

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



Performance Oversight Hearing
On
Fiscal Years 2021 and 2022 to Date

Testimony of Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education

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

March 3, 2022
Live via the Zoom Platform

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 priorities and accomplishments of the DME.

The DME team, under the leadership of Mayor Bowser, works tirelessly to create a city where all children, youth and adults thrive, where every child knows joy, feels safe, and is ready to learn, where every student attends a high-quality school, and where every youth and adult has opportunities for strong continuing education and family-sustaining jobs. Our public education system at every level has worked hard, through an extremely difficult set of circumstances, to reopen safely and meet the needs of students and staff as we collectively navigate the COVID-19 recovery. DME is proud to shepherd the vision for our recovery under the leadership of Mayor Bowser and, in partnership with our sister agencies, deliver services for residents and build a system that emerges more resilient, innovative, and effective. This work is challenging and does not happen overnight, and we are incredibly grateful to the educators, civil servants, policymakers, partners, and community members who make our work possible.

RECOVERY

I want to use the time today to share more about the DME's vision for our recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the accomplishments we have made in FY 21 and FY 22 to date. Since the onset of COVID-19 and during the recovery period, the DME has worked alongside our education cluster agency partners with a focus on three priority areas, developed as a result of agency input and feedback from parents, students, teachers, community members, practitioners, and advocates from all eight wards. The three priority areas are 1) strengthening and stabilizing early childhood education; 2) accelerating learning for all our students, K-12; and 3) driving an inclusive jobs recovery. We center equity and racial justice throughout this work, in our decision-making and investments. I will walk through each of these priority areas and the key investments and accomplishments this year.

Stabilize and Strengthen Early Childhood Education

Mayor Bowser has made critical investments in early childhood education. Under her leadership, we are working toward an early childhood sector at full strength across all eight wards. Critical to this effort is expanding access to affordable childcare to meet growing demand and supporting the development and retention of early childhood educators. Mayor Bowser has committed \$110 million over three years towards these goals, including grants to help licensed providers cover costs during the pandemic, updated subsidy payments to support the costs of quality care, facilities grants to increase the supply of infant and toddler care in shortage areas, a scholarship fund for early childhood educators to earn Childhood Development Associate (CDA) credentials and associate's and bachelor's degrees, and retention bonuses for

teachers at early childhood centers. The DME works in close partnership with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), the lead agency overseeing early childhood education, to support this priority work.

We are proud that our substantial investments in childcare will allow the District of Columbia to preserve and maintain 27,000 licensed childcare slots through FY22 and FY23, with support from approximately 4,000 child care employees, and add 1,000 new seats by the end of FY 23. OSSE is also supporting the Council’s Early Childhood Educator Equitable Compensation Task Force and is looking forward to implementing the Task Force’s FY22 recommendation to distribute supplemental payments to early childhood educators as quickly as possible.

Accelerate K-12 Learning

Recovery efforts within our public schools continue to focus on learning acceleration, to ensure all students regain any lost instructional time and get back on track to long-term success in their educational journeys. Mayor Bowser has committed \$182 million over three years towards this work, primarily implemented by DME and our education cluster agency partners. These initiatives include our back-to-school campaign and Every Day Counts (EDC) attendance and engagement initiatives, expanded after school programs and summer opportunities for students, school-based mental health expansion; high-impact tutoring, and work to reimagine high school, through increased access to authentic college and work-based learning opportunities. This body of work also includes our support for teachers.

We work with urgency to meet the needs of the moment. Recognizing the lost instructional time for students in SY 20-21, we worked hard to expand opportunities for students this past summer. This included Marion Barry Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) opportunities for 13,000 students, Out of School Time (OST) summer enrichment for 2,000 students through our community-based partners, new Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) Boost Camps, combining traditional camp and academic activities, for approximately 700 students, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) summer learning programs such as “Acceleration Academies” serving 9,000 students, in addition to summer programs at 122 charter schools, and AI-based literacy tutoring through a unique philanthropic partnership. This summer programming demonstrates how we pivoted quickly to set up more expansive and diverse offerings to help students engage and get on track.

This year, we are ramping up our high-impact tutoring work to meet the needs of students. This includes tutoring grants through the OST Office to community-based providers serving over 1,600 students across more than 30 schools this year. Thanks to the federal American Rescue Plan funds, we have already awarded \$1.7 million to SY 21-22 after school providers and \$1.9 million to high-impact tutoring providers, with funds remaining for the summer. We are also increasing mental health supports for students to address their needs beyond academics.

Right now, 155 schools have a school-based behavioral health clinician, and we plan to reach 96 additional schools in FY 2022.

We know we have more work to do to make education engaging and effective for all students. To that end, we are re-imagining our high schools to be more relevant and focused on preparing students for postsecondary success, including by adding 250 dual enrollment (free college) seats over two years, standing up a first of its kind Advanced Technical Center in the District starting in SY 22-23, where high school students can gain work experience and credits towards careers in healthcare and cybersecurity, and expanding opportunities for paid school-year internships.

Given the critical importance of attracting and retaining high-quality teachers, my office is working closely with OSSE and LEAs on new strategies to identify, keep, and grow local talent in particular. We are proud that 38 paraprofessionals enrolled in the spring pilot cohort of the new DC Futures program, which allows DC residents to earn free associate's and bachelor's degrees at select DC universities, with coaching and support. The recruitment of paraprofessionals was a direct result of input educators shared with my office about their needs in focus groups during the fall of 2021. DC continues to leverage strategies, including dual enrollment and scholarships at local institutions of higher education, to support DC students who are on the path to becoming future educators.

Supporting Youth Health and Safety

We also know that youth safety is a critical precondition for learning. A key focus of the DME this year has been on supporting a safe return to in-person learning, given the significant benefits for students and families. Our schools are safe, with a COVID positivity rate of 0.5% for the week of January 31st.¹ We have focused on strategic coordination and investments across our cluster and partner agencies, including funds for testing, through our weekly asymptomatic testing program, test to return from school breaks and holidays, and weekly testing of PreK-K students; PPE, including KN95 masks for DCPS staff and nonsurgical masks for students, outdoor learning equipment; and facility upgrades. Furthermore, immunization is critical to our recovery and to safe, in-person learning. Mayor Bowser has prioritized outreach and access to the COVID-19 vaccine, including through multiple vaccine distribution sites in every ward, pop-up sites in schools, the Vaccine Exchange, incentive programs, community outreach, and vaccine mandates for staff and student athletes. The DME has coordinated our school safety protocols across agencies through regular COVID-19 health and wellness calls, working in close partnership with OSSE and DC Health, and has worked with OSSE on guidance to LEAs. Our schools remain safe and open, thanks to the tremendous efforts of our educators and agency staff and the trust and partnership of our students and families, for which we are deeply grateful.

¹ For the most recent data, visit <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/page/covid-19-school-based-testing-program>.

To combat the increased violence across the city, Mayor Bowser has made significant investments in youth safety. We are especially proud of the \$4.3 million investment in our new Safe Blocks program, which is deploying over 200 individuals hired by community-based organizations to support safe routes to school and prevent violence. We are also piloting a new micro-transit shuttle program, DC SchoolConnect, in partnership with the Department of For-Hire Vehicles, which is currently providing transit for more than 125 students at 23 schools in Wards 7 and 8 in safe passage priority areas. Finally, we are supporting city-wide violence prevention efforts through a commitment of \$22 million across three years to enhance access to DPR recreation facilities for at-risk populations, certify violence interrupters, and expand and strengthen the Project Empowerment program. We know these challenges are entrenched and complex, and we are committed to doing everything we can to support our students.

Driving Inclusive Jobs Recovery

Finally, the DME is proud to oversee our critical workforce agencies and build a continuum of education and training from PreK through careers, working in close partnership with the Workforce Investment Council (WIC) and the Department of Employment Services (DOES), the University of the District of Columbia (UDC), and other institutions of higher education and employer partners.

We are working hard to respond to the immediate needs of residents and connect them to family-sustaining jobs, while simultaneously re-imagining workforce development to improve training quality and access aligned with employer demand. Mayor Bowser has committed \$292 million to invest in five key strategies: 1) Strengthen job-seeker and employer connections; 2) Drive a surge in credentialing in high-demand, high-wage industries; 3) Expand paid opportunities to learn at work; 4) Prioritize employer-driven trainings; and 5) Reimagine youth pathways to postsecondary success. Highlights include our new career coaches initiative, DC Futures, a new free college program, IT and Nursing training grants, expansion of Project Empowerment and apprenticeships, employer-led training grants, and the re-imagine high school work I discussed earlier in my testimony.

Citywide Coordination and Partnerships

While we are laser focused on our recovery priority areas, we are proud to continue our core, ongoing citywide partnership and coordination work. The DME has continued to run several citywide working groups on priority topics, including the EDC attendance task force and the Safe Passage Working Group, composed of government and community stakeholders. The EDC task force develops, evaluates, and coordinates attendance interventions, including the back to school campaign and tech-based communication platforms. The safe passage working group develops and coordinates safe passage initiatives across the district, including the new Safe Blocks and DC SchoolConnect programs and ongoing initiatives, such as Safe Spots and Safe Passage Priority Areas.

The DME is proud to house the Out of School Time Office and the Students in the Care of DC (SCDC) Office, which provide critical support to youth. The OST Office provides grants to community-based organizations to provide youth development and after school programs, high impact tutoring, and safe passage work. In FY 2021, OST grantees served 10,639 youth. SCDC provides supports for students in the District's child welfare and justice systems. SCDC is convening a working group focused on how the District can address educational continuity challenges for these students and has created a new grant opportunity targeting the recovery needs of SCDC populations.

We continue our multifaceted citywide planning efforts, to support a strong future for our city. This includes our office's enrollment analysis and projection work, facilities planning, and ongoing data analysis, publicized through EdSights and EdScapes, to highlight and share best practices in the field. We also support citywide data and research initiatives, including the Research Practice Partnership and Common Financial Reporting Standards.

Looking Ahead

I am incredibly proud of the hard work and accomplishments of the DME and the education and workforce agencies this year. I am grateful to Mayor Bowser for her steadfast leadership through the public health emergency and in looking forward to a brighter future for the District and a Fair Shot for all residents across all eight wards. The work has not been easy, yet we have delivered for our residents on many fronts. However, there is much more work to be done. Setting up new programs and expanding capacity in and outside of government takes time. Now that we have put much of the infrastructure in place, I look forward to getting more resources out the door so we can serve more residents in FY 22 and FY 23 in the impactful programs I have described today and new ones we will develop. We will continue our relentless focus on our recovery priorities to meet the needs of our students and deliver on the promise of a joyful and rich educational experience that truly prepares students to thrive in life.

Conclusion

I look forward to working with the Council, our partners, our educators, our students, and members of the community as we continue on our road to recovery. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.