



The District's Dime

Going Beyond the Budget Book

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The Need to Better Manage DCPS School Modernization

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All students deserve to go to school in a safe, accessible, and well-maintained building but in DC, the process for selecting which DCPS schools are modernized, in what order, and at what cost is far from transparent, according to a new [report](#) from the Office of the DC Auditor.

The audit points to significant problems with the city's school modernization program, including a lack of accountability, transparency, and financial management. DC should adopt these recommendations from the report:

- **A clear process for selecting schools for modernization is needed:** The city has a Master Facilities Plan (MFP), which covers a 10-15 year time period and provides an estimate for the schedule and budget for the school modernization process. But, the audit noted that there is no link between the MFP and the selection of schools that receive modernization each year. It found that of the 62 projects scheduled between 2010 and 2012, about half did not abide by the schedule and process outlined in the MFP. In addition, many projects were not completed on time, others were moved up in the schedule, and DCPS closed some schools that had already started work. A clear process should be developed, and aligned with the MFP, with one entity responsible for selecting schools.
- **The Modernization Advisory Committee should be reappointed:** DC law required this committee with expertise in planning, design, or public finance be formed to help monitor the program's spending and ensure the work being done is consistent across the city's various capital plans. However, due to inadequate support, the committee disbanded in 2008. It should be brought back.
- **Better tracking of scheduled projects and expenditures on a school-by-school basis:** The report makes suggestions to improve transparency, including making project descriptions for the next six years and expenditures for the past three years available online for the public. It also recommends better tracking of expenditures on a school-by-school basis to match appropriations.



The reality is, DCPS schools saw decades of disinvestment before the modernization program began, and 24 schools are still waiting for their turn. The city is also reaching the limits of the debt it can incur, so funding for school modernization is not unlimited. However, these financial struggles are not a signal to stop investing in better school facilities, but instead a reason to develop a clear, rational system to ensure the government agencies are held accountable for the dollars being spent.

You can find the full DC Auditor's report [here](#).