

Education: Make Essential Investments in All of DC's Children, In and Out of The Classroom

By Marlana Wallace

This brief lays out **six essential investments** DC should make in the Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 budget to support the education and healthy development of DC's children: early childhood learning, special education reforms, afterschool and out-of-school time opportunities, equitably funded classrooms, evidence-based student discipline, and community schools that holistically meet family and neighborhood needs.

Ensure Reimbursements for Child Care Subsidies Cover the Costs of Care Adopt Pending Legislation, and Provide at Least \$11 Million in FY 2019

Reimbursements for child care providers who educate low-income children should fully cover the true cost of care, including decent salaries for early educators that are on par with similarly credentialed Pre-K teachers.

Under-funding in the District's child care subsidy program is preventing the city from fully supporting the healthy development of all infants and toddlers. Payments to child care providers that primarily serve children from low-income families are well below the level needed to provide high-quality care, leaving many providers struggling to make ends meet. Teachers and staff earn far less than they deserve, and low-income families often cannot secure continuous, high-quality education for their youngest children.

Underinvestment in early childhood education has damaging lifetime effects, and intensifies DC's deep racial and economic inequality. Beginning at birth, low-income children and children of color experience fewer opportunities, and face larger barriers to academic achievement. The District's early educators are largely women of color who must support their own families on meager wages (\$29,000 on average). Low wages in this important sector contribute to both gender and racial disparities in earnings.

We can do better. Early education is the foundation for a lifetime of learning—it's how we shape the citizens and workers of tomorrow. DC should build on our Pre-K successes, and realize our responsibility to fully support the education of infants and toddlers. Legislation championed by Councilmembers Gray and R. White charts a path towards identifying and funding the full cost of educating low-income children in the subsidy program. DC leaders should adopt that legislation and set aside money to implement it, starting with an \$11 million "down-payment" towards that goal now, for the toddlers of today.



Implement the 2014 Special Education Reforms: Early Intervention for More Children, Faster Evaluations, and Better Transition Planning Full Funding, and the Removal of “Subject to Appropriations” Language

Many special education students in DC do not get the supports they need to succeed; by high school, fewer than one in 10 are college and career ready. Three critical special education reforms would align services with best practices, but have been on hold since 2014 due to lack of funding. Families have been waiting too long. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) is committed to implementing these reforms this year. It is time for DC leaders to also commit to funding:

- **Early Intervention for More Children:** Birth to age three is a crucial time for brain and body growth. Yet too many babies and toddlers fall behind because they have unaddressed developmental delays in areas like language or motor skills, especially low-income children. Almost half of children who get early intervention services completely catch up to their peers.
- **Faster Evaluation:** Currently, schools have 120 days to complete evaluations for special education, the longest timeline in the nation. That means a child can struggle without services for half the school year. Faster diagnosis prevents lost learning time for students, and months of stress for their families.
- **Better Transition Planning:** One year after graduating or leaving school, two-thirds of youth with disabilities in DC are not in college or working. Individual transition plans help youth with disabilities figure out how to take steps towards their personal aspirations for college, career, and independent living. Youth do better when they have robust support from their schools and families, and when they start transition planning earlier, at age 14—before choosing their high school.

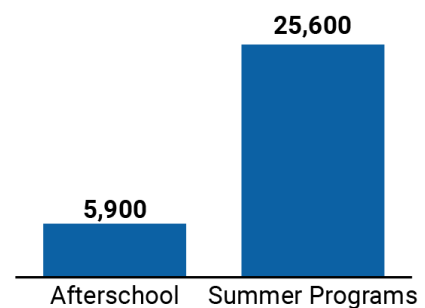
Afterschool and Summer Enrichment Opportunities for Every Low-Income Student \$25 Million

Low-income students should have the same kind of enriching, out-of-school-time opportunities as their higher-income peers. DC should invest \$25 million for the nearly 6,000 children without afterschool options, and the 25,000 children without summer programming.

Out-of-school time opportunities are more than just fun. These programs improve academic, social, and health outcomes, and give parents peace of mind knowing their children are in a safe environment while they work. After-school programs provide a significant return on investment, and summer programs limit summer learning loss.

DC’s funding for afterschool and summer programming has declined 63 percent since 2010. There are now more children waiting to get into afterschool programs than are enrolled. A lack of summer opportunities means low-income students and students of color are more likely to fall behind their peers.

Needed Out-of-School-Time Opportunities for Students Who Qualify for “At-Risk” Funding



Source: DC Alliance of Youth Advocates (DCAYA) analysis.

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Right-Size the School Funding Increase for Growing Enrollment, Rising Cost of Living, and Resource Equity

Full Funding

Budget increases for DC public schools and public charter schools in recent years have been arbitrary, and not connected to what’s really needed to provide quality education. This should stop in FY 2019. DC leaders should increase the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) based on what is required to meet three critical needs: 1) growing enrollment, 2) rising cost of living, and 3) improving the equity of resources, by ensuring every dollar of “at-risk” funding is dedicated to targeted services for low-income and academically struggling students.

Last year, dedicated advocacy from parents, educators, students and advocates led to a substantial increase in school funding—the largest since the Great Recession.

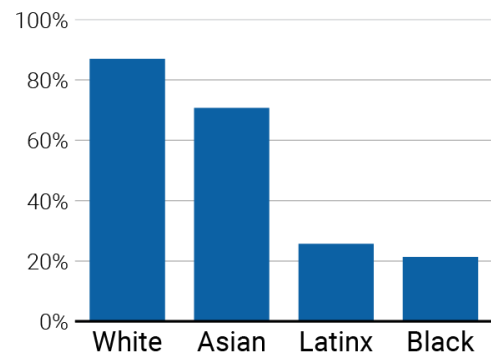
Despite this, funding still remains well below what schools need to prepare all PreK-12 students for success. There are [distressing differences](#) between the educational outcomes for white students and students of color. In high school English, 87 percent of white students are college and career ready compared to only 21 percent of Black students. Economically disadvantaged students are also faring far worse than their wealthier peers. Addressing the injustice of these inequalities requires targeted resources.

“At-risk” funds can be a powerful way to increase the equity of local school funding. The city’s funding formula gives additional money to schools to better support low-income students and those falling behind in the classroom. But because of budget constraints over the last few years, roughly *half* of those “at-risk” funds have been misspent on regular staff positions, rather than on dedicated supports that improve outcomes for those students. This is unacceptable.

As a city, we need to provide enough funds so that schools can appropriately staff their classrooms *and* improve student outcomes. To truly understand what it costs to effectively support DC schools and students, DC leaders should update and improve the 2013 Education Adequacy study, and improve school budget transparency. The UPSFF should also be automatically adjusted for inflation each year.

Opportunity & Achievement Gaps in DC Schools Point to Racial Inequity

Share of high school students scoring at Level 4 or higher on English Language Arts in 2016.

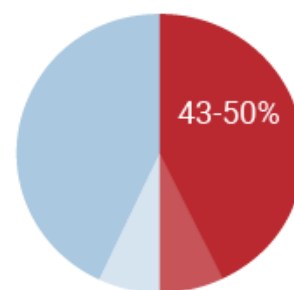


Note: Score refers to 2016-17 PARCC Scores.
Source: Office of the State Superintendent of Education.

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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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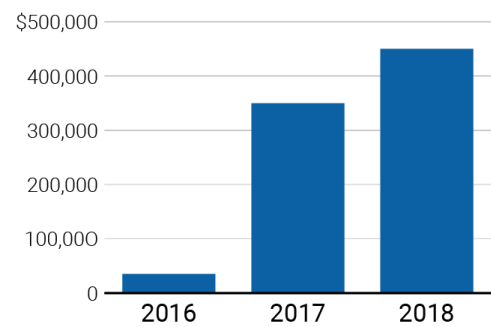
Stop School Push-out: Provide More Resources for Restorative Justice in Schools

Chancellor Wilson stated his intention last year to expand Restorative Justice to 74 schools, but without any additional funding from DC to do so. That’s the right goal, but to make that expansion effective, DC leaders should fund it appropriately. DC leaders should also allocate money for a Positive School Climate Fund, empowering schools to pursue other evidence-based solutions to stop school push-out.

When schools rely on suspension or expulsion as discipline methods, they create more problems than they solve. Students miss lessons, fall behind when they return, and are more likely to drop out. There is no evidence that students of color misbehave to a greater degree than white students. Yet in DC, Black students are [seven times](#) more likely to be suspended and sent out of the classroom than white students. Students of color are receiving much harsher disciplinary responses than white students for the same behaviors. We should stop relying on these unsuccessful approaches and give schools the resources they need to use evidence-based solutions instead, like Restorative Justice Models.

When schools have the funds to fully staff Restorative Justice, they can better address the root causes of disruptive behavior. Students acquire the skills to manage their emotions and actions, learn to take responsibility for their mistakes, develop a greater sense of empathy, strengthen relationships, and repair harm. Teachers are better supported in managing the classroom without interrupting the learning of individual students. A more positive school climate allows for greater attention to academics, benefitting everyone and boosting student performance.

Restorative Justice Funding in OSSE Increasing, But Insufficient



Source: Responses to FY 2016 OSSE Performance Oversight Questions and Committee on Education FY 2018 Committee Budget Report

Empower Community Schools to Better Support Students, Families, and Neighborhoods



In the coming year, every interested school that wants to become a “community school” to more holistically meet the needs of the families and neighborhoods they serve should have *enough* resources to fully realize that. DC leaders should enhance funding accordingly.

Schools are not just centers of academic instruction. They are among our most important and trusted community institutions. The District recognizes that schools can build on that strength to become community hubs, to connect children and their families with services that strengthen the whole community.

Under this approach, known as the “community schools” model, schools build partnerships with community-based resources to deliver services like health care, afterschool programs, adult education, or early childhood programming. These “integrated student supports” in turn can lead to engaged families, stronger communities, and better academic outcomes. Community schools provide needed resources in communities of color and lower-income neighborhoods that do not have the same resources as higher-income communities.