

Robert Henderson
Committee of the Whole
FY2026 Budget Oversight Hearing
on
DCPS
on
Friday, June 6, 2025, at 9:30 a.m.

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson. 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 am testifying today to request that the council allocate \$200,000 – \$300,000 in the FY26 budget to support international educators with expiring H1 visas to transition to green cards. Approximately 300 international teachers have signed up to work for DCPS with the expectation that they would be able to transition to green card status and remain in their roles for the long term. Yet, with the recent discontinuance of the DCPS green card sponsorship program, all but the first cohort of 24 educators who have already been sponsored may be unable to stay at the DCPS schools where they have become rooted, growing as teachers and building relationships with students and families. Reconstituting this sponsorship program would advance the District's goal to improve teacher retention. Many of these teachers bring their multilingual skills to fill positions at dual language schools. They will not be easy to replace. In addition to losing teachers who are already here, we risk our ability to recruit international talent in the future if we do not offer a path to permanence and even just by gaining a reputation for having uncertainty for international teachers.

If we do not act, school communities will feel the loss of these teachers deeply. I have heard from parents at one Ward 5 school, and I believe you will receive testimony from several of them later today, who fear the loss of two international teachers who they describe as “the glue of the entire school, essential to language programs, connecting families to the school and services, and our after-school program leaders.” These teachers have clearly made a deep impression on students and families.

I have also had the opportunity to hear directly from some of the affected teachers. They have built their careers and lives here because they want to be here. They are proud of the work that they do. They are proud to have become rated as “highly effective.” They want to stay and continue contributing to our schools, but they need our help.

My hope is that we can avoid losing these highly valued and highly valuable teachers by funding this program for the upcoming fiscal year for the next cohort of teachers who need to start the green card process now so that they can stay beyond their visa renewal, and in subsequent years as additional cohorts of current DCPS teachers near the expiration of their visas. The budget is tight, but replacing these teachers will be costly and investing to keep them now will pay dividends for years to come.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions.