



## Testimony of Allyson Criner Brown of Teaching for Change, for the DC Council Committee on Education

### Testimony on Fiscal Year 2019 Budget for DC Public Schools

Written Testimony for public witness hearing held March 28, 2018

Presented by Allyson Criner Brown, MPA

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Greetings Chairman Grosso and other members of the Council:

My name is Allyson Criner Brown and I am the Associate Director of Teaching for Change, a DC-based nonprofit whose mission is building social justice, starting in the classroom. I am also a resident of Ward 8 and a DCPS parent at Anne Beers Elementary School.

Teaching for Change is a D.C. based nonprofit that has been building social justice starting in the classroom for more than 25 years and has a nationally recognized approach to family engagement called the Tellin' Stories Project. We partner directly with five Title I DC Public Schools that serve more than 2,000 students in Wards 1, 2, and 4. We build parent power for stronger schools with families who are predominantly African American, Latinx, immigrant, and low-income. In the previous school year, more than 600 individual parents at these schools attended 140 school-based meetings, activities, and workshops that Teaching for Change supported, with an aggregate attendance of more than 2,042 participants. We average 15 parents per activity and 20 parents at the monthly parent-principal meetings we help facilitate.

Teaching for Change is a signee of the six principles advocated by the Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities and will echo some of the sentiments and concerns expressed by other

coalition members, ward education councils, and parent and community groups, while adding perspectives from our work in DC Public Schools.

With my time today, I will make four main charges to this committee and to the Council as a whole to pursue a stronger and more equitable strategy for funding education in the District, particularly DCPS.

*First*, the District is still underinvesting in its public schools and needs to: (1) increase the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), and (2) revisit the Deputy Mayor for Education’s 2013 Adequacy Study, which is designed to assess how much funding is needed to adequately provide a quality education for every DC student. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute notes:

Six years ago, the Deputy Mayor for Education commissioned a study to address the fundamental question of what it actually costs to provide a quality education for every student in the District. When the Adequacy Study was published in 2013, it included a recommendation that “DC government should undertake a rigorous assessment of the adequacy of education funding through the UPSFF [Uniform Per Student Funding Formula] **every five years.**”

The District is also required by law to reconvene a Technical Working Group to advise on revisions to the formula every two years, that includes members of the public.

...Five years have passed, and yet, we still have not reached the level of resources recommended in the 2013 Adequacy Study, once adjusted for inflation—let alone the level needed to keep up with all of our system’s changing needs. Budget increases for DC public schools and public charter schools in recent years have been arbitrary, and not connected to what’s really needed to provide quality education. (Feb. 13, 2018)

Last year, the Mayor proposed increasing the UPSFF by a pathetic 1.5% increase, which the Council increased to 3% after public outcry. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute notes that the amount of funding per student is still below pre-recession levels (when adjusted for inflation), and that an adequate increase in per student funding would be closer to 15 percent.

We know the UPSFF is inadequate because PTAs and PTOs in DCPS schools with wealthier families are raising tens and hundreds of thousands of dollars to contribute to the education of their public school students as publications from the Washington Post to the Atlantic have reported on in recent months and even weeks.

Furthermore, as you will hear in school testimonies today and as I testified last year, the dollar amounts in some DC school budgets are increasing, yet because of rising costs these schools are effectively facing budget cuts. I’ve heard this from many schools around town, including Anne Beers, where my daughter attends and Bruce Monroe Elementary at Park View, a Teaching for Change partner school. The result is that schools have to make tough decisions about programming, staffing cuts, larger class sizes, elective cut backs, and a lack of funds for academic enrichment supplies and opportunities. On the surface, the primary culprit seemed to

be the rising costs of the teacher raises – and to be clear, our teachers should have that raise. However, even though the Mayor increased the base raise amount of the WTU contract from \$10,447 to \$10,658, the DCFPI notes that adjusted for inflation, the base should be closer to \$11,600 according to the adequacy study. **Again, we are still underfunding our public schools as the city’s wealth – and inequality – continue to boom.**

*Second*, at-risk funds must be properly utilized to promote equity and achievement in the District, but there are still questions and accountability concerns as to how these funds are being spent at the school level. The Council must take seriously the gaps in equity, achievement, and funding by race and class in the District. The DC Fiscal Policy Institute reports that in FY2018, as in previous years, nearly half of at-risk funds were used incorrectly on core functions, namely services and staffing – this goes against the purpose of the at-risk funds, which are supposed to supplement and not supplant. Increasing the UPSFF and revising the Adequacy Study can strengthen school budgets directly and better support accountability in school spending.

*Third*, there is no increase in the Mayor’s budget for spending on restorative justice or community schools – critical supports that can address school pushout and other underlying issues behind the recent scandals that have plagued the headlines. Out-of-School Time funding to increase enrichment opportunities for low-income students’ needs to be increased, as well as funding for the Birth to Three legislation to support school readiness for our youngest up-and-coming learners.

*Finally*, I am still learning more about the updates to the Capital Improvement Plan and you will hear testimony from the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools Fund on this matter, but it appears that yet again, the District is bypassing equity and prioritizing modernizations in Ward 3 and Ward 6. The District is granting and increasing funds to “highly desired” DCPS schools in this area to address overcrowding in spite of the sequence recommended in the PACE prioritization. I implore this committee and the Council to look more closely into this matter with a keen and critical eye.

At the end of the day, the proposed FY2019 budget is set to continue trends of under-resourcing D.C.’s public schools, overburdening teachers and administrators, and exacerbating the opportunity gap between high-income and low-income students. It is imperative that the D.C. Council: 1) increase the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula and charge the DME with revising the Adequacy Study 2) ensure at-risk funds are distributed and used appropriately, 3) increase funding for restorative justice, community schools, OST programs, and Birth to Three legislation, and 4) critically examine the DCPS modernization schedule and funding with regards to PACE prioritization.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.