

IMPROVING PUBLIC SCHOOLS



This packet describes several of Mayor Fenty’s new initiatives for DC public schools. These are ***draft*** documents, describing some of the first initiatives that will be undertaken with the Mayor’s leadership.

More detailed information can be found in the Academic Plan, which lists the DCPS Reform Priorities of the Fenty administration. This document can be found on the District’s website at www.dc.gov. Look for the button on the right for the Mayor’s Education Initiatives.

The initiatives described here include:

- Ensuring Students Achieve
- Ensuring Schools are Safe and Respectful
- Safe, Modern School Facilities
- Fixing Special Education
- Engaging Parents, Guardians, and Community Partners

If you have comments on these draft initiatives, please put them on your worksheet.

ENSURING STUDENTS ACHIEVE

At the heart of all work to improve public education is **the goal of ensuring high levels of academic achievement among all of our students**. The focus on student achievement demands an intense focus, a strategic prioritization of resources, and relentless attention to implementation.

Our starting point is sobering. We have all seen the data, so often that for some of us, we are numbed, no longer enraged. On average, our students are performing poorly by any measure.

The Fenty Administration will work with speed and resolve to intervene aggressively on behalf of our lowest performing schools and students. However, we will not be satisfied by improvement only among our lowest performing students, we will also seek to increase the rigor, options, and performance of our highest performing students.

To succeed, we must support and expand what has worked well before – projects and programs with proven, measurable results – and let go of projects and programs that do not increase student achievement in measurable ways. The Fenty Administration has developed an academic plan outlining specific priorities moving forward. The full plan can be found at www.dc.gov. Key initiatives to improve teaching and learning include:

- **Refine the K-8 comprehensive reading and mathematics models** to ensure students who are struggling receive immediate help.
- Accelerate school improvement strategies at our **lowest performing high schools**. We can not give up on students who have made it to high school without gaining basic skills.
- **Expand access to more rigorous courses** at the high school level and ensure students have the preparation and support to excel in these classes. This is a key element in the broader effort to double the number of DC students graduating from college.
- **Expand Career and Technical Education opportunities**. Career and technical education that incorporates rigorous academic standards is an essential part of a comprehensive secondary education program.
- **Address the needs of English Language Learners**. Teachers and principals need support and professional development to ensure students who are learning English as a second or third language are effectively served.
- **Expand foreign-language instruction** and gifted and talented opportunities at all grade levels.
- **Increase access to high quality early childhood education**.
- Explore approaches to **extending the learning time** through a competitive grant program.
- **Regularly and consistently communicate how well students are doing** to parents and students.

ENSURING SCHOOLS ARE SAFE AND RESPECTFUL

The Fenty Administration is committed to ensuring that all students feel safe attending school and are in an environment that fosters learning. In safe schools, students treat each other with respect.

Progress is being made. The number of simple assaults, according to DCPS, has dramatically decreased from the SY06 to the SY07. There has been, however, a slight increase in fights at the senior high schools while there has been a decrease in the middle grades.

A key strategy to address student misbehavior is through the Student Support Team (SST) process. SST's provide assistance to teachers as they work with students who are struggling academically and/or behaviorally. When a teacher refers a student to the SST, team members—guidance counselors, general education teachers, administrators, other support staff, and, sometimes, the parent—use a collaborative process to discuss the student's needs and identify appropriate interventions and supports that the teacher may implement to help the student achieve.

MAYOR FENTY HAS INTRODUCED THE SAFE SCHOOLS INITIATIVE (SSI). SSI is a collaboration among District agencies and community organizations focused on reducing school violence and ensuring that students can safely travel between school and home. Two major components of Safe Schools are the **Safe Routes Project** and the **CNE Violence-Free Zone Program**. The Safe Routes Project offers students a secure path while traveling to and from school in areas that are directly affected by crime, violence and public disorder. The CNE Violence-Free Zone Program is unique in that it utilizes the experiences and talents of young adults from the same backgrounds as the students they serve. These young adults, called Youth Advisors, act as hall and cafeteria monitors, mentors, counselors, conflict resolvers, and role models.

THE ADMINISTRATION IS DETERMINED TO DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A DISCIPLINE POLICY that is conducive to learning and reflects the best research. This approach will foster a climate of respect and ensure that suspensions are not over-used as an approach to discipline. In schools, a culture of positive behavior is built on a school-wide positive supports and the development of carefully identified rules that are firmly, fairly, and consistently applied. The discipline plan will be consistent with the principles of safety, responsibility, respectfulness, appreciation of differences, honesty, and life-long learning.

SAFE, MODERN SCHOOL FACILITIES

The Fenty Administration is committed to fully modernizing all DCPS facilities, a task that will take several years. Many school facilities also need immediate repairs. To address both immediate and long-term facilities needs, the Mayor has initiated:

A “TARGETED REPAIR INITIATIVE” that will be completed by the beginning of the 2007-08 school year. This initiative will expand the reach of the DCPS ‘Blitz’ repair program by targeting an additional 33 schools identified as needing immediate improvement. By opening of school, 65 schools will be safer and cleaner buildings with most major repairs completed. Remaining repairs in other schools will be completed on an aggressive schedule. The Mayor’s initiative targets restrooms, security doors, carpeting, window air conditioning, lighting, water fountains, and windows, as well as aesthetic touches like painting and cleaning.

A NEW OFFICE OF FACILITIES MODERNIZATION will manage the design, contracting and oversight of school modernization. Careful management and use of effective contracting procedures by this new office will ensure that these funds are spent well and that DCPS facilities are transformed into quality spaces that support student learning. School modernization is funded annually out of the Public School Capital Improvement Fund, which provides approximately \$100 million a year for modernization. Combined with the schools’ annual capital budget, this is the largest infusion of facilities funds in the history of DCPS. Guided by the DCPS Master Facilities Plan, the Chancellor, the Public School Modernization Advisory Committee and the State Superintendent of Education will be engaged throughout the school modernization process.

The DCPS Master Facilities Plan continues to guide school consolidation. The Chancellor, the Public School Modernization Advisory Committee and the State Superintendent of Education will also make recommendations. The Mayor will ensure that the needs and voices of the community are considered.

FIXING SPECIAL EDUCATION

The U.S. Department of Education has identified four areas of longstanding noncompliance in the provision of services to children with disabilities in the District of Columbia. The special conditions for the District of Columbia are:

1. Provide timely initial evaluations and reevaluations.
2. Implement due process hearing decisions in a timely manner.
3. Ensure placement in the least restrictive environment (LRE).
4. Identify and correct, in a timely manner noncompliance with the requirements of Part B of IDEA.

Mayor Fenty recognizes that these requirements are paramount in addressing and correcting special education deficiencies and has resolved to improve special education and related services for all children with disabilities in the District of Columbia. To exemplify that commitment, the Mayor has developed an “**Action Plan for Special Education Reform in the District of Columbia**” to address additional steps to strengthen special education in the District of Columbia. The full Plan can be found at www.dc.gov under Education Initiatives. Below is a summary of some of the Action Steps that can be found in the Plan.

- All principals, teachers and support staff will be required to participate in training on special education topics, especially in the area of differentiated learning to assist teachers in reducing the number of inappropriate referrals for special education services.
- Principals will be required to meet monthly to report on special education data and services from their individual schools. Monthly meetings will be used as an opportunity for principals to share successes and challenges they face and learn from one another strategies to improve their school’s performance.
- Functioning Student Support Teams (SST) will be required in every school, including charter schools.
- The State Level Transition Team will provide technical assistance to all Local Education Agencies to ensure each and every high school student has a transition plan.
- All children serviced by Part C will be automatically referred to Special Education for an eligibility determination prior to their third birthday. Children found eligible for special education or Section 504 will have an IEP or 504 plan developed and implemented by their third birthday.
- The Mayor will release a comprehensive “User’s Guide” for special education programs and services offered in the District of Columbia. Opportunities will also be provided for parents to participate in trainings and workshops relating to special education issues.

ENGAGING PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Research – and common sense – tells us that “when parents are involved in education, children do better in school and schools improve.”¹ One of the top priorities for the Fenty administration is ensuring that parents and guardians have every opportunity to help students succeed.

TIMELY INFORMATION, TRAINING AND COURSE WORK will help parents and guardians become full partners in their children’s education. The Office of Parent and Community Involvement (OPCI), guided by the Parent Advisory Council, will work with parents, teachers and communities to design programs and materials. The OPCI will produce workshops, an annual parent handbook, newsletters and a Parents’ Academy modeled on the parents’ academy in Dade County in Florida.

PARENT PARTICIPATION IN DECISION-MAKING ABOUT THEIR CHILDREN’S EDUCATION at the local school level takes place in Local School Restructuring Team (LSRT) and other parent bodies, such as the PTA. The Administration will ensure that parents are informed about and trained to participate fully in school-level decisions.

COMMITMENT TO SOLVING PROBLEMS AND WORKING THROUGH ISSUES begins with the new Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education, where parents, students, teachers and staff will find impartial, confidential assistance in problem resolution. All processes designed to help parents help their children – mediation, truancy, suspension and expulsion hearings, the special education due process hearings – will be improved and implemented in a timely manner.

Schools cannot do it all. Community partners help students and schools in a myriad of ways, from serving as mentors and tutors to providing internships and after school programs.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS WILL BE ORGANIZED AT EACH SCHOOL to ensure supports are coordinated to help students achieve. The Administration will link the work of community partners with services provided by city agencies to reduce barriers to learning and focus public and private agencies on ensuring students thrive and are prepared for life.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS ARE BEING ORGANIZED TO WORK WITH DISCONNECTED YOUTH. All too many youth no longer attend school regularly. The Fenty Administration is driving an effort to reach disconnected youth and provide paths back into education.

¹ Lewis, Anne C.; Henderson, Anne T., [Urgent Message: Families Crucial to School Reform, 1998](#)

Parents, guardians, residents, teachers, principals, and community partners need to have opportunities to guide future directions, establish priorities, and hold school officials accountable.

THE STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION will provide parents and communities the opportunity to influence state level education policy, including how the District meets federal requirements under the No Child Left Behind Act.

THE FENTY ADMINISTRATION WILL ESTABLISH A RANGE OF MECHANISMS, INCLUDING town halls, meetings, and websites, to listen to and be guided by the public.