



D.C. POLICY

CENTER

PUBLIC HEARING

BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING:

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE,

ALL EDUCATION AGENCIES

Chairperson Phil Mendelson

June 3rd, 2021, at 9am

Virtual platform

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin

Director, Education Policy Initiative

D.C. Policy Center

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee of the Whole. My name is Chelsea Coffin and I am the Director of the Education Policy Initiative at the D.C. Policy Center, where our education research focuses on how schools connect to broader dynamics in the District of Columbia.

Last week, I testified at the Special Committee on COVID-19 Pandemic Recovery’s Joint Public Oversight Hearing on why we should keep an eye on high school students in

particular this coming year. Even before the pandemic, the transition from high school to college or career could be difficult, and some available information shows that high school students have faced more extreme challenges compared to younger students this past year – and they have fewer years to make up the difference before graduation. I will begin my testimony today by commending the commitments to high school students in the FY22 budget, including an advanced technical center for high-demand fields, work-based learning opportunities, internships, an expanded Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP), additional funding for high school students who are over-age or English Learners, and supports for the transition after high school (tuition assistance, career coaches, and the College Rising program). These resources for high school students present a critical opportunity to better connect to college and careers in the coming years.

I will now shift my testimony to what the FY22 budget means for students in D.C. who are designated as at-risk. Despite great efforts, distance learning was not as effective as in-person learning for most students (as of fall 2020), and distance learning was likely even more challenging for students who were designated as at-risk.¹ This budget does include an increase

¹ EmpowerK12. 2020. “COVID-19’s Impact on Student Achievement and Academic Growth in DC.” Available at: <https://www.empowerk12.org/research-source/covid-impact-achievement-dc>

in the at-risk weight from 0.226 to 0.24 (an 0.014 increase), resulting in an additional \$261 per student designated as at-risk. There is also a new supplemental weight of 0.06 for high school students who are over-age (providing \$703 in additional funding for 10 percent of the students who are at-risk).

However, the overall weight for students designated as at-risk at 0.24 remains well below the 0.37 weight recommended in the Adequacy Study. This means that students designated as at-risk are receiving less in per pupil funding from local resources than they need when they could benefit from more resources to recover from the academic and socio-emotional impact of COVID-19. At the same time, D.C. is receiving \$600 million in federal funding across three distributions of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding to spend by September 2024, with allocations from the federal government based on Title I formulas to better target students living in low-income households.

D.C. schools will receive \$540 million of this federal ESSER funding. This is over four times the spending on at-risk students in the FY22 budget (\$122 million), providing the potential to double funding for at-risk students, or at least fill the gap in funding to meet the 0.37 weight. The FY22 budget proposes many uses of federal funding toward education purposes, including tutoring, facility grants, expanding school-based mental health, micro transit options, and general learning acceleration activities. At this time, it is not explicit how this spending will be matched to the needs of students designated as at-risk. For each citywide activity and each LEA that receives these funds, there should be an estimate of the percentage of students designated as at-risk who were impacted so that federal funds disproportionately follow students designated as at-risk who stand the most to benefit from them.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.