Date: November 20, 2024

Case: DCPS Public Budget Hearing

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

OFFICE OF THE CHANCELLOR

FISCAL YEAR 2026 (FY 26)

DCPS BUDGET ENGAGEMENT

PUBLIC BUDGET HEARING

Via Microsoft Teams

Wednesday, November 20, 2024

6:00 p.m.

1   P R O C E E D I N G S

2   (6:00 P.M.)

3   MS. BROWN: Thank you for joining us this

4   evening for fiscal year 2026 public budget hearing

5   for school year 2025-2026. My name is Lauren Brown.

6   I'm the Deputy Chief of Family and Community

7   Engagement in the Office of External Affairs for DC

8   Public Schools. I'm also joined by Chancellor Lewis

9   D. Ferebee and Patrick Ashley, our Deputy Chancellor

10   for the Office of Finance and Operations here at

11   DCPS. We're excited to be with you here today.

12   This hearing is an important opportunity

13   to hear testimony from parents in the community as we

14   hear about your priorities. So, excuse me. I want

15   to go over our agenda with you for today. We are

16   going to highlight investments that support

17   strategic priorities as outlined in our capital

18   commitment. We'll listen to testimony from

19   stakeholders to inform our budget planning, and we'll

20   also share, excuse me, an overall timeline for the

21   FY26 budget development process and engagement.

22   I'll share with you our agenda for today.

1   We will first begin with an introduction and overview

2   by Chancellor Ferebee and myself, and that will be

3   followed by our public testimony. We'll be hearing,

4   as I mentioned, from community members, from

5   students, parents, partner organizations during this

6   period. As a speaker, if you're experiencing any

7   issues with connecting this evening, we ask that you

8   please connect by sending an email to

9   ceo.info@k12.dc.gov. And I'll repeat that one more

10 time, ceo.info@k12.dc.gov.

11   We do have interpretation available as

12 well as Spanish interpretation. Aliese, would you

13 mind coming off Mike to make an announcement in

14 Spanish, please? (Speaking in Spanish). Thank you

15 so much, Aliese. And now with that, I will turn it

16 over to our Chancellor, Dr. Lewis D. Ferebee.

17   MR. FEREBEE: Thank you, Lauren. I

18 appreciate the introduction and getting us started

19 this evening. Thank you everyone for joining us this

20 evening. I want to start by acknowledging the

21 valuable service of tonight's witness in helping

22 provide information to our community. Your unique

1   perspectives are important to this topic and allows

2   us to best support our young Washingtonians. Last

3   week we gathered at Brooklyn Middle School to engage

4   in a discussion around school year 25-26 budget, and

5   this evening is a continuation of that conversation.

6   I've had the honor of engaging with our

7   community this year, whether it's been around our

8   strategic plan process, our student and parent

9   advisory boards, and many others around our budget,

10   and I will continue to do so. First of all, our

11   students, our families and our staff have expressed

12   interest in several important investments that I want

13   to highlight including our after-school programming

14   and offering a diversity of programming across grade

15   bands, especially with our middle school age student.

16   And so anyone here who has seen these

17   programs you know that they're very transformative

18   for our students and provide additional care for

19   students after school for families. Another area of

20   interest that we've heard is career and technical

21   education, and we know that this is a huge

22   contributor to our scholar success in thinking about

1   their post-secondary future. Career and Technical

2   Education, also known as CTE, ensures that our

3   students have training, and the education needed to

4   succeed in college and career after graduating DCPS,

5   and especially for those students who don't want to

6   go directly into the workforce.

7   Safety has also been highlighted as

8   another top priority. We continue to collaborate

9   across government to ensure that our campuses are

10   safe for staff and students, and that also safety

11   measures for students, staff and families to and from

12   school. And then lastly, we are continuing our

13   investments in math. That's from early Numeracy

14   Programs to our Pathways Program that we're preparing

15   students for middle school algebra.

16   And now our district-wide math

17   competitions. We're excited about the way this

18   journey is changing mindsets around math at every

19   grade level and across every ward. I do want to

20   highlight for you our capital commitment for the

21   district in this capital commitment 2023 to 2028,

22   which is a continuation of our strategic planning

1 strategy around our five-year goals and blueprint for

2 excellence.

3   DCPS continues to be grounded in our

4 equity imperative. This emphasizes that students

5 furthest from opportunity must be reflected in our

6 budget, and that is for fiscal year 26 as well. To

7 meet the goals of this plan, we know we have to focus

8 on intensive targeted supports to eliminate barriers

9 to academic and social success for our special

10 student populations.

11   We've also made both commitments to value

12 our people. Whether that's the professional learning

13 experience, the wellness of our staff, the leadership

14 pathways within DCPS, and for our educators to be the

15 best workforce in the nation. We're also committed

16 to partnering with our community. We know we cannot

17 do this work alone. This partnership includes our

18 families, other agencies and DC Government, local

19 businesses and community-based organizations all are

20 critical to the work to ensuring that our students

21 and families get what they need.

22   I want to dive deeper into our capital

1 commitment 2023 - 2028, and share a little bit more

2 about our goals for achievement and our strategic

3 priorities. Our plan is organized into three big

4 goal areas, and then there are some measures

5 associated with each of these that I want to talk a

6 little bit more about today because I believe it

7 provides focus for our budget discussion. For the

8 first goal, it is succeeding academically, and as I

9 mentioned earlier, we're focused on math.

10   Here we want all of our students to be

11 able to write and read well, and we also want them to

12 be strong in math. And again, we know math is

13 important because the data shows that math is what is

14 needed for our students to succeed the most, and is

15 one of the areas where we've been sluggish in our

16 recovery. To do this well we believe that we need to

17 continue, as I mentioned earlier, to build a pathway

18 to eighth grade algebra.

19   So those students who have the skills and

20 the interest that we're able to offer this advanced

21 math. In addition to advanced math, financial

22 literacy is also something we want to focus on. And

1   also, data science courses. We know that more

2   advanced opportunities for math, especially in high

3   school, will prepare our students for graduation and

4   also their post-secondary journey.

5   Next, our second priority is, are

6   students feeling connected to school? We know that

7   our students are at their best when they're connected

8   to their school. They have relationships with their

9   peers and the adults. We also believe that the

10   meaningful afterschool programs that I mentioned

11   earlier are also important to student wellbeing and

12   those connections being made in school.

13   When students are more connected to

14   school, they have better academic outcomes and also

15   their attendance is improved. We're investing in a

16   number of after-school activities, enrichment

17   programs, to ensure that our middle school students

18   are prepared for high school. And all of our

19   cornerstone experiences also create experiential

20   learning and learning outside of the classroom.

21   And our third strategic priority is

22   making certain that our students are prepared for

1   what's next. Now, that's just not graduation. That

2   is every phase of the DCPS journey, beginning in

3   pre-K three, pre-K four, transitioning into

4   kindergarten, transitioning into middle school and

5   sixth grade and transitioning into ninth grade at

6   high school. Every transition throughout the DCPS

7   journey and beyond, we want our students to be

8   prepared.

9   We're doing that by ensuring that our

10   scholars are graduating on time and prepared for

11   focus for post-secondary success. And we've done

12   that through how we prepare students for graduating

13   on time, and we've seen an increased graduation rate

14   over the last five years. We also want to ensure

15   that our pre-K students are acquiring the critical

16   skills academically and also socially. And we've

17   invested in transition activities for our students,

18   transition into sixth grade, via sixth grade academy,

19   and then into ninth grade into our ninth grade

20   academy.

21   But we know that the work is not done

22   here. There's still a lot of work to do. There's a

1   lot for us to be proud of, and we're preparing our

2   students for what's next, but that's where we want to

3   hear from you. How do we get better? How do we

4   better serve our students and how we deliver on these

5   three goals that we set out as our strategic

6   priorities are in front of us for the next five years

7   for excellence?

8   It's my pleasure now to turn it back over

9   to Lauren, she's going to talk a little bit how

10   parents and caregivers can be more involved in the

11   budget process and to review some of the logistics

12   for tonight's public hearing. Also, I just wanted to

13   highlight before we get into the discussion, we've

14   laid out the next steps in this journey in our budget

15   development process, beginning with the public

16   hearing and then we have for you what to expect in

17   November, December, and also information on LSAT

18   engagement. And then finally, what to expect when we

19   deliver budgets in the spring and late winter. Thank

20   you.

21   MS. BROWN: Chancellor Ferebee. As our

22   budget planning continues, we encourage you to get

1   involved in your school's local school advisory team,

2   also known as the LSATs. LSATs are school-based

3   advisory groups that are made up of parents, staff,

4   and community members and they work with principals

5   on topics including identifying what school's

6   priorities are and developing the school's budget.

7   For a little bit more on LSATs, typically they meet

8   monthly throughout the school year.

9   They work on a range of topics from

10 school culture to student attendance. At each

11 meeting, there's a brief update on the school's

12 comprehensive school plan, which are the school

13 goals. And elections for chairs are held at the end

14 of each school year and voted on by their peers.

15 Staff elect staff who participate, and parents elect

16 parents. The principal and the school's

17 administrative staff host the election process with

18 assistance from the school's community action team

19 member.

20   Each school should have a functioning

21 LSAT by no later than October of each year, and

22 during the months of January and February the primary

1   topic of discussion at LSAT meetings is the school

2   budget for the next fiscal year. To support these

3   conversations, as I mentioned, the DCPS Community

4   Action Team and the school finance team will host

5   webinars on the budget process as well as the LSAT

6   election process.

7   Please be on the lookout for more

8   additional information in our LSAT newsletters. And

9   if you're interested in more information, you can

10   contact your principal or also email, excuse me,

11   lsat.help@k12.dc.gov for more info. Okay, so let's

12   get into some of the logistics for this evening. We

13   ask that for witnesses testifying. Please keep your

14   testimony to three minutes. We will be providing you

15   with a gentle nudge to let you know when your time is

16   up.

17   Groups: If there's a group present,

18   please identify one speaker. There will be one

19   person who should speak on behalf of your group. And

20   then as a reminder, please speak slowly and clearly.

21   We are recording testimony for the official record,

22   and we really want to make sure that everything

1   you've said is captured. A few other notes for the

2   process this evening, I will be announcing the

3   speaker list in groups of about five or six at a

4   time.

5   A member of our team should be contacting

6   you via text to alert you that your time is coming

7   soon. When it's your turn to testify, we will unmute

8   you, but you should turn your camera on so that we

9   may see you. When your time is up, please remember

10 to turn your camera off and mute yourself. If you

11 have questions or are having difficulties, again,

12 please email ceo.info@k12.dc.gov,

13 ceo.info@k12.dc.gov. Or you can text 202-558-8436.

14   Once again, 202-558-8436. Now, I will do

15 my best to pronounce your names properly, but please

16 feel free to correct me if I mispronounce it. I

17 mean, as a reminder, I'll call groups of five or six,

18 and then I will call up each speaker in that group

19 when it's your time. Lastly, we will be recording

20 this evening's hearing, and it will be posted on our

21 YouTube channel in both English and in Spanish.

22   Okay. Now the first group will be Kathy

1   Reilly, William Kane, Lucy Santiago, Kimberly Summy

2   or Summy and Ligia or Ligia Stearman. Kathy Reilly,

3   you'll be up first. Is Kathy on? Okay. I know that

4   I saw you present, we could help to take her off

5   mute. Thank you for your patience. We just want to

6   make sure. Kathy, could you try unmuting yourself

7   too, please? Thank you for your patience. We're

8   having a little bit of a technical issue here

9   because I know I can see that you're here and your

10   mic and camera are enabled, Kathy. Okay. Let's try

11   moving to the next one and see if we're running into

12   the same issue. Give me one second. Okay. William

13   Kane, are you present?

14   MR. KANE: Yes, I am present.

15   MS. BROWN: Wonderful. William, go ahead

16   and get started. Thank you.

17   MR. KANE: All right. Hello, my name is

18   William Kane. I am eight years old and also a third

19   grader at Marie H. Reed Elementary School. I'm in

20   the dual language program where I learn Spanish and

21   English. I have a question for DCPS Chancellor, Dr.

22   Ferebee; are you going to follow the Schools First in

1   Budgeting law? As a kid, I am expected to follow the

2   rules at school, at home and in my community, and you

3   are supposed to be an example and a good role model

4   for students.

5   Don't you want to be a champion, a

6   helper? Because that's not what I'm seeing. I'm

7   seeing someone who knows what they're doing wrong and

8   what they can fix, but decides to disobey the law.

9   For example, if I was in your position, I would fix

10 what was happening. I would obey the law, I would be

11 a role model, and I would do my part. So Dr.

12 Ferebee, so can you please obey the law now and make

13 sure our schools have funding?

14   The Schools First in Budgeting law is

15 important because it makes sure we have enough

16 teachers. It provides equitable and stable funding

17 in our school. It supports programs like

18 FoodPrints, and it supports students like myself and

19 my friends. I'm going to talk about the impact our

20 school budget has on kids. The best parts at school

21 are the fun parts where you don't realize that you're

22 learning.

1   I'm very upset that school is going to be

2   boring if we don't have any budget for the fun parts.

3   For example, FoodPrints. FoodPrints is a program

4   that is based at our school. They teach us about

5   gardening, nutrition, cookie, and all kinds of other

6   stuff in both Spanish and English. We learn math

7   when we measure the recipe, we learn about compost,

8   and now we have a compost band in the cafeteria.

9   But the best part about FoodPrints is

10 when we get to eat what we cook. I would be very,

11 very sad and disappointed if we didn't have any money

12 to support FoodPrints next year at Marie Reed. We

13 also need money in our school budget for field trips.

14 Field trips are fun and can teach us a lot. This

15 year, we don't have any money in our school budget

16 for field trip buses, it will be nearly impossible to

17 go on field trips further away from our

18 neighborhood.

19   Last year, in second grade, my class took

20 buses to the Imagination stage. Everyone loved the

21 performance of Cinderella, and it was our favorite

22 field trip. I'm sad I won't get to have those

1 experiences in third grade. Lastly, I want to tell

2 you about PAWS. PAWS stands for Panthers Always Walk

3 Strong. Panthers is our school mascot. PAWS teaches

4 us about things like courage, honesty, bravery,

5 perseverance and responsibility. We have a PAWS

6 lesson once a month.

7   I'm really upset that because of budget

8 cuts last year, we lost a social worker position at

9 Marie Reed. I hope the budgets don't get cut and

10 that our school will still be fun. I hope we still

11 have FoodPrints and that we still have field trips.

12 Please make sure we get the money we need and that we

13 don't get any more cuts in our budget. I expect the

14 Chancellor to follow the Schools First in Budgeting

15 law. Thanks for your time.

16   MS. BROWN: Thank you, William.

17   MR. KANE: You're welcome.

18   MS. BROWN: Next up will be Lucy

19 Santiago. I have one more announcement for Lucy

20 Santiago.

21   MS. SANTIAGO: Hello. My name is Lucy

22 Santiago. I'm nine years old and I'm in the fourth

1 grade at Marie H. Reed Elementary school. I live in

2 Ward One. I have a 7-year-old brother who is in

3 second grade at Marie Reed. We have both attended

4 Marie Reed since pre-K through. We love our school.

5 I'm here today because I'm worried about the programs

6 that will be cut out of our school and the teachers

7 we might lose if we do not get more funding.

8   I'm glad I can be here today to speak for

9 my community. Last year we did not get enough money

10 for the school year. I'm very concerned about having

11 enough money for our school. This year there were

12 problems paying for a mind, which is an app that

13 teachers use to communicate with families. Marie

14 Reed and other schools need to have money to pay for

15 a mind and other apps like Imagine Espanol and I

16 Excel.

17   Can't DCPS get group discounts for these?

18 Last year I told you about FoodPrints, which is a

19 program that teaches us about nature and how things

20 grow. What is even cooler is that FoodPrints helps

21 us grow food in the garden in the back of our school.

22 And then we harvest the food and learn yummy recipes

1 to make with the food we grow in our own school

2 garden. Have you ever tried making beet brownies?

3   That was probably the coolest recipe that

4 we made so far. They were really yummy. Please

5 prioritize enrichment programs like FoodPrints in the

6 budget. Last year, I also said I was concerned about

7 losing funding for social and emotional support

8 teachers who lead PAWS, or Panthers Always Walk

9 Strong. We did lose some of these teachers due to

10 budget cuts, and we are at risk of losing more. The

11 teachers who lead PAWS are very special to us.

12   One of our favorite PAWS teachers could

13 not come back this year due to budget cuts. It is

14 sad for her, but even sadder for some of my friends

15 who need her. Another thing that helps us learn in a

16 fun way is field trips. This year in fourth grade,

17 I've been learning about slavery in the Americas.

18 Wouldn't it make sense for my grade to be able to

19 visit the African American History Museum on a field

20 trip to learn more about slavery with African

21 Americans?

22   Please make sure schools have enough

1   money to pay for these types of trips. I love Marie

2   Read and these programs make school fun for me and my

3   friends. Last year, we got some of the money we need

4   to pay for programs that are important to kids at my

5   school, but not enough into it. Please do not cut

6   funding to our schools.

7   Please follow the Schools First in

8   Budgeting Act. Please remember that teachers earn

9   and deserve a raise each year, and schools need money

10   to pay for this. Please give schools money to help

11   them buy online programs and enough computers for all

12   DCPS students. Thank you for listening to me and for

13   giving me your time to have a voice in this process.

14   Decisions you make will impact me, my teachers, and

15   all the other DCPS students. Thank you.

16   MS. BROWN: Thank you, Lucy. Next up

17   will be Kimberly Summy or Summy. Kimberly.

18   MS. SUMMY: Good evening Chancellor

19   Ferebee colleagues and community members. My name is

20   Kimberly Summy and I've served as the athletic

21   trainer at Anacostia High School for 33 and-a-half

22   years. I'm here tonight to urge you to take

1   immediate action to prioritize the health and safety

2   of DCPS student athletes. Currently, DCPS employs

3   only 14 athletic trainers, a number unchanged since

4   1991, despite the addition of over 1,200 additional

5   athletic teams across middle and high schools.

6   This shortfall leaves many practices

7   where most injuries occur without proper medical

8   oversight. The stakes are clear. Athletic trainers

9   save lives. Yet inadequate staffing means critical

10   injuries go unaddressed or improperly handled,

11   risking long-term disability or even death of one of

12   our student athletes. Equally alarming is the state

13   of our medical resources. The budget for medical

14   supplies has been frozen at $60,000 since 2014.

15   While medical supply costs have risen at

16   an outrageous 85 percent. This has left critical

17   equipment like therapeutic modalities and AEDs

18   non-functioning. A recent audit by the athletic

19   trainers revealed that all 25 middle schools with

20   athletic programs lack the equipment necessary for

21   responding to emergencies. Without action, we are

22   gambling with the lives of our student athletes.

1   Between July and October of this school

2   year, 21 middle and high school student athletes

3   nationwide have died during sports. 21 in just five

4   months. These deaths have left communities

5   devastated. I'm asking for two critical changes.

6   First, funding to hire three additional athletic

7   trainers to cover the high schools without athletic

8   trainers, and approximately six more to serve the

9   middle school athletic programs.

10   Second, an immediate investment in the

11   athletic trainer budget to repair, replace and

12   maintain essential medical supplies and lifesaving

13   equipment. This is really about more than sports.

14   It's about protecting the lives of our children, and

15   we shouldn't wait for a tragedy to occur in DCPS.

16   The time to act is now. Thank you.

17   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Next

18   step will be Ligia Stearman.

19   MS. STEARMAN: (Speaking in Spanish)

20   MS. BROWN: Aliese will be coming on to

21   provide translation.

22   MS. GINGERICH: My apologies. My mic was

1   mute.

2   MS. BROWN: Oh, there we go.

3   MS. GINGERICH: Hello, my name is Aliese

4   Gingerich. I work with the Language Access Unit here

5   at DCPS. I'll be sharing the English translation of

6   Ms. Stearman's testimony that was just shared in

7   Spanish.

8   Good afternoon -- or good evening. My

9   name is Ligia Stearman. I'm from Guatemala and I

10 have been working at Bancroft for 10 years. I'm a

11 teacher and a mother of a student at this school.

12 Since I started working at Bancroft, the passion for

13 education, diversity and the well-being of the

14 students. I'm a part of the administration,

15 teachers, staff, parents, and the community has been

16 something quite powerful that I've gotten to observe

17 and experience in my years here.

18   Over the years, Bancroft has grown and of

19 course, it's an amazing school with incredible

20 capable, diverse, loving teachers and staff. But

21 this growth in students has brought challenges in

22 the everyday life, and that's why I'm here to ask you

1   to consider your budget for the purchase and

2   renovation of the Henderson building for the

3   following reasons.

4   Classes are filled with students beyond

5   capacity. In classes where they are designed to have

6   15 students there are 24. Spaces designed for small

7   groups are now full of complete classes with 15 to 20

8   students. Can you imagine the challenges there are

9   in meeting the socio-emotional and academic needs of

10 each student? Especially African American, Latino,

11 multilingual, and special education students? And

12 meeting those needs effectively in a classroom where

13 they can hardly move.

14   The cafeteria is another big challenge.

15 The space and schedule restrictions that the

16 cafeteria staff have to serve lunch contributes to

17 the limited time all students have to eat. The

18 other day I was taking care of lunch, and I kept

19 track of the time of how long students are in line to

20 grab their lunch and sit down to eat.

21   The last group of students had to eat

22 their lunch in seven minutes. We don't know if these

1   students are having their only meal of the day there

2   at school. This time is also not just for eating,

3   it's for working on your social skills. It should be

4   a relaxed and fun time, not a stressful one. The

5   cafeteria also exceeds its capacity limit. Another

6   big challenge is our special education classes that

7   are affected by overcrowding.

8   The number in these spaces has grown

9   significantly, and our ability to provide

10   personalized support and individualized attention is

11   compromised. Bancroft is the only school to offer a

12   bilingual education to special education students.

13   They need and deserve personalized attention and

14   consistent routines, which is difficult to maintain

15   when classes are stretched to capacity. Another big

16   concern is our preschool program, which has long been

17   the essence of Bancroft.

18   If we lose this program due to space

19   constraints or resource reallocation, we risk losing

20   Bancroft's identity. By transferring preschool to a

21   new building, it will be able to serve 80 percent of

22   families who have Spanish as their first language,

1 and as well as the most vulnerable students, many of

2 whom come from low-income backgrounds and lack

3 opportunities. If we get rid of preschool that goes

4 against the DCPS strategic plan that proposes, "With

5 the increased focus on math, students will be able to

6 receive a solid foundation in literature starting in

7 preschool to lead to accelerated results in middle

8 and high school."

9   How will DCPS be able to follow this plan

10 in Bancroft if there is no preschool? If we lose

11 preschool, a lot of the Latino and African American

12 population will also decrease. And without this

13 group of people, our school will change its essence.

14 So I ask you again to please consider your budget for

15 the purchase and renovation of the Henderson building

16 to alleviate the student overcapacity and provide

17 students and families with the care, education and

18 services they deserve. Thank you.

19   MS. BROWN: Thank you, Aliese. And thank

20 you again, Ligia. I understand that Kathy Reilly has

21 joined us. So Kathy, we will go to you next.

22   MS. REILLY: Okay. Can you hear me?

1   MS. BROWN: We can. Thank you.

2   MS. REILLY: Fantastic. I'm Kathy

3   Reilly, Executive Director of Shape and Facilitator

4   for Award Four at Alliance and C for DC. Thank you

5   for this opportunity to testify. I look forward to a

6   resolution of the impasse on the school's First

7   legislation. DCPS is bound by the law. The

8   stability funds calculation from the previous year

9   has to be based on the purchasing power. A school

10   has to be able to fund at a higher salary, the

11   teachers to serve their population, and it has to be

12   stable.

13   And DCPS has to make the case for the

14   vital central office functions, including security,

15   food service, human resources, IT, necessary

16   academic, health, and, you know, mental health and

17   support. We support the request of the digital

18   equity group. We support all schools having a full

19   complement of basic academic programs in addition to

20   art, music at all levels and world language at the

21   middle school level.

22   We support ensuring program curriculars

1   that are equitable across schools. This includes

2   transparency and how athletic funds are allocated.

3   And this was stressed in the boundary and student

4   assignment recommendation number 17, requiring

5   parity and rigorous programming across each DCPS high

6   school feeder pattern.

7   We support restoring REMIND to all

8   schools, especially heading into a different national

9   administration, ensuring that all families have

10 access to quick communication. CTE, as the

11 chancellor mentioned, has been underfunded and the

12 federal funds are not sufficient for the needs within

13 our schools. So local dollars have to supplement

14 them. Schools are bracing for a tough year and for

15 having less schools with students with additional

16 needs, including those that came here from other

17 countries, are especially anxious.

18   The DCPS budget will need to be strategic

19 and efficient and honor its equity imperative. Safe

20 passage will be far more critical. Schools will need

21 to understand what they are not legally required to

22 do so that they can protect their students.

1   Students' data at DCPS and at OSE will need to have

2   additional safeguards. Our schools have to be

3   sanctuaries. We will lobby at the city level for

4   this too.

5   In capital planning, we support convening

6   the seat team sooner than 18 months. We support the

7   Euclid Street Planning and Modernization, and we are

8   thrilled with the reprogramming to have McGovney come

9   back into the DCPS inventory to support swing space.

10 And we hope this is the beginning of more, you know,

11 more acquisitions of buildings that we really need

12 both for crowding, for swing space, and for all the

13 students since DCPS is the system of right. Thank

14 you for this opportunity to testify and sorry for

15 all the technology glitches at the beginning.

16   MS. BROWN: Thank you, Kathy. Next I

17 will read the next group and then the first person

18 who will go in that group. So the next five people

19 will be Jasmine Herndon, Camilo Mantilla, Dalia

20 Sokolov, Jamie Barden, Meier Galblam Haigh. First

21 from that group, Jasmine Herndon.

22   MS. HERNDON: Hi, I'm Jasmine Herndon.

1   This is my daughter.

2   LILY: Hi, I am Lily.

3   MS. HERNDON: We're here today because

4   we'd like to ask you to add $35 million to the DCPS

5   budget for Bancroft. This might seem like a large

6   ask. Oh my goodness. I lost my camera. Can you

7   guys still hear me?

8   MS. BROWN: We can definitely hear you.

9   MS. HERNDON: Okay. There we go. We're

10   here today to -- we'd like to ask you for $35 million

11   to add to the DCPS PS budget for Bancroft. This

12   might seem like a big ask, but it's a necessary one.

13   LILY: We both testified last year twice.

14   The first one was to keep our community together. We

15   then asked for $9 million to buy the Henderson

16   buildings as an annex to Bancroft for the pre-K

17   classes. Thank you so much for your continued

18   support. Our science and gardening classrooms are

19   long gone because they're now learning classrooms.

20   Our library has shrunk on both sides to make new

21   classrooms for students.

22   I know that because I was in one of those

1   rooms last year. Our lunchroom is small. Lunchtimes

2   run nearly all day with two really long lines and not

3   enough time to eat if you're at the end. Last year I

4   was in the last group of students to go to lunch,

5   and so we had to break for snack during learning time

6   in the middle of the morning. It means we're really

7   hungry during class times, all because we don't have

8   enough space to have more kids in the cafeteria.

9   MS. HERNDON: DME came toward the

10   building with DCPS facility staff and concluded is

11   not possible to create any more classrooms in

12   Bancroft. The enrollment there is now 828, which is

13   117 percent of the 709 students in the building

14   capacity is supposed to hold according to last year's

15   master facilities plan. And enrollment has increased

16   by about 40 students every year for the past six

17   years. In a letter to Bancroft community from

18   Chancellor Farabee, he admitted enrollment has

19   increased 45 percent since 2016, and it indicated we

20   need a long-term solution for over capacity

21   challenges.

22   He also noted the Henderson buildings,

1 which is within the Bancroft boundary, makes it

2 appealing and that DCPS remains committed to working

3 with DGS, the DC City Council and the Bancroft

4 School community to assess Henderson's viability and

5 other long-term options. We can't build on the

6 current campus because Bancroft's already in the red

7 zone for not having enough outdoor space per student.

8   We can't put trailers on the soccer field

9 because the school's already in the red zone for not

10 having enough outdoor space for students. The DME

11 stated to parents and kids that the DC government has

12 no alternative long plan for Bancroft over capacity

13 other than the Henderson building.

14   LILY: What can we do?

15   MS. HERNDON: We want to urge the mayor

16 to actively bid on the Henderson buildings through

17 community outreach and writing letters.

18   LILY: What can we do?

19   MS. HERNDON: We can encourage you, the

20 DCPS to allot $35 million for the renovation of the

21 Henderson buildings.

22   LILY: What can we do?

1   MS. HERNDON: We can ask you to request

2   the mayor to direct the Department of General

3   Services to initiate purchase of the Henderson

4   buildings, which could start as early as tomorrow.

5   LILY: The Hendersons buildings as an

6   annex for the pre-K is still the best solution for

7   our community and for our school. Thank you for your

8   consideration. Sincerely, Lily and my mom, Jasmine.

9   Bye.

10   MS. BROWN: Thank you Lily and Jasmine.

11   LILY: You are welcome.

12   MS. BROWN: Next up will be Camilo

13   Mantilla.

14   MR. MANTILLA: (Speaking in Spanish) Can

15   you hear me? (Speaking in Spanish)

16   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Just want to make

17   sure that we -- okay, so because we don't have your

18   written testimony, we want to make sure that this

19   gets translated. So Aliese, I'll have you come off

20   mic

21   MS. GINGERICH: As the interpreter, we're

22   going to unfortunately have to start over with Mr.

1   with Camilo's testimony, and so I'll be interpreting

2   consecutively. So he'll start from scratch and you

3   guys will get to hear it twice.

4   My name is Camilo Mantilla. I am the

5   father of Samuel Benjamin. Currently Samuel is in

6   first grade at Bancroft. My son Benjamin is only a

7   year, so clearly he's not a student yet. But we are

8   hoping that once he is of the appropriate age, he

9   will be able to join the Bancroft community as a

10   kindergartner. Because of that, I'm here as a father

11   and adding my voice to the many other parents of our

12   Bancroft community who have asked for the mayor and

13   DCPS representatives to acquire the necessary

14   buildings and spaces to be able to have enough space

15   for our entire school and including the pre-K without

16   sacrificing the recreational areas as well as, you

17   know, space for lunch and cafeteria.

18   All of those other important things that

19   help to maintain our school community's

20   multicultural, multilingual development. So the

21   overcapacity or the overcrowding at our school is

22   truly affecting both the learning and the social and

1 emotional development of our children. In that

2 during times where they should be able to take

3 advantage of the space to eat lunch and be relaxed

4 they're oftentimes being forced into other spaces or

5 those spaces are being used in other ways.

6   So oftentimes when they should be able to

7 relax they are being, you know, made to just kind of

8 like continue with the grind and rush through things

9 which definitely has an effect on their education

10 overall. Oftentimes my son does not have enough

11 time to eat, to socialize, to, you know, recharge his

12 energy. And so because of that and other reasons

13 that I've mentioned, I would like for you all to

14 consider adding in the budget. The ability to

15 acquire the Henderson building.

16   The alternative that was proposed to us

17 about putting trailers in the soccer field many other

18 parents have lent their voices of protest against

19 that. And that that green space allows our children

20 important activities. Losing that space would also

21 limit their ability to play in fresh air, which we

22 know is important for child development. It's also

1   an important space for connection. We know that that

2   green space serves not just for our children and

3   that, you know, it allows them a space for sports and

4   for rest and recharging, it's also a community space.

5   It's used for many community events such

6   as the recent a hundred-year celebration. It's also

7   a space where our children's teams go and practice on

8   the weekends. So we know that if it were filled with

9   trailers that it would be a detriment not for just

10   the students at our school, but also the wider

11   community. Because of that, we want to lend our

12   voices asking the mayor and other representatives to

13   resolve this situation.

14   We don't want these difficulties to

15   persist. Rather we would like for Bancroft to

16   continue to be an example, an exemplary school

17   community like the one that we know that it is. We

18   want Bancroft to be able to continue offering the

19   valuable opportunities that are the same

20   opportunities that brought many people here to the

21   Bancroft and the Mount Pleasant area.

22   Many people have come here, moved here

1   specifically seeking out those opportunities. So we

2   want them to continue to be an example and a

3   reference of the positive impact that a school has

4   on a community. So we ask that the DCPS

5   representatives can work together with the Mayor's

6   office to update our buildings and find a solution

7   that has been approved by Bancroft families. Thank

8   you

9   MS. BROWN: Gracias Camilo, and thank you

10 Aliese, for jumping in there. Next up is Dalia

11 Sokolov.

12   MS. SOKOLOV: Can you hear me?

13   MS. BROWN: We can. Thank you.

14   MS. SOKOLOV: Great. Thank you. And

15 good evening and thank you for the opportunity to

16 testify this evening. My name's Dalia Sokolov, and

17 I'm a parent of a Bancroft first grader. Like

18 Camillo, and they're in the same class, in fact. In

19 2018 with a new baby, my husband and I were fortunate

20 to find our forever home in Mount Pleasant. We knew

21 Bancroft had come so far in the decade prior, thanks

22 to DCPS's investment in the renovation to excellent

1 principals and staff, and to the commitment of the

2 local community.

3   We were particularly happy to send our

4 son to a bilingual school, and one that reflects the

5 diversity of Mount Pleasant. Our own son does well

6 academically and has no special needs that we are

7 aware of, but even for a child blessed with many

8 advantages, the overcrowding at Bancroft has

9 consequences. The shortened lunch period that you

10 heard about means that most days he eats little to no

11 lunch.

12   At six years old, skipping lunch means

13 that by the end of the school day, my son has lost

14 the ability to manage his emotions. It's hard on

15 him, hard on his teachers. It affects his learning

16 and even his relationships with his peers. This is

17 just one of countless personal anecdotes and likely

18 far from the worst if you were to talk to more

19 parents at Bancroft.

20   We are grateful that the city council has

21 demonstrated its strong support for the purchase of

22 the Henderson building for a pre-K annex for

1   Bancroft. Now we are asking DCPS to request that

2   the mayor direct DGS to initiate the purchase of the

3   Henderson building without further delay. We are

4   also asking for 35 million for Henderson renovation

5   costs to be included in next year's budget. A

6   failure by the city now to invest in Bancroft future

7   will be catastrophic for the school and the

8   neighborhood.

9   I don't want to repeat everything that

10   Lily and Jasmine and Camilo already said, they said

11   it so eloquently about all the impacts across the

12   school, both indoors and outdoors. And I just want

13   to add my voice to all those specific impacts in the

14   ways that they affect learning and affect the

15   community.

16   And I'll add this; many who believes that

17   they were buying forever homes will return to the

18   days of moving out to the suburbs. That's how Mount

19   Pleasant used to be. My own brother who raised his

20   kids here, chose not to send them to Bancroft 15

21   years ago. And he was far from the only one. Good

22   teachers will be hard to recruit. The kids who will

1   lose the most are those who are already at risk in so

2   many other ways.

3   Yes, we want this for our own son, but we

4   also want it for our beloved neighborhood and the

5   city we have both called home for nearly a quarter

6   century. Investing in the future of the city's

7   largest elementary school and the full diversity of

8   students it serves clearly meets Chancellor Ferebee's

9   commitments to equity as ascribed in the current

10   five-year strategic plan. We are asking DCPS to make

11   a long-term commitment to a school and to a community

12   that has demonstrated we can walk the walk of equity.

13   Now is the time to double down on a success story,

14   not abandon it. Thank you.

15   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Next up we have

16   Jamie Barden.

17   MR. BARDEN: There we go. Hi, my name is

18   Jamie Barden. I'm a Bancroft Elementary School

19   parent and the co-chair of the Bancroft Annex Working

20   Group. Principal Morales shared a statement, which

21   is my honor to share with you. She said, "The

22   success of DCPS's strategic plan, Bancroft

1   Elementary's mission and collaboration with the

2   Columbia Heights Education campus relies on our

3   unwavering commitment to equity guided by our capital

4   commitment 2023, 2028 we will leverage the

5   opportunities provided by the purchase of the

6   Henderson Building to deliver targeted support and

7   eliminate barriers to academic and social success for

8   our black and Hispanic Latino students, multilingual

9   learners, and those receiving special education

10   services. As a united community, we will foster a

11   diverse, vibrant environment where every child,

12   regardless of background, is empowered to achieve

13   bilingual, biliterate and high academic success."

14   As you've heard from the other

15   testimonies, Bancroft is 120 students over capacity.

16   To sum that up, that basically means we've run out of

17   spaces to jury rig into classrooms. So I want to

18   thank Chancellor Ferebee for providing a temporary

19   solution to relocate some classrooms to Sharp Health

20   School for two years. But we all know that Sharp is

21   needed for other schools, and that time will come

22   soon enough.

1   Chancellor Ferebee has identified the

2   Henderson buildings as a long-term option that is

3   appealing because it is within Bancroft boundaries.

4   The Henderson buildings is the only location that

5   anybody's been able to find that is a school property

6   currently for sale and located between Bancroft and

7   CHEC, which it will serve. The chancellor's

8   five-year plan places equity as the first priority as

9   it should.

10   And I think Principal Morales' statement

11 really addresses how solving this problem is key to

12 maintaining that commitment. Just to put too fine a

13 point on it, if Bancroft Pre-K grades move to the

14 Henderson building, this will serve around 80

15 Spanish dominant students and their families, many of

16 whom are low income and immigrant families. That's

17 because pre-K at Bancroft is 80 percent Spanish

18 dominant.

19   Without the Henderson buildings when we

20 lose sharp, the pre-K classrooms will be eliminated,

21 harming our most vulnerable students and families,

22 and undermining the bilingual program. For CHEC High

1   School, which will co-locate with Bancroft the

2   Henderson buildings will include daycare facilities

3   for children of teenage mothers who are trying to

4   complete their high school diplomas.

5   The building will also house training

6   programs for CHEC students to become bilingual

7   educators themselves. In other words, DC residents

8   who can go on to teach bilingual classrooms. The

9   city council voted unanimously this last summer to

10   set aside $9 million for the purchase of the

11   Henderson buildings. We are asking the school's

12   chancellor and DCPS to urge the Mayor and Deputy

13   Mayor to move forward with the purchase of the

14   Henderson buildings in short order.

15   This process could start tomorrow. This

16   is urgent since there is a competing buyer. Since

17   DCPS visited almost a year ago, last February, we

18   have known that the Henderson buildings requires

19   extensive renovation. Let's be honest, that's why

20   it's so relatively affordable at 51,000 square feet

21   and why it's still on the market. As a result, it's

22   necessary to ask DCPS to request the Mayor to include

1    $35 million for renovation of this space to bring it

2   up to code for DCPS so it can serve all students,

3   those with various specific needs and the school body

4   in general.

5   MS. BROWN: Thank you.

6   MR. BARDEN: No, that's good.

7   MS. BROWN: Thank you. So great. Thank

8   you very much. Next up is Meier Galblam Haigh. I

9   see you here. Okay, let's go to the next group and

10   then we will try to work with you to get back. Let

11   me read the next group of speakers, Dr. Cuana Jeffer

12   Williams, Grace Hu, Davinia Seay, you'll have to

13   correct me on that first. Dr. Kawana Williams.

14   MS. WILLIAMS: Okay. Hi. Hello

15   everyone. Hi. First I want to say thank you for

16   allowing me to speak today to share my overall

17   thoughts. I am a mother of a fifth-sixth grader at

18   Capitol Hill -- sorry, a sixth-seventh grader at

19   Capitol Hill Montessori. And although we adore our

20   school, we are advocating today on behalf of the

21   general public and the general school systems. As a

22   policy advisor, I'll have to share my thoughts.

1   In addition to -- on the budget overall,

2   with solutions, in addition to my specific goal is to

3   address the Title 1 schools in the area. First, I

4   have identified the budget gaps and many schools are

5   facing potential cuts and teaching staff, which can

6   negatively impact student learning and support

7   services.

8   I urge our DCPS leadership to focus on

9   technology and how inefficient the funding may be in

10 for grades and the maintenance for that to tender the

11 students' access to essential digital tools as well

12 as refocusing the efforts on food, nutrition and

13 budget constraints, and how quality in the food

14 nutrition and the meals for the students may be

15 priority.

16   There is security for the children.

17 Security measures should be also considered and not

18 be compromised, as well as the safety of all schools.

19 For example, my next testimony will be addressing the

20 Anacostia High School initiative that I'll propose.

21 But for now, the proposed solutions are simply this.

22 We're allocating the additional funds to retain a

1 higher quality of teachers.

2   I know as a mother of a sixth-seventh

3 grader, and for one who's been here for over 13 years

4 in Washington DC area, and have contributed through

5 community services and public services measures that

6 we must maintain a financial budget that will give us

7 quality teachers and low student ratios. We

8 recruited for years back, for quality teachers

9 worldwide, even national wide.

10   And I believe we should push for that

11 again, to bring those who have the doctoral degrees

12 in the forefront of the children and the students who

13 need it the most, and work away with master level

14 teachers in the lower grades to ensure that they're

15 meeting the efforts and that the digital technology

16 and sciences are being pushed to the forefront with

17 mathematics.

18   I am urging to increase the funding for

19 food and nutrition, for healthier options and meals

20 for all students because a hungry stomach is an empty

21 mind. To nourish the mind with education and

22 academics achievements, but to nourish the body is to

1   help the child reach their achievements. My second

2   goal is to ensure that we are allocating safety.

3   Safety and security in cyber walls,

4   cybersecurity in our technology, ensuring that we are

5   focusing on new technology in our computer labs.

6   I've noticed there are a lot of Dell computers, and

7   we may have the opportunity to allocate funds for

8   more advanced laptops and or computer services like

9   Apple for example because a lot of the children are

10 very tech savvy. In conclusion --

11   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Go ahead. If

12 you're wrapping.

13   MS. WILLIAMS: In inclusion, we are

14 addressing the budget to ensure that all students in

15 the district have high quality education and the

16 personnel and technology is up to par and they're

17 nutritionally sound and they feel safe within their

18 school systems.

19   MS. BROWN: Thank so much.

20   MS. WILLIAMS: I do have a second

21 testimony for my group. The second testimony will --

22   MS. BROWN: I'm sorry. I'm sorry, I'm

1 just trying to get some clarity here. Is there

2 another person for whom you're speaking?

3   MS. WILLIAMS: No, it's just another

4 testimony.

5   MS. BROWN: Okay. Can we --

6   MS. WILLIAMS: Sure.

7   MS. BROWN: -- can we have you submit

8 that so then we can make sure that we're going

9 through all the folks. We want to make sure that

10 we're giving three minutes for each speaker tonight.

11   MS. WILLIAMS: Thank you.

12   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much.

13   MS. WILLIAMS: Welcome.

14   MS. BROWN: Okay. And I just want to

15 make a note that in this group I neglected to add

16 Jean Blacker Be Stretch. And so we'll go Grace Hu,

17 Davinia and then we will go to Jean. Thank you very

18 much. Grace.

19   MS. HU: Hi Chancellor Ferebee and Deputy

20 Chancellor Ashley and other OSTB staff -- I mean,

21 sorry, other DCPS staff. My name is Grace Hu, and

22 I'm one of the parent co-leads for digital equity in

1   DC education. A citywide coalition of parents

2   working to close the digital divide and to provide a

3   21st century education for our children. And I'm

4   also on the DCPS tech advisory committee.

5   Since 2018 our parent group has

6   continuously engaged with DCPS on technology issues.

7   For this school year and for the 26th budget, we ask

8   that DCPS address the following issues. Number one,

9   advanced placement tests this school year will be

10   online, with the college board discontinuing paper

11   testing. However, we are still hearing that not all

12   high schools are at a one-to-one student device

13   ratio. And that lack of technology poses a barrier

14   to preparing students for AP tests.

15   We ask that DCPS reach out to every high

16   school to assess whether they have sufficient

17   devices, including enough devices in the upper grades

18   to prepare for and administer the AP test. On

19   computer distribution, some schools provide computers

20   through carts and certain classrooms instead of

21   issuing each student a device. The cart distribution

22   model poses challenges for secondary schools as a

1   number of devices in each classroom is not always

2   sufficient given the larger variation in student

3   schedules and class sizes at high schools.

4   We urge central office to consider how a

5   school's distribution model may impact the need for a

6   larger contingency of devices at the school. On

7   regular refresh of technology, including student and

8   teacher devices; the lack of stability and funding

9   for technology impacts school's abilities to support

10   day-to-day learning and runs counter to the mayor's

11   commitment to provide a one-to-one student device

12   ratio for all students in grades three to 12.

13   Parents should not have to advocate year

14   after year for funding to maintain functional

15   appropriate technology, which is now a must have for

16   21st century education and needed for online

17   assessments and curricula that DCPS central requires

18   of schools. The refresh of text should be

19   automatically baked into the DCPS operating budget

20   every year.

21   And lastly, despite DCPS paying OCTO the

22   office of the Chief Technology officer, millions of

1   dollars per year to provide IT support and WIFI to

2   DCPS schools, we continue to hear challenges with

3   schools, management of technology and internet

4   connectivity. OCTO technicians are currently not

5   allowed to access the tip web inventories, which

6   schools have to keep updated and which central

7   office uses to allocate devices.

8   We urge DCPS to assess whether it is

9   getting the full value of what it is paying to OCTO

10   and to also consider having OCTO technicians provide

11   asset management support to schools, including

12   helping schools with updating their tip web

13   technology inventories. Thank you for the

14   opportunity to testify and we look forward to

15   continuing to engage you and your staff on DCPS

16   technology.

17   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Next, we will

18   have --

19   MS. GINGERICH: Just to interrupt, we

20   have un update that we wanted to put in.

21   MS. BROWN: Yes, please. Thank you.

22   MS. GINGERICH: (Speaking in Spanish)

1   speaking as the interpreter, I'm just giving a notice

2   to those that are Spanish speakers, if they do wish

3   to give their testimony in Spanish, please contact

4   your POC so that we can make sure our interpreter is

5   ready ahead of time.

6   MS. BROWN: Thanks for that Elise.

7   Davinia. One more call for Davinia. Okay. Let's

8   move on to -- oh, I see Davinia, you just popped up.

9   While we're working on getting you going, is Jean

10 available?

11   MS. STRITCH: Yes, I'm here.

12   MS. BROWN: Great.

13   MS. STRITCH: Hi, my name is Jean Stritch

14 and my children attend Brent Elementary in Ward six.

15 Thank you for the opportunity to speak. Our school

16 community will be displaced 3.7 miles from Brent to

17 Meyer Elementary during the 2025, 26 and 2026, 27

18 school years. The furthest distance any DC public

19 school has had to travel for a swing space during

20 modernization. We would like to request specific

21 measures related to DCPS's process for school

22 modernizations and swing spaces across the city.

1   These are common sense measures to keep

2   school communities intact during modernization.

3   First, to amend the student's first act to guarantee

4   that enrollment projections be held harmless for DCPS

5   schools undergoing modernization and relocation to a

6   swing space across the modernization years and the

7   year immediately following.

8   The enrollment projection of the school

9   year prior to the commencement of construction should

10 be maintained and held harmless from adjustments

11 during the modernization years and the year

12 following, serving as the floor of the projection for

13 years of construction in the school year after.

14 Failure to legislate this will continue to drive

15 enrollment instability in schools leading to faculty

16 departures and overcrowding of modernized spaces upon

17 return and long-lasting damage to school communities.

18   Second, legislate swing space standards

19 and provide oversight of swing space facility

20 readiness for all school modernizations across the

21 city. Assigned swing spaces should be safe and

22 usable, ready to house school communities. All open

1 work orders should be adequately completed and closed

2 prior to a new school's occupation of the space. To

3 ask a community to relocate a significant distance,

4 in this case 3.7 miles, to an unsafe or unfinished

5 swing space is unacceptable.

6   There should be published consistent

7 standards for swing spaces that house schools

8 undergoing modernization in DCPS. Third, there

9 should be structured oversight of DCPS swing space

10 planning. DCPS should be held to basic standards

11 regarding swing space planning and project

12 management, including, timelines for community

13 engagement on swing spaces well before the assignment

14 of a swing space.

15   And a transparent process for ensuring an

16 assigned swing space is prepared. This includes

17 specified timelines and processes for the incoming

18 school to see the space and identify projects that

19 need to be completed. Moreover, DCPS should approach

20 swing space planning in a more rational manner,

21 sequencing modernizations among wards such that

22 schools swing to a space in their ward and not so far

1   away. Many of the swing space issues throughout the

2   district could have been avoided with these

3   practical measures in place. Thank you.

4   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Okay,

5   we're going to go back to, it looks like we were able

6   hopefully to address some tech issues? So let's do,

7   Davinia, are you ready? And then we will after

8   Davinia go back to Meier. Is Davinia ready? Okay,

9   great. Are we able to unmute Davinia? I see that

10 they have their hand raised. Thank you all for your

11 patience while we try to work this out. Let's

12 continue working with Davinia so that we can get

13 them their mic working. Let's try to go back to

14 Meier and then if not, we'll go to the next group.

15 So is Meier, I know that you were working on some

16 tech.

17   MS. HAIGH: Hi, yes, I'm here.

18   MS. BROWN: Wonderful.

19   MS. HAIGH: Hello. Hello. Can you hear

20 me?

21   MS. BROWN: We can hear you, yes. Thank

22 you.

1   MS. HAIGH: Great. Thank you so much.

2 Thank you so much to Shona for helping me get on.

3 Hello. My name is Meier Galblam Haigh. I am a Trans

4 mask, non-binary disabled parent at Bancroft. My

5 pronouns are they and them. And I'm a parent to an

6 incredible five-year-old kindergartner named Tova at

7 Bancroft Elementary School in Mount Pleasant. And

8 I'm here to talk to you today about accessible play

9 space in DC, something that some of you-all might not

10 realize is at stake at Bancroft Elementary School.

11   And specifically, to ask you not to take

12 away one of the very few wheelchair accessible play

13 spaces that we have within wheeling distance of my

14 home in Mount Pleasant at Bancroft Elementary School.

15 I've lived here in DC for over 13 years, and though I

16 was born in Alaska, I've got five generations of

17 family roots here in the city. I've been invisibly

18 disabled for my whole life. But about a month after

19 the birth of my daughter, I was involved in a hit and

20 run car accident in Shaw and I got a fairly severe

21 traumatic brain injury.

22   And then during the COVID Pandemic I got

1   meningitis. And as a result, I now live life on

2   wheels. I love this city. I love DC. I also became

3   physically disabled here in this city, and my

4   daughter and I deserve to continue to live a full and

5   dignified life in this city. I'm proud to be a part

6   of the disability community, but living a dignified

7   life as a disabled parent here in our city can be

8   very difficult. I spend a lot of time exploring the

9   city with my daughter. She loves to point out which

10   buildings we could explore when she sees a new ramp.

11   Which can give you an idea of how many of

12   our buildings don't have them. And she loves to

13   point out which playgrounds look accessible.

14   Bancroft Elementary School provides one of the only

15   accessible play spaces within miles of our home that

16   I can safely go to with my child. DC Parks and Rec,

17   unfortunately, has finished nearly every playground

18   within miles of our home with mulch, which if you

19   don't know, is not accessible on wheels.

20   And that means if there's an emergency, I

21   can't reach her. When she was three, we were at a

22   playground in Columbia Heights when older kids set

1 off fireworks and a lot of people thought that they

2 were gunshots all around us. Everyone around us hit

3 the ground and parents were scrambling for their kids

4 except me because I could not reach my child until

5 long after the crisis had passed, and I realized it

6 was fine.

7   A year later, a physical fight broke out

8 at the playground with an adult punching someone.

9 And I couldn't reach my child in the midst of that

10 crisis because 30 feet of mulch separated us. Weeks

11 later, a child was in another fight, multiple

12 children, another physical fight. And once again, I

13 couldn't reach her. And as a result, Bancroft has

14 become a go-to playground for us. It's safe, it's

15 wheelchair accessible. If something goes wrong, I

16 can always reach her and it's open to the public

17 seven days a week.

18   At Bancroft, I can parent with dignity.

19 We could sit here and debate whether the DC

20 government should make every playground in this city

21 accessible, but that isn't an overnight solution.

22 And I'm going to be very honest with you it would

1 cost the city far more than the Henderson building or

2 the renovation of the Henderson building that is more

3 than a $35 million solution.

4   The question in front of you right now is

5 whether to put trailers over one of the only

6 accessible play spaces that we have in our region of

7 the city. And the only solution to stopping that

8 right now on the table is to buy the Henderson

9 buildings in Mount Pleasant. And it has a bonus of

10 saving both CHEC and Bancroft from massive

11 overcrowding in the process. My child --

12   MS. BROWN: Reminder, you are getting

13 close. I just wanted --

14   MS. HAIGH: Thank you so much.

15   MS. BROWN: Thank you.

16   MS. HAIGH: I'm almost done. My child's

17 already in an overcrowded classroom at Bancroft. A

18 converted teacher's lounge that is half the size of

19 other classrooms with 25-year-olds. There's no space

20 for a carpet, no space for play, no space for circle

21 time. Just 25-year-olds sitting at desks and they

22 can't do anything else but sit at their desks. She

1 struggles to sit still for so long all day in just

2 one place without a lot of exercise, which means it's

3 on me to find her playtime after school so that she

4 can do that during the day.

5   That means, me having accessible play

6 spaces is even more important in the midst of

7 Bancroft's overcrowding. Disabled people are

8 critical members of our community, but too often

9 we're locked out of housing, of businesses, of

10 transit, of more, and seeing disabled parents living

11 a dignified life in our city and parenting like every

12 other parent at the playground isn't just good for my

13 kid. It's good for every single other kid in this

14 city and every other kid at Bancroft.

15   While securing the sharp swing space is a

16 good first step. It only secures our next two years.

17 We need Henderson to truly guarantee this critical

18 accessible play space and to ensure our kids have the

19 space they so desperately need to learn. So I'm

20 asking you to take one step towards a more inclusive,

21 dignified, and welcoming DC by fighting for

22 accessible play space and the dignity of disabled

1   parents and kids. This is the district I believe

2   that we are. And so I'm asking you to help me build

3   it together, one neighborhood at a time. Thank you.

4   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. I'll be

5   calling the next group. So this will be Dylan Craig,

6   Dr. Jermal Sewell. Laura Fuchs, Maureen Perrone will

7   be speaking on behalf of Jacqueline Seaward Clements.

8   And then Nora Stein will be speaking on behalf of

9   Robin Nelson. And so first we will hear from Dylan

10 Craig. Dylan, are you able to put your camera on?

11 And then we are able to get you unmuted. Yeah. Look

12 like you came off for just a quick a second. Someone

13 able to work with Dylan? Okay. While we're working

14 on your technology, let's move on to Dr. Jermal

15 Sewell.

16   MS. SEWELL: Good evening. Can you all

17 hear me?

18   MS. BROWN: We can. Thank you.

19   MS. SEWELL: Good evening. Dr. Ferebee

20 other DCPS officials, colleagues, families, and

21 students. My name is Dr. Jermal Sewell, I teach

22 cosmetology at Garnet Patterson Stay Opportunity

1   Academy. Thank you for allowing me this opportunity

2   to speak today about the critical need for robust

3   funding for career and technical education CTE

4   programs. The value of CTE; CTE programs are

5   transformative. They provide students with the

6   skills, confidence and certifications necessary to

7   enter the workforce directly after high school or

8   pursue higher education with a strong foundation.

9   At Garnet Patterson, I've witnessed

10   students who were once disengaged from traditional

11   academics find purpose and direction through hands-on

12   learning in our cosmetology program. These programs,

13   excuse me, programs don't just teach skills. They

14   instill discipline that allow them to enter a $60

15   billion industry. Imagine the ripple-effect

16   graduates starting their own businesses,

17   contributing to the local economy and inspiring their

18   peers. This isn't unique to cosmetology.

19   This is across all CTE disciplines where

20   students gain tangible tools to build their futures.

21   The challenge: however, our CTE programs are

22   underfunded, limited resources mean outdated

1 equipment, insufficient materials, and fewer

2 opportunities for students to access industry

3 standard experiences in cosmetology alone. For

4 instance, my students deserve modern tools to mirror

5 real world environments, yet we're often forced to

6 make do with less.

7   I have 30 students and eight textbooks

8 for example. The ask; investing in CTE is investing

9 in our students' futures, our community's growth, and

10 our city's workforce. By allocating more robust

11 funding, we can expand access, improve equipment, and

12 offer additional certifications that give our

13 students a competitive edge. In conclusion, our

14 students are counting on us to see their potential

15 and provide resources they need to thrive. I urge

16 you to prioritize funding for CTE programs because

17 the returns economically, socially and educationally

18 are immeasurable. Thank you for your time.

19   MS. BROWN: Thank you for yours. Elise,

20 do you mind popping on to make a quick note, please?

21   MS. GINGERICH: Of course. Hey everyone,

22 interpreter here again. Just another announcement.

1   (Speaking in Spanish) Bernard, I see that you have

2   your hand raised. If you need an interpreter for

3   when you're testifying, you can let us know.

4   Otherwise, unfortunately we cannot accept other

5   questions right now, but your mic should be enabled

6   so you can request if you need an interpreter. Okay,

7   looks like that is gone. Let's continue.

8   MS. BROWN: Thank you for that Elise.

9   Okay. Next up is Laura Fuchs.

10   MS. FUCHS: Hello. I'm going to be

11   reading off my phone so I don't think my camera will

12   work. Can you hear me?

13   MS. BROWN: We can hear you.

14   MS. FUCHS: Great. So I'm in my 18th

15   year teaching at HT Woodson High School and I'm

16   testifying solely as myself. As many have said

17   before, it's almost impossible to plan for long term

18   sustained investments in our schools because plans

19   come and go. I have several elements we need to take

20   into consideration to combat this.

21   One of the challenges we face with the

22   DCP Central office turns out unnecessary paperwork

1 over testing and other needless and unhelpful

2 initiatives that cost a lot of money. We're facing a

3 crisis in our classrooms for our time. Students are

4 being asked to take countless benchmarks, required

5 curricular tasks that don't align to the curriculum,

6 outside contractor assessments, and then the

7 high-stake standardized assessments, leaving little

8 to no time for educators to actually teach.

9   We're also forced to grade a lot of these

10 assessments, entering the grades into multiple

11 databases for a wide number of students and little to

12 no accounting again, for our time. And onto this,

13 the countless meetings that ostensibly had to go over

14 the data but rarely do since we have no time. And

15 all the other databases and new programs and new

16 initiatives you're expected to fulfill, we are left

17 with a very piecemeal and sorry excuse for

18 curriculum that is constantly being interrupted by

19 outside programs.

20   Does not allow the experts that were

21 hired and survive countless impact evaluations to do

22 our actual jobs. This goes double for special

1   educators and ELL teachers and anyone else who

2   provides a necessary support service to our students

3   on top of their regular educated duties. The

4   solution is to cut back on central office spending on

5   outside contracts, conduct a full audit of all of the

6   program's, databases, and external contractors that

7   includes extensive talking to the teachers and

8   students as to whether these programs are useful.

9   Then trim the fat in central office

10 spending and reinvest that money in direct support

11 for students. There are too many redundancies that

12 are not achieving the goals. We don't need five

13 trackers to tell us what a teacher could have told

14 you based on their own assessments. It is time to

15 consolidate and focus on what works and eliminate the

16 rest. Yes, that may mean saying goodbye to some of

17 your Teach for America alumni friends and stopping

18 giving them over voted contracts, but I'm pretty sure

19 they'll be okay.

20   The next challenge is for WT contracts to

21 not expire and DCPS to show up and negotiate in good

22 faith. Once again, we are keeping to see an endless

1 pattern of under Mayoral control contracts expiring.

2 This last one expired a year before we could

3 actually get it decided, and we want to say that's a

4 good thing. It is not.

5   This does not allow us to properly fund

6 our school system. It makes it hard to account for

7 all the money that goes to cover those costs and

8 usually what DCPS ends up doing is trying to charge

9 the schools and double count what is being actually

10 paid for by the DC council. So please DCPS in the

11 future show up to the table before the WT contract

12 expires and then negotiate in good faith to the

13 benefit of our students, educators and communities.

14   We then need to make sure we're

15 addressing the challenge that our school populations

16 are unstable, especially in schools east of the river

17 because we use student-based budgeting, now we have

18 to really focus on making sure our students are going

19 where they're supposed to. I've completed that in my

20 written testimony. And that we need to really try to

21 limit the number of new programs that we are

22 constantly starting and ending because those have

1   real costs and they don't have real results. Thank

2   you.

3   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Okay.

4   I think Dylan, we have our technology sorted, so

5   Dylan Craig, are you available?

6   MR. CRAIG: Yes, sorry.

7   MS. BROWN: Wonderful. We can hear you.

8   MR. CRAIG: Perfect. Switched to my

9   phone so we should be good. Good evening DCPS

10   leaders. I'm Dylan Craig, an English teacher and

11   LSAT chair at Garnett Patterson State Opportunity

12   Academy. I thank you for holding this hearing and

13   listening to the community regarding the funding of

14   our schools. First, I want to advocate that DCPS

15   follows the Schools First in Budgeting Act to ensure

16   that our schools remain as stable as possible from

17   year to year.

18   Students feeling connected to school is

19   one of the main goals for DCPS, but when schools are

20   constantly shifting or eliminating positions to

21   reshape the budget year after year, students can feel

22   that state of flux and it hurts their connection to

1   the school because it hurts the consistency they see.

2   It also hurts morale at the school as looming

3   budgetary uncertainty can create anxiety that hinders

4   the staff member's ability to fully serve.

5   Even if this legislation creates a

6   logistical challenge or change for DCPS and central

7   office, so much good can come from making sure

8   schools are stable and always sufficiently funded

9   from year to year. Central office works to support

10   schools, but it cannot support what no longer exists

11   due to budget cuts at the local school level. The

12   local school level should always be a priority.

13   Second, with consistency and stability in

14   mind, I also ask that DCPS consider how partnerships

15   with outside organizations impact the work at our

16   schools. DCPS has partnered with XQ and has

17   received a large sum of money to reimagine schools,

18   but is unclear what happens when this funding goes.

19   It seems now that schools are on their own to cover

20   new positions and programs that were started by XQ,

21   again, creating budgetary challenges and instability

22   and jeopardizing any positive work that came from the

1   partnership.

2   These schools are real communities and

3   not playgrounds for billionaire money to help expand

4   their portfolio and leave schools to struggle and

5   figure out the rest. Third, regarding the budgeting

6   process. As we know, many students come to our

7   school post-enrollment count day. This is especially

8   true for Opportunity Academies who enroll students

9   all throughout the year, but many schools take

10   students who are unenrolled at a charter school or

11   new to the city or country or need a new school for a

12   variety of reasons.

13   These students are then supported at

14   their DCPS school without the actual funding

15   challenging the school's resources. I know this is

16   not an easy fix but having funding for these

17   situations so schools can fully support students they

18   receive post count day could have incredibly positive

19   impacts. Finally, as we know, the upcoming federal

20   administration is going to be hostile to the city,

21   the public schools and our students, particular,

22   immigrant and LGBTQ students.

1   This is not a time for an austerity

2   budget. This is a time for robust funding that shows

3   our students that we are investing in them, in their

4   schools and in their communities to help protect and

5   promote their success and wellbeing. We must make

6   sure that the current funding is going where it needs

7   to so we can effectively resource our schools and

8   move money in a way that makes sense and the Schools

9   First in Budgeting Act can be followed.

10   This is why I support the DC auditor's

11   exploration of DCPS finances and I hope DCPS

12   cooperates fully so there's no uncertainty about

13   where money is going and what we can and cannot move

14   to meet the budgeting first legislation and protect

15   our students moving forward. Thank you again for

16   taking the time to listen.

17   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Okay. Davinia,

18   did we get you worked out? I will check back in just

19   a minute. Let's go to Maureen Perrone for Jacquelyn

20   Seaward Clements. Are you with us, Maureen?

21   MS. PERRONE: Hi. Yes, I'm with you.

22   MS. BROWN: Oh, wonderful. I can hear

1   you.

2   MS. PERRONE: I just can't get my video

3   working or won't let me. Oh, there we go. Hi.

4   Great.

5   MS. BROWN: I can see you.

6   MS. PERRONE: Hi, my name is Maureen

7   Perrone and I'm a parent at Janney Elementary School.

8   I'm speaking on behalf of one of our teachers this

9   evening, Jacqueline Seward Clemens, who is not able

10   to be here as she's participating in a professional

11   development with her colleagues.

12   "My name is Jacqueline Seward Clemens.

13   I've worked at Janney Elementary School for 18 years.

14   I've worked as the special education teacher for the

15   first grade the past three years and the third grade

16   before. Two of my children now attend a second

17   grader and a kindergartner. I'm sorry I couldn't

18   join tonight. I'm attending a math professional

19   development session with our other teachers from my

20   first-grade team. We are working off hours to

21   better support our students.

22   Last year's proposed budget cuts were the

1   most severe I've seen in my career within DCPS. The

2   initial budget had us projected to lose 16 positions

3   out of 85 positions. While the council and mayor

4   worked on the budget, 16 staff members were given

5   pig slips. This period greatly damaged the trust and

6   relationships between staff and administration. With

7   the council's actions, some of these staff members

8   were able to be reinstated, but even for those who

9   were saved, it caused pain.

10   Among those cuts were a math TLI and an

11   ELA coach, physicians working with struggling

12   students and teachers to improve our teaching

13   practices. The school also lost a special education,

14   a front office staff member, a member of the

15   custodial staff and an art teacher. Enrollment is

16   projected to increase again this year. If the budget

17   is cut again, we will have even fewer staff members.

18   Due to the reductions in staff, the

19   teacher-to- student ratios continue to increase and a

20   large demand on the remaining staff builds. We are

21   lucky to still have custodial support, a part-time,

22   OT, a social worker, a school psychologist, a nurse

1 sometimes, but the school has over 700 children

2 enrolled. It is not enough.

3   And because of this, it is a necessity

4 that every remaining staff member acts in a multitude

5 of capacities. It's extraordinarily draining and the

6 burnout is severe. Teachers and staff, those new and

7 experienced are quitting because the workload is

8 unbearable and there's no relief in sight. To meet

9 the first grade student service minutes, the school's

10 required to provide by law, I needed to give up my

11 planning hours to make it work.

12   There's no room for flexibility in my

13 schedule, even if it's in the best interest for the

14 child. There are times children need to be pulled as

15 they're entering the building. The schedule doesn't

16 allow for optimal learning for students or allow me

17 time to prepare. Most if not all teachers work more

18 hours than the 40-hour work week, myself included.

19 That means working after my three children are in bed

20 and working in the morning before they wake up. I am

21 gravely concerned with the budget season coming up

22 and more cuts being discussed.

1   With this increasing strain, our bubble

2   will inevitably burst. Teachers will leave and go to

3   other districts. The numbers will drop, students

4   will leave the school, families will leave the

5   neighborhood. Teachers and staff members play an

6   integral part in Janney running smoothly so that our

7   children feel safe, secure, and ready to learn.

8   Despite the strain, our staff is dedicated to the

9   students' community and we have been present for many

10   years. We need more funding for related services,

11   custodial staff, front office and teacher support.

12   More, not less. Thank you for listening.

13   Jacqueline Seward Clements." Thank you.

14   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Okay, Davinia,

15   we're going to do this. We're going to get you up

16   here.

17   MS. SEAY: Yes.

18   MS. BROWN: I hear you.

19   MS. SEAY: Yes.

20   MS. BROWN: Wonderful.

21   MS. SEAY: The third device finally

22   worked.

1   MS. BROWN: Thank you for your

2   perseverance.

3   MS. SEAY: So good evening. My name is

4   Davinia Seay, I'm a Ward Seven resident and a parent

5   at the elementary school student at the Language

6   Immersion School in Ward Seven. And on that school's

7   advocacy committee within their PPTO. Right now,

8   Ward Seven has three elementary schools with language

9   immersion or dual language programs and DCPS speak,

10 Spanish at Houston, Spanish and French Stokes East

11 End and Mandarin at Global PCS.

12   Despite this, there is no language

13 immersion middle school, east of the river. This

14 means our children studying Spanish, French, or

15 Mandarin hit a roadblock after fifth grade if they

16 want to continue dual language in a neighborhood

17 school. Thus, I'm requesting DCPS include funding

18 for dual language middle school, east of the river in

19 their upcoming budget.

20   Why a language middle school specifically

21 east of the river? Well, there are several reasons.

22 Every child, regardless of their location or

1   background or race, deserves access and is legally

2   entitled to quality education close to home with

3   equitable access to the same enriching educational

4   experiences as their peers.

5   Currently language students in Ward Seven

6   only option to continue their dual language program

7   is traveling to DCI, a good one hour away in one

8   direction for those of us east of the river, which is

9   unacceptable. And why is language immersion option

10   important for our students? To prepare our students

11   for the global environment they will live in until

12   one day take advantage of employment opportunities in

13   their own city.

14   Our students need and deserve the

15   opportunity to further their language acquisition

16   skills and immersion environment beyond elementary

17   school. It's time for DCPS to be accountable to the

18   students at Ward Seven and their tax paying parents

19   and caregivers who deserve the same continuity of

20   programming as every other student in the district.

21   Our kids want to go to school in their neighborhood

22   and still have equitable access to the same

1 enriching educational experiences as their peers

2 across the city.

3   They deserve that. I know it's a tough

4 ask in the current budget season, but if not now,

5 when? Why should it be east of the river students

6 that suffer because of shortcomings and DCPS

7 planning? There is no excuse. OSI noted in 2019

8 that dual language has been a highly popular program

9 offering where demand has vastly surpassed supply in

10 DC for many years.

11   Additionally, the master facility study,

12 sorry, the boundary and assignment study calls for a

13 public plan for assuring dual access to language

14 across the city by 2027. I'm appreciative of the

15 study committee's work, but the timeline is

16 absolutely unacceptable for a problem DCPS has known

17 about since at least 2019. Please don't punish and

18 harm our students' academic desires for the lack of

19 coordination and planning between the multiple

20 agencies that regulate our city's education system.

21 Thank you for your consideration.

22   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Next

1 step will be Norris Stein speaking on behalf of Robyn

2 Nelson. I see you've popped up Nora. I want to just

3 give another second to see if we can work out your

4 mic. While you're working on that I'll read the

5 next bunch and then come back to you and see if

6 you're able to go up. And then we'll keep working on

7 this. So the next batch will be Melanie Douglass,

8 Daaiyah Bilal-Threats, Scott Goldstein or Goldstein,

9 Barry Brinkley.

10   So let's try Nora one more time while

11 we're working on, see if we're able to get you off

12 mic. Okay. Let's try Melanie Douglas and we will

13 keep working with you Nora. Melanie, are you able to

14 come off? Okay. I see you are here, Melanie. Thank

15 you everybody for your patience as we try to make

16 sure that folks get a chance. Okay. So let's see.

17 Let's see if the next person come off while we keep

18 trying to work with folks that I've named. Is it

19 Dia? Dia?

20   MS. BILAL-THREATS: Can you hear me?

21   MS. BROWN: Yes, I can.

22   MS. BILAL-THREATS: Oh, okay. I don't

1   think I'm able, oh no, there I am. All right. Can

2   you see me?

3   MS. BROWN: Yes, I can.

4   MS. BILAL-THREATS: Well, hot dog. Okay,

5   I'm ready when you are.

6   MS. BROWN: You are on.

7   MS. BILAL-THREATS: All right. Good

8   evening. I'm Daaiyah Bilal-Threats. You pronounced

9   it right the first time. I'm a 23-year DC homeowner

10   and a parent to a fourth and eighth grader at John R.

11   Francis Education Campus. I'm also a parent serving

12   on our PTA and LSAT committees. There is only one

13   thing that's ever made my husband, and I decide or

14   consider leaving DC after 23 years. And I know that

15   we're not alone. And it's not the expense of

16   housing, and it's not the daily crime alerts that you

17   get on your phone.

18   It is overcrowded classrooms and a budget

19   that is too small to provide the staff that our

20   students need and too small to do what DCPS has asked

21   our school to take on. If we and city leaders want

22   families to stay in DC, kids and schools have to come

1   first. John R. Francis Education Campus has to be

2   staffed for the kind of equity and sense of belonging

3   the DCPS names in its capital commitments document.

4   We can't have or expect equity or a sense

5   of belonging when we have too few teachers to provide

6   the individualized instruction that our students need

7   and deserve. Just a little bit about the Francis

8   Education Campus. We are a Title one school. We

9   are the largest pre-K through eight education campus

10 in the city. And we serve students from all eight

11 wards. Our enrollment last year was 479 kids. This

12 year it's 580 and next year it's projected to be 627.

13   During all the times of increase over the

14 years, we had been promised that our budget would be

15 commensurate with the increase in our enrollment and

16 that has not happened yet. And our students and our

17 families and staff are beginning to believe that it

18 never will. So here's why we're asking for

19 additional funding. Several of our grades are

20 already over-enrolled and DCPS has asked Francis

21 Education Campus to add three new feeders next year

22 because it wants to close Cardozo Middle School.

1   Garrison, Cleveland and Seton Elementary

2   Schools will be feeders next year. We need a budget

3   that will ensure that we will have the staffing and

4   resources that we need to accommodate this large

5   influx of students. For example, 109 fifth graders

6   across those three schools in addition to the two

7   feeder schools we already have Thompson and Ross, 42

8   from there, plus our current Francis students.

9   That is six new school cultures coming

10   together, being asked to merge together all at once.

11   In order for us to set our students up for success,

12   we need the DCPS to give us a budget that's

13   commiserate with the enrollment numbers that we're

14   going to see and to set us up for success, not for

15   more frustration, stress and disappointment. And we

16   want to be ready on day one.

17   We believe that we can meet the needs and

18   the expectations that DCPS has set for us as an

19   education campus, but only with sufficient funds and

20   staffing support to help these six communities come

21   together. Thank you.

22   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Now I'd

1   like to try to revisit Nora Stein on behalf of Robin

2   Nelson. I saw that Nora popped up again and so let

3   me just give a minute. I know there's been a little

4   bit of a delay in taking folks.

5   MS. STEIN: Okay. I'm on.

6   MS. BROWN: Wonderful. I can hear you

7   clearly.

8   MS. STEIN: Great. Thank you.

9   MS. BROWN: Thank you.

10   MS. STEIN: Trying to enable my camera.

11 I'm joining tonight. I'm a Janney Elementary School

12 parent and I'm not able to enable my camera. Sorry

13 about that. Now I can do it. And I'm reading Robin

14 Nelson's testimony. Robin's a first-grade teacher at

15 our school. She couldn't join tonight because she's

16 also attending a professional development activity

17 with the first-grade team. Thank you for letting me

18 share her testimony.

19   "As teachers in DCPS classrooms, it is

20 our goal to educate children daily. This is a goal

21 we strive to attain daily. However, with the budget

22 constraints placed on so many of the district

1   schools, it has been challenging, exhausting, and

2   overwhelming to continue to meet the level of highly

3   engaging teaching that we plan for daily. Due to the

4   current budget cuts, classrooms are short staffed,

5   missing the required and needed SPED credentialed

6   educators to work alongside us to achieve the

7   learning for students.

8   Many of us are teaching the classrooms

9   that have more than 25 students in the room who have

10   a range of needs and abilities causing an

11   unattainable level of differentiation and planning

12   that cannot happen in the designed work hours. We as

13   educators are dealing with an overwhelming for both

14   students and teachers' level of mandated testing for

15   children from K through five.

16   It is completely unreasonable to ask the

17   kindergarten student to take a test on an iPad before

18   September 15th when so many of them are still

19   learning to read and write and have never tested on a

20   computer. And let's be clear, testing is very

21   different than finding Bluey on YouTube or asking

22   Alexa to place Snoop Dogg affirmations. The testing

1   is causing unprecedented levels of anxiety and

2   pressure on young children that is not fair or

3   healthy.

4   Children, especially the students in K

5   through two should be learning through play and

6   experiencing the wonders of the world around them,

7   not creating data that only shows that they don't

8   know how to take a test. It is with this firsthand

9   experience and knowledge of mind that we submit

10   testimony asking that testing of our students be

11   reduced dramatically, which would then provide a

12   significant amount of money that could back into the

13   budget and fund the needed positions of the SPED

14   teacher in each classroom to co-teach with a general

15   education teacher.

16   This will not only provide a stronger

17   learning environment for students, but we'll also

18   begin to help close the educational gap between our

19   students with different learning styles and needs.

20   It also allows for the students who may not need an

21   IEP or 504, but do need a little more one-to-one or

22   small group intervention to receive support they

1   need. If DCPS is committed to educating and

2   nurturing the whole child, then not cutting the

3   budget further and reinstating the funds that cause a

4   reduction in staff should be of the utmost priority.

5   Thank you for your time.

6   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Okay.

7   Let's see. Melanie, are you with us now? Okay, I

8   know we were working. Okay, Melanie, I see you've

9   popped up, so let's make sure that we get you off.

10   MS. DOUGLASS: Can you hear me

11   MS. BROWN: Now we can hear you.

12   MS. DOUGLASS: Yay.

13   MS. BROWN: Thank you for your patience.

14   MS. DOUGLASS: Thank you. Okay. All

15   right. I'm on the phone, which made it work better.

16   Hello. I am the parent co-chair of the LSAT at

17   Janney Elementary School. Last year was my first

18   year on the LSAT in my first introduction to the

19   chaotic DCPS budget process. When the 24-25 DCPS

20   budget was first unveiled Last February, Janney's

21   budget cut on paper was 216,000 with a purchasing

22   deficit of about 1.2 million or 16 total staff

1   positions, ranging from classroom teachers, custodial

2   staff, special education teachers, front office

3   staff, academic coaches, and numerous specialist

4   positions.

5   For a school that served almost 700

6   students, one of the larger elementary schools in the

7   city, this was devastating thanks to the efforts and

8   coordination of the DC City Council, especially Ward

9   Three, Councilman Matt Freeman, we ultimately

10 recouped much of our budget shortfall. Still the

11 damage was done. Staff members whose jobs were not

12 guaranteed for our current school year, sadly went

13 elsewhere.

14   Administrators spent the summer months

15 refilling those positions, unnecessary transitions

16 for students and staff. Other staff positions ceased

17 to exist because our leaner budgets simply didn't

18 allow for them. Janney has surpassed its enrollment

19 goals and is bursting at the seams. A projected 695

20 turned into 717 students, yet we have one fewer

21 custodian than we did last year.

22   For a school with robust programming from

1 7:30 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. there are four custodians down

2 from last year's five. The result of this, it is

3 difficult to keep a school of this size adequately

4 clean. And this year the mice problem became

5 noticeable by students and demoralizing to staff. A

6 mouse even ran across our principal's desk during our

7 October LSAT. Janney is bursting at the seams, and

8 yet we have not had a consistent nurse.

9   A problem felt all around the district.

10 School administrators take time out of their day to

11 dispense medications and take care of sick children.

12 Janney is bursting at the seams, and yet members of

13 our student support team are shared among multiple

14 other schools. Teachers need more support, not less.

15 Our students need more support, not less. With our

16 projected enrollment for next school year continuing

17 to increase, I ask that you fully staff Janney

18 Elementary School next year and do not subject

19 schools to the budgeting chaos that happened last

20 year. Thank you.

21   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Next, we'll hear

22 from Scott Goldstein.

1   MR. GOLDSTEIN: Thank you for the

2 opportunity to testify about the DCPS budget for the

3 upcoming fiscal year. I want to start by

4 acknowledging the context which we all live. Any

5 suggestion that this is a tight budget year and we

6 must cut back, must be placed against the backdrop of

7 the headlines that we may read in the coming months.

8 Headlines like military deployed in major cities in

9 Trump's mass deportation efforts, schools at risk.

10   Headlines like federal budget passed with

11 major cuts to Medicare and Medicaid and food

12 assistance. The idea that we would cut back in a

13 year where we know the federal government is going to

14 do substantially less for our most vulnerable

15 residents is irresponsible. We must do more to

16 protect our students and families in the coming year

17 and raise new revenue as a city to do it.

18   To do anything less as to prematurely

19 surrender the protection of our students that we are

20 charged with caring for. This is the card we have

21 been dealt and the challenge of our time.

22 Additionally, the DME and DCPS should immediately

1   seek the legal guidance they need to declare our

2   school sanctuary schools protect student information

3   and data from the federal government and ensure

4   protections for LGBTQ students.

5   In that context, we're calling for DCPS

6   to make sure our budgets stay stable, adequate, and

7   equitable in light of threats to the Department of

8   Education. We must ensure that we have sufficient

9   funding for special education, teacher professional

10   development, and dedicated funding for Title one

11   schools. To do this, we must ensure schools are at a

12   minimum held harmless.

13   This means not just maintaining budgets

14   in real dollars, but in purchasing power. We

15   recommend reinstating elements of the comprehensive

16   staffing model to ensure equitable provision of

17   services and programs across schools. To ensure high

18   quality instruction every single day, and protect

19   teacher planning time so they can deliver high

20   quality instruction the next day we must ensure that

21   every school has at least one permanent in-building

22   substitute per 250 students.

1   We can also support teachers by expanding

2   co-teaching models passed early grades. DC must

3   invest more in innovative, flexible scheduling model

4   so that teachers have the time they need to plan,

5   collaborate, engage families, give students feedback,

6   and have the time they need for themselves and their

7   own families to sustain themselves in this

8   profession. To strengthen the pipeline, DCPS should

9   be working with schools to recruit bilingual

10 educators and paying visa costs for immigrant

11 educators across the board.

12   And to increase teacher expertise, we

13 recommend DCPS begin paying for educators to obtain

14 national board certification. Finally, $250 simply

15 is not enough money in teacher supply cards. DCPS

16 should ensure adequate funding for all educators,

17 including paraprofessionals, to have devices. And

18 finally, already in November, educators are digging

19 into their pockets and we need to make it easier for

20 them to replenish supplies.

21   To improve the student experience,

22 attendance and address root causes of inequity, DCPS

1   should invest in an expansion of connected schools.

2   We must also invest in experiential learning and

3   field trips. DCPS must invest in ensuring high

4   quality transportation for field trips that is easy

5   for teachers to secure and can safely transport

6   students with disabilities. We must ensure, even as

7   we try to provide individualized support and

8   tutoring to improve math and reading outcomes, we

9   invest in so many other parts of the curriculum that

10   makes students want to come to school every day.

11   That's why we should use the

12   comprehensive staffing model to ensure a related arts

13   allocation, not just for elementary school, but high

14   school as well. The CSM should lower the ELL rate

15   to increase need. We suggest 13 to one. And the

16   demand for study abroad has also increased to outpace

17   availability. We ask DCPS and the council to ensure

18   funding to expand from the current 120 to 240

19   students in the coming year, which will cost about

20   $800,000.

21   Finally, we must improve the budget

22   process itself. DCPS must work with the council to

1   ensure there's no back and forth again that

2   destabilizes our schools and fails to allow proper

3   planning in the spring. DCPS should give LSATs more

4   time to review and approve budgets. The year ahead

5   presents daunting challenges. Let's not coward

6   before the threats or impose a deficit mindset on

7   ourselves. The success of our students and families

8   depends on our courage and our investments. Thank

9   you.

10   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Next we'll hear

11 from Barry Brinkley. Okay. Barry, I see you've been

12 spot lit. I'll give you a moment that we can work

13 out. While we're working on mute for Barry, I will

14 read the next batch. Dana Springer, Nick Wertsch,

15 Regina Bell, Jhonna Turner, and Lynette Preston. And

16 those will be our final Testifiers, I believe. Let's

17 go back and see if Barry is ready to offer their

18 testimony. Okay. Let's see. Okay. We are going to

19 continue to try to work with you on the backend,

20 Barry. While we're doing that, let's try for Dana

21 Springer.

22   MS. SPRINGER: Hi, can you hear me?

1   MS. BROWN: Yes, we can.

2   MS. SPRINGER: Great. Good evening. My

3   name is Dana Springer. I'm the parent of two

4   students at the School Without Walls High School and

5   co-chair of the School of LSAT. Thank you for the

6   opportunity to testify. I have three points to

7   share. First, budget stability is essential.

8   Unexpected cuts, even temporary disrupt school

9   operations and have long-term consequences, including

10   staff departures, reduced student learning and loss

11   of public trust.

12   When the mayor and Chancellor released

13   school budgets for the 2024, 25 school year, School

14   Without Walls was forced to cut two positions even

15   though our school's enrollment had not decreased.

16   After months of advocacy by students and families,

17   the DC Council, and particularly council member

18   Brooke Pinto, took action in these positions were

19   reinstated. However, in the meantime, two valued

20   teachers lost their jobs and left the school. The

21   two positions were filled, but the damage was done.

22   And this happened in schools across the

1   city. The Mayor and chancellor need to adhere to the

2   Schools First in Budgeting law. The law requires

3   that budgets provide schools with no less than the

4   funding they received the previous year and keep up

5   with increased costs. The intent of the law is for

6   schools to be able to rely on funding stability

7   instead of the chaos that has been typical for so

8   many budget seasons.

9   Moreover, schools with stable enrollment

10 should not be penalized by the budget formula.

11 Schools first should also protect budgets for schools

12 that have stable enrollment in which cannot increase

13 enrollment like our school because of our space

14 constraints. The Mayor and chancellor need to work

15 with DC Council to determine a productive path

16 forward with schools first.

17   All schools in the district need budget

18 stability. Second budgets and enrollment must take

19 into consideration school facilities. School Without

20 Walls Students love their high school and the college

21 environment that comes with being within the George

22 Washington University campus. However, the building

1   is overcrowded to an extent that it's unhealthy and

2   impacts student learning.

3   Our school has an enrollment of 605

4   students in a building with a capacity of 520. Last

5   year's. The Master Facilities plan showed that our

6   school had a 136 percent utilization rate and rated

7   the building as having the lowest educational

8   adequacy score of all DCPS schools. Most of our 38

9   teachers share classrooms and spend their days in

10   windowless basement rooms. The building doesn't have

11   an auditorium, gymnasium or playing fields.

12   For many years, our partnership with

13   George Washington University has helped meet our

14   needs for space to hold assemblies mandated testing

15   and classes, but we can no longer rely on the

16   university to meet our space needs. Our students

17   travel all over the city for athletics and families

18   fill in the gaps with funding and transportation.

19   Moreover, the building systems are failing. School

20   administrators spend an extraordinary amount of time

21   reporting and following up on problems when their

22   time should be spent supporting instruction.

1   Last year's Master Facilities plan found

2   that there were 59 work orders per square foot in the

3   2019-2020 school year, one of the highest rates

4   across the city. Our school needs resources that

5   help administrators address the lack of onsite

6   instructional and recreational space and manage

7   ongoing issues with the building. Finally, it's

8   important that schools have sufficient time to review

9   initial budgets.

10   In the past, principals and LSATs have

11 had less than one week to review budgets and respond.

12 This is not enough time to determine whether an

13 initial budget will support a school's needs, and

14 when it's not sufficient to determine how to proceed.

15 I ask the DCPS to create a budget timeline that gives

16 school leadership and LSATs more time to review their

17 budgets. Thank you for your time.

18   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Let's try for

19 Barry again. Okay. We're still supporting Barry on

20 the backend. Let's move on to Nick Wertsch.

21   MR. WERTSCH: Hi there. My name is Nick

22 Wertsch and I'm a member of the Family Teacher

1   Organization at Truesdell Elementary School in Ward

2   Four. And I'm a parent of a pre-K four student. As

3   you develop your budget for fiscal year 26, we wish

4   to raise several important issues from our community.

5   So first, funding allocations and enrollment

6   projections.

7   So over the last several years, DCPS

8   enrollment projections for Truesdell have been

9   consistently lower than the number of students who

10 end up attending Truesdell. We understand our

11 projection numbers are no longer based on a count

12 day, and they're now based on this year's enrollment.

13 But it is known that enrollment dips when a school is

14 in a swing space. And prior to modernization,

15 Truesdell was at 460 students. Our current

16 enrollment is at 375.

17   This is problematic as we are expecting

18 enrollment to pick back up once again once we are

19 back in our new building. So, in summary, our budget

20 is cut dramatically only to be reinstated over the

21 summer, but the money does not become available until

22 late in the fall. And the cycle is unproductive.

1   Shortchanges our special education students, new

2   teachers and other members of our community.

3   Our principal is submitting a petition

4   for a higher enrollment projection, and we ask that

5   you approve that petition. Second, Truesdell's new

6   Building Maintenance. Truesdell is currently in the

7   last year of its modernization project and it's on

8   track to be done for the next school year. We're

9   excited to be moving back into a beautiful new

10   building, but it is critical that DCPS work with the

11   Department of General Services to ensure strong

12   maintenance for the new building and to ensure any

13   issues are immediately spotted, reported, and fixed

14   while the building is still under warranty.

15   Third, resources for English language

16   learners. Truesdell has a high number of ELL

17   students and families, and we need the proper funding

18   to provide adequate support, services, staffing and

19   resources to help those students succeed. Fourth,

20   additional staff professional development for trauma

21   response. We'd like DCPS to consider more trauma

22   response training for the professional development of

1   our social behavioral staff with possible changes in

2   policy at the federal level.

3   Those staff members may have a lot more

4   to do to support students who are separated from

5   family or who fear separation and it's important our

6   staff and teachers have the tools they need to be

7   able to help those students. Fifth and last;

8   funding for the newly ratified contract with the

9   Washington Teachers Union. We support our union

10   teachers and it is essential that DCPS account for

11   the pay increases for teachers that will occur under

12   the new union contract, and that will help with

13   teacher retention and long-term teacher and staff

14   communities at our schools.

15   Thank you very much for your time. I

16   think it's worth just noting that there are a few

17   common themes you're hearing through all of the

18   testimony you've already heard today. A lot of it

19   comes back to making sure schools are adequately

20   fronted on the front end of a school year, meaning

21   teachers, staff, and services are properly accounted

22   for, and we're not underestimating the needs of those

1   students and communities. Thank you very much.

2   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Next we will move

3   on to Regina Bell.

4   MS. BELL: Good evening Chancellor. I am

5   Regina Bell, General Vice President of the Washington

6   Teachers Union. I hope I am as thoughtful and

7   articulate as the students from Marie Reed and

8   Bancroft. The WTU is dedicated to social and

9   educational justice for all students of the District

10 of Columbia, and to improving the quality of support,

11 resources, and working conditions for the public

12 servants and proud teachers who educate our students

13 in DCPS.

14   The teachers in DCPS wear many hats and

15 they play a crucial role in students' lives. We'd

16 like DCPS to recognize the significance of this role

17 and show deference. You can show respect by taking

18 the politics out of the budget process. Fully funds

19 special education. These are our most vulnerable

20 students. They all have legally binding documents

21 that details their educational needs. Yet many

22 self-contained special-Ed classes are over capacity.

1   Those classrooms are not safe and there are not

2   enough adults, teachers, and paraprofessionals to

3   meet the students' needs.

4   Resource teachers are pulled to

5   substitute, and therefore their students do not

6   receive the required special education instruction.

7   In some schools, teachers are listed as special

8   educators, but they do not teach special education

9   students. This is not acceptable. Reduce the number

10 of tests students take. Make school fun again.

11 Kindergarten students are required to take i-Ready

12 Math, i-Ready Reading, RCTs and dibels.

13   The number of tests is excessive and some

14 are not developmentally appropriate. In addition,

15 it's turning kids off from wanting to come to school.

16 Many schools report that they have high attendance on

17 the day that students have Food Prints and invest in

18 more experiential learning. Technology needs to be

19 maintained and kept up to date, budget, and schedule

20 a refresh cycle for devices for students and

21 teachers. Upgrade and maintain internet

22 connectivity. This technology is necessary to

1   provide students with a 21st Century Education.

2   School budgets need a more stable and

3   consistent funding plan to ensure that the most

4   effective programs for students are funded during the

5   next budget cycle. We must find ways to continue

6   funding those effective programs that support

7   student social and emotional learning, as well as

8   meet their academic needs. SEL needs need to be met

9   before students can learn. Therefore, SEL needs to

10   be a priority.

11   Fund school libraries which are essential

12   in supporting student development of lifelong

13   critical thinking and problem-solving skills. For

14   the last two years, DC librarians have enabled

15   students and educators to utilize over 1 million

16   print and online resources that influence

17   imagination, creativity, and foundational knowledge

18   essential for the science of reading.

19   Don't ask our teachers and principals to

20   do more with less. For some students, school is the

21   most stable part of their day. Let's not cause more

22   disruption in their lives by cutting school budgets.

1 Thank you for allowing me to testify.

2   MS. BROWN: Thank you. Okay. All right.

3 Right. Let's try Barry again. I think we have

4 worked through our technology. Give a moment for him

5 to come on. For them to come on.

6   MR. BRINKLEY: Hello? Can you hear me?

7   MS. BROWN: Yes, we can. Thank you for

8 your perseverance.

9   MR. BRINKLEY: No problem. Thank you

10 all. Well, thank you to Chancellor Ferebee and to

11 all our other district in DCPS leadership here. My

12 name is Barry Brinkley. I am the Executive Director

13 for Reading Partners DC. I appreciate the

14 opportunity to speak with you all tonight regarding

15 the need for Reading Partners DC and DCPS schools.

16   Reading Partners DC is an education

17 nonprofit that invest in students and communities by

18 recruiting, training, and supporting community

19 volunteers to provide individualized literacy

20 tutoring to elementary students in a number of d DC

21 schools, mostly DCPS schools. With the goal of

22 creating lifelong readers, we provide individualized

1 instruction, both in person and virtually.

2   This allows us to expand our reach as

3 volunteers can choose which mode of tutoring works

4 best for their schedules. And our students benefit

5 from either working when they volunteer in person or

6 experiencing the tutoring session virtually while

7 sitting in the school's reading center with support

8 from our team.

9   We're excited to share that we're

10 approaching our 15th year serving students in schools

11 in the district. This school year, we're serving in

12 15 schools or community sites. 11 of these are DC

13 PDS sites. Over the course of these past 15 years,

14 we've heard stories from young people who are now in

15 high school and beyond. They speak about the impact

16 of our program on their literacy journeys and their

17 lives.

18   While these stories are extremely

19 encouraging, we've been disheartened by the numbers

20 to schools who are no longer able to afford to have

21 reading partners to support the work to increase

22 student literacy in their buildings. We are thankful

1 for the investment the district has made in high

2 impact tutoring, and we hope that this means that we

3 can serve more DCPS schools in the future.

4   Literacy is the foundation of all

5 successful learning. Without reading, students do

6 not have the skills they need to be successful in

7 school or in life. Nationwide, fewer than one in

8 five students from low-income households are reading

9 proficiency by the fourth grade, which equates to

10 about 8.7 million children. Students who are not

11 reading proficiency by fourth grade are four times

12 less likely to graduate from high school on time,

13 which is why we concentrate on grades K through four

14 with our program.

15   Last school year, 453 students

16 participating in 12 or more tutoring sessions in our

17 14 Reading Partners Reading centers. Unfortunately,

18 this is down for more than 700 students we saw the

19 year prior to that in 22 reading centers. Again,

20 because of the schools having to let go of our

21 services because not being able to afford to have

22 reading partners in their building.

1   Even still, 89 percent of our reading

2   partner students in grades K through fourth grade,

3   met or exceeded their primary student literacy growth

4   goals, which is a measure that we use to determine

5   the student's readiness to read. 94 percent of our

6   kinder through second grade students mastered their

7   foundational literacy skills across all of our

8   reading sites. In addition, over 10,000 books were

9   distributed to students in these 14 partner schools,

10   eight of which were DCPS schools in the 2023-2024

11   school year.

12   As DCPS determines next year's budget, we

13   hope that reading partners in our collaboration with

14   schools will be considered. If we are truly to

15   change the lives and trajectory of our students, we

16   have to invest in necessary resources to do so. We

17   know that reading is a civil right, and it is not

18   just for certain students from certain families in

19   certain neighborhoods. It's a right for everyone.

20   At Reading Partners we want to ensure that students

21   are exercising this right at an early age to ensure

22   they're set up for success in school and in life.

1   Thank you.

2   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Next,

3   we will go to Johnna Turner. Oh, I see you. I

4   cannot hear you, but it doesn't look like you're

5   muted. Can't hear you. No, still can't. Still not

6   able to hear. No. Let us work with you on the back

7   end and then we will let Ms. Preston, familiar face,

8   if you are able to come off and then Ms. Johnna if

9   you're able to log off and log back on using your

10   phone. People seem to be having success with that,

11   so if you could try to work on that. And then

12   Lynette Preston, if you can come off.

13   MS. PRESTON: I am.

14   MS. BROWN: Okay. Great.

15   MS. PRESTON: Good evening. I'm going to

16   start by saying thank you for this opportunity.

17   However, I did not expect to testify. So I do not

18   have anything prepared. I will say that I've been on

19   from the beginning and I've been listening to the

20   testimony of several parents, staff members,

21   community members and organizations.

22   I hear some consistencies in a lack of

1 preparation for the increase of the population in

2 Washington DC and the reality that those people will

3 begin to create families and increase enrollment in

4 several areas. I hear Janney, I here Bancroft, well,

5 that's up here in Upper Northwest that has had a

6 massive boom in residence. So I would consider DCPS

7 taking a more realistic look at who's actually living

8 in what communities and the increase in children

9 across the board from pre-K three up since those are

10 grades ages that are supported by DCPS.

11   I also wanted to mention a disparity in

12 representation in those that are testifying. I think

13 some consideration needs to be looked at into how you

14 secure people to testify. I heard the word equity

15 used often in testimonies. However, there is no

16 equity in the representation of schools and wards in

17 the city. So I take issue with that definitely as

18 I'm someone that, while I live in Ward Four, I work

19 in Ward Seven and I only heard one testimony that

20 speaks specifically to the students in Ward Seven.

21   I also had a chance to review this

22 Schools First in Budgeting. But this is an emergency

1 amendment, so I'm curious to know why it's still in

2 place. There's conversation about pandemic money.

3 Why is this still the rule that is dictating school

4 budgets? That makes no sense. This reflects an

5 expectation of additional funds to come from the

6 federal government due to pandemic issues and

7 challenges that need to be fixed due to the

8 pandemic.

9   Is that money still coming? Why is it

10 being considered? I heard some definite points that

11 I think are relevant, special education EKL

12 transfers. As a former registrar that worked east of

13 the river, I can tell you that populations almost

14 double around November and December with no

15 consideration to budget. I had teachers, the

16 freshman English teachers had just 30 kids in her

17 class.

18   I think there is a lack of consideration

19 to the real expectation of our kids while they are in

20 these schools, and a lack of support for new families

21 to the city that are unaware housing historically

22 have worked, and other families that are considered

1   the voiceless that come from communities where there

2   are more students of need and support. So lots of

3   things to unpack and fix in this budget conversation.

4   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. Next,

5   we will go back to Jhonna. After Jonna we have one

6   more, which will be -- I'm sorry. Thank you for your

7   patience. Which will be John Ruffing. So let's go.

8   Jhonna, I see you popped up.

9   MS. TURNER: Yes. Can you hear me

10   MS. BROWN: Perfectly?

11   MS. TURNER: Okay. Thank you. And I

12   just want to thank the person. I think her name was

13   Lynette and everything she just said. My name is

14   Jonna Turner. I'm here on behalf of community

15   advocacy and resources for education Washington DC,

16   Care DC. We are a community-based, chapter driven

17   movement dedicated to serving marginalized school

18   communities by utilizing the power of our community

19   to enforce change.

20   Care DC is the neighborhoods filled with

21   great community potential and are eager to mobilize

22   people, impact policy, and increase funding. The

1   purpose of being neighborhood focused with its own

2   staff and volunteers is to ensure care values are at

3   the forefront. Proximity, community and resource

4   mobilization. Our current chapters are 501C3

5   entities based in Greater Anacostia and Brooklyn

6   neighborhoods.

7   We're here today because every family

8   wants their child's education to be liberating,

9   empowering and equitable. Educators often exhaust

10 all their creativity and passion to provide these

11 three components but are working against a school

12 budget that is maintaining the status quo, systemic

13 inequity. Through hundreds of hours of

14 conversations, meetings, workshops, and more with our

15 stakeholders the desires of our youth for our youth

16 in each neighborhood fall into three buckets.

17   Safe school, student joy, and a strong

18 feeder pattern. Safe Schools; Care Anacostia

19 operates in five schools in greater Anacostia

20 neighborhood that feed into each other. Three out of

21 the five schools we support have a connected school's

22 manager, and the difference is noticeable. The

1   impact of the managers elevates the whole child,

2   whole school and whole community approach.

3   Because of this additional support,

4   sustainable and meaningful partnerships are created.

5   Family voices are elevated and community resources

6   are intentionally distributed. Underrepresented

7   under-resourced and underfunded school communities

8   need to have a support person that will accelerate

9   the outcomes of all students.

10   Because of systemic racism, black

11   communities are often destabilized. Connected

12   school's managers work as a stabilizing force to

13   increase upward progress to meet student and family

14   needs. If funding is used for it, then funding must

15   be directed towards connected school's managers in

16   each title one school in Washington DC to create

17   support, stability, and progress for disinvested

18   schools and communities.

19   Student joy: the literacy rate in our

20   Care Anacostia schools collectively is less than 10

21   percent. We do not believe this is a student,

22   family, or educator issue, but rather, a systems

1   issue where dollars are not directed to educate black

2   and brown students as if they are the future of the

3   city. But rather a data point to reach. Educators

4   are complaining about over testing their students.

5   Families have stated that children have increased

6   anxiety because of the onslaught of testing, and the

7   results are abysmal with no clear solution.

8   And of course, correcting over testing.

9   Our current state of education is flavorless. We

10 need dollars to be used to elevate field-based

11 learning and fully integrate experiential learning to

12 increase student engagement, family support, and

13 educator excitement. We must educate our children as

14 if the future is ahead of them. And I'm going to ask

15 for an additional 30 seconds.

16   Strengthening the feed pattern by

17 addressing the issues, the hopes and dreams of our

18 communities and schools, are big yet basic. The

19 basic needs of our schools are not being met, which

20 leads to deep public health concerns. The basics

21 range from unfulfilled work orders, requests to

22 address leaking ceilings, to needing permanent

1   substitute teachers available to build relationships

2   and maintain school culture and help move classrooms

3   forward in lieu of a teacher.

4   In addition, the quality of mental health

5   support is paramount. Before the pandemic, there was

6   a need that needed to be addressed. Now we're in a

7   crisis mode. The explosion of social media

8   isolation, negative influential forces, and the

9   inability to developmentally manage and navigate this

10 medium is leaving many students without the emotional

11 intelligence to navigate the real world.

12   Families are in a conundrum because

13 phones are used as a safety tool, and without trust

14 in school systems. Families do not know how to

15 mitigate this issue. Our children deserve more.

16 They require urgent, drastic, and revolutionary

17 change that starts from the community and makes its

18 way to the top. At Care DC we believe that every

19 dollar is crucial for progress, civil rights in the

20 future of Washington DC. I will leave with this

21 question. Are we using funding to educate students

22 who can successfully afford to live in this city? I

1   hope so. Thank you.

2   MS. BROWN: Thank you very much. And our

3   last public testifier will be Sean Ruffing. Sean,

4   are you with us? You've popped up here. We're going

5   to try to give a brief moment to see if we can work

6   out the tech issues here. Sean, are you able to

7   come back using your phone? That seems to be what's

8   been most successful for folks. So give a brief

9   moment for that because we are otherwise going to be

10   ready to wrap. Okay. I think we will be concluding

11   at this moment. I'd like to pass it back over to

12   Chancellor Ferebee to offer closing remarks.

13   MR. FEREBEE: Thank you, Lauren. And

14   thank you to everyone for your valuable feedback. We

15   had opportunity tonight to hear from students,

16   parents, staff members, partners, community members,

17   we will certainly consider all of your feedback as we

18   begin the journey of developing the budget for the

19   25-26 school year. Again, reminder, as I shared

20   earlier, this is the beginning of the process in

21   November, December, as we begin to look at

22   enrollment projections and our engagement with the

1   LSAT community begin, and which will go into the new

2   year.

3   And then we will deliver budgets to

4   school, ultimately will be submitted to part of the

5   Mayor's budget, and then there's council approval.

6   We are working to ensure that we get the budgets to

7   school as soon as possible. I know we heard from

8   several people tonight about timeline and giving

9   schools maximum opportunity to digest and make good

10   decisions about how to best serve their school

11   communities.

12   We also heard about facility interests in

13   buildings and spacing capacity. We will also in

14   concert with our operating budget, we'll be building

15   our capital budget to be responsive to our capital

16   needs, including our modernizations, our swing and

17   our small capital projects. We'll continue to keep

18   you informed, and again, we're really grateful for

19   your participation tonight and your valuable

20   feedback. Thank you and have a good evening.

21   (Whereupon the meeting adjourned at 8:38

22   p.m.)

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