

**Testimony of Marlana Wallace, Policy Analyst
At the FY 2018 Performance Oversight Hearing for
the Deputy Mayor for Education and the Public Charter School Board
DC Council Committee on Education
February 13, 2018**

Chairperson Grosso and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Marlana Wallace and I am the education policy analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI promotes budget choices to reduce economic and racial inequality and build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I would like to focus my testimony today on the importance of improving the 2013 cost model of a quality education, increasing funding so more children and youth benefit from Out-of-School Time opportunities, and fully implementing the 2014 special education reforms. We hope to see strong leadership from the office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, and this Committee, in accomplishing all three.

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

Thank you Chairperson Grosso for your opening comments during last week's hearing on graduation rate accountability. You emphasized the importance of considering the "entire scope of the problem" and taking the challenges of poverty in the classroom seriously. Too many DC students come to school hungry, and too many of their families are coping with the difficulties of unstable housing and the stress of living paycheck to paycheck. The recent news coverage of deeply troubling rates of chronic absenteeism, graduation policy violations, teacher turnover, and undocumented suspensions in DC schools show that addressing the underlying issues is not just a question of setting high expectations, it is also a question of resources.¹ Money matters, particularly for students facing adversity.

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.**"²

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.³

It is now time to do both.

We recommend that the Deputy Mayor for Education use the opportunity of these overlapping timelines to comply with both the law and expert recommendations: by updating the Adequacy Study with input from the Technical Working Group. We would like to hear from the DME on next steps towards commissioning a revision of the Adequacy Study and assembling the Technical Working Group, including a timeline.

At DCFPI, we deeply 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.”⁴

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 advocate 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 these 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.”⁵ 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.

We are grateful to this Committee for requiring both DC public schools and public charter schools to release reports on how “at-risk” funds were spent at the school level, in order to improve budget transparency and accountability. Although we are pleased to note that the Public Charter School Board has released their report on “at-risk” funds, we are disappointed it was not circulated earlier to give the community an opportunity to raise questions during this hearing.

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

Fixing educational funding shortages is not just about what happens in the classroom during the school day. 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.

I am here today to encourage the Deputy Mayor for Education, the Mayor, and the DC Council to do right by children and youth by investing \$25 million in Out-of-School-Time (OST) programs for the children and youth who need them most. Low-income students should have the same kind of enriching, out-of-school-time opportunities as their higher-income peers.

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.⁶ After-school programs provide a significant return on investment, and summer programs limit summer learning loss.

Yet funding for expanded learning in DC has fallen sharply over the last decade—by 63 percent since FY 2010. The cuts have led to a severe shortage of afterschool opportunities, especially for low-income students. There are now more children *waiting* to get into afterschool programs than are enrolled.

Chairperson Grosso, we thank you for including Out-of-School Time opportunities on your FY 2019 budget priority list. It is our hope that the Deputy Mayor for Education shares your commitment, and that the budget for the Office of Out-of-School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes will reflect that.

Implement the 2014 Special Education Reforms

It is also our hope that the Deputy Mayor for Education will lead the city in improving outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. The first step is for the Deputy Mayor for Education to ensure funding for the implementation of the Enhanced Special Education Services Act of 2014 (ESESA) in the Mayor's proposed FY 2019 budget.

Those reforms are:

- **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.

We thank you, Chairperson Grosso, and this Committee, for your leadership on implementation of the reforms. Executive branch leaders have stated that they expect these reforms to go into effect July 2018. To keep that commitment, these reforms must be funded in the FY 2019 proposed budget with a clear budget narrative.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

¹For example: Matos and Brown, Washington Post, [“Some D.C. High Schools Are Reporting Only a Fraction of Suspensions”](#); Matos, Washington Post, [“One D.C. School Lost More Than a Quarter of its Teaching Staff This Year”](#); Valdivia-Cazzol and Mark Hecker, Washington Post, [“Ask the Right Questions About Ballou’s Absentee Scandal, and You’ll Learn Something”](#); Stein, Washington Post, [“Report Calls into Question Validity of Hundreds of Diplomas”](#)

² Deputy Mayor for Education, “Cost of Student Achievement: Report of the DC Education Adequacy Study”, December 2013

³ [§ 38-2911. Periodic revision of Formula.](#)

(a) (1) Except as provided in paragraph (2) of this subsection, the Mayor and Council, in consultation with representatives of DCPS and of the Public Charter Schools, shall review and revise this Formula within 2 years of its establishment, within 2 years after this initial review and revision, and once every 4 years subsequently. Revisions shall be based upon information and data including study of actual costs of education in the District of Columbia, consideration of performance incentives created by the Formula in practice, research in education and education finance, and public comment.

(2) Beginning January 30, 2016, the Mayor shall submit to the Council a report every 2 years that reviews the Formula and includes recommendations for revisions to the Formula based upon a study of actual costs of education in the District of Columbia, research in education and education finance, and public comment.

(b) The study of actual costs of education pursuant to subsection (a) of this section shall include but not be limited to the following:

- (1) The relation of funding levels to student outcomes;
- (2) Maintenance of effort in specified areas of focus to promote continuity of effective practices;
- (3) Improved techniques for determining specific levels of funding needed to provide adequate special education services;
- (4) Improved measures of change in the cost of education; and
- (5) A review of the costs associated with serving at-risk students and of how at-risk students are identified.

(c) The Office of the State Superintendent for Education shall be responsible for the development of the report required by subsection (a) of this section and shall convene a working group, which shall be comprised of, at a minimum, representatives from DCPS, public charter schools, and the public, to solicit input and recommendations regarding revisions to the Formula.

⁴ Deputy Mayor for Education, “Cost of Student Achievement: Report of the DC Education Adequacy Study”, December 2013

⁵ Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, “Auditor: Schools Largely Comply with Comprehensive Staffing Model, But All Used “At-Risk” Funds to Meet Staffing Goals” Press Release, October 2017, p.1

⁶ DCAYA, “#ExpandLearning DC,” June 2016.