

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION**



Fiscal Years 2022 and 2023 Performance Oversight Hearing

Testimony of
Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education

Before the
Committee of the Whole, The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia

March 3, 2023

INTRODUCTION

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, staff, and members of the public. My name is Paul Kihn, and I am honored to serve as the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) for the District of Columbia. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on the priorities and accomplishments of the DME.

OUR PROGRESS

Our education system, with Mayoral accountability and Council oversight, has so much to be proud of.

- This is a city that is prioritizing our students and our schools – **increasing its yearly education budget by over half a billion dollars since 2019 and over 80% over the past decade**. Per student funding in DC is among the top three in the nation.
- This is a city where **approximately 69% of 3-year-olds and over 80% of 4-year-olds are attending Pre-K for free**.
- This is a city where our public **school teachers are among the highest compensated in the nation**, earning 24% more on average than their peers nationwide – and that was before the new teachers’ contract increased wages by 12%.
- This is a city that is **investing in strong neighborhood schools**, by developing new programs to attract students, redesigning high schools with accompanying investments, and stabilizing schools until enrollment grows.
- This is a city that **offers families a wide range of educational options**, including dual language, Montessori, career and technical education, and early college programs, with the majority of families getting their top choice through the My School DC lottery.
- This is a city that **since 2011 has led urban school districts in student achievement gains** in 4th and 8th grade reading and was among the top three leaders in 4th and 8th grade math progress. Moreover, following the pandemic, our 8th grade literacy scores on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) held steady while 33 other states saw declines and the national average dropped by 3 points.
- This is a city where **graduation rates have grown 14 percentage points** over the past decade.

We have made real progress towards creating a city in which all families want their children and grandchildren to grow up and attend school, and where young people thrive in high-quality schools surrounded by caring, supportive adults and graduate prepared for success in life. We are strong and getting stronger, although we know we have so much more work to do.

As we look back on the year, we have come a long way from the start of Fiscal Year 2022. At that time, we were in the throes of reopening our schools safely after more than a year of primarily remote learning due to the pandemic. Alongside jurisdictions across the country, we worked to get our buildings and our classrooms ready for safe, in-person learning, including

through facility upgrades, funding for outdoor learning, Personal Protective Equipment for staff, testing programs, and health and safety guidance in the face of evolving circumstances. 80% of families approved of how their school educated students during the pandemic. To support a strong recovery, we made significant investments in early childhood education, learning acceleration, job training and employer connections so that our system from cradle through career could survive the multiple challenges brought about by the pandemic and emerge stronger. This work was a once-in-a-generation effort that took around-the-clock work and perseverance by our civil servants and school and program staff, deep coordination and collaboration across our public school sectors and the whole of government, and tremendous trust and patience on the part of our students and families.

In our recovery work, we made real gains.

- We not only sustained but **expanded our early childhood education** sector by 1,000 seats since the onset of the pandemic;
- We **provided targeted high-impact tutoring** to approximately 5,000 students, helping them recover lost instructional time;
- We **expanded community-based youth safety initiatives** in eight priority areas across the District;
- We **expanded our investment in mental health** supports for students by \$8 million since the beginning of the pandemic;
- We **established a free college program** for local residents and expanded free college opportunities for high school students;
- We are **investing in work-based learning** for over 1,300 high school students to give them a head start on their futures; and
- We **made a historic investment in public education** through a 5.9% increase in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) to enable Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools to invest in the best interests of their communities.

As a result, our LEAs and schools have been able to invest in the experience of their students and in their communities, despite incredibly difficult circumstances. While the pandemic caused severe setbacks, we are proud of what we have achieved. There is no better testament to our progress than the vote of confidence from our students and families – **this year, at a time when school systems nationally and regionally lost students, our total public school population grew by 3% to over 96,500 students, the highest in 15 years.**

OUR COMEBACK

Now, on the heels of one of the most difficult periods in American education, we are focused on our comeback. We know it is neither sufficient nor possible to go back to the way things were. Our comeback includes a new vision for high school – one that allows students to graduate with meaningful college and career experience so they are better prepared to achieve their future

goals. Our comeback includes making DC a highly desirable place for teachers to work and live. Our comeback includes providing engaging after school options for all students and families who want them. Our comeback includes more supports for student mental health and well-being, and increased safety in and around schools. Our comeback includes a public education system in which all District families have access to strong DCPS neighborhood schools complemented by high-quality citywide public school options. Our comeback includes pathways for residents farthest from opportunity to succeed in family-sustaining jobs.

DME is proud to shepherd the vision for our comeback under the leadership of Mayor Bowser. In partnership with our sister agencies, we are proud to spearhead an ambitious vision for our education and workforce system that moves us towards greater equity and opportunity and sustains and builds a vibrant middle class in DC. Meaningful change does not happen overnight, and we are incredibly grateful to the educators, civil servants, policymakers, partners, and community members who are making this possible through their daily work and engagement.

I want to take a moment to outline some key points of pride and progress towards our comeback vision.

1. Academic Acceleration

1a. Reimagining High School to Prepare All Youth for College and Career

We are proud that we made headway this year in our effort to reimagine high school in DC so that it is engaging for all students and prepares them for life after graduation. To that end, we launched the first-of-its-kind Advanced Technical Center in the fall of 2022. This citywide opportunity is offering nearly 100 students from eight different public high schools across both sectors the opportunity to take credit-bearing college courses in cybersecurity, general nursing, and health information technology from Trinity Washington University, with involvement from several employer partners, including George Washington University's Rodham Institute, MedStar Health, Children's National Hospital, the White House Office of Cybersecurity, U.S. Department of Defense, and Amazon. Over a two-year period, students can earn up to 20 college credits, free of charge. Over 40% of the students enrolled come from Wards 7 and 8, and attendance is above 96%. The ATC provides or reimburses schools for transportation to remove participation barriers for students. At full scale, the ATC will serve approximately 500 students, who will remain enrolled at their home school but participate in the ATC for part of the day. In addition to the ATC, we have doubled the number of dual enrollment seats to over 450 and have expanded paid, for-credit internships for approximately 230 students through the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and we have expanded school-year internships through the Department of Employment Services (DOES) to over 1,130 students.

1b. Supporting Educators: Developing DC as a Teacher Oasis

We know that our educators are the backbone of our schools. To that end, we are proud of the investments we have made to give our teachers nationally competitive compensation, including 12% raises. The WTU contract also includes retro-pay back to FY 2020 as well as retention bonuses for all teachers and additional compensation for teachers in hard to fill positions. We are glad that our starting salaries for District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) teachers are now \$63,000 (up from \$56,000), our average salaries are \$103,000 (up from \$92,000), and veteran teachers can make up to \$131,000 (up from \$116,000).

We want our educators to not only choose to work in DC but also to be able to live in the District. To that end, we are investing in teacher housing, including through the forthcoming Wilhelmina at Malcolm X teacher housing project, adjacent to the Congress Heights Metro Station and Bard High School Early College. We have also supported educators who want to live in the District through the Landed mortgage assistance program, which has helped more than 20 teachers buy homes in the District this year. This complements the Council's expansion of benefits for educators in the Employer-Assisted Housing Program. The additional resources we are investing in schools and in mental health, learning acceleration, and safety, among other areas, are part of our larger effort to recruit and retain top talent. We are proud that our teacher retention rate in DC is 88%, with 74% of teachers staying in the same school. We are proud that DCPS retained over 92% of Highly Effective and Effective teachers over the last three school years. School leader retention district-wide was also strong, with approximately 91% of school leaders remaining in administrative roles in DC education. While we are proud of our progress, we know we have more to do to make DC the premier place for teachers to work and live.

2. Youth Well-Being and Safety

Youth safety is a top concern for us and for so many students and families in the District. To promote youth safety and prevent violence, DME launched the Safe Passage, Safe Blocks (Safe Blocks) program in 2021. This program supports 5 community-based organizations and over 160 staff in 8 safe passage priority areas serving over 50 schools. Safe Blocks workers, who are community-based staff, help to create conditions in which students can travel safely to and from school and help anticipate and diffuse conflicts. To strengthen service provision and consistency, the DME provided summer training, in partnership with the Build Program, to all Safe Passage workers on a community-based approach to violence prevention, de-escalation, and mediation. We are now strengthening the program by supporting schools in building relationships between students, staff, and Safe Passage workers, including through meet and greets and joint professional development days. While Safe Blocks is an important community-driven strategy, we know our schools need more support, and we urge the Council to restore the School Resource Officer (SRO) program. The SRO program complements the work of safe passage, micro-transit, restorative justice, and mental health professionals – all important resources we have expanded –and ensures that police officers can focus on relationships and

prevention, and that those officers called to schools when violence occurs have the experience and training to work with our young people.

Another side of safety is health, as we know all too well from the experience of COVID-19. We are proud that this year, we developed and enforced the District's Immunization Attendance Policy, commonly referred to as No Shots, No School, for the first time in years. This work entailed a massive youth vaccination campaign for Routine Pediatric Immunizations and COVID-19 this past year, conducted by agencies across the education and health sector, with extensive outreach and vaccination sites, exchanges, and mobile clinics in every ward. DME played a key coordinating role in vaccine access, communication, and incentive programs to increase uptake among youth. DME also worked closely with OSSE, DCPS, the DC Public Charter School Board (PCSB), DC Health, and the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) to enforce the Immunization Attendance Policy. In the end, we cut the percentage of non-compliant students in half, making our schools much safer places of learning for students and staff. Our effort to vaccinate our youth and enforce No Shots, No School is an example of government working together in a coordinated, unified, and responsive manner to achieve an important milestone for residents.

3. Positive Youth Development and Engagement

DC is a national leader in early childhood education; now we are working hard to create the most robust after care system in the nation. High-quality after school activities, which can range from leadership development to arts to experiential learning to recreation, are critical for youth development and engagement and provide important child care for families. We are proud that we are expanding Out of School Time (OST) offerings to approximately 15,000 students. We are currently undertaking a strategic planning process, building on a needs assessment conducted by the DC Policy Center, to determine where to strategically expand based on the greatest need. Our goal is that all students who want to participate will have access to a high-quality after school opportunity, at their school or in the community. Our partners at DPR play an important role in this work. We are glad that DPR is expanding its reach this year through new funding for core recreation in areas with limited access and the new Recreation for All initiative, which will significantly expand recreational opportunities for youth. The DME, through the OST office, coordinates a multi-agency effort (with DPR, DOES, and LEAs) to expand after school opportunities.

4. Citywide Planning

A core function of the DME is citywide planning and coordination across sectors and our 70 LEAs. This year, we are engaged in three large bodies of work that will be completed in 2023 and that will impact our citywide planning: the Master Facilities Plan (MFP), the Boundary and Student Assignment Study (Boundary Study), and the Adequacy Study.

Our 2023 5-year MFP will look at facility conditions across the District with the following three goals in mind: 1) Ensuring school facilities are efficiently utilized; 2) Ensuring every student is enrolled in a modern state of the art facility; and 3) Ensuring every student's daily experience is in a well-maintained facility. The plan will include information on programmatic facility capacity and future enrollment and utilization trends, and will identify recommendations for addressing where more capacity is needed, where to co-locate schools or educational programming, potential boundary or feeder modifications, and system-level recommendations to streamline maintenance operations.

The 2023 Boundary Study, the first conducted in a decade, will build on the MFP and focus on the following goals: 1) Clear assignment to DCPS schools of right and feeder pathways; 2) Adequate capacity in DCPS schools of right; and 3) Equitable access to high-quality public schools. With the help of a community advisory committee, we will adjust existing boundaries as needed, identify boundaries for new schools, balance geographic and programmatic feeders patterns, and explore policy recommendations for advancing equitable access to high-quality schools. We have already held over 25 presentations for community stakeholders on these projects and will continue significant community engagement for the remainder of the calendar year.

Finally, the 2023 adequacy study will examine the finances of schools and the adequacy of education funding, including a review of the UPSFF. The study will help us determine how we are currently using resources, the types of positions and resources needed to support high-quality schools, and how we can use funding to close opportunity gaps.

All three studies are examples of DME work that will help guide cross-sector decision making, alongside our continued data analysis and reporting through our EdSights and EdScape publications.

5. An Inclusive Jobs Recovery

Finally, the DME is proud to support the workforce cluster in promoting an inclusive jobs recovery that connects residents, especially those farthest from opportunity, to training and employment. This work includes identifying good, high-growth jobs that lead to middle class careers and creating our workforce system to help our residents obtain these careers. Specifically, this work includes the new Career Coach DC program, which is serving more than 600 residents, the expansion of Project Empowerment, which has already served nearly 1,000 residents in FY23, and expanded opportunities to learn on the job through internships, apprenticeships, and on-the-job training. As part of this, 80 young people are now participating in youth apprenticeships that will set them up to succeed in full-time apprenticeship opportunities after graduation. In addition, through the DC Futures Program, 1,300 DC residents, including 120 paraprofessionals in our schools, are earning associate's and bachelor's degrees at

local universities, free of charge. Across all of these investments, we are creating pathways to economic mobility for DC residents and ensuring that residents can access family-sustaining career opportunities.

CONCLUSION

As I said at the outset, we are strong and getting stronger. We have important, ambitious work ahead, and I look forward to working with the Council, our partners, our educators, our students, our families, and members of the community as we achieve our comeback. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.