

TESTIMONY: In A Time Of Upheaval We Must Ensure Our Schools Have the Resources They Need to Serve All Students

By Marlana Wallace

Changing the outcomes of our school system requires more than changed leadership. The Mayor and DC Council are responsible for the investments we choose to make—or choose not make—in the education of the District’s children and youth. A rigorous reassessment of our educational policies will fall short without a corresponding reassessment of the adequacy of our educational investments.

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 DC Council should commission the expert-recommended five-year revision to the 2013 Adequacy Study, with input from both the public and the Technical Working Group, in order to update our holistic understanding of what a quality education in the District costs. 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.

Five years have passed, and 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.

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 facing the largest barriers.

We need a better blueprint for the resources required to staff every school and the resources needed to support low-income students in particular. 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 growing enrollment, rising cost of living, and the correct use of every “at-risk” dollar. DCPS schools must also be given the funding necessary to fully implement promised improvements to special education, provide quality Out-of-School Time programming in partnership with community-based organizations, and invest in other community-oriented, school based programs that serve the “whole child,” including Community School and Restorative Justice models.

Read our full testimony from the FY 2018 Performance Oversight Hearing for DC Public Schools [here](#).