

February 10, 2021

The Honorable Mayor Muriel Bowser  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, DC 20004

Deputy Mayor Paul Kihn  
Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education  
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 307  
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser and Deputy Mayor Kihn:

A global pandemic, a national racial reckoning, a record turnout presidential election, and—most importantly for the work of public schools—a shift to remote learning for many of our learners have made the past year unparalleled for the District of Columbia. At the same time, courage, collaboration, and transformative decision-making at the executive level and throughout the city have enabled our city to weather the storm.

With the interruption of our schools brought upon us by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever that we continue to invest in our schools. The dozens of leaders operating public charter schools serving more than 40,000 of the District's students are thankful that in recent years you have remained committed to investing in and improving our education system. And public charter school leaders are thankful to serve the students of our city knowing that the District of Columbia enjoys one of the highest per-pupil allocations for education funding in the country.

With an ever-changing environment, public charter schools relentlessly provide a high-quality education for their students. This crucial work occurs while COVID-19 continues to disproportionately affect low-income communities, with more than half of the DC lives lost in Wards 5, 7, and 8<sup>1</sup>—communities with the lowest median household incomes in the city. Public schools serving a high number of students living in poverty and those at risk of academic failure need additional financial resources to address education opportunity gaps. In December, an EmpowerK12 study revealed that **students designated as at-risk lost an additional month of math instruction compared to their peers, and they fell about one-third of a year behind in reading**<sup>2</sup>. While our students have made significant improvements over the years, our investments have not yet produced the education outcomes necessary for every part of our city to thrive. And with COVID-19 disproportionately affecting low-income communities, even more is needed to close opportunity gaps.

For this reason, we call upon the Mayor and the DC Council to make the following education funding commitments in the FY 22 budget in addition to prioritizing a safe reopening and full recovery:

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<sup>1</sup> DC Government, "Coronavirus Data for Jan. 26, 2021," <https://coronavirus.dc.gov/release/coronavirus-data-january-26-2021>.

<sup>2</sup> Empower K12 (December 2020), [Covid-19's Impact on Student achievement and Academic Growth in DC](#).

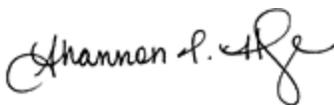
- **Increase the UPSFF foundation level by 4%** to partially close the gap between current funding levels and the recommended levels from the 2013 DC Education Adequacy Study.<sup>3</sup>
- **Increase the facilities allotment by 3.1%** to ensure that charter schools continue to receive funds needed to secure and maintain school buildings.
- **Increase the at-risk funding weight to .37**, the level recommended in the 2013 adequacy study, to direct needed funds to our students most in need of targeted interventions and support.
- **Provide \$6.4M to expand the Department of Behavioral Health’s school-based mental health program**, which will enable 80 additional schools to address student and family mental health needs that instability and loss during the last year have likely exacerbated.
- **Increase the English learner weight to .61**, the level recommended in the 2013 adequacy study, to support undocumented students who are often excluded from receiving other financial supports due to lack of documentation.

In addition to these continued and increased investments, we also recommend the following legislative adjustment so that our schools can better serve our most marginalized students:

- Create a statutory requirement for **review of the definition of “at-risk”** under the DC Code to ensure the definition appropriately captures the students in need of additional funding support.
- Continue the **automatic escalation of facilities funding** for public charter schools with a 3.1% annual increase for each of the next five years to ensure continuity of funding for charter school facilities.

As your administration and the Council begin to consider the critical questions and needs for DC residents in the upcoming fiscal year, we urge you to prioritize the over 90,000 students in the District. The DC Charter School Alliance is ready to work alongside you and your team to reopen our school buildings, resume providing a high-quality education to students inside classrooms, and recover strongly.

Sincerely,



Shannon T. Hodge  
Founding Executive Director

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<sup>3</sup> The Finance Project (December 2013), [Cost of Student Achievement: Report of the DC Education Adequacy Study](#).