the DCPS system, will receive \$100,000 more to offer students an extra four hours of instructional time each week. However, one exception – Dunbar Senior High School – is slated to receive almost \$600,000 for extended school day. The budget and related documents do not explain why Dunbar would get so much more than other schools.

How that extra time will be used will be key to its success. Research shows that struggling students can greatly benefit from engaging, individualized learning experiences, including those offered through afterschool and summer programs. But simply adding more of the same curriculum offered during the school day won't necessarily make a difference in student achievement and could result in student fatigue. A good system-wide strategy should take into account what types of programs already exist, in and out of school hours, offer complementary programming, and assess the costs of implementation. In addition, teachers and parents need to be included in these changes so that they are fully aware and supportive.

The DC Fiscal Policy Institute looks forward to following the expansion of longer school days to improve outcomes in high-poverty schools, and hopes that this will be undertaken in a thorough and thoughtful way.

Stay tuned to more from the District's Dime on the FY 2015 budget!