



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

Mayor Bowser,

We write to you this year in a time of urgent vulnerability for residents across our beloved city. This time last year we could not have predicted the full scope of need that our schools, students, and neighbors would face – but we have also seen community members step up in big and small ways to support one another. As we share our FY 2027 Budget Recommendations, we urge you to consider these factors:

First, DC's social safety faces significantly more pressure than this time last year in ways that require urgent investments to shelter our residents through the current storm. Cuts to SNAP and Medicaid leave gaps in nutrition and health care access. Health care premiums are set to skyrocket for many residents. Emergency Rental Assistance funding has dropped, leaving thousands more families vulnerable to eviction and housing instability. With local cuts compounding federal instability, our local government can and must do its part to patch safety net holes in housing, healthcare, and child care, which took critical hits in last year's budget. With our neighbors severely impacted by federal layoffs and an inclement recession, it is especially critical that we create stability for our most vulnerable residents first.

Second, DC enters 2026 after nearly 5 months of federal occupation. Federal law agencies, including ICE, HSI, ATF, FBI, IRS, and many more, have assuredly made our city less safe, including causing traumatic scenes for students and families directly outside of schools. We see this as an inflection point, and know it is time to make deep, proactive investments in community safety that expand opportunity rather than enhance surveillance or state harm. This is especially true for our immigrant and newcomer families, and our Black and Brown youth. Our youth deserve and require the city's investment.

Third, amidst deep cuts and manufactured instability at the Department of Education, we know building on DC's historic investments for public education is especially necessary. DC is a national example of consistent, thoughtful enhancements for public education. Now is not the time to walk back our wins, especially when federal funding for teacher development, multilingual learners, special education services, mental health, and Title funding face high uncertainty.

Already, we have seen our city become a target of the federal administration. As we present our budget priorities for FY 2027, we hope you share our goal to build a DC that is resilient, joyful, stable, and rich with opportunity. This is the time to invest more, not less, amidst an uncertain future.



INVESTING IN OUR EDUCATORS, TEACHING AND LEARNING

The most important thing we can do within schools to promote student success is to ensure every school has well-trained, well-supported and diverse educators who stay at their schools each year. By investing in our educators, we strengthen our workforce and local economy: evidence shows that retaining healthy, whole educators builds dividends for students, improves school culture, and drives learning success – all of which support economic growth.

To support and retain educators while improving pedagogy and learning experiences for all DC students, we ask for the following critical investments:

Educator Retention

First, to improve the retention of our educators and ensure all students have the critical long-lasting relationships with adults and stability in school they deserve, we ask the city to establish an Educator Retention Fund that will allow high turnover schools to utilize the most effective, research-backed strategies to support and retain staff. We propose a \$4,000,000 investment in year one funding to provide \$200,000 each to twenty qualifying schools with high staff turnover. Given that the average cost to replace an educator is \$25,000 per educator, this program should approach cost neutrality.

Funds would be utilized to employ a minimum of two strategies, chosen by the school leader and staff together, from the following:

- hire additional permanent substitutes,
- hire a school partner to support flexible scheduling for educators,
- hire a Wellness Coordinator to orchestrate student and staff wellbeing initiatives,
- partner with a CBO to support a whole-school educator wellness approach,
- implement additional staff mental health days,
- build a staff mentorship program.

While DC Public Schools continues to improve its educator retention, we know that many public charter schools are struggling to do so. Although attacking this challenge requires more than addressing pay, adequate educator pay for the sector is a critical baseline for retention. We support ensuring equitable funding for public charter schools to pay competitive salaries through the funding formula.



Next, as educators navigate both their own and their students' needs, we again ask the city to budget for the continuation of the OSSE Whole School Educator Wellness Grants at \$400,000/year over the four year financial plan to allow community organizations to directly support schools in improving educator wellbeing and retention.

We are grateful for the recent decision to make this a continuation grant, and for the Mayor's past investments in this work. However, it is difficult for community partners to maintain momentum with the work when it isn't built into the 4 year financial plan. A \$100,000 increase over FY 2026 funding would also provide more adequate per school partnership funding. Educators who benefit from the grant partnership consistently tell us that it enhances their wellbeing, fights burnout, improves social-emotional needs, and increases retention– all of which are more important than ever.

Permanent Substitutes

We owe it to every student to ensure that each day they have a well-prepared educator in front of them ready to deliver high-quality learning experiences. Unfortunately, teacher burnout and resulting absences can undermine this goal. Far too often this means one of two things: students are left with under-qualified or unprepared substitutes who do not know them and are unable to implement a real learning experience for them during their teacher's absence. Or, it means another full-time educator is under strain, asked to step into a colleague's class and lose their own planning period. Loss of planning periods lowers the quality of instruction; it is unfair to students because it undermines the teacher's ability to plan and prepare.

For all of these reasons, we must ensure every school has adequate, full-time permanent building substitutes who have existing relationships with students and are prepared to step in and deliver quality lessons. DC should ensure a ratio of 1 permanent building substitute per 250 students. We estimate moving from the status quo to implementing this critical model in all DCPS schools would cost approximately \$11 million in the coming fiscal year– and would dramatically improve teaching, learning and educator morale.

Teacher Diversity

Next, we must support a diverse educator workforce that reflects and affirms the identities of our students. Research resoundingly concludes that students benefit from educators who both understand their life experiences and who come from a different background than their own. To support educator diversity, uphold our commitment to DC's immigrant community, and promote bilingual education, we ask DCPS and the city to work towards a sustainable program to sponsor immigrant educator visas, and to implement signing bonuses for bilingual educators and Black male educators.



Although DC has a higher percentage of bilingual educators and Black male educators than many urban districts, they continue to be rare and necessary presences in schools, with the percentage of Black male educators shrinking and immigrant educators facing hostility. While DC has invested heavily in merit-based teacher pay, research has shown that front-end recruitment or signing bonuses for high-need roles at high-need schools are more effective. **It is a values choice that DC currently provides all police recruits a \$25,000 signing bonus and provides no such bonuses for educators. At a minimum, we can do so for Black male educators, bilingual educators and those in high-need, shortage areas like CTE and Special Education.**

At a moment when our educators and public servants are already carrying extraordinary strain, we are extremely concerned that the proposed changes to DC's Paid Family Leave program would roll back hard-won protections by cutting family-caregiving leave from eight weeks to two, narrowing who counts as family, and allowing agencies to deny leave based on 'operational needs.' These restrictions would destabilize the very workforce our city depends on—especially those caring for aging parents, sick relatives, or chosen family—and would make it harder for educators and school-based staff to remain in the profession during moments of profound personal need. **We urge you to preserve the current Paid Family Leave policy in full**, so that DC continues to be a place where public servants can care for their families without risking their livelihoods.

Improving Pedagogy

Educators deeply desire to improve their craft to better serve their students. Too often they feel like the professional development provided to them is not properly differentiated for the point in their career, their subject area, or the particular strategies that would best serve their students. Educators want to learn from other expert teachers and observe great teaching. In our all-educator city-wide survey, one of the things educators said would retain them was funding and support to pursue their own professional advancement. For that reason **we are asking for the creation of a \$500,000 Educator Personalized Professional Growth Fund accessible by educators to pursue pedagogical advancement**, including National Board Certification, professional conferences admission, approved online coursework (especially as it relates to culturally sustaining pedagogy) and other related expenses. As the federal government erodes professional development funding, we must bolster it locally.

Educators continue to dip into their own pockets to serve students. Science educators have voiced strong concerns with having inadequate supply budgets. In many cases they have been told by DCPS to utilize the \$200 supply card they receive at the beginning of the year—meant for decorating and setting up their room with basic supplies—to buy advanced science equipment. Not all subjects have the same costs, and having an adequately stocked science lab is important, and expensive. At minimum, stocking a science lab requires \$1,000 per lab on top of basic supplies, an amount which must be increased at 2% annually as budget allows.



We ask DCPS and our charter LEAs to make sure science educator supplies are maintained as a separate and sufficient budget line from general supplies.

Finally, as costs rise and it becomes harder to afford living in DC for so many educators, a majority of whom already live outside the District, we have heard educators raise the stress and strain of parking for decades. Many schools have insufficient parking, including schools undergoing renovation where portable classrooms are placed in the parking lot cutting available parking space. Solutions have been on the table before, but not carried out city-wide. While administrators have guaranteed spots, staff do not, often incurring a daily charge or arriving late due to extended parking searches. We propose a daily allotment of \$15 per day for parking for educators at schools without available on-site parking for all staff.

IMPROVING THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE

In the past year, the world has shrunk around our young people. The city imposed curfews that limit where and when they can gather, and banned students from sporting events without adult supervision. Moreover, federal presence (and local law enforcement collaboration) has made many young people fearful to even be out of the house at all. It is one of the core responsibilities of the government to provide safety for its citizens– but safety cannot be achieved only by limiting opportunity, or confining our residents to remain shut in their own homes.

We owe it to young people to use this budget to broaden their opportunities for freedom and joy with investments in safe, rich and childhood-defining experiences.

First, we ask for an expansion of the Bridge the Gap Experiential Learning Fund with Live It, Learn It at \$700,000 for the next year. This program has proven to be one the most efficient and productive bang-for-the-buck programs with young people of any government program in recent history. Already this year, 92 projects have been approved serving 7,802 students being able to take part in experiential and project-based learning experiences because of this fund. Sixteen additional projects serving another 1500 students are in the approval process– and it's only December! It's essential to keep building on this success.

Second, we ask you to directly allot \$500,000 for the continuation and expansion of the DCPS study abroad program– for both domestic and international trips– and provide \$500,000 in grants that can be accessed by public charter schools to expand similar opportunities. More than a decade ago, DC promised to expand study abroad to all students, but has since backtracked. The DCPS program serves just over 100 students annually. These life-changing experiences are fundamental to shaping the perspectives and possibilities of our young people– and no less important than tutoring and testing. The budget should reflect that.



Youth Safety

Third, we ask you to support student safety by investing in the Department of Parks and Recreation to expand the hours of recreation centers in all eight wards, tripling the number of “Late Night Hype” events throughout the year (a major ask from youth at recent hearings) and supporting youth mentorship. We ask you to fully fund and implement the Youth Mentorship Through Community Engagement Act, passed by Council this past year.

Positive adult connection through meaningful, trauma-informed mentorship vastly improves sense of self and belonging for students. Our teachers stood behind this bill, and are asking for the Council to fully fund the Youth Mentorship Through Community Engagement Act in the FY 2027 budget at \$2.1 million per year. To continue to bolster efforts to increase student attendance, we must continue to take a human-centered approach focused on case-management and providing targeted services. This is why we should expand the successful DHS Truancy Pilot and budget \$6 million for the program in the FY 2027 budget.

Post-Secondary Success

Fourth, we ask the Deputy Mayor for Education’s Office to build and launch a postsecondary career options hub. Our teachers support students’ request to **set aside \$700k to build, launch, and market a Student Success Hub website focused on supporting college preparation, vocational training, and early career opportunities for postsecondary success, including support to navigate financial and scholarship needs.** Currently, significant informational barriers inhibit student ability to locate and access all city-provided resources for postsecondary options. By centralizing all resources for multiple postsecondary pathways in an accessible, navigable website, we can ensure students don’t struggle to navigate scattered, inefficient supports.

Fifth, we ask OSSE to prepare for the new graduation requirements rollout and build on the implementation of Social and Emotional Learning standards by **setting aside at least \$200,000 (for a managing FTE and implementation support) in funds for launching linguistically-accessible family education courses focused on post-secondary career options and social and emotional learning standards**– helping parents be partners in implementing social and emotional development standards at home.

Sixth, we know that excessive testing continues to decrease student learning time and tank student engagement. We ask you to build on the council’s work in the FY 2026 budget, which educators were grateful for, and continue the critical work of identifying superfluous assessments so that we can increase learning time and **reinvest funds from unnecessary testing contracts towards adequately implementing student support accommodations and improved educator professional learning.**



We also ask you create stipended teacher positions to provide input and oversight in district-wide assessment development.

Each year, educators share that required curricular tasks and other mandatory assessments like RCTs— which educators have frequently testified are poorly designed and timed— are not useful for driving student growth. Opportunities to participate in task forces or focus groups that shape assessment design are poorly marketed to educators, who feel they lack input in state assessments and find them not culturally relevant and inappropriate for newcomer students. Culturally responsive assessments—for-growth can be done by trusting the professionalism of our educators and eliminating contracts with testing companies that drain resources while driving students and educators away from the learning process.

ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES OF INEQUITY

As our educators work every day to improve student outcomes in schools, we must also be honest that we cannot solve the deep educational inequities and resulting gaps in achievement simply by reforming our in-school approaches to academics. We must attack the root causes of inequity and provide true safety and prosperity to all District families to truly experience equity of opportunity.

We were thrilled to see the Council move earlier this year to set up an investment in the Child Tax Credit in the FY 2027 budget. We call on the Mayor to maintain this critical investment in the budget as it is one of the most effective tools to reduce childhood poverty and, along with it, educational outcomes for young people. We must also fully restore and fund the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) programs in light of the devastating cuts set to go into effect that would stop inflation adjustments, impose job-readiness sanctions and set damaging time limits on receiving full benefits. These harmful actions go into effect next October and undercut efforts to address poverty in the District and harm DC students and families.

Community Schools

We know that one of the single most effective ways to address the holistic needs of students and families is through implementation of the community schools models. From California to our neighbors in Maryland, compounding evidence shows that community schools implementation lowers chronic absenteeism, reduces suspensions, increases student engagement and improves student academic outcomes at a marginal cost compared to other interventions. This solution is especially critical at this time. As cuts to the federal safety net and federal layoffs continue to harm DC residents, one of the most powerful tools we have to ensure student and families needs are met is to bring services, from food pantries and clothing to medical and dental care, directly into our schools.



DC is behind the curve on community schools implementation with cities like Cincinnati and Baltimore close to 100% implementation, Oakland at 84%, Prince George's County at 70% and DC only at around 15% of our schools. We ask the city to invest \$4.1 million in FY 2027 (\$2 million to bring on eight new community schools at \$250,000 each plus \$2.1 M to bring funding equity to existing community schools operating with less than \$250,000 annually), followed by \$2 million additional per year in FY 28, 29 and 30 to add eight new community schools per year.

We believe that prioritization should be determined based on meeting at least three of the following six factors: at least 60% of students "at-risk", bottom quartile on attendance, top quartile of justice-involved youth, top quartile of English language learners, bottom quartile neighborhood food access score, and neighborhoods historically impacted by redlining.

Safe Passage

When it comes to ensuring every student can arrive at school safely, on time, every day, we have work to do to reform and reinvigorate the Safe Passage program. For years we have heard concerns that safe passage workers did not have adequate training, agency to act, or thorough, adequate integration into school communities and strategies.

Over the past year, these issues have been compounded. As federal law enforcement roams our city, Safe Passage's accountability to the DMPSJ reduces community members' trust in Safe Passage and prevents them from supporting students over law enforcement, especially Black, Brown and immigrant students who are most targeted. For all of these reasons, we are asking the Mayor and Council to invest an additional \$4 million (for a total of \$12 million) and to dramatically restructure the Safe Passage program, including by relocating the program out of DMPSJ. Since its relocation from the Deputy Mayor for Education to the Deputy Mayor of Public Safety and Justice, coordination with schools has weakened while coordination with MPD, and the public mistrust of the program, have increased.

This compounds current challenges with the program: students and educators want Safe Passage Ambassadors to offer restorative violence intervention to conflict, which they are not empowered to offer, and for the Ambassadors to benefit from more stable, full-time employment. We propose that Safe Passage be restructured as a grant program, administered either by OSSE or the AG's office, that supports a cohort of CBOs for contiguous restorative justice interventions in and around schools. A lead CBO grantee would be responsible for training and other CBO partners for staffing and implementation. At least one Ambassador per zone should be a full-time employee of a local school, transitioning from morning Safe Passage into the building, developing relationships and supporting restorative justice programming happening within the building, and back to Safe Passage at the end of the day.



Bolstering the UPSFF and Supporting Students with Disabilities

In addition to a meaningful increase in the overall Unified Per Student Funding Formula, we ask that you prioritize increasing the Special Education, ELL and Adult weights in the formula to the recommendations of the 2023 Adequacy Study.

Additionally, we must fully fund the schools serving one of our highest need populations. St. Coletta and River Terrace serve the District's highest-need special education students, many of whom require more than 24 hours of specialized instruction and more than 24 hours of full-time aide support. We support fully funding the proposed Level 5 UPSFF weight or, if Level 5 cannot be implemented immediately, increasing the Special Education School weight to ensure these legally mandated services are sustainably funded.

Conclusion

Education investments are one of the most critical parts of our city budget. Taken together, the investments recommended in this letter will make an enormous difference in the lives of DC students, families and the educators who serve them – and the DC economy. We also know that if we are truly committed to closing gaps in opportunity for all DC students, academic interventions in PK-12 will not be enough. We know we need to ensure every child and family has a strong start, and so we fully endorse the recommendations of the Under 3 DC Coalition to fully fund the Pay Equity Fund and Child Care Subsidy programs.

We know we must care for the mental health of our young people, which is why we fully endorse the recommendations of the Strengthening Families Coalition, of which we are a part. We also know we must address the whole child and support their families– which is why we are proud to endorse the recommendations of the Fair Budget Coalition and educators who continue to fight for the city to invest in the affordable housing, food security, economic justice and community safety investments that underlie the ability of our students to focus on learning and truly thrive in the District of Columbia.

We thank you for your commitment to the District of Columbia and look forward to meeting with you and continuing to discuss these recommendations during the course of your work on the FY 2027 budget.

Signed,

The Educators of EmpowerEd

→ EDUCATOR BUDGET DEMANDS FY 2027 ←

Educator Investments

The Student Experience

Addressing Root Causes

Retention Fund

\$4 M Educator Retention Fund (\$200,000 each for 20 high turnover school) to implement at least two evidence-based retention strategies

Permanent Substitutes

\$11 M to ensure 1 perm sub. per 250 students across the city to provide higher quality learning, ease burden on teachers

Wellness Grants

Renew OSSE Educator Wellness Grants at \$400,000

Educator PD Funding

\$500,000 Educator Personalized Professional Growth Fund to support career advancement and improved pedagogy

Teacher Diversity

- Fund a sustainable immigrant educator visa program
- Hiring bonuses for bilingual and Black male educators
- Bolster paraprofessional pay

Paid Leave

Protect 8 weeks Paid Leave for educators!

Educator Parking

\$15/day allowance for educator parking

Experiential Learning

Bridge the Gap Fund: \$700,000 In continued funding for this highly efficient program delivering rich experiences to students

Youth Safety & Support

- Fund Mentorship- \$2.1 M/ Year
- Expand DPR recreation centers hours in all 8 wards
- Triple Late Night Hypes
- Get funding to CBOs
- Expand DHS Truancy Pilot- \$6M

Study Abroad & Travel

\$500,000 to DCPS to expand study abroad (which includes domestic travel) and \$500,000 available in grants to charter LEAs to do the same

Post-Secondary Career Hub

\$700,000 for DME to create Post-Secondary Career Hub

Family Education

\$200,000 to OSSE for linguistically accessible family education classes on post-secondary options and SEL

Less Testing, More Learning

Decrease testing contracts, re-invest in teacher development including stipended positions for teachers to provide input and oversight into test development

Community Schools

\$4.1 million new in FY 27 (new schools + program \$ equity), \$2M additional annual funding in FYs 28, 29 & 30 to onboard 8 new schools a year (\$250,000 each) for full-service community schools model to improve attendance, engagement and outcomes and protect against cuts to the safety net. Prioritization based on criteria in our letter.

Safe Passage

\$4 million additional, \$12M total investment alongside restructuring as grant-based, CBO run program under OSSE or AG that prioritizes violence interruption and restorative approach and integrates with schools.

Child Tax Credit & TANF

Maintain already planned investment that passed council for the CTC and reverse damaging TANF cuts

Funding Formula

- Increase ELL, SPED & Adult weights in the formula to the 2023 adequacy study levels
- Special Education Support: Implement a level 5 special ed rate or increase SPED weight and ensure funding for St. Coletta and River Terrace