



July 19, 2021

The Honorable Phil Mendelson
Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 504
Washington, DC 20001

Dear Chairman Mendelson,

The DC State Board of Education (State Board) greatly appreciates the Council's decision to fund an FTE for each of our sister offices, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and the Office of the Student Advocate. We request that the Council identify additional funds to provide the State Board with a full FTE as well in order to facilitate the substantial Educational Standards work which the State Board has initiated. In addition to this request for funding for our office, the State Board would like to highlight the following priorities across the District's education budget:

Ensure all DC students travel safely starting on the first day of school

Earlier this month, the State Board sent a letter urging the Council to fully fund all three components of the Mayor's proposed Safe Passage plan. In addition, we urge the Council to identify funds and the Mayor to direct relevant agencies to ensure that our students benefit from these safe passage initiatives beginning on the very first day of school.

Make school budgets more equitable

The State Board adopted a resolution at our June Public Meeting urging the Council to provide or redirect funding within the education budget to ensure that all students have access to a full-time librarian. More broadly, we urge the Council to ensure that all schools receive a base funding amount that keeps pace with teacher contract costs, inflation, and other cost of education increases in the District of Columbia. The Council should also ensure that the Unified per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) and all state-level funding is disbursed in an equitable fashion, guaranteeing that schools serving students with the greatest needs are provided adequate funding to meet their educational needs. Ultimately, we support a school budget process that provides every school with the funding needed so no school leader has to decide between hiring a full-time teacher, a social worker or a school librarian.

Build capacity for more transparency through robust data collection

In alignment with the State Board's legislation that would require the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to annually collect more robust teacher data, we support the DC Auditor's recommendations related to building out OSSE's capacity for more robust, systematic student data collection. According to the DC Auditor's report "Measuring What Matters: More and Better Data Needed to Improve D.C. Public Schools," the OSSE currently lacks the infrastructure needed to accurately and adequately understand the work and results in which

DC Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and schools already invest. Therefore, the State Board urges Council to fully fund the following three capacity-building systems:

- investment of \$15 million toward a Student Information System (SIS). These off the shelf systems come with the controls needed to both lower burden for LEAs and schools and increase data reliability allowing the District to more effectively diagnosis, intervene, and allocate resources.
- needed infrastructure that would allow OSSE to use the SIS for course collection, one of the data elements outlined in our report and one of the most critical, as student courses, credits, and grades are proven to be better predictors of academic success than test scores.
- an Early Warning System to support secondary students at risk of disengagement

Create a more diverse teacher pipeline

Members of the State Board were encouraged to hear many councilmembers during the budget hearing last week voice their support for the Representation in Education Pipeline Project (REPP DC) proposal which would invest in grow your own educator preparation programs to help DC students and paraprofessionals become licensed educators. We are aware that the University of the District of Columbia (UDC) has also proposed expanding its educator preparation programs and asked for Council support. We recommend that to the Council identify the funds to support an approach that both increases UDC funding while addressing the broader need to prepare candidates for high demand/ shortage teaching positions through competitive grants to "grow your own" programs through OSSE.

Ensure all students have access to safe, joyous learning opportunities

Throughout the last school year, the State Board has advocated for outdoor learning as a scientifically grounded approach to providing all students with safe, engaging, and developmentally appropriate learning.¹ As we attempt to return to in-person learning this fall, providing outdoor options will be especially important for elementary-age children who will not have access to the vaccine. And now that the Center for Disease Control has confirmed that the risk of COVID-19 spread outdoors is miniscule, bringing children outside as much as possible is one way to address students' need for social interaction, physical movement, hands-on learning and joy.

While we applaud DC Public Schools (DCPS) for designating \$9 million dollars in funding available for "Innovation and Outdoor Learning," the last round of guidelines only allowed schools to spend those funds on "furniture and equipment." The State Board recommends that Council urge DCPS to:

¹ See for example: <https://apnews.com/article/rhode-island-anthony-fauci-gina-raimondo-infectious-diseases-virus-outbreak-ef7e8bb311a5f71c4afb11f7d3e77e7f> and <https://academic.oup.com/jid/advance>



- provide schools with sufficient flexibility for schools to tailor space and programming to the needs, interests and talents of their respective school communities.
- invite school partnering organizations to apply for this funding in collaboration with schools. School leaders and staff are already stretched thin, and partners are often in a better position to indicate specific resource and funding needs based on school programming requests.

The State Board recognizes that this budget cycle has been challenging for many reasons. Not least of all the delays and complications brought from federal funding. We are grateful to the Council for its dedication and conscientiousness in developing a budget to serve all residents of the District of Columbia, especially its most vulnerable.

In partnership,

The DC State Board of Education

