

**Testimony of Ed Lazere, Executive Director  
At the Public Oversight Hearing on DC Public Schools  
DC Council Committee on Education  
DC Council Committee of the Whole  
February 26, 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 the recently released OSSE report from the working group on 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 misuse of at-risk funds to pay for school library staff that should be funded under the Comprehensive Staffing Model. This supplantation, which should be stopped as soon as possible, partially reflects inadequate funding for basic education funding for DCPS.

I want to highlight several of the recommendations of the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula working group. 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 a 2013 Adequacy Study. While the at-risk supplement was increased in the FY 2019 budget, to almost \$2,400 for every eligible child, the full weight is \$3,900. The USPSFF working group recommended increasing the at-risk weight over the next four years to reach the full adequacy level.

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. DCFPI strongly supports efforts to make at-risk funding more transparent, to stop any further supplantation, and to give school leaders, parents, and teachers more say in how at-risk funds are used at their school.

- **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 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.

Thank you for the chance to testify.