



**D.C. POLICY**  
**CENTER**

FY2025 BUDGET OVERSIGHT HEARING  
EDUCATION AGENCIES  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE

April 4<sup>th</sup>, 2024

Room 412 (Track B)

John A. Wilson Building

Testimony of Chelsea Coffin  
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**Good afternoon, 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, an independent think tank focused on advancing policies for a growing, vibrant, and compelling District of Columbia. My testimony will focus on three needs in the District's public education system relevant to the current budget discussions that emerged from our recent State of D.C. Schools report: boosting attendance; improving learning outcomes, especially in math; and strengthening the high school experience. This budget goes a long way to address the fiscal cliff schools will face at the end of Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funding, but with slow recovery from the pandemic, D.C. also needs to focus on identifying successful approaches.

**First, last school year,<sup>i</sup> 44 percent of students—an estimated 34,000 students—were chronically absent (defined as missing 10 percent or more of the school year), with the majority<sup>ii</sup> of absences being unexcused.<sup>iii</sup>** This is much higher than the pre-pandemic rate of 29 percent even when the definition of absenteeism now allows students to miss up to 40 percent of the school day (compared to 20 percent pre-pandemic), and still be counted as present.<sup>iv</sup> In addition to targeted efforts to address truancy, broad nudge interventions,<sup>v</sup> and making school more engaging, we need to know what works to reduce absenteeism through research and sharing best practices for schools.

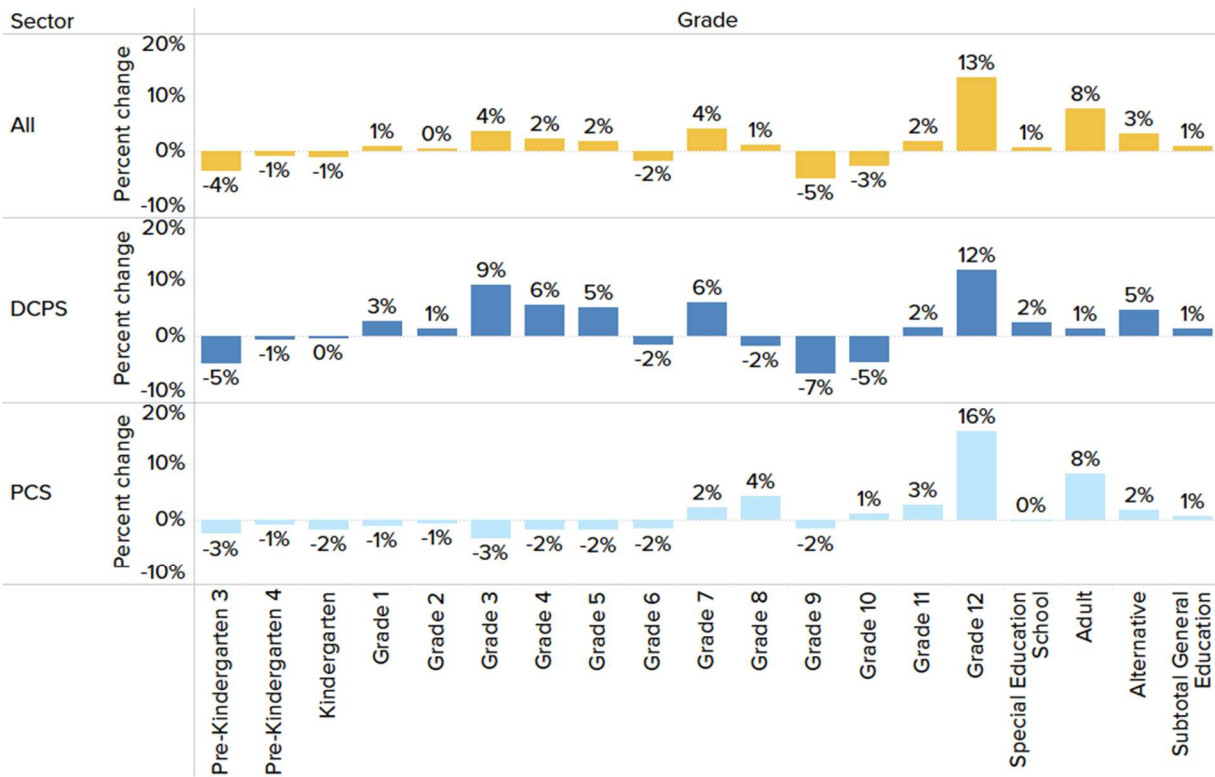
**Second, learning outcomes on the statewide assessment improved by 3 percentage points (and only for elementary and middle school students) but we still lag behind pre-pandemic levels by 4 percentage points in English Language Arts (ELA) and 7 percentage points in math.<sup>vi</sup>** The proposed budget is increasing foundation level funding to make up for the loss of one-time resources, dedicating \$2M for literacy instruction materials, and making a \$4.8M investment in high-impact tutoring.<sup>vii</sup> We need to know how efforts will focus on math and we need to figure out what is working to accelerate learning.

**Third, high school students in D.C., who were mostly in middle school when the pandemic began, are especially in need of support.** There is now a greater disconnect between high

school graduation and promotion, and other indicators of secondary success like attendance, SAT scores, academic achievement, and postsecondary success. A larger share of high school students are chronically absent, at 60 percent in school year 2022-23.<sup>viii</sup> The share of high schoolers meeting the SAT college and career benchmark is steady at 20 percent, and has decreased for Black and economically disadvantaged students.<sup>ix</sup> Postsecondary enrollment has declined since the pandemic by 3 percentage points, and 18 out of every 100 9<sup>th</sup> graders complete postsecondary, with large disparities between subgroups.<sup>x</sup> Yet more high school students are being promoted: 9<sup>th</sup> grade repetition rates have decreased by 3 percentage points and graduation rates have increased by 8 percentage points since pre-pandemic.<sup>xi</sup>

**In response, the FY25 budget includes efforts to better connect the high school experience to college and career outcomes.** This includes investments in work-based learning, with career and technical education, advanced internship opportunities, and career ready internships at an expanded version of the existing Advanced Technical Center in Ward 5 as well as a new Advanced Technical Center in Ward 8. It also means continued dual enrollment opportunities so that high school students can earn college credit and a scholarship program at UDC for a behavioral health pathway. Importantly, the Office of Education through Employment Pathways will truly shine a light on what is working to improve longitudinal outcomes after high school across these efforts.<sup>xii</sup>

## Percent change in enrollment projections for D.C.'s public schools, FY24 to FY25



**Source:** Government of the District of Columbia FY24 and FY25 Proposed Budget and Financial Plans.



**Although the per pupil funding level is proposed to increase significantly by 12.4 percent, this has not resulted in a commensurate increase in the amount of education spending.** And the budget picture will get more difficult for the public schools with slower projected growth in enrollment. This means there is continued pressure to evaluate what is working for students.

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

<sup>i</sup> New data for this school year through November shows a 6 percentage point decrease in chronic absenteeism. For more information, please see OSSE's 2023-24 Mid-year Attendance Brief: [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page\\_content/attachments/Mid\\_Year%20Attendance\\_1\\_Pager%203\\_29\\_2024.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/page_content/attachments/Mid_Year%20Attendance_1_Pager%203_29_2024.pdf)

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- <sup>ii</sup> The average student was absent for 22 days (up from 16 pre-pandemic), with 14 of these absences being unexcused.
- <sup>iii</sup> Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE). 2023. *District of Columbia Attendance Report, 2022-23 School Year*. OSSE. Retrieved from [https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2022-23%20Attendance%20Report\\_FINAL\\_0.pdf](https://osse.dc.gov/sites/default/files/dc/sites/osse/publication/attachments/2022-23%20Attendance%20Report_FINAL_0.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> Coffin, C. and Mason, H. 2024. *State of D.C. Schools, 2022-23: Challenges to pandemic recovery in a new normal*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-of-dc-schools-2022-23/>
- <sup>v</sup> Investments include \$375,000 in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)’s budget for “nudges” to improve attendance, DC School Connect Program provides school transportation for 350 students at \$7.2M, and the PASS and ACE truancy interventions programs at an additional \$7M that serve an estimated 680 youth. The Show Up, Stand Out or SUSO program is eliminated at \$2M, 1,895 referrals in SY21-22.
- <sup>vi</sup> Coffin, C. 2023. “Chart of the week: New PARCC data show overall gain for DC students last year—but high school progress remained flat.” D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/parcc-data-gains/>
- <sup>vii</sup> National Student Support Accelerator. 2024. “Early Findings Show Evidence that High-Impact Tutoring Increases Student Attendance in D.C. Schools.” National Student Support Accelerator. Retrieved from <https://studentsupportaccelerator.org/news/early-findings-show-evidence-high-impact-tutoring-increases-student-attendance-dc-schools>
- <sup>viii</sup> High school rates compare to 37 percent and 38 percent of elementary and middle school students, respectively, and higher than 51 percent of high schoolers before the pandemic. For more information, please see Mason, H. 2023. “Chronic absenteeism is still higher than pre-pandemic, especially in high school grades.” D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/chronic-absenteeism-dc-public-schools/>
- <sup>ix</sup> Dodds, N. 2024. “Rising graduation rates and falling SAT scores for DC students.” D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/dc-graduation-rates-and-sat-scores/>
- <sup>x</sup> Coffin, C. and Mason, H. 2024. *State of D.C. Schools, 2022-23: Challenges to pandemic recovery in a new normal*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-of-dc-schools-2022-23/>
- <sup>xi</sup> Coffin, C. and Mason, H. 2024. *State of D.C. Schools, 2022-23: Challenges to pandemic recovery in a new normal*. D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/state-of-dc-schools-2022-23/>
- <sup>xii</sup> Coffin, C. and Rubin, J. 2021. *Measuring early career outcomes in D.C.* D.C. Policy Center. Retrieved from <https://www.dcpolicycenter.org/publications/measuring-outcomes/>