

March 12, 2015

Dear District of Columbia Public Schools Community:

We are excited to share our budget and plan for the upcoming school year with you and are grateful to everyone who took the time to provide suggestions and feedback. Many ideas, including expanded elective offerings in every high school and our 500 for 500 literacy mentorship program, came directly from your input.

Budget development kicked off in November 2014 with public meetings, where we shared our three priorities for the coming year: ensuring equity of curriculum and instruction in every school; investing in high schools; and establishing the Empowering Males of Color initiative. We heard wide consensus that we had selected the right priorities and great ideas about how to implement them. In the end, we established plans that were improved by community input and ensured equity across schools.

We are thankful that Mayor Bowser made education a budget priority and maintained per student funding at the same level as last year. With 1,553 projected new students and four new schools opening next year, this means that DCPS will see a 3.4 % budget increase in a tight fiscal year when other agencies have absorbed budget cuts. DCPS' budget ensures that every penny of this increase goes directly to schools. This funding, along with some strategic cuts to our central office, ensures that we are able to continue delivering on the mayor's top priority to provide a world-class education that prepares students in all eight wards for success, including transforming middle schools by 2020.

First, we will ensure equity of instruction for every student. While there is incredible work happening in curriculum and instruction across the district, we recognize that implementation is still uneven. Starting next year, we will provide every teacher with cornerstone lessons – high quality, teacher-developed experiences to use in the classroom. These model lessons will set the standard for our teachers and will make sure every student, in every class enjoys great instruction more consistently.

Second, we will invest heavily in our comprehensive high schools. In addition to the core subject areas, we will ensure that every high school can offer a minimum of 20 electives including choir, debate, African-American literature and SAT preparation. All our neighborhood high schools will offer a minimum of six Advanced Placement courses. We will increase investment in career and technical education so that students graduate ready to compete for high-wage, high-growth jobs. High school improvement will be a multi-year project, but we are excited to begin the process of ensuring that all our high school students have great opportunities and that current middle school and elementary school students see a great future at their neighborhood high school.

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Third, we have launched the Empowering Males of Color initiative. By engaging the entire community and employing innovative strategies, this initiative aims to improve academic achievement and life outcomes for Black and Latino males. Most of this initiative will be funded through private grants and investments rather than public dollars, but it is central to our strategy to build the best urban school district in the nation, and meets a very critical need in our city.

Finally, we are continuing our commitment to transforming middle schools. We have seen some of our greatest growth in student achievement and remarkable growth in student enrollment in the middle grades. To build on this success, we will continue to ensure all middle school students receive instruction in a foreign language, art, music, and physical education during the school day and that all middle grade students have the opportunity to take algebra. We are also offering expanded opportunities for field trips, extracurricular activities, and extended time in school.

While the initiatives outlined above represent our newest and most visible work, DCPS remains committed to excellence in every part of our school system. The five Capital Commitment goals established in 2012 continue to drive us forward as we seek to hit the ambitious targets set around student achievement rates, improvements to our lowest performing schools, increased graduation rates, student satisfaction, and overall enrollment. Additionally, we have directed \$45 million in at-risk funding directly to schools to provide supports to meet the needs of our most vulnerable students.

We all know that DCPS has made a great deal of progress over the past few years. We also know that there is much more work that we need to do to ensure that every student in every school has equal access to a world-class education. Our plans for the upcoming school year represent the next step in creating, together, the school district we all want.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kaya Henderson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Kaya Henderson,  
Chancellor