



February 18, 2021

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser,

The DC State Board of Education (State Board) appreciates the challenging landscape you face as you make decisions about your Fiscal Year 2022 budget and financial plan. The global pandemic has significantly reduced available funds for important programs across the District. As such, we believe it important for us to provide you with information on programs that we strongly believe should be part of your budget.

We want to thank you, the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME) and the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), for convening a working group to discuss changes to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF). In only a few short months, the working group was able to create a detailed report with recommendations in three major areas: Foundation, Special Populations, and Further Exploration. ***The State Board strongly urges you to adopt the recommendations in your budget plan, including an immediate four percent (4%) increase in the foundation level, providing additional funding through a new supplemental weight for students who have two or more at-risk characteristics, increasing the English Language Learner (ELL) weight to 0.61, creating an additional supplemental ELL weight for students with limited or interrupted formal education, and considering an automatic increase for the alternative student weight.***

Further, the DME [commissioned report](#) studying the adequacy of funding for public education recommended providing “additional funding to address the learning needs of students at risk of academic failure”. ***The State Board strongly urges you to embrace and enhance this recommendation in the Fiscal Year 2022 budget.*** The State Board believes that changing the name of the “at-risk of academic failure” designation so that it reflects a more person-first and asset-based language would be an important step forward.

Social and emotional learning (SEL) provides a solid foundation for safe and positive learning while enhancing a student’s capability to succeed in school and in life. Students need access to SEL opportunities that are infused throughout education processes and policies, curriculum and extra-curricular activities. ***The State Board urges you to include \$10.8 million (an estimated average cost of \$45,000 per school) in new funding to ensure that all schools have access to***



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adequate funding specifically designated for research-based SEL opportunities focused on students' needs.

Combined with SEL, opportunities for students, families' and teachers' ease of access to mental health services will be vital to the success of a new normal in public education in the District. The pandemic has added deep and lasting trauma to all of us. This is compounded for students who have already experienced trauma in their lives. ***We believe that the FY2022 budget should include funding to meet the American School Counselor Association recommendation that schools have one counselor for every 250 students¹.*** Considering the impact that a low counselor-to-student ration has on post-secondary activities—and the impact that the pandemic has wrought in our community—we believe a lower ratio may be appropriate and encourage you to direct the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) to establish thresholds for lower ratios as a matter of equity. Further, in FY2021, \$23.8 million was invested in behavioral and support services for 171 District schools (89 DC Public Schools and 82 Public Charter Schools) through the DBH. ***The State Board recommends an additional \$6.4 million to fully fund School Based Mental Health expansion and add clinicians in 80 more schools and \$4 million to restore cuts to community-based health providers.***

The State Board also believes new additional funding and program support should be made to increase the impact of the Safe Passage Working Group. If students do not feel safe walking *to* the building, it is impossible for them to feel safe *in* a building. Further, the State Board has heard testimony from high school students that police presence inside schools makes them feel unsafe and causes undo stress. Student and school safety concerns have a major impact on our continually dismal in-seat attendance and truancy rates. ***It is time for the District to*** allow each school to develop an adequate plan for alternative systems that maintain a safe and supportive learning environment in place of security provided by the Metropolitan Police Department. ***These cost savings can be redirected to the implementation of alternatives developed by the Local Education Agencies (LEAs), but additional funding may also be necessary to ensure that all schools have access to transformative justice programs such as the presence of violence interrupters within the school community and evidence-based restorative justice programs.***

Fully reopening schools in the fall must be done carefully and with significant community support. For almost a year, schools have largely been on a virtual setting that is not a replacement for in-person instruction. Students will return with gaps in their learning and we must be ready to boost them forward from day one. As you make difficult budget decisions regarding reopening, the State Board urges you to consider the following recommendations. ***First, the State Board heard strong testimony at its [January 13, 2021, Public Meeting](#) on some options you may want to consider,***

¹ <https://www.schoolcounselor.org/getmedia/bb23299b-678d-4bce-8863-cfcb55f7df87/2020-State-of-the-Profession.pdf>



including developing a cadre of skilled tutoring across the District, empowering principals and heads of schools to deploy targeted programming to their schools, expanding funding to existing partnerships, providing additional funding to invite new partnerships to school communities, and ensuring equitable access to these resources. This is the time to be bold, to paraphrase President Biden.

Second, the State Board approved [SR21-1 in Support of Outdoor Education Funding](#) in conjunction with our letter of December 21, 2021, advising that a fund of \$4 million should be established to provide grants for public and public charter schools to establish or expand outdoor learning opportunities for students. While we believe this funding is important in the near term, *the State Board also believes it should be incorporated into the FY2022 budget, as outdoor learning will remain valuable for DC students long beyond the duration of this pandemic.*

Third, the State Board heard testimony at our [January 15, 2020, Public Meeting](#) related to the science of teaching reading in schools and how important early diagnosis of learning disabilities like dyslexia is on future success for students. *We believe you should provide full funding in the FY2022 budget to implement the Dyslexia and Other Reading Disabilities Screening and Prevention Pilot Program Act of 2020, Act 23-548. This is more important than ever this year, as even more students than in past are likely to have been missed in screenings and lost out on needed interventions due to the nature of remote learning.*

Finally, we would be remiss if we did not also make clear the importance of sustained and increased funding for our sister offices, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, and the Office of the Student Advocate. Each year, both offices serve hundreds of students and families.

The **Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education** serves as an external, impartial resource for current and prospective public-school students and their parents or guardians in the resolution of complaints and concerns regarding public education in a way that furthers the students' best interest. The Ombudsman's Office uses conflict resolution strategies, including coaching, facilitation, and mediation to assist families and schools experiencing disagreement or conflict.

The **Office of the Student Advocate** supports students, parents, and families in their advocacy through parent education, one-on-one coaching, resource supports, and trainings. The rationale behind these actions is to amplify the voices of families and communities in agency processes and decision-making, provide equitable avenues for access to resources and understanding systems, and to amplify the power families and communities already possess.

We urge you to ensure that these agencies' full Need for Appropriations requests are met and hope you can devote additional funding to enhancing their programs and staffing.



Thank you for the opportunity to share our views as you finalize your Fiscal Year 2022 Budget. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our partnerships with you and your agencies.

Sincerely,

Zachary Parker, President and Ward 5 Representative
Emily Gasoi, Vice President and Ward 1 Representative
Allister Chang, Ward 2 Representative
Ruth Wattenberg, Ward 3 Representative
Frazier O'Leary, Ward 4 Representative
Jessica Sutter, Ward 6 Representative
Ebony-Rose Thompson, Ward 7 Representative
Carlene Reid, Ward 8 Representative
Jacque Patterson, At-Large Representative
Alex O'Sullivan, Student Representative
Shayla Dell, Student Representative

cc: Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education
Council of the District of Columbia



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