

December 15, 2017

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Chronic Absenteeism is a Symptom of Underinvestment in the Supports Students Need to Thrive Inside and Outside the Classroom

It would be short-sighted to look at the problems at Ballou High School as an isolated scandal: one school alone cannot remedy decades of economic inequality and racial injustice. Chronic absenteeism is widespread across public schools, and reflects the enormous challenges faced by too many DC students and their families—unhealthy environments, housing instability, food insecurity, and the stress of living paycheck to paycheck, as a Ballou student so [poignantly expressed](#).

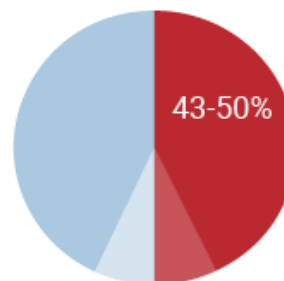
Ballou High School's attendance problems also reflect the District's failure to follow through on our commitment to equitably distribute resources among schools. DC schools are supposed to get additional resources, through "at-risk" funds, to target resources for low-income students and students who are struggling academically. Yet DCPS schools have been underfunded, forcing schools to [misuse nearly half of "at-risk" dollars](#) for basic staff positions, rather than supports for the students who need them most, like meaningful credit recovery programs.

"Chronic absenteeism at Ballou and many other schools reflects a failure of the District to follow through on its commitments to children and youth, both inside and outside the classroom," said Marlana Wallace, education policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. "As a start, the District should make sure that every dollar intended to provide additional resources for low-income and academically struggling students actually goes to help those students."

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Almost Half of DCPS 'At-Risk' Funds Used Incorrectly on Core Services in Fiscal Year 2018

■ Used to 'Supplant' Core School Function
■ Targeted At-Risk Use
■ Unclear



Source: Analysis of DCPS' initial budget allocations for FY 2018 by Mary Levy, April 2017

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