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Digital Equity in DC Education  
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Good evening. My name is Grace Hu and I am a parent and LSAT member at Amidon-Bowen Elementary in Southwest DC. I'm also a member of the Ward 6 Public Schools Parent Organization (W6PSPO) and Leadership for Educational Equity (LEE). Today I am here on behalf of Digital Equity in DC Education, a citywide coalition of parents, to give you an update of where we are in addressing the technology gaps in our schools. While we have made some progress, there is much more work to be done.

#### 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Last year we began an advocacy effort to address the unreliable and outdated technology in a school system that is heavily reliant on computer-based testing. Our schools require students to use computers for everything from reading and math intervention and blended learning 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. Not surprisingly, many schools are not able to find sufficient funds to update computers and maintain other technology like Smartboards. The schools most likely to have significant technology challenges are also the ones likely to have high "at-risk" student populations and limited PTA capacity for raising funds.

Last February, DC Public Schools (DCPS) announced \$4.6 million in the mayor's 2020 budget for student computers, as part of DCPS's new Empowered Learners Initiative. This one-year funding enables DCPS to provide a computer device for all students in grades 3, 6, and 9 and for other grades to reach a 3:1 student-device ratio. The computers have not arrived at schools yet; DCPS is securing the approvals for the computer contract as we speak.

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 (e.g., word processing, Powerpoint, e-mail) that they will need to use in high school, college, and their future jobs. Moving forward, we have prioritized five areas where we could use your help in holding the school system accountable:

#### Priorities for Implementation of Empowered Learners Initiative (DCPS's technology 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.



Laptop being used at  
Wilson HS, October 2019

**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.

If these five areas are not adequately addressed, there will be an equity issue – the schools with the least capacity, in terms of staffing and resources, will be the most disadvantaged. And the value of this investment in computer hardware will be limited if students and teachers don't have the knowledge and skills to fully benefit from technology.

Comprehensive Technology Plan Still Lacking; Nov. 6 Council Hearing on Tech Equity Bill  
Although the coalition was successful in advocating for additional funding in the FY 2020 budget, there is one demand that has not been fully met—the development of a comprehensive, multi-year technology plan (with expected costs and funding sources) to provide adequate technology to every school—as recommended by the DC auditor in 2017.

This has not happened, but this past March eight DC city council members introduced the *District of Columbia Public Schools Student Technology Equity Act of 2019*, which would require the mayor to periodically convene a steering committee to assess technology needs of schools and develop a comprehensive technology equity plan for DCPS. On November 6, the council will hold a joint hearing on the legislation. Our views on the bill are included in the appendix of this testimony.

For the rest of the year, the Digital Equity in DC Education coalition will focus on securing funding in the 2021 budget to continue to move DCPS to a 1:1 student-device ratio for grades 3-12 and to strengthen professional development and school-level supports for managing technology so that the burden for both is not on school staff and parents. We hope we can count

on you for your support and would be happy to discuss in more detail how you can help support digital equity in our schools. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

[Next page: Analysis of DCPS Student Technology Equity Act for Nov. 6 hearing]

**District of Columbia Public Schools Student Technology Equity Act of 2019**  
**Analysis by Digital Equity in DC Education**  
[DigitalEquityDC@gmail.com](mailto:DigitalEquityDC@gmail.com)

Hearing on Nov. 6: <https://dccouncil.us/event/committee-of-the-whole-education-public-hearing-2/>

Bill language [here](#)

Bill Summary

Sections 1-3 describe the steering committee that would develop the comprehensive technology plan for DCPS. It would require the following:

- The Mayor to convene a steering committee every 2 years to develop and publish a Comprehensive Student Technology Equity Plan that will serve as a blueprint for DC Public Schools.
- The steering committee to include the chancellor or his designees; DC's Chief Technology Officer; stakeholders to include parents, teachers, students, administrators; and IT experts.
- Conduct a needs assessment of each DCPS school which analyzes:
  - number and type of computers and other equipment
  - the last technology upgrade for each school
  - level of IT support provided to schools for repairing and maintaining technology
  - "gaps in student fluency with and access to, both in and out of school, computers, tablets, and other equipment among elementary schools"
- At least 2 public meetings to discuss the needs assessment.
- Submission of the technology plan to the DC Council every two years, beginning March 1, 2020

Section 4 states the comprehensive technology equity plan will include the following:

- A vision and goals for educational technology in schools
- The results of the needs assessment mentioned above
- A 5-year plan to achieve or maintain a 1:1 student-computer device ratio for grades 3-12
- A framework for equitably maintaining and updating school technology
- A plan to close the gaps in fluency that are analyzed in the needs assessment mentioned above
- A cost estimate and identification of planned funding sources associated with what was found in the needs assessment and the 5-year plan to achieve 1:1 student-device ratio

Section 5 includes standard language on rulemaking, fiscal impact statement and the date when the bill would become effective.

General Comments/Analysis

- We appreciate the Council's recognition of the need for a comprehensive student technology plan for DC Public Schools as a step towards closing the digital divide in our

school communities. The DC Auditor recommended a multi-year plan in 2017 and many other school districts already have one.

- Currently, the bill **focuses on computer devices and hardware**, which is a **minimal** requirement but **not sufficient for achieving digital equity**.
- The bill could be strengthened by taking a **broader view** of how our school system should use technology to **empower students and prepare them for the jobs** of the future.
- We must ensure that students not only have computers, but are also computer literate and **prepared to use technology applications in a high school, college and professional setting**. [While many kids use smartphones and social media, they lack knowledge on the range of technology applications like word processing, Powerpoint, spreadsheets, and e-mail.]
- Several government agencies -- DCPS, Office of the Chief Technology Officer (OCTO), and DGS -- are involved with providing and supporting school technology. Any plan should outline each **agency's role and the mechanisms to ensure accountability** of each agency. [No mention of multi-agency aspect and governance/accountability in current bill.]
- Any plan should include **metrics** for assessing the state of technology in our schools. These metrics should not focus solely on number of computers or other hardware. They should allow us to assess student tech use and literacy and the extent to which blended learning programs and software being purchased with taxpayer money is being used.
- We also urge Council to think about **how the bill can be strengthened to hold agencies accountable** for implementing a comprehensive technology plan. For example, there could be a requirement for a council hearing in which agency heads testify on how they will implement the plan and/or a requirement for a narrative to be included in the Mayor's annual budget submission on how DCPS and the other agencies are working to address technology gaps and supporting the comprehensive technology plan. We do not want the technology plan to be a paper exercise.