



**Testimony of Dr. Jessica Sutter
Ward 6 Representative and President
D.C. State Board of Education**

*Before the Committee of the Whole, Council of the District of Columbia
On the Fiscal Year 2023 Budget*

March 30, 2022

Mr. Chairman, Members of the Council of the District of Columbia and staff, thank you for holding this hearing today to discuss the fiscal year 2023 budget needs of the D.C. State Board of Education (State Board). I am Dr. Jessica Sutter, the Ward 6 Representative and President of the State Board. I am testifying today on behalf of the agency.

Overall, the State Board is pleased with the mayor's proposal for our agency. We believe the submission, if adopted by Council, would provide the State Board with the minimum funding needed to continue our operations. However, there are still opportunities for the Council to provide additional funding to enhance the State Board's work and operations, particularly in terms of additional research capacity and full-time equivalents (FTEs). We have provided details about these requests to the Committee, and I am happy to provide more information upon request, but I want to highlight two in particular.

First, the State Board joins the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB) and the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) in a request for funding to provide new or renovated office space designed for those offices. Currently, the OMB and OSA are housed in a single suite in the Marion S. Barry, Jr. Building that was built out before the State Board was made independent in 2013. Putting it frankly, the current office is not conducive to their work and does not provide appropriate space for their work with District families. Appropriate space would provide privacy for families to share sensitive information. The Department of General Services (DGS) informed us last week that there is no available space in any government building and recommended that we seek commercial space. DGS suggested an initial budget of \$600,000 per year (rising 2-3% annually) for the rent payment we would need. Second, the State Board is requesting two additional FTEs to enhance its work. One FTE will be devoted to the review and updating of education standards and the other will be devoted to community engagement work on behalf of the agency.

As the Council is aware, the State Board is required by D.C. Official Code to submit a Need for Appropriations (NfA) each year to the Mayor. That NfA is to be included in the mayor's budget proposal along with any recommendations she might make related to our request. The mayor has a different understanding of the law and, therefore, requires the State Board to participate in the regular budget process, but unlike dependent agencies, the State Board is not informed of what will be included in the mayor's submission until it becomes public. We would request that the Committee of the Whole include language in their committee report or in the Budget Support Act (BSA) clarifying the budget process for the State Board.





We would also appreciate the Council’s consideration of adding the text of our proposed legislation, [B24-0355, *The Statewide Data Warehouse Amendment Act*](#), to the BSA. This legislation would empower the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) to annually collect and report more robust, consistent, and detailed information about the District’s teacher workforce. The State Board has shown that year after year, the District loses on average nearly a quarter of its teaching staff. We believe that with the additional data required in the bill, all local education agencies (LEAs) and the District’s state education agency (i.e., OSSE) would be better equipped to attract and retain the best teaching workforce in the country. On Monday, March 28, U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona called for states to consider establishing teaching as a Registered Apprenticeship, investing in teacher residency programs, expanding loan forgiveness and service scholarship programs. The State Board is supportive of these ideas as part of the larger work we are doing to enhance the District’s teacher workforce.

The State Board recently sent a [letter](#) to Mayor Bowser and provided copies to the members of the Council laying out our hopes for the education budget. We are disappointed that only a few of these priorities have received adequate funding. I have attached a copy of that letter to my testimony as well. Here are some of the highlights:

In 2021, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) developed a [five-year comprehensive literacy plan](#) funded by a \$16 million federal grant. To move the work of the literacy plan forward, the State Board requests that OSSE receive funding for Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for all K–5 teachers, reading specialists, literacy coaches, special educators, teachers of multilingual learners, and administrators. Further, the State Board requests that the D.C. Reading Clinic programming at DCPS be fully funded to ensure that research-based structured literacy instruction is available to struggling readers, as well as apprenticeship opportunities are available for aspiring reading specialists. The District must ensure that it has adequate resources in place so there is at least one full-time reading specialist in every elementary school who is trained in the science of reading and able to administer screenings and interventions for students with reading disorders, in line with [L23-0919, the Addressing Dyslexia and Other Reading Difficulties Amendment Act of 2020](#).

The State Board strongly urges the Council to provide more funding for school-based supports, including funding for: teacher retention and school-staffing initiatives, hiring of more support staff (i.e., paraprofessionals), implementation of school-based mental health services (especially for middle and high school students), community schools and outdoor education programs, more grants for adult education providers, and to provide translation and interpretation services (e.g., translation of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs)). This funding might come from providing an increase in the “at-risk” weight to 0.37 in the UPSFF, funding agency-based initiatives at OSSE, Department of Behavioral Health (DBH), Department of Employment Services (DOES) and Department of Energy and Environment (DOEE).





In 2020, the OSA administered surveys and conducted focus groups with students across 15 DCPS and 12 public charter schools to better understand student experiences with traveling to and from school (see [report](#)). The State Board has previously called on the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), OSSE, and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of all students (see [SR21-8, On Strengthening Safe Passage for All Students in the District of Columbia](#)). The State Board calls for prioritizing funds and investments that ensure the hiring, training, and retention of safe passage personnel in Safe Passage Priority Areas, as well as other supports that ensure the safety of traveling students (i.e., crossing guards, raised crosswalks) are in place.

To close, Mr. Chairman, I want to thank the mayor for including two enhancement requests for the State Board in her budget. We hope the Council will retain both enhancements. The first will provide needed funding for each elected State Board Representative to broaden their engagement with their communities for a total of \$9,000. This could include printing costs, room fees, and other items at the discretion of the Representative. We would appreciate this funding be made recurring rather than one-time.

The second exciting enhancement will provide \$50,000 in funding for the State Board to determine exactly what would be necessary for us to bring our meetings into the community. As the Council is aware, we are temporarily unable to have our meetings at the Marion S. Barry, Jr. Building because the Old Council Chambers is being used by the mayor. Our plan is to use this funding to hire an expert that will help us develop a plan for these meetings that will include what equipment or technology would be needed, transportation suggestions, and how to ensure that meetings comply with District record keeping and open meetings requirements.

Mr. Chairman, the State Board may be a fairly small agency, but even with a limited budget and staff, we have proven ourselves to be strong partners in advancing educational equity. We look forward to continuing this work in fiscal year 2023.

Before I close, I want to extend my appreciation to the State Board staff, including the employees of the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education and the Office of the Student Advocate. They are incredibly hard working and are deeply dedicated to our mission. We would not be successful without them, and they have the State Board's deepest gratitude.

I am now available for any questions you might have.





March 14, 2022

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

Dear Mayor Bowser,

The D.C. State Board of Education (State Board) appreciates and notes your commitment to public education and District schools, as well as the challenging decisions and landscape you face as you prepare your FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan.

During the State Board's March 2 working session, we identified priorities we believe should be included in the FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan. Below is a list of the top five (5) priorities; we have also included other items of importance to the State Board, as well as items specific to the State Board's own budget and enhancement requests.

1. ***\$72 million¹ for identifying, planning, and successfully executing literacy programming and supports in the District, as well as the training and hiring of teachers and school-based reading specialists.*** In 2021, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) developed a [five-year comprehensive literacy plan](#) funded by a \$16 million federal grant. To move the work of the literacy plan forward, the State Board requests funding for Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling (LETRS) training for all K–5 teachers, reading specialists, literacy coaches, special educators, teachers of multilingual learners, and administrators. Further, the State Board requests that the DC Reading Clinic programming be fully funded to ensure that research-based structured literacy instruction is available to struggling readers, as well as apprenticeship opportunities are available for aspiring reading specialists. The District must ensure that it has adequate resources in place so there is at least one full-time reading specialist in every elementary school who is trained in the science of reading and able to administer screenings and interventions for students with reading disorders. Finally, the 126-page literacy plan must be made accessible to all stakeholders in schools and community settings.
2. ***\$49 million² for school-based supports,*** including funding for: teacher retention and school-staffing initiatives, hiring of more support staff (i.e., paraprofessionals), implementation of school-based mental health services (especially for middle and high

¹ \$12M in funding for one reading specialist in every elementary school based on ~150 elementary schools, \$100,000 in salary and benefits and reducing by \$3M already budgeted for 31 reading specialists. The remaining \$60M is calculated for ~3,000 FTEs to take a training that averages \$2,000 per person. This figure does not include additional funding for the DC Reading Clinic or engagement of external stakeholders around the Comprehensive Literacy Plan; the State Board is supportive of funding for these efforts. The literacy plan, at a minimum, must be translated into languages other than English to ensure accessibility.

² Includes the additional \$27M in funding announced for the Department of Behavioral Health, \$2M in funding for translation and interpretations services, \$20M in grants for local education agencies (LEAs) for teacher retention and adult education programs.

school students), more grants for adult education providers, and to provide translation and interpretation services (e.g., translation of Individualized Education Programs (IEP)).

3. ***\$10 million to maintain and expand the District’s Safe Passage Safe Blocks (SPSB) initiative—to ensure that all students feel safe traveling to and from school.*** In 2020, the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) administered surveys and conducted focus groups with students across 15 DC Public Schools and 12 public charter schools to better understand student experiences with traveling to and from school (see [report](#)). The State Board has previously called on the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME), OSSE, and the District Department of Transportation (DDOT) to strengthen the safety and wellbeing of all students (see [SR21-8, On Strengthening Safe Passage for All Students in the District of Columbia](#)). The State Board calls for prioritizing funds and investments that ensure the hiring and retention of safe passage personnel in Safe Passage Priority Areas, as well as other supports that ensure the safety of traveling students (i.e., crossing guards, raised crosswalks) are in place.
4. ***Increase the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) at-risk weight to the recommended 0.37 and ensure the UPSFF keeps pace with rising inflation costs.*** The [December 2013 UPSFF Adequacy Study](#) recommend an at-risk weight of 0.37 “for students at risk of academic failure”. Further, [OSSE’s January 2021 Report on the UPSFF](#) noted that its working group suggested a new supplemental weight for students who have 2 or more at-risk characteristics be considered and developed in the context of the Adequacy Study’s 0.37 recommendation. Over the last twelve months, the Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 7.9 percent—the largest 12-month increase in 40 years. The State Board requests that student-based school budgets are based on growing inflationary pressures, as well as the specific needs of the District’s special student populations.
5. ***Additional funding³ to ensure that the District’s schools, infrastructure, and education spaces are up to date and regularly maintained.*** Over the course of the COVID pandemic, the State Board has heard from constituents about facilities that do not have operational HVAC systems, toilets that do not flush and sinks without filled soap containers, insufficient simulcasting and smartboard technology, and inadequate resources to ensure proper and successful outdoor learning and lunches. There are equity issues when it comes to facilities in the District, such that not all schools have the financial resources of well-funded PTOs. The State Board ask you to make significant investments in the continued and ongoing modernization of the District’s schools, infrastructure, and education spaces.

In addition to the five (5) above-noted priority areas, the State Board has also identified **other areas for increased and needed funding**: compensatory education services for students with special needs, academic standards implementation and curriculum support, student-focused

³ We have not provided a specific dollar amount for this request because of the many variables that exist within identifying capital funding and modernization schedules.



cultural and experiential learning opportunities, subsidized aftercare programming space, homeschool support, out-of-school programming and education partnerships, and exploration of alternatives to the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) exam.

Further, the State Board requests the following **State Board-specific budget priorities** be funded in the FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan—each of these items is important and necessary to ensure that the State Board can successfully do its work for the District residents.

- ***\$15,000⁴ to complete renovations in the Old Council Chambers to provide the State Board a meeting space that meets the needs of a post-COVID hybrid meeting structure.*** Over the pandemic, the State Board saw large increases in public participation at its public meetings due to our virtual meeting posture—308 testimonies in 2020 (an increase of 143 percent over the previous year) and 275 testimonies in 2021 (of which 60 percent were first time testifiers). As such, the State Board plans to continue its practice of virtual public testimony to ensure that the largest number of District residents can engage in the State Board’s work. To fully achieve this, the State Board needs adequate funds to ensure that it has the appropriate space and technology needs moving into a post-COVID hybrid meeting structure. We understand that the Mayor’s budget proposal includes funding for the State Board to determine the physical and technological requirements to hold its meetings across the city. We are deeply grateful for this support as it means the State Board will be able to bring its meetings into the communities we serve.
- ***\$18,000⁵ to support the State Board’s city-wide community meeting efforts.*** In November and December 2021, the State Board hosted in-person engagement sessions with over 50 attendees sharing their thoughts and feedback on the State Board’s projects and work. These types of in-community sessions and meetings are important for cultivating trust, building relationships, and hearing from a wide range of perspectives. The State Board requests that funds be allocated to our city-wide community meeting efforts.
- ***\$9,000⁶ to provide limited funding for each elected member of the State Board to direct within their respective ward for direct constituent engagement and communications efforts.*** These limited funds would be equally divided (i.e., \$1,000 per elected member), and each member would be responsible for their use, under the overall purchasing controls of the Executive Director and District law. As part-time elected Board members, such financial

⁴ This funding would purchase additional technology identified by the Office of Cable Television, Film, Movies and Entertainment (OCTFME) and the Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO) as well as physical enhancements to the Old Council Chambers located in the Marion S. Barry, Jr. Building.

⁵ This figure includes reservation of meeting space, the creation and translation of materials, interpretation services, and refreshments as appropriate for at least eight (8) city-wide community meetings.

⁶ This request provides \$1,000 for each elected representative to meet the particular needs of their residents. It will not be used for constituent services but is focused on broadening the ability of the State Board to provide information to and receive feedback directly from residents.





resources will further ensure our work is timely and effective. It is our understanding that the Mayor's budget includes this funding, and we are very grateful.

- The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB), the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA), and the OMB's new virtual and brick-and-mortar special education parent resource center are all in need of physical space that better fits the needs of their office and the families and students they serve. Resolving families' education-related concerns and complaints by providing information, coaching, attending, or facilitating school meetings, and conducting mediations is integral to the public education landscape and the current OMB and OSA office space is inadequate for its growing demands and needs. The State Board requests that you direct the Department of General Services (DGS) to identify and build space promptly in FY 2023 to appropriately house these offices.

The State Board directs the Council to [SR21-9](#), *DC State Board of Education Fiscal Year 2023 Need for Appropriations Resolution* for additional information related to the State Board's FY 2023 budget and other related enhancements.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views on the FY 2023 Budget and Financial Plan. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our partnerships with you and your team.

Sincerely,

The D.C. State Board of Education

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

