

**TESTIMONY TO THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA  
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE**

**Subject:       The Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Support Act of 2007**  
**Presented by: Margot Berkey, Parents United for the DC Public Schools**  
**Date:           April 24, 2007**

Good morning. My name is Margot Berkey and I am director of Parents United for the DC Public Schools. I serve on the LSRT at two schools and am the parent of an 8<sup>th</sup> grader at Alice Deal Junior High. I am testifying in regard to the portions of the Fiscal Year 2007 Budget Support Act that pertain to funding for the District of Columbia Public Schools. There are several areas of concern in the funding proposed by Mayor Fenty for the schools that can be corrected through the Budget Support Act.

First, the Mayor did not accept the recommendation of the State Education Office (SEO) as to the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula. These would have updated the Formula to current cost levels and provided extra funding for early childhood education that would suffice to make our programs meet national accreditation and DC's own standards. The difference of nearly \$300 per student (between the amount in the Budget Support Act and that established by the SEO) is very significant. At the two schools where I serve on the LSRT, \$300 more per student means that two teaching positions could be retained or added.

The Mayor's budget does not adequately fund increases to "fixed costs" such as heat, electricity, water and sewer for school buildings. This was part of the SEO's recommendation but it's not covered.

The Mayor is assuming that 3000 more students will leave DCPS in the year he takes over, and he is pulling funds for those students now rather than after demonstrated evidence collected in the enrollment audit next fall. The results of the audit are not available until the second semester. If the students don't leave, it will be too late to hire teachers and other personnel. This will leave students in classrooms with long-term substitutes who do not usually have full teaching credentials or subject-area expertise. This is a misguided practice that will erode the schools' ability to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress. An action such as this should only be taken when the school system has achieved greater stability in enrollment, and has undergone a year or more of corrective action in the DCPS human resources function.

The Mayor did not set aside funds to cover wage increases that may be negotiated with the teachers union and other unions. If salary increases are approved, there won't be funding to cover them. We have been down this path for several years under Mayor Williams. His campaign promises to the teachers union resulted in wage increases that were unbudgeted. The net effect was cutting teachers midyear from schools, over and above the losses due to "equalization" or "reconciliation." We must prevent another round of cuts. The budget must be adjusted now.

The Board of Education proposed that funding be allocated to implement major initiatives of the Master Education Plan, which the Mayor says he supports. These funds would cover more counselors for the children, Student Support Teams, aspects of the Middle Grades reform, athletic equipment, and more. These investments are essential to meeting the needs of DC children but they are not funded. It is unclear what is intended in the Budget Support Act by the proposed “fund for reorganization of state functions or public education initiatives.” It is obvious that expansion of the SEO will come with substantial costs, but the public does not know what else might be intended by “public education initiatives.” We urge the Council to ensure that full funding is allocated as planned to achieve the Master Education Plan, rather than leaving unspecified funds for unspecified purposes. We urge the Council to fund the DC Public Schools at the level of \$849,000,000.

Finally, since 1953 the Metropolitan Police Department has been responsible for school crossing guards. The change proposed now to place this function under the Department of Transportation may have some rationale but since we are not aware of public discussion of the matter, we are concerned that it may not be in the best interest of our children. MPD has always been able to “back stop” the system of civilian guards with police when absences occur and to meet the full scope of needs around the city. Will the crossing guards now be back stopped by meter maids? If not, we fear a lack of coordination between DDOT and MPD on the timely basis that is needed to ensure the safety of children. We do not understand why it will be better to engage yet another city agency in coordination with schools. We do not understand whether this offers financial benefit to the city. This is an example of the kind of education related policy making that we urge the Council to make only upon full exploration of the issues and communication with residents, especially parents.

Thank you for your attention.