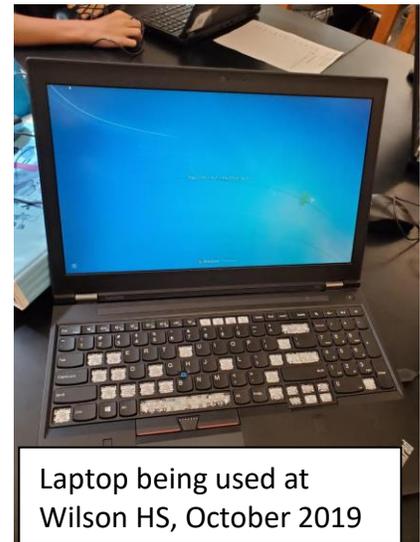


Grace Hu
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Digital Equity in DC Education
DigitalEquityDC@gmail.com
DCPS Budget Hearing

Good evening. My name is Grace Hu and I am a parent and LSAT member at Amidon-Bowen Elementary in Southwest DC. Today I am here on behalf of Digital Equity in DC Education, a citywide coalition of parents, to discuss the continuing technology gaps in our schools.

More Work Needed to Achieve Digital Equity

Last year we began an advocacy effort to address the unreliable and outdated technology in a school system that is heavily reliant on computer-based testing--from everything from reading and math intervention programs, to beginning- and end-of-year assessments in multiple subjects and the high-stakes PARCC test. Despite this reliance on computers, the burden has been on individual schools to find the money to refresh their technology and many have struggled to do this.



Laptop being used at
Wilson HS, October 2019

While we appreciate the \$4.6 million in the mayor's 2020 budget for student computers (as part of DCPS's new Empowered Learners Initiative), one-year funding is not enough for closing the digital divide in our schools. We urge DCPS to follow through and provide funding in the 2021 budget to continue to move schools to a 1:1 student-device ratio. Additionally, we urge DCPS to take the following into consideration:

1. Empowering Students to Use Technology

Simply providing computer hardware won't result in digital equity. While many kids use smartphones and social media, they lack knowledge on the range of technology applications such as word processing, Powerpoint, and e-mail. We need DCPS to look closely at the support (or lack of) for providing students with technology skills they will need for the jobs of the 21st century. Since the announcement of Amazon's selection of Arlington as a new headquarters, neighboring localities have decided to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in regional institutions of higher education for technology research and education. Will DCPS graduates be prepared to take advantage of these local opportunities?

2. Support for Teachers

We also need DCPS to look closely at support for training teachers to effectively incorporate technology into instruction. This is an issue with scaling up—while DCPS currently offers some voluntary professional development opportunities for teachers, it is not sufficient to ensure the whole teacher workforce is equipped to use technology effectively (to achieve educational goals). We also continue to hear that some teachers are not issued a laptop by their school because the school cannot afford to purchase laptops for its staff.

3. Continued Inequity Requires Holistic Approach to Solve

Lastly, as part of the Empowered Learners Initiative, additional tasks/requirements have been placed on our schools, such as having to regularly update school technology inventories and plan for device distribution. This work is being placed on current school staff. As we saw last year, some schools struggled to complete their technology inventories due to lack of staff capacity, and IT support for fixing computers is still inadequate. If computer devices are NOT paired with adequate support for managing them at the school level, we will continue to have an equity issue, as the schools with the least staffing capacity and resources will be the most disadvantaged.

For a technology initiative that truly empowers our students and teaching staff, we need an ecosystem of supports—not just computer hardware. In the addendum to my testimony, I have included our top five areas where attention is needed in implementing the Empowered Learners’ Initiative Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

Addendum: Our parent coalition has identified five areas where attention is needed.

Parent Priorities for Implementation of Empowered Learners Initiative

- 1. Adequate support for technology at the school level:** This includes adequate staffing and resources at the school level for taking inventory of the school’s existing computers, handling device rollout, and maintaining and fixing technology.
- 2. Devices provided in a timely manner to schools:** A number of approvals are needed to finalize the new DCPS contract for computers. Every month that goes by without having the computers at schools is a lost opportunity for our students, especially those in testing grades who are expected to take the online PARCC test in the spring.
- 3. Equitable and transparent allocation of devices to schools:** Each school community should be informed of the number of new computers and other technology assets that will be allocated to their school and how this number was determined.
- 4. Transparent and timely communication to schools (including school leadership, staff/teachers, parents):** DCPS has developed planning guides and other resources to support schools, but it’s not clear that most school communities have seen and are using these resources. In some schools, staff continue to ask PTAs to raise money for technology. Everyone—school leaders, teachers, and parents—needs to be on the same page regarding what assets and support will be provided to schools by DCPS’s central office and when they will be provided.
- 5. Training for teachers and students:** School staff and students should be properly trained to use and maintain their equipment, including best practices for incorporating digital learning into classrooms and preventing misuse of technology. This issue is about *scaling up*: while some optional professional development opportunities are being offered by DCPS’s central office, it will take more work and resources to ensure all teachers and students are prepared to use technology effectively.