

It's Time to Update our Understanding of What a Quality Education Costs

By Marlana Wallace

This year, the Deputy Mayor for Education should lead an evaluation of the District's educational investments and commission an updated study of what it actually costs to provide a quality education for every student in the District. The Deputy Mayor for Education should also commit the needed resources for what we know is effective—expanding enriching Out-of-School Time programs and implementing critical special education reforms.

Update and Improve Cost Modeling and the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula

Six years ago, the Deputy Mayor for Education commissioned a study to address the fundamental question of what it actually costs to provide a quality education for every student in the District. When the [Adequacy Study](#) was published in 2013, it included a recommendation that “DC government should undertake a rigorous assessment of the adequacy of education funding through the UPSFF [Uniform Per Student Funding Formula] **every five years.**”

The District is also [required by law](#) to reconvene a Technical Working Group to advise on revisions to the formula every two years, that includes members of the public.

It is now time to do both.

We recommend that the Deputy Mayor of Education use the opportunity of these overlapping timelines to comply with both the law and expert recommendations in 2018: by updating the Adequacy Study with input from the Technical Working Group.

At DCFPI, we believe in the aim of the Adequacy Study: that the District should invest enough resources “to ensure all students enter school ready to learn and leave school with the tools and skills they need to succeed in life.”

Five years have passed, and yet, we still have not reached the level of resources recommended in the 2013 Adequacy Study, once adjusted for inflation—let alone the level needed to keep up with all of our system's changing needs. 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.

We hope the Deputy Mayor for Education will work to automatically adjust the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) for inflation, and increase Fiscal Year (FY) 2019 funding based on what is required to meet three critical needs:

- 1) growing enrollment
- 2) rising cost of living
- 3) greater resource equity

The city's funding formula gives additional money to schools to better support low-income students and those falling behind in the classroom. These "at-risk" funds can be a powerful way to increase the equity of local school funding. But because of budget constraints over the last few years, roughly half of those "at-risk" funds have been misspent on regular staff positions, not spent on dedicated supports that improve outcomes for the students those funds are supposed to support. As noted by DC Auditor, Kathy Patterson in her recent audit: "using funds ear-marked for a sub-group of students to benefit an entire group of students defeats the purpose of supplemental funding, if schools need to use those supplemental funds to be compliant, it's a sign that the model may not be fully funded." The FY 2019 UPSFF increase should improve resource equity, by ensuring every dollar of "at-risk" funding is dedicated to targeted services for low-income and academically struggling students.

Fund Enriching Out-of-School Time Opportunities for Every Low-Income Student

This fall, the Deputy Mayor for Education launched a new office dedicated to improving and expanding critical Out-of-School Time (OST) programs, the Office of Out-of-School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes.

We encourage the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Mayor, and the DC Council to invest \$25 million in that office and in OST programs for the students who need them most. Low-income students should have the same kind of enriching OST opportunities as their higher-income peers. 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. Yet funding for expanded learning in DC has fallen sharply.

Implement the 2014 Special Education Reforms

We hope that the Deputy Mayor for Education will lead the city in improving outcomes for students with disabilities. The first step is to ensure funding for the implementation of the 2014 Special Education Reforms in the Mayor's proposed FY 2019 budget.

These critical reforms include: early intervention services for more young children, faster evaluations, and better transition planning that begins at 14 years old, instead of 16.

Watch our testimony today, or read it in full [here](#).