

January 11, 2023

Dear Mayor Bowser:



As you finalize your FY24 budget proposal, we **urge you to prioritize investment in robust technology supports and infrastructure for DC Public Schools**, which are critical for minimizing disruptions to learning and teaching, maximizing the benefits of your prior investments in technology, and closing the digital divide. **A robust, reliable technology infrastructure will benefit every single student in the school system, by supporting student learning and providing the skills and knowledge needed for college and career.** Specifically, we ask you to commit to healthy funding and planning in the four areas outlined below:

1. **1:1 Student-Device Ratio and a Computer for Every Teacher.** We appreciate DCPS's commitment to maintain a 1:1 student-device ratio for grades 3-12 and a minimum 3:1 student-device ratio for PreK-2nd grade and are encouraged to see DCPS invest in more robust devices for high school students in Career and Technical Education programs. We urge DCPS to provide tech tools that meet student needs at every level, instead of adopting a one-size-fits-all approach. **As the initial tranche of devices provided under the Empowered Learners initiative (ELi) approach the end of their life cycle, we urge you to fund the timely replacement of devices to maintain student and teacher device ratios and support learning across DCPS.**
2. **School-Level Asset Management and Tech Support.** IT asset management at the school level continues to be a challenge for many schools. There continue to be delays at the start of every school year in providing adequate devices and classroom technology to schools due to lack of school capacity for effectively managing IT, including updating school technology inventories, which are used by DCPS Central Office to determine the number of new computers allocated to each school. Lack of effective school-level asset management also contributes to device loss and underutilization of warranties when devices are damaged. These issues have remained unresolved for years, even though the number of OCTO technicians and amount of funding associated with DCPS's agreement with OCTO has increased. The school system will not fully benefit from the multi-million-dollar investment that the city has made in devices until DCPS and OCTO are able to effectively provide support for school-level asset management and daily tech support. **The technology infrastructure will continue to grow in complexity as our education system becomes more dependent on technology for instruction and learning. Now is the time to invest in an asset management support structure to minimize loss and maximize the city's investment in school technology.**
3. **Digital Literacy Skills.** Knowledge and mastery of online learning platforms and digital tools vary widely amongst DCPS students, their families, and school staff. This lack of consistency contributes to increased inequities and barriers to learning. Digital fluency is critical to allowing students to ably demonstrate what they know. From the 3rd grade, students must be able to navigate online prompts and type multiple-sentence responses in a timed environment when taking high-stakes online assessments like PARCC. Beyond the K12 and testing environment, technology has become increasingly essential in higher education and in the workplace. If we are to prepare students for college and career, we must equip them with the skills to succeed. **The integration of digital literacy skills building into daily learning and curriculum should be adequately funded, prioritized, and supported across schools.**
4. **Technology Infrastructure.** We are encouraged by the recent investments to upgrade WiFi infrastructure and Smartboards across DCPS. However, schools are still experiencing internet connectivity challenges, in some cases due to content filter issues, network infrastructure issues, IT policies that are not aligned with school programmatic needs, and the increased volume of users. In addition, this fall the installation of

several hundred Smartboards was delayed for several months due to contracting challenges. To minimize disruptions to learning, we recommend DCPS proactively develop contingency plans to deal with potential supply chain delays. In addition, there is opportunity for DCPS and OCTO to work more closely with schools to understand and solve infrastructure challenges and ensure reliable connectivity to enable teaching and learning. We also see opportunity for DCPS and OCTO to coordinate efforts to ensure home connectivity for all learners.

2023 DCPS Technology Snapshot

PROGRESS ASSESSMENT ON 4 KEY AREAS



Devices & Classroom Technology	School-level Asset Management & Tech Support	Digital Literacy Skills	Technology Infrastructure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> DCPS is committed to maintaining a 3:1 student-device ratio in grades K-2 and 1:1 in grades 3-12. DCPS is investing in more robust computers for students in Career and Technical Education pathways to support program requirements. DCPS is in the midst of a multi-year effort to replace Smartboards across all schools. <p>Recommendation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve asset management support and reporting at the school level to ensure device and classroom tech inventories are up-to-date at all schools and students have the tools they need to learn. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local school capacity to effectively manage IT, including updating school technology inventories, is limited and varies widely across schools. Gaps persist in training, accountability/roles, support, and communication to schools. In particular, elementary schools have limited staff capacity and budget for asset management roles. <p>Recommendation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DCPS and OCTO must produce and implement a solution to provide timely, reliable support for schools, particularly schools that do not have dedicated technology staff. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital literacy instruction varies widely across and within schools. Limited uptake of existing training and resources due to limited planning and professional development (PD) time. Teachers report needing in-person, hands-on training to help them better integrate digital tools into teaching practice. <p>Recommendation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DCPS leadership, principals, and teachers must prioritize digital literacy skills building in daily instruction. This may require additional PD hours for skills building. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Over the last two years, DCPS has increased bandwidth speeds in schools. Schools still experience connectivity issues due to content filtering, inadequate network infrastructure and policies, and increased user volume. DCPS is piloting classroom management software to support instruction & provide parental controls. <p>Recommendation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> DCPS and OCTO should work closely with schools to solve infrastructure challenges and ensure reliable connectivity. In addition, a coordinated effort is needed to ensure home connectivity for all learners.

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Expanding Digital Equity in DC

We look forward to working with your Administration to support implementation of the DCPS Digital Equity Act of 2022, which requires a comprehensive, multi-year technology plan that addresses the areas outlined above. Additionally, we were excited to learn that DC will be receiving a multi-million-dollar grant funded by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law to focus on digital equity. This represents an important opportunity to close gaps in our community and public school system. We look forward to working with OCTO as planning begins to explore how best to use the funding to improve digital equity in DC.

Sincerely,

Digital Equity in DC Education

Co-signed by:

- Ward 2 Education Council
- Ward 3 Education Network
- Ward 4 Education Alliance
- Ward 5 Education Equity Committee
- Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization
- Ward 7 Education Council
- Ward 8 Education Council

- DC Education Coalition for Change (DECC)
- DC Fiscal Policy Institute
- S.H.A.P.P.E. (Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
- Teaching for Change
- Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
- Washington Teachers' Union
- Educationdc.net
- Education Town Hall - We Act Radio