

The following is a response from Mary Filardo, Director of the 21st Century School Fund to the June 6, 2010 article on the front page of the Washington Post, entitled “Spreading D.C.’s money around, Recent data on projects indicate Fenty doesn’t favor particular wards”

The quality of the physical school environment makes a difference to students and teachers—their health, focus, and curriculum—and thankfully the District government is investing in much needed public school building projects throughout the city. However, the taxpayers of the District will be paying hundreds of millions of dollars annually to repay the billions in bonds that finance these projects, so it is important that this use of these public funds is covered by the Washington Post. But “Spreading D.C.’s money around, Recent data on projects indicate Fenty doesn’t favor particular wards” is not telling an accurate story.

In her Sunday, June 6, 2010 article Nikita Stewart says “...some critics of Fenty (D) have long branded the mayor as favoring white neighborhoods at the expense of black communities. But a Washington Post analysis of city data on school construction, parks and recreation projects, and funding for new libraries and schools over the past three years shows that the reality is more complex.”

It was so complex the reporter got it wrong for schools, the lion’s share of the capital spending.

The DCPS school construction spending of the City since 2007 has favored Wards 2 and 3 far more than the rest of the city. The average spending on DCPS public schools in Ward 2 was \$152 a square foot and in Ward 3 it was \$118 a square foot. Not so in the other wards. The next highest spending was for Ward 5 DCPS schools at \$74 a square foot, followed by Ward 6 at \$62 a square foot, Ward 8 at \$54 a square foot, Ward 1 at \$52 a square foot, Ward 7 at \$40 a square foot and Ward 4 at \$37 a square foot.

Funding per building square feet gives the best characterization of the quality of the physical teaching and learning conditions. However, funding per student also gives a measure of equity and fairness. This is where it is more complex.

When looking at school construction funding per student, DCPS schools in Ward 3, rather than being the second highest falls to the fourth highest in spending per student. Ward 2 DCPS schools still top the list due to major modernization projects at School Without Walls HS, Hardy MS, Hyde/Addison and Thomson elementary schools. Ward 4 DCPS schools were again dead last. Another factor contributing to the inequity: Ward 7 and 8 had 34% of all of the DCPS students—14,388 students in the 08-09 school year, while Wards 2 and 3 enrolled only 19%—8,199 students.

	Construction Spending on DCPS School Buildings 2007-2009		
	Total	Per Student	Per Square Ft
Ward 1	\$ 79,239,210	\$ 15,151	\$ 52
Ward 2	\$ 121,541,671	\$ 35,938	\$ 152
Ward 3	\$ 88,460,735	\$ 18,364	\$ 118
Ward 4	\$ 61,104,282	\$ 9,931	\$ 37
Ward 5	\$ 156,635,514	\$ 29,267	\$ 74
Ward 6	\$ 92,695,119	\$ 18,787	\$ 62
Ward 7	\$ 77,846,772	\$ 12,921	\$ 40
Ward 8	\$ 133,554,219	\$ 15,970	\$ 54

Data Source: OPEFM reports to the DC City Council (back up tables at <http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/datashop.asp>)

There is good data and valid experience to support concerns about equity and how the District is making decisions about school construction projects and funding. Maybe it is not so complicated after all. Communities without social capital lose out on public investment when there is poor planning and no intentional public policy for equity.

Read Nikita Stewart's Washington Post article, ["Spreading D.C.'s money around, Recent data on projects indicate Fenty doesn't favor particular wards"](#)

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