

**Testimony of Marlana Wallace, Policy Analyst
At the FY 2018 Performance Oversight Hearing for DC Public Schools
DC Council Committee on Education
February 21, 2018**

Chairperson Grosso and members of the Committee, good morning and thank you for the opportunity to testify 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 for all residents in the District, through independent research and policy recommendations.

Although frustrating and deeply distressing, the challenges that have surfaced in DC public schools over the past year are not new. But we have a lot to learn from the way they have come to light. One measure alone can mislead us on both the nature of the problem and the solution. We must look at graduation rates alongside the share of students testing college and career ready; examine teacher turnover together with school climate assessments, assess chronic absenteeism next to suspension rates. Only then can we understand the full picture of what's working, and how to avoid unintended consequences.

The same is true of budgets. A rigorous reassessment of our educational policies will fall short without a corresponding reassessment of the adequacy of our educational investments. Addressing the underlying issues is not just a question of setting smart policies, it is also a question of resources. A singular focus on the percentage increase to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula does not fully capture whether staffing models include everything they should, or if targeted resources are well-spent on effective programs for the students who need them most.

We urge the Council to update our holistic understanding of what a quality education in the District costs by commissioning the expert-recommended five-year revision to the 2013 Adequacy Study, with input from both the public and the biennial Technical Working Group.

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 need a better blueprint for the resources required to staff every school and the resources needed to support low-income students in particular.

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, roughly half of "at-risk" funds have been misspent on regular staff positions, rather than on dedicated supports that improve outcomes for the students with the biggest barriers. Shortchanging the available resources for targeted services that help students who are falling behind deeply affects programs like credit recovery. The Alvarez and Marsal report on citywide graduation policy violations recommended the development of better credit recovery policies and the provision of "sufficient tools and personnel to administer and monitor credit recovery programs in

order to ensure adherence to stated requirements.”¹ In other words, the recommended credit recovery policy changes require corresponding budgets to implement them, and further underscores the need for DC Council to ensure that all “at-risk” funds are available for the students who need them most.

DC leaders must also evaluate the effectiveness of the targeted investments we are currently making with “at-risk” funds, using multiple measures. For example, a significant portion of at-risk funds are used to support extended school days and school years. Yet according to the Performance Question responses, out of 30 participating schools in 2017, fewer than half experienced gains in both English and Math PARCC scores.² What other measures should we use to determine where and when the extended school day model is an effective investment?

The inclusion of low-income measures in the definition of ‘at-risk’ underscores the need to think beyond PARCC scores and strictly academic supports. The resources required to educate the whole child and attend to social and emotional needs will vary by student and by school. School-level decisions on how to allocate “at-risk” funds should be guided by input from the school community and academic research, and periodically evaluated for effectiveness.

Within the next two weeks, DCPS will release the Initial School Budget Allocation Worksheets to principals, teachers, parents and Local School Advisory Teams. DCPS should take immediate steps to solicit direct input from families and teachers on how to improve the transparency and readability of these Worksheets, particularly with regard to “at-risk” funds. DCFPI recommends supplementing the existing breakdown of required positions and principal discretionary spending with a table that clearly connects ‘at-risk’ revenue with specific expenditures (see Appendix A for an example).

Changing the system requires more than changed leadership, and we are all accountable. The DC Council is responsible for the investments we choose to make or not make in the education of the District’s children and youth. The challenges facing our students and schools may not be new, but the emotions of this moment are fresh. It is our hope that the Mayor and DC Council will channel frustrations into constructive change by building an education budget that meets the scale of our challenges.

As a city, we need a better blueprint, but we should also make investments we know are effective *now* that reflect the cumulative and comprehensive nature of learning: from birth through high-school and beyond, inside and outside of the classroom walls.

That starts with a 2019 school funding formula increase that actually provides enough to meet: 1) growing enrollment, 2) rising cost of living, and 3) greater resource equity. We should leverage one of the most powerful local budget tools available to increase the equitable distribution of resources by ensuring every dollar of “at-risk” funding is dedicated to targeted services for low-income and students struggling academically. We must fund promised improvements for special education students so that every child with disabilities in every school gets the early intervention, faster evaluation, and transition planning services assured in the still as-yet-unfunded 2014 special education reforms.

¹ Alvarez and Marsal, “Final Report District of Columbia Public Schools Audit and Investigation, January 26, 2018”, page 14.

² DCPS Performance Oversight Responses, Question 43: In 2017, 30 schools participated in extended day, and 14 schools showed growth in both ELA and Math.

Needed, effective investments also include additional resources for community-oriented, school-based programs that serve the “whole child” including Community School and Restorative Justice Models, so schools have the resources to develop holistic ways to meet the needs of families where they are, and to stop pushing students out of the classroom with ineffective punitive discipline that leaves the root causes of behavioral issues unaddressed.

Investing in education does not end with the DCPS school bell. The District needs to do much more to support the Out-of-School Time learning that has been proven to strengthen students’ social, health and academic outcomes, as well as relieve working parents. We also seriously under-resource early childhood education, which lays the foundation for a lifetime of learning. As a city, we must invest in school readiness by reimbursing the providers who educate low-income infants and toddlers in the subsidy program enough to cover the true costs of care, including decent salaries for teachers on par with public schools.

We look forward to an education budget that includes these and other needed investments and equips schools with the resources to make real and substantive changes that go deeper than one statistic.

More Detail on Needed Investments in the Fiscal Year 2019 Budget

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

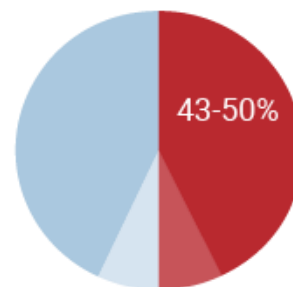
Last year, dedicated advocacy from parents, educators, students and advocates led to a substantial increase in school funding—the largest since the Great Recession.

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.

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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As a city, we need to provide enough funds so that schools can appropriately staff their classrooms *and* improve student outcomes. 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.

Implement the 2014 Special Education Reforms

It is also our hope that DCPS and the DC Council will prioritize improving outcomes for children and youth with disabilities. The first step is 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.

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.

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

DC leaders should also allocate money for Restorative Justice and other positive behavioral approaches, empowering schools to pursue 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 Models, 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.

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 DCPS, 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. 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 budget for the Office of Out-of-School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes will reflect that.

Support School Readiness: Reimburse Providers Enough to Cover the Costs of Providing a Quality Education to Low-Income Infants and Toddlers in the Subsidy Program

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 towards that goal now in the Fiscal Year 2019 budget, for the toddlers of today.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today.

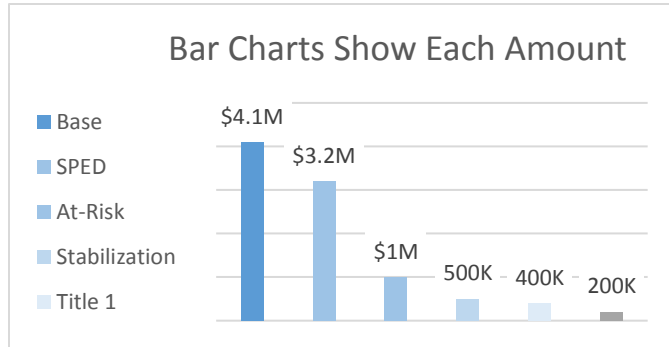
APPENDIX A

Example Initial School Budget Worksheet

Anacostia HS

Fiscal Year 2019 (FY19) Initial Allocation

\$X.XM total budget
 -XXXXK from prior year
 XXX total enrollment
 -XXX change in enrollment
 XX% 'at-risk' %
 \$XXX total 'at-risk' funds



Position	# of Required Positions	Expenditure Type	Revenue Fund	Budget Amount
School Leadership				
Principal	1	Required	Base Local Funding	\$170,000
Assistant Principal	1	Required	Base Local Funding	\$140,000
Assistant Principal	1.4	Discretionary	At Risk Funding	\$193,398
General Education				
Total General Ed	25	Required	Base Local Funding	\$2,400,000
Special Education				
Aide	12	Required	SPED Local Funding	\$400,000
Special Education Teacher	21	Required	SPED Local Funding	
English Language Learner				
Teacher ELL	.5	Required	ELL Local Funding	\$5,000
Social Worker	4	Required	Base Local Funding	\$450,000
Social Worker	1	Districtwide 'at-risk' (Petition-able)	At Risk Funding	\$90,000
Behavioral Technician	3	Districtwide 'at-risk' (Petition-able)	At Risk Funding	\$135,000
Schoolwide Instructional Support				
Instructional Coach	1	Required	Federal Title 1	\$97,000

Funding Source	Total
Local Base Funding	XM
At Risk Funding	XXXXK
Special Education Funding	XXXXK
English Language Learner	XXXXK
Federal Title 1	XXXXK

Expenditure Type	Total
Required	XM
Districtwide 'at-risk' (Petition-able)	XM
Discretionary	XXXXK