

**Statement of Iris J. Toyer  
District of Columbia Public Schools Hearing  
of the Chancellor on the FY 09 Operating Budget  
November 15, 2007**

Good evening Chancellor Rhee, I am Iris J. Toyer, Chairperson, Parents United. More importantly, I am the mother of a 10<sup>th</sup> grade DCPS student and the grandmother of two very young DCPS students. I am in it for the long haul. As a lifelong Washingtonian and graduate of DC Public Schools, I have a personal interest in assuring that the school system provides our city's children a high quality education.

As a former member of the DC Board of Education, I too know the challenge of trying to make bricks from straw. Inadequate resources, no matter how clever one might be, does not allow for sweeping, positive, innovative change. At best one can only maintain already under-resourced programs. That simply will no longer do. You have unprecedented support from the Office of the Mayor and it is our expectation that you will use that support to request a budget that will provide for sustainable improvements - - not just the status quo..

Since FY09 will be your first budget so community anticipation and expectation are very high. In 2004 the community began a process that ultimately led to the development of the Master Education Plan. That plan reflects the work of hundreds if not thousands of DC citizens coming together to discuss our public school system and what we want it to provide our children. We were tremendously heartened to hear that Mayor Fenty and you planned to use the MEP as the framework for transforming our schools. To accomplish that task will take a significant investment in our schools—beyond what we currently spend.

To achieve any of this will take teamwork. The team must be comprised of you, your administration, local school staff, members of the community and parents. To that end, I would like to talk about the process for arriving at your budget request.

We are deeply in need of a transparent, open and collaborative process. As team members we need to participate in the decision making that will yield the recommendations on local school funding. Currently, we are without any information on our current budget which of course makes it very difficult to champion next year's budget. To date, no normal mechanism has been established for us to work together on issues that will surely impact local school funding.

For example work had begun on:

- Small school funding—will it continue?
- Grade level funding determinations—what will be the basis?
- Funding of our specialty schools
  - Will the application process for more schools to receive these funds be implemented
  - Will the process be open to all schools as previously recommended
  - We need to know if the pilot schools who are currently receiving funds will continue to do so?
  - Will the innovative schools be funded beyond this first year?

Our ability to assist you in grappling with these issues is severely hampered by the information gap that has developed.

I am sure you will hear this recurring theme, so let me join the chorus by saying parents want a budget request that reflects a positive vision for the future of DCPS; one that expresses our goal for an excellent public school system with a willing administration and teachers and staff enthusiastic about re-vitalizing teaching and learning.

To help you get there we need more public information about the DCPS budget and spending and details on expected savings and exactly where they would come from as you contemplate school closings and/or mergers, as well as reductions in levels of staffing.

Great school systems are ones that are inclusive of the community and parents. They call on the brain trusts that reside in the community to help them achieve not only academic success, but improvements that impact on the classroom. As you attempt to improve our schools, it is our hope that we will do it together.