

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
OFFICE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION FACILITIES MODERNIZATION**



Testimony of

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D.C. Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization**

**Before the United States Senate Homeland Security and
Government Affairs Subcommittee on Oversight Management, the
Federal Workforce, and the District of Columbia**

On

**“Great Expectations: Assessment, Assurances and Accountability
of the Mayor’s Proposal to Reform the District of Columbia Public
School System”**

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**Dirksen Senate Office Building
Room 342**

Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. My name is Allen Lew and I am Executive Director of the District of Columbia's newly created Office of Public Education Facilities Modernization.

At the outset, I would like to thank you and the other members of the Committee for moving so quickly to approve the Mayor's school reform legislation, under which my office was created. From this new office, I feel confident that my staff and I will be able to set a dramatically different course for the facilities of the DC Public School System.

As you may know, I was nominated to this post by the Mayor a little over a month ago and the City Council confirmed my appointment last week. Since being named, I have worked very quickly to assemble an interim team of staff and consultants and tasked them with thoroughly assessing conditions at our schools.

Today I will share with you our initial findings regarding the prior facilities management structure at DCPS and the benchmarks we wish to establish going forward so that our efforts can be accurately monitored and assessed in the months and years ahead.

The problems of DCPS facilities are well-documented so I won't recount them here. I will tell you, however, that I intend to establish a new culture for school facilities management that will be proactive and result-oriented. The current system has too many layers of bureaucracy and is too inwardly focused. We will create a leaner, flatter management structure that is more like those in the private sector than a traditional government model. We will treat the school system's students, parents and staff as our customers, our clients, and deliver school facilities that meet their needs.

In the immediate term, I am committed to resolving the long-standing problem of deferred maintenance in our schools. Specifically, we will tackle several thousand outstanding work orders over the next several months. However, we are also examining the full scope of work to be performed at each school, whether or not the problem was submitted as a work order.

To that end, Mayor Fenty has charged me with pushing forward to address critical quality-of-life issues for students and staff before the opening of schools in the fall. The first initiative is the “Summer Blitz” program recently approved by the City Council for 37 schools most in need of remedial repair. Unfortunately, due to flawed cost estimates and incomplete scopes of work prepared by DCPS, each of these projects had to be re-estimated, with scopes of work provided by our project managers and engineers, and then re-bid and procured. Despite this delay, we have selected contractors for each school and negotiated contracts based on solid estimates. The work on many of these schools began this week.

This phase of the work is focusing on the most significant building deficiencies: leaking roofs and non-functioning gutters, repairs to boilers and heating systems, air-conditioning, ventilation systems, and bathroom, kitchen and plumbing issues. Additional work will include replacement of drinking fountains, windows and other items.

While most of this work will be completed by the start of school, we will necessarily have to push into the Fall Semester to complete all of the items on the scopes of work. In my discussions with School Principals, I have been heartened to learn that they share the Mayor’s view that, it is more important to do the work correctly the first time, and have the necessary warranties and maintenance plans in place, rather than rushing to meet a particular deadline.

At the Mayor's direction, we are also undertaking an accelerated program this summer to make "Targeted Repairs" at another 33 schools. This work program was originally anticipated to begin in Fiscal Year 2008 but has been moved forward so that the most serious problems at as many schools as possible are addressed this year. Again, some of the work in this program will not be completed by the opening day of school and will have to extend into the school year. However, my staff and I are committed to working with Chancellor Rhee and the School Principals to ensure that there is minimal disruption to classroom instruction.

For the longer term, I also am focused on recruiting the in-house staff necessary to run the large scale modernization effort and ensure successful, cost effective projects that are completed on a timely basis. We also will engage a management consultant to help us set up state of the art construction management systems – for accounting, procurement, personnel and project management – that are necessary for success. We plan to have this consultant engaged by the first part of September and to have the initial systems in place by year's end.

Within the larger charge to my office of system-wide school modernization, my staff and I are in the process of analyzing the school system's Master Facilities Plan. We plan to present to the Mayor and the Council a revised Master Facilities Plan as soon as practical. Going into this, we know that the Master Facilities Plan was designed as a 10 to 15 year program and we need immediate results. We also know that it is not fair to ask – or expect – that students and teachers can wait this long for relief.

It is my intention that the new DC Public School facilities are on par with the best in the world. We will engage the most talented architects and engineers in the nation to raise the design standards for DC Public Schools. We will develop these design standards and

best-practices with the help of groups like the American Institute of Architects. We will examine what works, and what does not, in the best school districts in the country.

We will hire District businesses and residents to build these facilities. We will develop internships and special programs for students interested in architecture, engineering, environmental conservation, historic preservation, business and, of course, the craft of construction. Perhaps most importantly, we plan to include students and parents at every stage possible in the modernization campaign.

As I mentioned previously, I know that our success will be predicated upon building the best and brightest staff, hiring the most qualified contractors and changing the culture in the school facilities operations. I did that with the development of the new Washington Convention Center and the new Washington Nationals Ballpark; we will use the same aggressive approach to instill a results-based, no excuses-bottom-line attitude to the tasks ahead.

In conclusion, I believe we have accomplished a great deal in just a month, but we certainly realize how very far we have yet to go. In the coming days we will announce the revised schedule for the summer programs as well as our plan for eradicating the backlog of work orders.

With regard to benchmarks, by this time next year each school in the system will be functional with all major systems: heating, cooling, drinking water, bathrooms, roofs that do not leak and all other quality of life essentials, fully operational. In addition, plans for both new and modernized facilities will be well underway after an exhaustive and inclusive community design review process.

I am excited to begin the process with Chancellor Rhee, principals, parents and, most importantly, students and the larger community to

develop and modernize school facilities that will be true centers of education and community life in our city.

Chairman Akaka, Senator Voinovich, that concludes my testimony and I look forward to answering any questions the Committee may have.