

**Testimony of Qubilah Huddleston, Education Policy Analyst
At the Performance Oversight Hearing for the
District of Columbia Public Schools
DC Council Committee on Education
February 19, 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 successes and challenges the District has had in supporting students and families facing the largest opportunity gaps. I would also like to discuss next steps the District should take to ensure these students can thrive in the classroom and beyond.

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and Policymakers Should Do More to Support Students Facing the Largest Opportunity Gaps

Last week, I testified before this Committee about the need for policymakers to fully fund the public education budget. When policymakers fail to pass an adequate budget, that decision harms all students, especially low-income students who face the largest opportunity gaps. The District identifies these students as “at-risk” of academic failure, but I think it is more accurate to describe them as students living in communities harmed by the District’s history of forced racial segregation in housing and schools and disinvestment in schools serving Black and brown children.

Too few low-income students and other students facing barriers are reaching the level of academic success that they are fully capable of achieving. Only 18 percent of at-risk students met or exceeded expectations according to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) last school year. Only 25 and 34 percent of Black and Latinx students met expectations, respectively, compared to 82 percent of their white classmates.¹

Under an inadequately funded education budget DCPS has routinely diverted its “at-risk” funding to cover core staffing positions, such as art teachers and librarians, instead of allocating these funds to schools so they can invest in targeted resources and supports, such as an after-school math tutoring program.² DCPS is doing this despite a law requiring the school system to add to, not replace, school budgets with at-risk funds.³ This practice is harmful, yet one that policymakers can address by **fully funding the public education budget and increasing the at-risk UPSFF weight to level recommended in the 2013 DC Adequacy Study**, among other policy and budget choices.

The District is currently providing an additional \$2,470 for each at-risk student in DC’s public education budget, but it isn’t enough. School finance experts in the 2013 DC Adequacy Study recommended that policymakers set the at-risk UPSFF weight at .37, which would amount to \$4,200 to \$4,300 per at-risk student in the fiscal year (FY) 2021, depending on the approved UPSFF base.

The District Should Acknowledge That Schools with Large Percentages of At-Risk Students Need Additional Support

The DME is currently examining the adequacy of the current design of the at-risk UPSFF weight and whether the UPSFF should provide additional funding to schools with high concentrations of at-risk students.⁴ Councilmember Trayon White introduced a bill last year, the Critical Risk Rate School Funding Designation Act of 2019, which would require the UPSFF to provide additional resources to schools—both DCPS and public charters—where at least 70 percent of students are considered at risk. Currently, 43 DCPS schools would meet this designation based on projected FY 2020 enrollments.⁵

These budget and policy levers could not have come at a more critical time. High-poverty schools in DC face higher rates of enrollment declines and student mobility, according to a new report by the DC Auditor.⁶ Both phenomena can lead to decreases in school resources, disrupting students' learning experiences and potentially leading to poorer outcomes.

For example, when students change schools in the middle of the year, the District does not provide DCPS or public charter schools additional funding to accommodate new students. This forces school leaders to stretch their budgets to serve more students, which can become even more difficult if the students they receive mid-year have more intensive needs—such as English learners—and require funding beyond the standard per-pupil amount.

The concentration of budget cuts Wards 7 and 8 in FY 2020's budget and new data on student mobility signal that the District needs other measures to fortify the way we fund high-poverty schools.

DCFPI looks forward to reading the DME's study and hopes that the report's finding will help improve the way the District equitably funds the education of at-risk students.

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

¹ EmpowerK12 "2019 DC PARCC Dashboard," <https://empowerk12.org/dc-parcc-dash>.

² Qubilah Huddleston, "Study of School Funding Formula Presents Opportunity to Involve the Community," September 24, 20219, <https://www.dcfpi.org/all/study-of-school-funding-formula-presents-opportunity-to-involve-the-community/>.

³ D.C. Code 38-2905.01 (b)(3).

⁴ Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, "FY20 Request for Applications: 2020 Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) Study," <https://dme.dc.gov/page/fy20-request-applications-2020-uniform-student-funding-formula-upsff-study>.

⁵ Will Perkins, "Review of DCPS At-Risk Projection Accuracy," sent to me via email on February 15, 2020.

⁶ Office of the DC Auditor (ODCA), "Enrollment Projections in D.C. Public Schools: Controls Needed to Ensure Funding Equity: A Report for ODCA by the Center for Research and Reform in Education," January 9, 2020, <http://dcauditor.org/report/enrollment-projections-in-d-c-public-schools-controls-needed-to-ensure-funding-equity/>.