



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

Dear Mayor Bowser,

As you craft the Fiscal Year 2025 DC Budget, we write to you as a broad coalition of DC educators dedicated to improving education for all of our DC students to share our education related budget priorities for the coming year. In the process of writing these recommendations we have engaged hundreds of DC educators across all eight wards. Our 35 educator fellows come equally from DCPS and DC public charter schools. They represent the racial diversity of our city, educate in all 8 wards and teach every grade level and subject area. Our fellows also, more than ever before, include an even distribution of new, mid-career and veteran educators. As an intentionally diverse educator community we have come to these budget priorities because we believe this year's budget presents the opportunity to shape your vision for how we want our education system to emerge from the pandemic not by restoring the system that we had previously, but by building the one we need for the next decade.

Our priorities fall into three categories. First, we must invest in efforts to retain our amazing educators and promote their well-being with innovative solutions that meet the workforce where it is and create win-win solutions for students, families and educators alike. Second, we must enrich the student experience at school and invest in a more holistic approach to education that provides students with the kinds of inspiring, joyful and rigorous educational experiences that will promote attendance, engagement and ensure their post secondary success. Finally, we must address root causes of educational inequity to ensure that our schools have a fighting chance to ensure student success by sufficiently supporting DC families and erasing housing insecurity, food insecurity and job insecurity in the District.

EDUCATOR INVESTMENTS

We know that educator retention is one of the foundational building blocks of improving student outcomes and that every dollar invested in educator well-being yields high returns for our students. We are grateful that last year the council recognized the need to provide educators more flexible schedules that can begin to make teaching more competitive with comparable jobs outside of the classroom.



While the investments in a flexible scheduling pilot and the one-year continuation of the OSSE Educator Wellness Technical Assistance Grants were very welcome, we must do more. *First, we ask you to ensure permanent local funding over the four year financial plan for OSSE's Educator Wellness Technical Assistance Grants-* the most effective way to support school leaders in retaining their educators through partnerships with CBOs that can help them craft and implement tailored educator wellness plans that meet the needs of their school. *Next, we ask that you fully fund the implementation of the Educator Retention for Student Success Act to provide mental health days for educators, a wellness coordinator to 25 critically in-need schools, study paraprofessional pay and continue to invest in flexible scheduling to meet the demand.* This coming February DCPS will issue a report on demand and acceptance to their flexible scheduling pilot. *We ask you to ensure both that current funding is protected and that funding be increased in this year's budget to meet school application demand for flexible scheduling based on the February report.* We must also focus on improving teacher quality by significantly strengthening teacher induction programs for all educators across sectors with research-based induction to high-expertise teaching and mentoring and strengthen the pipeline by creating a teacher apprenticeship program for DC high school students.

To further support our educators we must prioritize an equitable distribution of full-time permanent substitute teachers for all DCPS and DC public charter schools throughout the district. This role has become especially critical since the pandemic. As you know, educator call outs and short staffing have put an incredible strain on educators who find themselves routinely missing their planning period to cover for a colleague- not only producing a great deal of stress but undermining the quality of their preparation for their own teaching. *That is why we ask you to strengthen the benefits and pay structure for our schools' permanent substitutes and create a dedicated stream of funding to ensure that every school has at least one full-time permanent substitute on its roster per 250 students.*

Finally, we ask that you fund the final version of pending council legislation proposed by Council Member Christina Henderson to provide student loan relief for educators. We hope that this bill is amended to allow broader eligibility for DC educators, not only those who live in DC, with a higher income cap that would make the program more widely available to DCPS as well as charter school educators. We also ask for consideration of an increased amount of forgiveness based on years served to incentivize retention.

IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE AT SCHOOL

We believe one of the District's highest priorities should be closing the dramatic Experience Gap in student opportunities across schools.



We believe this is best attacked in this budget by focusing on three priority areas: 1) Access to STEM, outdoor & environmental literacy, 2) Access to experiential and project-based learning and 3) Access to specialized programs like global education and dual language programs.

First, we ask that you fully fund the build out of the 63 STEM and outdoor learning labs already designed by Out Teach to provide students with rich, real-world STEM and environmental learning experiences while improving student mental health and academic performance with more time outdoors in these highly-utilized outdoor classrooms. Out Teach helps teachers and schools transform the outdoors into active learning labs that unlock the wonder of science for students. This early exposure to engaging, hands-on, outdoor science learning is critical to sparking an interest in STEM which ensures students stay on an elementary to STEM career pathway. [Our ask for you is to provide \\$8M over four years to build 63 outdoor learning labs at DC public and public charter schools, supporting an estimated 2,520 teachers and allowing 63,000 students to experience science in new ways.](#) Throughout the Master Facilities Plan process, city leaders heard strong feedback that a school's outdoor footprint is as important to students and families as the indoor facilities. While OSSE paid for the design of these sites, 63 school sites remain designed but unbuilt.

Second, we are asking you to attack the Experience Gap by establishing a city-wide Experiential Learning Micro-Grant Fund that any educator, across-sector, can apply to and be provided timely funding to bring [experiential, project-based and field-based learning to life for the students they serve.](#) In November of 2023, DC educators had a total of \$408,000 outstanding Donors Choose requests, not including funding requests through parent organizations, Kickstarter campaigns and other sources. Educators should not be dependent on PTO funding or spending their limited time fundraising through Donors Choose to provide rich academic experiences including cross-curricular and real-world experiences. And these experiences, ones that both improve student learning and student attendance, shouldn't be limited to students in the wealthiest school communities. [That is why we are asking you to establish this micro-grant fund with an initial \\$250,000 investment \(a fraction of demonstrated demand\) and to provide a preference for teacher applications from schools with the highest at-risk student populations.](#)

Third, educators believe that the soon to be completed boundary and school assignment process is a good starting place to attack the inequity in access to specialized programs throughout the city by [investing in the expansion of dual language programs and global studies.](#) Throughout the public feedback process, many residents have expressed a desire to see dual language programs be expanded and more equitably distributed throughout the city.



The city must also invest in funding curriculum development for dual language schools and work to bridge the racial inequities in current participation. We also believe that to prepare students for the global future, we must expand the global studies theme and global studies certification present in just a few DC schools currently, to schools throughout the district. When we invest in our youth becoming global citizens, they will have pride in representing themselves, their families and the District. Our students must be prepared for the global future.

Finally, our students must be safe at school. According to our 2023 survey of hundreds of teachers, students and community members, the number one indicator of school quality is whether students feel safe in schools. Because our response to safety concerns must be both urgent and holistic, we ask the Mayor and DC Council to fund a four-pronged approach to crime and school safety concerns.

First, we ask for an expansion of Safe Passage Zones, consistent with feedback from both the Office of the Ombudsman and the Office of the Student Advocate. This signals your commitment to the belief that every student deserves to feel safe traveling to and from school. Second, we urge you to fund expanded access to Out of School Time (OST) programs, which keep students safe and engaged. Third, we also ask you to implement a developmentally-appropriate conflict resolution curriculum in all schools and provide sufficient funding for schools to purchase already developed, high quality curriculum to support implementation- giving students tools to express themselves and mediate on their own behalf. Finally, we ask that you fund a School Safety Director position in every high school across the District. These positions are vital in marshaling community and school resources, prioritizing a comprehensive approach to safety, and showing that the city is taking a proactive approach to safety concerns. We must make these investments in school safety in order that our students feel seen, heard, and supported.

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES

In order to address root causes of inequity among schools and students, we urge Council to pass and fund *both* of Council Member Zachary Parker's Child Tax Credit bills, with pandemic-era, per-child allocations of up to \$1,500 to eligible families, to increase funding for schools with the greatest need and to invest in a dramatic expansion of the proven Community & Connected Schools model. We know that child poverty most affects students of color, particularly Black students, and that poverty has a direct and adverse relationship to student achievement. A child tax credit has the potential to reduce structural poverty for District families while reinvesting in community success.



We can also ensure that every student is ready to learn by providing universal free school meals. We should eliminate the stigma associated with food insecurity, ensure that every child can access healthy food at school and streamline the process for our schools by [passing and funding the Universal Free School Meals Amendment Act of 2023](#).

We also ask that you [reinvest in neighborhood schools through direct funding allocations to the school most in need](#). Research proves that schools in historically redlined neighborhoods have a statistically significant decline in educational opportunity to the present day, necessitating a direct intervention to protect the futures of our students. However, as much as 40% of targeted “at-risk” funding is diverted to general school programming, and with declining enrollment in neighborhood schools, “at-risk” funding must be stabilized such that it need not be used to supplant basic programming. We can commit to increasing “at-risk” student formula funding, and pass an additional weighted category of per-pupil funding for schools with 85% or greater “at-risk” student population. These investments will go a long way to protecting “supplement not supplant” stipulations in neighborhood schools.

Finally, we ask the Mayor and Council to [deepen our investment in the Community Schools model](#) both through OSSE’s Community School Incentive Initiative and through an investment in the DCPS Connected Schools Program to expand the Community School model, which provides deep wrap around supports for students and families, starting with expanding to every DCPS middle school within the next two years, and every school with over a 70 % “at-risk” student population within the next four years.

As members of the Fair Budget Coalition and the Under 3 DC Coalition, we also express our full support for their budget recommendations and will work alongside our allies to support the holistic, equity-centered agenda they are presenting.

Together, these budget commitments make a substantial effort to reinvest in DC communities while closing opportunity gaps for our students and schools. We look forward to working together to bring these solutions to life to serve all DC students.

With appreciation,

The Educators of EmpowerEd