

Testimony to Chancellor Rhee on the DCPS FY09 Operating Budget
Prepared by Margot Berkey, Wilson HS parent and director of Parents
United for the DC Public Schools
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My name is Margot Berkey and I am the parent of a 9th grade student at Wilson HS and the director of Parents United for the DC Public Schools. As you know, since March 2006 Parents United has worked extensively with the middle grades schools in our city, organizing monthly meetings on topics related to the Master Education Plan, the Master Facility Plan, standards, security and more. We believe that reform of the DCPS middle grades schools is key to strengthening the district overall, preparing our children for high school, college and careers, and attending to the social and academic development of thousands of the city's early adolescent children. With that in mind, I am here to ask that the budget for FY09 include funding that will accomplish the middle grades reforms of the MEP. This means that we will look for the DCPS Operating budget to include:

1. Increases in the WSF so that middle grades schools can afford to provide small learning teams comprised of teachers in each of the four core subjects.
2. Staffing configurations and school schedules that guarantee collaborative planning time for teachers.
3. Funding for art, music, world languages, librarians, and physical education teachers and the resources for those courses. This will ensure that DCPS can deliver the new standards in these areas.
4. Counselors, psychologists and other supports needed for the emotional, physical and mental health of our children. This will also require that you insist upon alignment of resources from other city agencies by working with the DC Dept. of Education.
5. Ongoing principal and teacher professional development in middle level education.
6. Intensifying the work of the Academy for Educational Development's Middle Start initiative. This program has received national recognition for improving test scores and is included in the National Catalogue of School Reform Models. We are currently fortunate that AED is working with 19 of our middle grades schools thanks to money from the Gates Foundation. We urge you to provide ongoing funding, from Gates or in the DCPS budget, to deepen the work of Middle Start with our schools as part of our middle grades reform.
7. Funding for programs and personnel that can implement positive behavioral approaches to improving school climate, rather locking down our children with punishments and suspensions.
8. Funding for clubs and extracurricular programs that allow young adolescents to explore subjects and activities that interest them.
9. Proven interventions that will help keep our struggling students from being retained in 8th grade as the new promotion and retention policy requires. We want our children to be helped to master the standards, not held back because of a lack of attainment and lack of support.
10. Summer Bridge programs for students entering and leaving middle grades schools.