



**Testimony of Eboni-Rose Thompson
Ward 7 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 2024 Budget*

April 7, 2023

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 2024 budget needs of the D.C. State Board of Education (State Board). I am Eboni-Rose Thompson, the Ward 7 Representative and President of the State Board. I am testifying today on behalf of the agency.

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

With that said, the mayor's proposed budget for the State Board is inadequate. We would appreciate the Council's assistance in funding four positions within our agency: Two caseload positions left unfunded by the Mayor for the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB) and the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA). Two additional FTEs to enhance the State Board's work and operations, particularly in terms of needed administrative and community engagement capacity. The total cost for these FTEs is \$ \$385,505.

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 retain two FTEs that were hired with APRA funding to address the increasing demand for their services due to the covid 19 pandemic. While the District is no longer in a "state of emergency," the community demand for their services has not diminished, and requests for their services have increased. Moreover, each of the FTEs mentioned earlier provides assistance in Spanish for families in need. We urge the Council to find the funding requested to fill those needs as these two offices are critical resources to families as students and parents in the District.

Second, the State Board requests two additional FTEs to strengthen its work. Over the last year, administrative responsibilities have stretched our team beyond its limits. Our agency only has one staff person responsible for its procurement, budget, and operation functions for the State Board's central office, the Office of Student Advocate, and the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education. This is a dangerous precedent, creating conditions for burnout and mistakes.





We need an additional full-time employee (FTE) for administrative support to keep pace with the agency's growth and required governmental responsibilities. Next, the mission of the District of Columbia State Board of Education is to provide policy leadership, support, advocacy, and oversight of public education to ensure that every student is valued and learns the skills and knowledge necessary to become informed, competent, and contributing global citizens. The State Board views its role in achieving this mission as a shared responsibility. It engages families, students, educators, community members, elected officials, and business leaders to play a vital role in preparing every child for college and/or career success. To help us realize that mission, the State Board needs an FTE dedicated to community engagement work on behalf of the agency. Without a dedicated FTE to help the State Board in this area, the agency has not been able to engage and uplift all DC communities in the statewide education policy process thoroughly and thoughtfully.

As the State Board looks ahead to FY 2024 and the next school year, we are excited to continue our work with the Office of the State Superintendent of Education, examining education standards, establishing literacy benchmarks, and revising our DC School Report. We also want to engage families and students more deeply in this work. The State Board's commitment to interagency collaboration can also be seen in our Healthy School Facilities Network (HSFN) team. Last year the State Board was awarded a \$10,000 grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) to help the State Board form a collaborative team of experts to take targeted, concrete actions toward creating healthy, safe, and educationally appropriate school facilities. This team comprises representatives from the State Board, DME, DC Public Schools (DCPS), D.C. Council, George Washington University, the 21st Century School Fund, Mary's Center, and one of the District's largest charter LEAs. The team has been exploring state-level public school facility standards for school location, design, condition, utilization, and options for appropriate roles and responsibilities for the State Board with education facilities. The HSFN team will prepare a policy paper on its findings and recommendations later this summer. The team's work coincides nicely with the Master Facilities Plan (MFP) and Student Assignment & School Boundary Study slated to begin this spring through the DME's Office. The State Board is grateful for the strong interagency collaboration on this work—and looks to it as a model for how work in the District's education space should be done.

Lastly, 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. I have attached a copy of that letter to my testimony as well. Here are some of the highlights:

- We would like to see \$6.6 million for structured literacy training to ensure 1,000 Pre-K educators, 3,500 K–5 educators, and 750 administrators receive LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training over the next few years. The State Board appreciates and acknowledges the current work of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and their Early Literacy Education Task Force that is developing recommendations for actionable steps related to literacy in D.C. However, the Task Force will not deliver their final report and recommendations until September 2023. As such, the State Board asks that you include multi-year funding for literacy training in your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan.





- The Board strongly urges additional funding to ensure that D.C.’s schools, infrastructure, and education spaces are up-to-date and regularly maintained. The State Board consistently hears from constituents about school facility issues (e.g., broken public-announcement systems, ineffective alarm, and emergency management systems, temporary spaces that have become de-facto permanent classrooms, broken HVAC systems, etc.), as well as many schools repeatedly being denied full modernizations in favor of new schools. During the State Board’s February 15 Public Meeting, we heard from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, school personnel, students, and advocates about the need for our students, educators, and school-based leaders to have safe, healthy, and educationally-appropriate spaces.
- The State Board calls for increased funding for the Safe Passage Safe Blocks (SPSB) Initiative, developing standardized communication and coordination plans, and investments in safety advocates, restorative justice, and mediation programming—and directs you to [SR22-13, Recommendations Related to Public Safety](#).
- At least \$11.6 million for expanded investments in student- and school-based mental health and nursing services. Students face challenges accessing the appropriate mental health services in their schools. The State Board’s Student Advisory Committee (SAC) found that nearly 1 in 4 students feel there is insufficient support when looking for someone to talk to about their mental health needs.

To close, Mr. Chairman, the State Board may be a relatively small agency, but even with a limited budget and staff, we have proven to be strong partners in advancing and amplifying community voice, supporting student voice and engagement, and strengthening interagency collaboration. We look forward to continuing this work in fiscal year 2024.

I also 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 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 13, 2023

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 schools in D.C., as well as the challenging decisions and landscape you face as you prepare your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan.

During the State Board’s March 1 Working Session, we identified budget priorities we believe should be included in your forthcoming FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan. Below is a list of the State Board’s top four (4) priorities, as well as items specific to the State Board’s own budget and enhancement requests for the upcoming budget cycle.

- 1. \$6.6 million¹ for structured literacy training to ensure 1,000 Pre-K educators, 3,500 K–5 educators, and 750 administrators receive LETRS (Language Essentials for Teachers of Reading and Spelling) training over the next few years.**² The State Board appreciates and acknowledges the current work of the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) and their Early Literacy Education Task Force that is developing recommendations for actionable steps related to literacy in D.C. However, the Task Force will not be delivering their final report and recommendations until September 2023. As such, the State Board asks that you include multi-year funding for literacy training in your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan, so that critical literacy training (e.g., [LETRS](#), D.C. Reading Clinic, TNTP) can robustly continue and begin in school year 2023–24 without funding delays. Using empirically validated instructional methods based on the science of reading is imperative to support early and struggling readers adequately. Making this investment in literacy for D.C. educators and students now will build on the [“Structured Literacy Action Plan Act of 2022”](#) and the State Board’s [SR22-12, On Early Literacy Priorities](#).³
- 2. At least \$11.6 million⁴ for expanded investments in student- and school-based mental health and nursing services.** Students continue to face challenges with accessing the appropriate and needed mental health services in their schools—and these challenges have

¹ This estimate is based on a calculation using data contained in [OSSE’s 2022 Educator Workforce Report](#), as well as pricing estimates provided by Lexia (the proprietary owner of LETRS) for 88 bundles of LETRS 3E at a cost of \$5.3 million, 25 bundles of LETRS EC at a cost of \$430,000, and 30 bundles of LETRS Administrator at a cost of \$847,500.

² The State Board recognizes that a different literacy training program or set of programs could be selected; this budget request is based on information and an assumption that D.C. would select and only use LETRS training.

³ At the request of Mayor Bowser, Ward 1 Representative Ben Williams transmitted a letter on the importance of funding literacy training on Friday, March 10, 2023; other members of the State Board and the Student Advisory Committee (SAC) also signed on to his letter.

⁴ The Strengthening Families Through Behavioral Health Coalition has estimated that at least \$5.7 million is needed to ensure community-based organizations (CBOs), which recruit and retain behavioral and mental health clinicians, are able to effectively do their work and provide a grant of about \$103,000 per clinician (up from the current \$99,371). The Mayor’s FY23 Budget and Financial Plan also called for \$5.9 million to expand school nursing services and additional school health services programs in public and public charter schools; the State Board feels that at least this amount should be included for FY24.





only been accelerated post-COVID pandemic.⁵ The State Board’s Student Advisory Committee (SAC) found that nearly 1 in 4 students feel there is insufficient support when looking for someone to talk to about their mental health needs.⁶ The State Board requests you included additional investments for the District’s School Health Services Program (SHSP)⁷, so that every school has a nurse on site every day of the week, as well as enhancements for the Department of Behavioral Health’s (DBH) school-based behavioral health services program.

- 3. ***Additional funding⁸ to ensure that D.C.’s schools, infrastructure, and education spaces are up to date and regularly maintained.*** The State Board consistently hears from constituents about school facility issues (e.g., broken public-announcement systems, ineffective alarm and emergency management systems, temporary spaces that have become de-facto permanent classrooms, broken HVAC systems, etc.), as well as many schools repeatedly being denied full modernizations in favor of new schools. During the State Board’s February 15 Public Meeting we heard from the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education, school personnel, students, and advocates about the need for our students, educators, and school-based leaders to have safe, healthy, and educationally-appropriate spaces. The State Board is grateful for your team’s current work on the District’s Master Facilities Plan (MFP) and Student Assignment and Boundary Study; however, we must ensure there are basic standards for the location, design, condition, and utilization for school buildings and grounds—regardless of sector.⁹ The State Board asks you to make significant investments in the continued and ongoing modernization of D.C.’s schools, infrastructure, and education spaces—with a particular focus on the importance of everyday maintenance¹⁰ and increasing funding for school-based maintenance staff.

- 4. ***At least \$36.4 million¹¹ for the expansion of safe passage sites and increased opportunities for safe passage workers to ensure they are trained in violence interrupter best practices.*** At the State Board’s October 19 Public Meeting, members heard from an expert panel about the effects that violence has on youth, the varying levels of work and coordination happening in D.C. at the government-, school-, community-, and student-level, and the need for safe and consistent funding streams to support public safety work in and around schools. The Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) has also elevated the value of and need for “safety advocates” as D.C. works to transition away from school

⁵ According to the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s \(CDC\) Youth Risk Behavior Survey Data Summary & Trends Report: 2011–2021](#), 42 percent of high school students expressed experiencing persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness—the highest in ten years (i.e., the rate was 28 percent in 2011 and 37 percent in 2019).

⁶ See page 5 of the [2022 SAC Annual Report](#); delivered to and considered by the State Board in July 2022.

⁷ The D.C. Department of Health provides school health services to over 70,000 students in more than 175 D.C. public and public charter schools, which means that at least one-third of public-school students do not have access to health suite services.

⁸ We have yet to provide a specific budget amount for this request because of the many variables that exist in identifying and developing capital funding and modernization schedules, as well as the current work related to the MFP and Student Assignment and Boundary Study. It is the State Board’s understanding that we will have more information following the completion of these streams of work at the end of summer 2023.

⁹ The State Board passed [SR22-18, To Approve the National Association of State Boards of Education \(NASBE\) Healthy School Facility Network \(HSFN\) Team Work Plan](#). The resolution also established the State Board’s team engaged in work related to safe, healthy, and educationally-appropriate school facilities; as of March 2023, the team now includes representatives from the Deputy Mayor for Education, DC Public Schools, Friendship Public Charter Schools, George Washington School of Public Health, 21st Century School Fund, and Mary’s Center.

¹⁰ As of March 13, 2023, 3,493 open work orders across all DCPS facilities are listed on the [Department of General Services \(DGS\) Public Work Order Dashboard](#).

¹¹ The fiscal impact statement for the [B24-0066, Safe Passage to School Expansion Act of 2021](#), states: “The Chief Financial Officer concluded that funds are insufficient in the fiscal year 2023 through fiscal year 2026 budget and financial plan to implement the bill. The bill’s implementation will cost \$3,371,000 in fiscal year 2023 and \$148,803,000 over the four-year financial plan period.” The State Board has made its estimates based on the information provided in this fiscal impact statement.





resource officers (SROs) to other public safety personnel.¹² The State Board calls for increased funding for the Safe Passage Safe Blocks (SPSB) Initiative, developing standardized communication and coordination plans, and investments in safety advocates, restorative justice, and mediation programming—and directs you to [SR22-13, Recommendations Related to Public Safety](#).

Further, the State Board requests the following **State Board-specific budget priorities** be funded in your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan—each of these items is critically important and necessary to ensure that the State Board can successfully do its work for D.C. residents.

- ***\$190,000 to hire two additional FTEs for the State Board to increase administrative and operational support, as well as community engagement.*** The State Board is served by a small but dedicated team who work very hard to provide support and expertise to the agency and the elected members of the State Board. Over the last year, administrative responsibilities have stretched the agency; currently, our agency has only one FTE responsible for its procurement, budget, and operational functions for all three offices of the State Board. The agency is grateful for recent increases and funding for programmatic personnel; however, those increases have not been matched with increases on the State Board’s administrative side. Further, over the past few years, the State Board has seen notable increases in work related to constituent and community engagement services; in the absence of a dedicated FTE to help the State Board in this area, the agency has not been able to engage and uplift all communities in the statewide education policy process fully and thoughtfully.
- ***\$100,000 to complete a full-scale renovation of the Old Council Chambers to provide the State Board with a hybrid meeting space that meets the needs of the agency and residents of D.C.*** In 2022, the State Board held over 80 meetings, received over 125 pieces of public testimony¹³, and answered over 1,100 phone calls from constituents. We consider all forms of feedback from the community to guide our actions seriously—and the State Board must ensure that the public meeting space where we conduct our official business in is fully accessible to both in-person and virtual attendance, as well as for individuals with disabilities or childcare needs. In September 2022, the State Board attempted to host a hybrid meeting in the Old Council Chambers; however, we were unable to successfully connect and ensure AV connectivity and needed feeds to the Office of the Cable Television, Film, Media, and Entertainment (OCTFME)—resulting in an inadequate experience. To fully employ a hybrid meeting in the Old Council Chambers, the State Board needs funding that goes beyond ad-hoc fixes and updates. The State Board recognizes that with the appropriate resources, we can have hybrid spaces like those currently available to both the

¹² See page 24 of the [Office of the Student Advocate 2022 Annual Report](#), which describes “safety advocates” as non-uniformed officers who are still part of their local police department who partner with school counselors and other mental health professionals, and community-based organizations (CBOs) to connect students with the support structures that they need.

¹³ This represents a 60 percent decrease in testimony since 2020 and 55 percent decrease since 2021—both were during periods of time when virtual testimony at our meetings was a robust and accessible option.





Council of the District of Columbia and the Executive Office of the Mayor.¹⁴ Increasing efficacy of the Old Council Chambers for the State Board—and other agencies who frequently use this space—will provide better and much-improved access and engagement with constituents, communities, and other stakeholders in D.C.’s work.

- The Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education (OMB) and the Office of the Student Advocate (OSA) have independent budget authority under the State Board. They have also submitted requests for permanent local funding for two FTEs due to expiring American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds, as well as information technology and data security and storage items to increase their offices’ efficiency. The State Board fully supports our sister offices’ requests—and asks that you include them in your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan.

The State Board directs you and your team to [SR22-7, Approval of Fiscal Year 2024 Appropriations and Enhancements](#) for additional information related to the State Board’s FY2024 budget and other related enhancements.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our views as you finalize your FY2024 Budget and Financial Plan. We look forward to continuing and strengthening our partnership with you and your agencies.

Sincerely,

Eboni-Rose Thompson, *Ward 7 Representative and President*
 Frazier O’Leary, *Ward 4 Representative and Vice President*
 Ben Williams, *Ward 1 Representative*
 Allister Chang, *Ward 2 Representative*
 Eric Goulet, *Ward 3 Representative*
 Robert Henderson, *Ward 5 Representative*
 Brandon Best, *Ward 6 Representative*
 Carlene Reid, *Ward 8 Representative*
 Jacque Patterson, *At-Large Representative*
 Liv Birnstad, *Student Representative*
 Téa Washington, *Student Representative*

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

¹⁴ The Council of the District of Columbia has fully hybrid capabilities in its main chambers (i.e., Room 500) and the Executive Office of the Mayor has Cisco Room 70 Panorama technology (approximate value is \$60,000) installed in Room 527 of the John A. Wilson Building that allows for hybrid meetings.

