

**Testimony for the State Board of Education Public Meeting
Wednesday March 17, 2021**

To: DC State Board of Education Members

From: Leigh Sims

Date: March 17, 2021

Good evening, State Board of Education members. My name is Leigh Sims and I am a proud parent of one budding preschool student. My family and I live in Ward 6. I also serve with Parents Amplifying Voices in Education (PAVE) on the ward 6 PLE board.

In the Fiscal Year 2021 budget, we saw many important investments in parent priorities, including a 3% increase in the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF) and +300k in funding for at-risk students. Those were important investments! Today, I am testifying before you because we need to see a UPSFF and at-risk weight that is funded to the recommended adequacy levels. This ask is important for my family because we chose this city as our home and we hope that while we choose to remain Washingtonians we get to see ALL of our community members access the best this country has to offer. As a child, I used to beg my mother and father to send me to private school. The students were always a year ahead in math and their required reading seemed to be “just a little bit more interesting to me.” My private school request was never realized even though I tantrumed about it all through middle school and even the beginning of highschool. One day, my mother sat me down and explained to me that she and my father were strong public school advocates and as long as they were able they would select their place of residence based on the quality of the PUBLIC school education provided in that district. DC should invest in equitable school funding and funding for students who are most vulnerable, including **\$106 million** to fully fund the UPSFF (per pupil funding) and **\$78.5 million** to fully fund the at-risk weight.

- The [2013 adequacy study](#) reported that the base UPSFF should be \$11,638 (when adjusted for inflation). However, the [UPSFF is currently set at \\$11,310](#) which is a gap of \$665 per student (when adjusted for inflation).
 - Source: The Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) has released the District’s first comprehensive education adequacy study, *Cost of Student Achievement: Report of the DC Education Adequacy Study*. The adequacy study resulted from the DC Public Education Finance Reform Commission’s

recommendation that the Mayor secure an in depth study of the city's Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF), the city's method for allocating local operating dollars to District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools. In September 2012, the DME contracted with The Finance Project (a Washington-based policy research and technical assistance firm) and their sub-contractor, Augenblick, Palaich and Associates (a Denver-based education research firm) to complete the DC Education Adequacy Study.

- The 2013 study said the at-risk weight should be 0.37, or \$4,062 per student. The at-risk weight is currently set at 0.2256, or \$2,551 per student, which is a [gap of \\$1,879 per student.](#)

Even though I was a DC public and charter school teacher for more than 10 years, the statement my mother made so many decades ago hits home literally, as I think about my son's public school trajectory. I have to ask myself, if the city is NOT working at the margins are they not performing a disservice to all; in other words if it's not good enough for my neighbor, it's NOT good enough for me.

Thank you for allowing me to testify and share what I want to see for our kids and our city. I hope you will consider fully funding the UPSFF and at-risk weight for the betterment of our community and the benefit it will provide to our kids.

Leigh Sims
Ward 6 PAVE Parent Leader