

**Testimony of Qubilah Huddleston, Education Policy Analyst
At the Performance Oversight Hearing for the
Deputy Mayor for Education and Public Charter School Board
DC Council Committee on Education
February 12, 2020**

Chairman Mendelson, Chairman Grosso, and members of the Committee of the Whole and Committee on Education, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. My name is Qubilah Huddleston and I am a Policy Analyst at the DC Fiscal Policy Institute (DCFPI). DCFPI is a non-profit organization that promotes budget choices to reduce DC's economic and racial inequities through independent research and policy recommendations.

I would like to focus my testimony today on the importance of:

- Strengthening our early care and education system.
- Adequately funding all public schools.
- Improving supports to students facing the largest opportunity gaps—most of whom are low-income Black and Latinx; and,
- Expanding out-of-school time opportunities.

All these investments will help our children do their best inside and outside of the classroom.

Improve the Quality of Subsidized Childcare Programs and Pay Early Childhood Educators a Fair Wage

Every parent knows that the early years of a child's life are an amazing and critical period of development. And every family deserves care and support to support the healthy development of their babies. Together, we can make sure DC remains an attractive place to live, work, and raise a family.

The District has made considerable progress toward realizing the vision of the comprehensive Birth-to-Three law, yet there's still more work for policymakers to do.

DCFPI is calling on the Council to invest an additional \$40 million to increase reimbursement rates in the childcare subsidy/voucher program in fiscal year (FY) 2021 to address racial and income inequities in access to high quality care and education and to strengthen our early childhood educator workforce. We recommend that the Council allocates half of the funding to help providers cover the full cost of high-quality care and education and the other \$20 million to enable providers to pay their teachers fairly.

Many early education centers that serve families in the District's childcare subsidy program operate in the red because reimbursement rates don't cover the true costs of high-quality care.¹ When providers are forced to shutter their doors because they can't keep up with rising rent costs or increasing licensing fees, low-income families are left scrambling to figure out alternate care options that meet their standards and needs. This is unacceptable; yet, it is a problem that District leaders can solve.

Insufficient reimbursement rates also undermine the District’s ability to attract and retain a high-quality early care and education workforce. Early childhood educators in DC—most of whom are either Black or Latinx women—earn salaries much lower than their preschool and kindergarten educator peers in DC Public Schools (DCPS), with the median worker earning just \$14.84 in 2018.² These low wages contribute to a “chronically low rate of retention (8 months to two years),” among our educators.³ Such turnover can disrupt the continuity of care that babies and toddlers receive, undermining their overall development and well-being.

DC can and should do better by our families and childcare providers. It’s time to provide all our youngest learners and their families with high-quality childcare and education options so they can flourish.

DC’s Children Deserve to Attend Schools That Are Funded Adequately

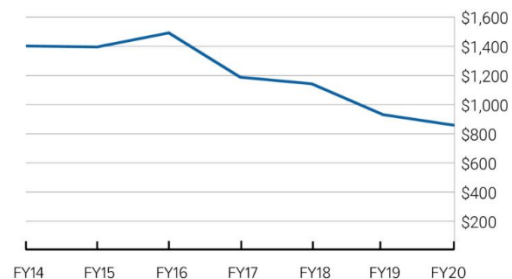
DCFPI applauds the Mayor’s plan to increase the UPSFF for FY 2021 by four percent—one of the largest increases in recent years. We also appreciate Chairman Mendelson’s statement that our city’s increasing prosperity should be used to “ensure that our schools can improve student outcomes and...close the widening achievement gap.”⁴ And, we are grateful for Chairman Grosso who has long been a champion of many educational initiatives DCFPI supports—such as, for requesting greater investments in students in his FY 2021 budget letter to the Mayor.⁵

While a four percent increase is a strong investment in our city’s students, a **six percent increase** would allow the education budget to keep up with inflation, putting us on a path to closing the adequacy gap within two years.

Since the release of the Deputy Mayor for Education’s (DME) DC Adequacy Study in 2013 (Adequacy Study), policymakers have never funded the UPSFF at the level recommended by school finance experts (*Figure 2*).⁶ These budget choices have created the adequacy gap.

The consequences of this inadequacy are clear: the District has shortchanged our schools of hundreds of millions of dollars over the last seven years, often forcing school leaders to choose between funding the basics for all students or providing extra resources to support students who face challenges such as poverty or homelessness.⁷ Policymakers should not be forcing school leaders to make these types of tough decisions.

DC Lawmakers Have Never Funded the UPSFF to Meet the Adequacy Study Recommendation, Shortchanging Students
Difference Between Recommendation and UPSFF Level, Adjusted for Inflation



Source: Author’s calculation based on base UPSFF adequacy gap, adjusted for inflation by year and the annual audited public school enrollment for SY 2013-14 through SY 2018-19 and preliminary SY 2019-20 enrollment.

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The District Can Boost Equity by Making Greater Investments in At-Risk Students

The DME is currently examining whether the UPSFF should provide additional funding to schools with high concentrations of at-risk students. Additionally, Chairman Grosso introduced the School Financial Transparency Amendment Act of 2019 that would require DCPS and public charter local education agencies to be more transparent about their use of at-risk funds. DCFPI looks forward to reading the DME’s report and urges Chairman Mendelson to put the transparency bill on the COW agenda soon.

The District is currently providing an additional \$2,470 for each student who is “at risk” of academic failure in DC’s public education budget—40 percent lower than the amount recommended in the Adequacy Study.⁸

Policymakers should increase the UPSFF base *and* the supplemental at-risk in order to address the large and unacceptable disparities in outcomes for students who are low-income, experiencing homelessness, or behind grade level in high school—many of whom are Black or Latinx. By increasing the at-risk UPSFF weight from .225 to .37—the level recommended in the Adequacy Study—District leaders would provide public and public charter schools with an additional \$4,200 to \$4,300 per at-risk student, depending on the final UPSFF base.

We know that great schools can be transformative for students. But at-risk students are the least likely to attend the best-rated schools. Currently, only 25 percent of at-risk students attend either a four- or five-star school as measured by the STAR framework, compared to 58 percent of non-at-risk students. Giving public charter school leaders a policy mechanism to prioritize at-risk students, such as an optional lottery preference, would allow them to increase the proportion of at-risk students they can serve.

We should not tolerate such abysmal test scores for students who through no fault of their own, face conditions that can make it challenging for them to succeed. District leaders should embrace policy and budget choices that support students that give *all* students shot at success.

Policymakers Should Expand Out-of-School Time Opportunities to Keep Students Safe and Engaged in the Hours Before and After School and During the Summer

Students' success in school and life is about what they do outside of the classroom as much as it is about what they do in the classroom.

Policymakers should invest \$25 million in Out-of-School Time (OST) programming, which includes \$19 million for Learn 24's Office of Youth Grants and Opportunities—a \$5.1 million increase over the current funding level—and \$5.9 million for programs funded through the Department of Parks and Recreation.

Ninety percent of parents strongly support OST programs, yet not every parent is able to provide their children with these enriching experiences.⁹ OST programs—before and after school, and in summer—have proven to increase student engagement, foster positive social-emotional development, and boost self-esteem. These are factors that help students succeed in and out of the classroom.

In recent years, the District has made historic investments in OST programs. However, further increases are needed to enable low-income students and other students who need support to have access to the same enriching OST opportunities as their more well-off peers.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify and I am happy to answer any questions.

¹ Office of State Superintendent of Education, “Modeling the Cost of Child Care in the District of Columbia 2018,” <https://osse.dc.gov/publication/modeling-cost-child-care-district-columbia-2018>

² <https://www.bls.gov/oes/tables.htm>.

³ Office of the State Superintendent of Education, “DC Commission on Early Childhood Teacher Compensation Final Report, page 9,” https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/DC_Compensation_Report_Printer_Final-1.pdf.

⁴ Chairman Phil Mendelson, “Council Chairman Mendelson Highlights District’s Comprehensive Annual Financial Report,” Press Release, January 31, 2020, <http://chairmanmendelson.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/1.31.20-Press-Release-2020-CAFR.pdf>.

⁵ Councilman David Grosso, “FY 2021 Budget Letter to the Mayor,” December 18, 2019, <http://www.davidgrosso.org/grosso-analysis>.

⁶ Alyssa Noth, “Educational Equity Requires an Adequate School Budget,” DC Fiscal Policy Institute, December 2, 2019, <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/educational-equity-requires-an-adequate-school-budget/>; Qubilah Huddleston, “Raising the Bar: Better Budgeting for a Strong Public Education System,” DC Fiscal Policy Institute, December 17, 2019, <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/raising-the-bar/>.

⁷ Alyssa Noth, “Educational Equity Requires an Adequate School Budget”.

⁸ The Finance Project, Augenblick, Palich and Associates, “Cost of Student Achievement: Report of the DC Education Adequacy Study,” District of Columbia Deputy Mayor for Education, December 20, 2013, <https://dme.dc.gov/page/dc-education-adequacy-study>.

⁹ All Data From: DCAYA via LIMS, Afterschool Alliance Policy State Fact Sheets, After School Alliance Time of Risk to Time of Opportunity, and LEARN 24.