

January 10, 2019

Mayor Muriel Bowser
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We write to you as a diverse coalition of parents, teachers, and advocates from all eight wards in DC. We believe the current state of technology in DC Public Schools inadequately prepares our children for the jobs of the future. For years, the vast majority of DCPS students have used unreliable, aging technology, and there has been a shortage of working devices at many schools, even as DCPS has transitioned to heavy reliance on computer-based assessments (including the high-stakes PARCC test) and online learning programs.

Failure to address DCPS technology challenges will result in continued irreversible impacts on students, including lost instruction time due to unreliable computer devices, substandard performance on online tests due either to students' lack of familiarity with computers or poorly functioning devices, and fewer career options for students who are not computer literate. Simply put, the status quo is failing our students.

As noted by the *City Paper* in July 2018, access to technology in DC Public Schools is deeply unequal. Parent Teacher Organizations at some schools have taken on the burden of raising money for technology, but even that type of supplementation is inadequate. Further, many schools do not have this option, which only increases the existing inequities in our school system.

We commend you on your efforts to attract technology jobs to DC and improve technology training through initiatives like the Tech Career Pathways Pledge and Lighthouse City partnership that provide internship and education opportunities for young adults. You have previously stated:

- “We will continue preparing residents with the skills and knowledge they need for the jobs of the future, including at Amazon” (2018).
- “As we work to create more pathways to the middle class for Washingtonians, we are focused on bringing in companies that are looking for the type of talent and entrepreneurial spirit that exists in Washington, DC” (2018).
- “We will expand the capacity of DC residents to engage in the tech economy by creating 5,000 new tech jobs for underrepresented workers” (2016).

However, we have not yet seen a comparable effort to improve technology infrastructure and education in DC Public Schools, despite the critical role of K-12 education in preparing students to be college and career ready. For DC to be viewed credibly as a source of highly-qualified talent by future employers across any industry, including the tech industry, our students need to be not just computer literate, but also skilled in using a broad range of technology applications.

Many of our highest-need students also lack access to technology at home. In Wards 5, 7, and 8, the average home broadband adoption rate is less than 65 percent, compared to 85 percent for other Wards. Students with limited technology and broadband access at school and at home are at a distinct disadvantage as more school and learning activities move online. The digital divide becomes greater with each year that a comprehensive and viable technology plan for schools is not implemented.

Since the announcement of Amazon's selection of Arlington as a new headquarters, we have learned that neighboring localities plan to invest hundreds of millions of dollars in regional institutions of higher education for technology research and education. Likewise, we must make investments today to ensure that DCPS graduates are prepared to take advantage of these local opportunities in the future.

Let us be clear on this point. We cannot emphasize enough the vast gap between what our students require for a productive future, and the reality of insufficient and outdated technology infrastructure and support that our schools and students grapple with every day. Incremental changes will not close this increasing digital divide.

Therefore, our students urgently need the following, with your vital leadership:

1. **The 2020 DCPS budget should allocate sufficient dedicated funding to meet school technology needs** equitably across all our city's schools. Previous budgets have not allocated such funding. We also understand that DCPS has submitted for your approval a budget proposal that would phase in a 1:1 student-device ratio over time. Accepting this proposal would be a good start, but it does not fully address the need for a comprehensive technology plan that ensures working technology, reliable IT support, teacher training, reliable broadband access, and sustainable funding for the long term.
2. **DCPS should develop and make public a comprehensive, multi-year technology plan** to define and provide adequate technology to every school, as recommended by the DC Auditor in 2017. The plan should include expected costs and planned funding sources. Many other U.S. urban school districts have comprehensive technology plans and are already a few years into implementing them.
3. **DCPS should build the capacity to maintain functional, up-to-date technology** equitably across all our city's schools. There is not yet a sustainable model in place for maintaining and replacing technology at DCPS schools.

By implementing these actions, we have an opportunity not just to address a significant deficit, but to position DC education as a national model for preparing a creative, engaged and tech-ready workforce. We would be happy to serve as a partner with your staff in implementing these actions.

Sincerely,

Ward 1 Education Council Interim Executive Board
Ward 3 - Wilson Feeder Education Network
Ward 4 Education Alliance
Capitol Hill Public Schools Parent Organization (CHPSPO)
Ward 7 Education Council
Ward 8 Education Council
S.H.A.P.P.E. (Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
Washington Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs

Washington Teachers' Union
EmpowerEd Teacher Council
Teaching for Change
Coolidge Alumni Association
Education Town Hall - We Act Radio
Educationdc.net

CC:

Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn
Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development Brian Kenner