

**Robert Henderson**  
**Committee of the Whole**  
**PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING**  
**on**  
**DCPS Budget**  
**on**  
**Wednesday, October 23, 2024, at 11:00 a.m.**

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Robert Henderson. I am here in my individual capacity as Ward 5 member of the State Board of Education, and I am not representing the views of the Board as a whole.

I first want to acknowledge the legacy of Mary Levy with immense gratitude. We will surely miss her voice here today. I can only hope that the dozens of us who learned from her over the years can collectively pick up the torch in fighting for adequate, equitable, and stable budgets forged through transparent, democratic processes. Achieving such a budget this cycle will depend on how the council and the executive will resolve their disagreements over Schools First in Budgeting Act and if and how the DME's 2023 adequacy study will affect spending.

I have said before that I greatly appreciate the Council's efforts to stabilize school funding. The mayor's failure to submit budgets that comply with the Schools First has resulted in confusion and finger-pointing that has not served students well. In addition to the turmoil of this back and forth, stability has been elusive in large part due to year-to-year declines in purchasing power even when dollars remain stable. Here I think that the proposal that you will hear from Scott Goldstein and Carolyn Pryor with EmpowerEd to maintain school stability based on purchasing power rather than dollar amounts is a promising alternative.

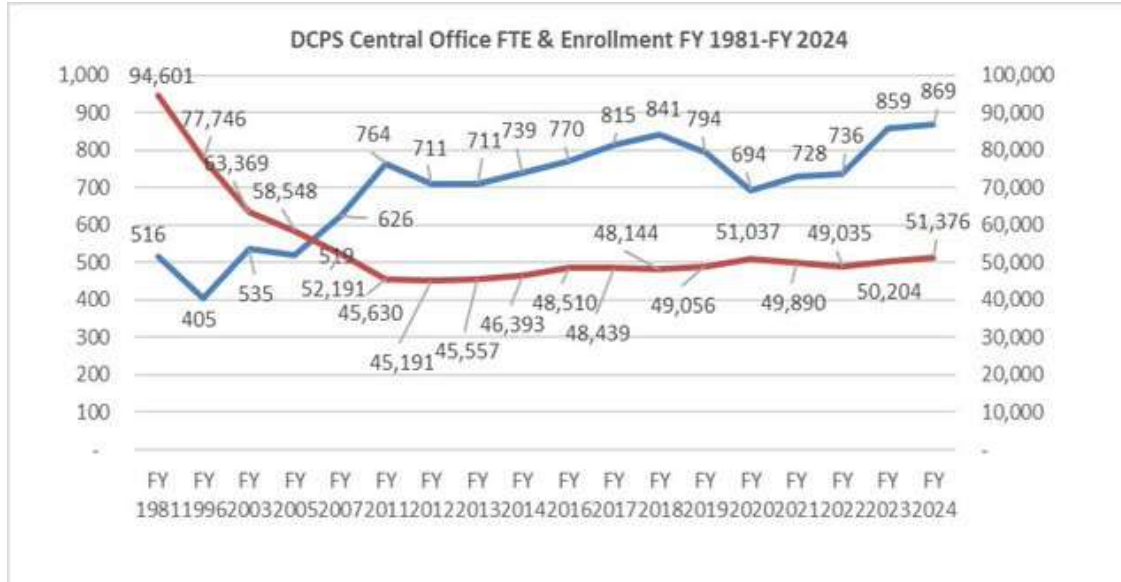
A second challenge to stability is that schools are increasingly shouldering costs to support the noninstructional needs of students. According to the DME's adequacy study, on average, schools are spending less than half of their budgets on instructional staff.<sup>1</sup> I strongly believe that students' mental health, safety, physical, and other needs must be met for them to succeed academically. Yet to the extent that the costs of meeting these needs are borne by school budgets, that should be supplemental to, not competing with, instructional costs. The adequacy study seems to understand this; will the study's insights and recommendations be reflected in the budget?

Finally, I will say that I think that DCPS central office does and can perform vital functions that need to be adequately funded to support students. In fact, the State Board just passed a resolution recommending funding for the DCPS Dream Center to support math instruction. That said, I do think that central office is long overdue for a thorough, honest audit of what is and is not effectively serving students. Last spring, Mary Levy shared the following graph, showing central office FTEs growing to an all-time high even as enrollment remained relatively flat. While not represented in the graph, we know that there is no correlating increase

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<sup>1</sup> <https://app.box.com/s/v2j675bdum1tkyu2efgmr1rz1edcpgbk>, p. 3.

in student performance.



Source: <https://x.com/MaryLevy17/status/1781077375301648721>

As will be suggested in Scott Goldstein’s testimony regarding contracted services, school-based personnel should have input on this audit. I continually hear from teachers about tasks mandated by central office that they feel offer no tangible benefit to students and are a waste of their all too scarce time. And as recently as last weekend, I heard reports of delayed onboarding causing staffing shortages at a school. I don’t have any objection to spending or staffing central office, so long as it is effectively serving our schools and ultimately, our students. I think that the latter is most likely to happen when we have transparency and school-based stakeholder input on central office spending and the related programs, policies, and products.

If education, by which I mean student learning, is the priority many of us say it is, our budget discussions shouldn’t be marked schools versus central office competing over a slice of the budget but by providing the resources to adequately and equitable support student learning.