



May 13, 2024

Dear Councilmembers,

On Friday, Chairman Mendelson circulated a proposal to dramatically cut services that DCPS funds centrally for schools and students. **I am writing to urge you to reject these harmful cuts.** DCPS is already proposing cuts to staff and non-personnel services at Central Services in the FY25 budget as part of our rightsizing and realization of operational efficiencies. The proposed cuts by the Committee of the Whole would further reduce the services that are provided to schools and students in areas like security, food service, technology support, and services to students experiencing homelessness to a level that would drastically diminish the services our parents, students and educators expect. I am deeply concerned that cutting these services at DCPS will not put students first but will make it more difficult for educators to do their jobs and for students to succeed. These cuts are short-sighted and will be felt for years to come.

1. The Proposed Cuts Will Harm Students and the District

The Committee of the Whole proposes cuts to essential services that DCPS funds centrally but provides to individual schools and students. Some of the proposed cuts include the following reductions:

- **Security Services** – The proposed \$10,505,912 cut would remove 33% of DCPS’ security funding and limit schools’ ability to keep students safe. This funding covers all non-MPD security staff, maintenance for cameras and x-ray machines, access to citywide radios by DCPS police, and other equipment that DCPS and contractors use to ensure student safety. The FY25 proposed amount in the Mayor’s budget was already \$5 million dollars less than FY23 actual costs; this further reduction is equivalent to over 200,000 fewer hours of security services. If this cut is maintained, DCPS would be forced to reduce more than 100 security officers – resulting in most campuses losing at least one security officer during the school day, in addition to reducing free security provided to partners such as after school programs and limiting security for programs outside of the school day such as on nights and weekends.
- **Food and Nutrition Services** – The proposed \$4,123,937 cut would require DCPS to reduce meals for afterschool activities. A cut of this magnitude is equivalent to over 600,000 student meals. School meals are a vital factor in students’ health, wellness, and engaged learning. The proposed cut could also limit DCPS’ ability to maintain kitchen and other food service equipment.
- **Attorneys’ Fees** – The proposed \$3,617,334 cut would limit the ability of the District to pay court-imposed fees associated with settlements in lawsuits brought against the District. The Office of the Chief Financial Officer requires \$5 million of funding for this budget but the proposed cut would reduce this budget to \$1.4 million.
- **Technology Support** – The proposed \$3,000,000 cut would limit DCPS’ ability to improve Wi-Fi services at schools, reduce DCPS teachers and parents’ access to the student information system for grades, assignments, and record keeping, and remove funding for TurnItIn software that prevents plagiarism.
- **Mathematics Training for Teachers** – The proposed \$2,399,826 cut would eliminate the DREAM Math Center. This cut would mean that DCPS could not begin new training programs for math teachers or engaging content for families related to math. The DREAM Math Center is designed from the model of the highly effective DC Reading Clinic but focused on mathematics instruction. The DREAM Math Center is a core strategy for improving student outcomes in math, a district priority.



- **Alternative Education Program** – The proposed \$1,611,509 cut would eliminate this program. This cut would mean DCPS could not begin an alternative pilot program for students who require a significantly higher level of support due to serious safety concerns, including students who bring firearms to school.
- **Learn to Swim Program** – The proposed \$783,704 cut would eliminate the 3rd Grade Swim Program. Currently, 63 of 86 elementary schools (79%) and over 2,500 third grade students participate in the program.
- **Connected Schools Support** – The proposed \$520,622 cut would eliminate centrally funded support for Connected Schools. Connected Schools are DCPS' community schools model. This cut would shift costs for services like food pantry access or mental health support onto school budgets.
- **Employee Clearances** – The proposed \$464,858 cut would eliminate over 80% of the funding DCPS uses to pay for its personnel hiring and management software and for compliance with required clearances. Schools use this software to screen, interview, and select staff for vacancies.
- **Substitutes and Other Position Costs** – The proposed \$452,029 cut to schools reduces the amount of funding to support credentialing personnel in schools, covering substitute costs, and providing IMPACTplus bonuses and other teacher stipends.
- **Services for Students Experiencing Homelessness** – The proposed \$366,980 cut would eliminate academic enrichment resources for students experiencing homelessness or who are designated at-risk.
- **MacArthur Supplies and Materials** – The proposed \$290,218 cut would eliminate necessary supplies for MacArthur High School like additional textbooks, science lab equipment, and curriculum materials as our newest high school continues to expand. These expenses are not capital eligible.
- **Graduation Venues** – The proposed \$266,728 cut would eliminate funding to pay for large graduation venues. Without this funding, schools would either need to provide their own funding for venues or hold ceremonies on campus, which would limit attendance, especially for large schools.
- **Early Childhood Mathematics Curriculum** – The proposed \$125,000 cut would eliminate training for early childhood educators in DCPS' new mathematics curriculum. This training would support teachers in improving student proficiency in mathematics, an area of focus for the district.

2. DCPS is Already Cutting Central Services Staff and Contracts

DCPS funds three types of positions centrally to support schools – Central Administration, School Support, and Schoolwide. These programs and services are more effectively budgeted at a centralized level rather than school by school. Overall, across these three groups, DCPS is proposing an FY25 budget with 6% fewer centrally budgeted staff than FY24.ⁱ This includes a 3% cut to Central Administration, a 5% cut to School Support, and a 9% cut to Schoolwide.ⁱⁱ These reductions include both vacant and non-vacant positions and will result in reduction in service in the areas described below:

- Central Administration includes district functions such as human resources, procurement, legal services, and financial administration.
- School Support includes curriculum and instruction, school partnerships like after school programs, college and career education, support for special education services, and school leadership recruitment and training.
- Schoolwide includes support activities like food services, security, fixed costs like electricity and other utilities, athletic trainers, itinerant teachers supporting English Language Learners, related service providers for students with disabilities, social workers, psychologists, and substitute teachers. Schoolwide positions work predominantly or exclusively in school buildings daily.



The Committee proposed over \$1.3 million in cuts to centrally funded positions beyond the cuts already proposed by DCPS. These cuts will limit schools' ability to access critical services like technology support (2 positions), legal counsel (1 position), school operations and facilities support (2 positions), human resources (1 position), language access services (1 position), specialized instruction (1 position), and other services (3 positions). These positions support students and DCPS educators with specific needs across multiple schools. In addition to staff cuts, DCPS has worked to reduce contractual expenditures in the FY25 proposed budget.

3. DCPS Has Invested Heavily in Schools and Now is the Time to Right-Size for Sustainability

We understand that any reduction to the number of educators at a school can be painful. Districts across the country are now experiencing the sunset of COVID recovery federal dollars and feeling the increased costs of new labor contracts and higher benefits costs. For all these reasons, now is the time to ensure a sustainable staffing level, which will still be significantly higher than pre-pandemic. DCPS has increased school-based staff by 20% since the 2018 – 2019 school year.ⁱⁱⁱ During that six-year period, enrollment has increased 7% and the cost of salaries and benefits for teachers have increased 28%.^{iv} DCPS prioritized stability throughout the pandemic and held school budgets steady during that time. DCPS is proposing a 2% reduction in school-based staff for FY25 to ensure a sustainable and equitable staffing level.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this concerning Committee report. Again, I urge you to reject these harmful cuts to essential services for students.

Sincerely,

Lewis D. Ferebee, Ed.D.

Chancellor

District of Columbia Public Schools

ⁱ In FY24, DCPS' budget included 1,516 FTEs that were funded centrally across Central Administration, School Support, and Schoolwide. DCPS' proposed FY25 budget includes 1,428 FTEs that are funded centrally across all three areas for a net decrease of 88 positions. These reductions include both vacant and non-vacant positions.

ⁱⁱ In FY24, DCPS' budget included 152 FTEs in Central Administration, 910 FTEs in School Support, and 454 FTEs in Schoolwide. For FY25, DCPS' proposed budget includes 148 FTE in Central Administration, 865 FTEs in School Support, and 415 FTEs in Schoolwide.

ⁱⁱⁱ In FY19, DCPS employed 7,065 school-based staff. In FY25, DCPS proposes to employ 8,767 school-based staff. In FY24, DCPS employed 8,967 school-based staff. For FY25, DCPS proposes 8,767 school-based staff, a 2% reduction.

^{iv} According to OSSE's FY19 enrollment audit, available at <https://osse.dc.gov/node/1390091>, DCPS' audited public October enrollment was 49,056 for the 2018-2019 school year. In FY25, DCPS projects enrollment of 52,342 for the 2024-2025 school year. According to page 47 in Volume 2 of OCFO's FY19 budget book, available at <https://cfo.dc.gov/node/292242>, the average salary and benefits for a DCPS teacher was \$98,965. According to page 98 in Volume 2 of OCFO's FY25 budget book, available at <https://cfo.dc.gov/node/289642>, the average salary and benefits for a DCPS teacher is \$126,570.