DIGITAL EQUITY IN DC EDUCATION

In the midst of a global pandemic, the Mayor has proposed a budget that supports DCPS's pre-pandemic plan to provide computers to every student in grades 3-12 over three years. This plan is totally inadequate for the new reality of education, in which a hybrid learning model will occur at home and in school. Without additional investment in computers and IT support, we risk students falling further behind in the next school year.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FY21 BUDGET

1. **To prepare for a hybrid learning model starting fall 2020, every DCPS student in kindergarten through grade 12 should be issued a computer for use in school and at home. Technology will be a critical tool to providing instructional continuity as students transition between in-school and at-home learning and will reduce learning loss during the upcoming academic year.**

   - The city and DCPS have already acknowledged the need to move to a 1:1 student-device ratio through the Empowered Learners initiative (ELi). To meet the current challenge of re-opening schools and safely educate DC children during the COVID-19 pandemic, DCPS must accelerate its three-year plan to provide devices to all students in grades 3-12 by 2022.
   - By **adding $11 million to the DCPS budget (for a total of $17.9 million for computers)**, Council can ensure that **every student from kindergarten to 12th grade begins the next school year with the technology needed** for in-school and at-home learning. This investment would support an additional 22,000 computers (see assumptions for funding numbers on page 2).

2. **Robust IT support will be critical to supporting student learning and maximizing the investment in computer hardware.** The hybrid learning model will require students to learn at home for a significant portion of time. Therefore, Council needs to work with DCPS to ensure **IT support for at-home learners through real time phone and chat support methods.**

3. **Teachers will require professional development that is interactive, practical, and provides them with working knowledge of the content delivery platforms and applications that DCPS Central is choosing to support distance learning.** Council should hold DCPS accountable for providing teachers with the tools and supports to effectively navigate online learning. Without needed supports, we risk overwhelming teachers and contributing to the teacher turnover problem.

DETAILS

- ⌨ The Mayor's budget proposal, which included $6.9 million for computers, assumes that DCPS will implement year 2 of the Empowered Learners Initiative by adding devices for three grade levels (grades 3,6, and 9), with a goal of reaching a 1:1 student-device ratio by 2022. To date, this plan remains unchanged despite the new reality of distance learning during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- ⌨ DCPS's initiative does not explicitly address technology for young learners (below grade 3). However, even our youngest learners use online math and reading programs that can only be accessed on a tablet or laptop.

- ⌨ Our recommendation to provide an additional $11 million (for a total of $17.9 million) would provide a device to an additional 9,000 students in grades 3-12 and a device to approximately 13,000 students in kindergarten through 2nd grade. We assume younger students could use a less

expensive device than the current Microsoft Surface Go computers being used by students in grades 3-12.

ASSUMPTIONS FOR BUDGET NUMBERS

Total DCPS computer inventory end of FY19–20

> 18,000 [computers purchased in FY19–20 for the Empowered Learners initiative (ELi)]
>
> - 3,000 [estimate of computers lost/damaged during distance learning March—Summer 2020]
>
> = 15,000 computers left end of FY19–20

Total computers for FY20-21 assuming current Mayor's Budget

> 15,000
>
> + 11,000 [new ELi computers from $6.9 million in Mayor's FY21 Budget]
>
> = 26,000 computers

Total number of DCPS students in grades 3—12 = 34,200

Number of additional devices needed to reach 1:1 for grades 3—12

> 34,200 [students in grades 3—12]
>
> - 26,000 [Eli computers in current inventory and to be funded by Mayor's $6.9 million allocation]
>
> = 8,200 additional devices needed

Add ~10% contingency (for additional students mid-year, replacement of lost/damaged devices)

> 8,200
>
> + 800 contingency devices
>
> = 9,000 additional devices needed for grades 3–12

Cost of technology per student in grades 3–12 = $640 [includes computer, warranty, keyboard, etc.]

Total increase to reach 1:1 ratio for grades 3—12: 9,000 x $640 = $5.8 million

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Number of students in K—2nd grade = 13,000

Cost of technology per student in grades K—2 = $400 (assume $240 less expensive than upper grades)

Total increase to reach 1:1 ratio for Kindergarten through grade 2: 13,000 x $400 = $5.2 million

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TOTAL INCREASE ABOVE THE MAYOR'S REQUEST NEEDED FOR 1:1 STUDENT-DEVICE RATIO FOR GRADES K THROUGH 12: $5.8 MILLION + $5.2 MILLION = $11 MILLION

Digital Equity in DC Education is a citywide parent-led coalition started in 2018 by parents with children in DC Public Schools. To learn more, contact digitalequitydc@gmail.com or @DigitalEquityDC on Twitter.