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**Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director  
At the Public Oversight Hearing on the Office of the State Superintendent of Education  
DC Council Committee on Education  
DC Council Committee of the Whole  
February 21, 2019**

Chairman Grosso, Chairman Mendelson, and other members of the Council, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Ed Lazere, and I am the Executive Director of the DC Fiscal Policy Institute. DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to address DC's economic and racial inequities and to build widespread prosperity in the District of Columbia, through independent research and policy recommendations.

I'm here today to address DC's early childhood education programs, the recently released OSSE report from the working group on the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula, and the Student Fair Access to School Act. These issues are of deep importance to the DC Fiscal Policy Institute and have been a significant focus of our work.

**Early Childhood Education: The Importance of Using FY 2020 to Build on Recent Progress**

DCFPI has conducted research in recent years to highlight the importance of early childhood education, and that research has helped expose the large gap between the cost of providing high quality care and DC's reimbursements to providers in the child care subsidy program. This makes it difficult for parents to access high-quality care and contributes to very low pay of the early childhood workforce, which in turn makes it hard to attract and retain qualified staff. DCFPI is a member of the Birth to Three Policy Alliance, a network of institutions committed to transforming how DC invests in infants, toddlers, and families from pregnancy through age three. The Birth to Three Policy Alliance knows it is essential for DC to ensure affordable access to high-quality health, education, and developmental support through the first 1,000 days of a child's life.

With leadership from both OSSE and the DC Council, the District has taken important recent steps to support infants through age three, including investments to improve quality child care, analysis to identify the true cost of high-quality care, and the adoption last year of the Birth to Three for All DC Act. This groundbreaking and comprehensive legislation will transform the system of supports for young children and help ensure that every DC child gets off to the right start from birth. As part of the Birth to Three Policy Alliance, DCFPI looks forward to working with you to ensure full implementation of this legislation, including making important progress in FY 2020.

The Birth to Three for All DC Act recognizes that payments to child care providers serving children from low-income families are well below the level needed for high-quality care and leave many providers in low-income communities struggling to make ends meet. This has damaging lifetime effects on children and adds to DC's deep racial and economic inequities. Children in families with low incomes and children of color face barriers to academic achievement beginning at birth. Low payments to child care providers also contribute to meager earnings for early childhood educators—

primarily women of color—who make just \$29,000 on average. Increasing support for child care providers should be connected to raising wages for educators.

To keep pace with the multi-year implementation of Birth to Three for All DC Act, the District will need to invest \$22 million in FY 2020 in the early childhood subsidy program, to increase access to high-quality care for low-income children and bring pay for early childhood educators closer to that of elementary school teachers. It also requires OSSE to complete the early childhood compensation study needed to create an appropriate salary scale. It is our understanding that the study has been drafted and is undergoing review. We encourage OSSE to release it soon.

## **PreK-12: Fund Schools Adequately through the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula**

DCFPI has focused its work on PreK-12 education on ensuring that the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula provides funding that is predictable and adequate, to provide high-quality education to all students, and to narrow the large inequities in education faced by students of color. DCFPI was honored to serve on the UPSFF working group in 2018 and applaud OSSE for its thoughtful leadership of the working group. We also strongly support its findings and urge the Mayor and Council to implement them.

The working group’s report finds that key parts of the school funding formula remain underfunded—particularly supports for students at risk of falling behind and English-language learners. While not covered by the working group, it also has been well documented that DCPS continues to divert a large share of at-risk funds intended for high-poverty schools to other educational purposes, including a recent analysis from the DC Auditor on mis-use of at-risk funds to pay for school library staff that should be funded under the Comprehensive Staffing Model. This supplantation partially reflects inadequate funding for basic education funding for DCPS.

I want to highlight several of the recommendations of the OSSE working group on the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula. DCFPI urges the Mayor and Council to implement them in the FY 2020 budget.

- **Increase Funding for All Schools to Match Growing Costs:** Currently, DC has no standard to ensure that school funding rises each year to address growing costs such as teacher pay and maintenance. Annual funding increases in the UPSFF have been arbitrary in recent years, and for much of the past decade total school funding per-pupil failed to keep up with inflation. The working group recommends increasing school funding each year in a predictable way, using an inflation measure tied to education costs in DC.
- **Increase and Protect At-Risk Funds:** DC’s funding formula provides additional money to schools to support low-income students and those falling behind in the classroom. “At-risk” funds are a powerful tool to increase the equity of school funding and address [distressing differences](#) between the educational outcomes for white students and students of color. These inequities reflect historic and ongoing barriers to quality education and good jobs, housing discrimination and segregation, and other factors that have resulted in low incomes for many Black households and most Black students attending high-poverty schools.

Despite these persisting inequities, the at-risk supplement is less than two-thirds the amount recommended in the 2013 Adequacy Study. Equally important, DCPS has misspent over 40

percent of “at-risk” funds in recent years, using the funds for regular staff positions across all schools rather than directing funds to schools that low-income students attend. The USPSFF working group recommended increasing the at-risk weight over the next four years to reach the full adequacy level.

- **Increase Funds for English Language Learners:** DC’s school funding formula includes a supplement to meet the needs of English language learners. The current supplement is 20 percent lower than the amount recommended in DC’s 2013 Education Adequacy study, which means we are not providing adequate resources to help immigrant students succeed. Without adequate resources, just one in five English-language learners in DC schools are college and career ready. The USPSFF working group recommended increasing the ELL weight over the next four years to reach the full adequacy level.
- **Explore Future Changes to the UPSFF:** The working group also highlighted needs for further study and exploration. In particular, it noted that students who are considered at risk because they are homeless or in foster care may have greater needs than students who are at-risk primarily due to poverty. The working group also noted that schools with a large concentration of at-risk students have higher needs than those with a smaller concentration, in ways that are not captured solely by providing a per-student at-risk supplement. The working group recommended studying this further, with the goal of possibly modifying the UPSFF. The working group also recommended reviewing key aspects of the 2013 Adequacy study to assess their relevance for today. DCFPI urges the Mayor and Council to set aside the needed funding to explore these fundamental issues of school funding.

### **School Discipline: Provide More Resources for Restorative Justice in Schools**

In 2018, the District adopted legislation to shift away from school discipline policies that utilize suspensions and expulsions, and instead focus on restorative justice and creating positive school climates. The District now needs to devote funds to implement the new law, the Student Fair Access to School Act (SFASA).

SFASA dramatically shifts our approach to school discipline. It limits the use and duration of out-of-school suspensions, expulsions, and involuntary transfers to other schools. It also calls for DC to support schools in implementing alternate practices to address behavioral issues and to develop education settings that are trauma-informed.

This shift is important. When schools rely on suspension or expulsion for discipline, students miss lessons, fall behind when they return, and are more likely to drop out. In DC, students of color have received much harsher disciplinary responses than white students for the same behaviors. There is no evidence that students of color misbehave to a greater degree than white students, yet Black students are [seven times](#) more likely to be suspended and sent out of the classroom than white students.

To improve school culture, student outcomes, and effectively begin implementing the Student Fair Access to School Act, the District should provide at least \$23.5 million in FY 2020 for the following:

- **Additional School Staffing:** \$15 million will allow DC to hire 144 school-based counselors to serve DC’s highest-need schools.

- **Positive School Climate Fund:** \$8.5 million will empower schools to pursue promising practices that reduce school push-out. For example, school leaders might offer new teacher trainings or trauma-responsive services.

Thank you for the chance to testify.