



COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20004

July 12, 2023

Delano Hunter
Acting Director, Department of General Services
3924 Minnesota Avenue, NE
Washington, DC 20019

Lewis Ferebee
Chancellor, District of Columbia Public Schools
1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

Dear Acting Director Hunter and Chancellor Ferebee:

I write to share my thanks and observations from the recent site visits my office coordinated across select DCPS and DPR facilities in late June. Together with several of my Council colleagues, representatives from the State Board of Education, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, and community members, we visited eight DPR sites and 13 DCPS facilities. Sites were selected in consultation with each Ward Councilmember to provide a cross-section of DGS' facilities maintenance overall and identify systemic issues to address through further oversight or legislation.

I appreciate DGS leadership, DCPS and DPR facilities leadership, as well as school and recreation center staff members for facilitating each visit. A special thank you to Leticia Delgado, Donielle Powe, Monica Swintz, and Toussaint Webster. Staff at all levels are working hard to ensure our facilities are well-maintained and repair requests are responded to in a timely manner. These are complex tasks, and I do not want to understate the current level of effort all parties are putting forth to support our students, staff, and residents. That said, there were several items of concern which I detail below.

Before I share my high-level findings, I want to address the letter sent to all Councilmembers on Monday, June 26th signed by Chancellor Ferebee and Acting Director Hunter. The letter says that DCPS and DGS will not accompany any additional Council site visits scheduled later this summer. I strongly encourage you to reconsider such a blanket policy. Each of the previous visits focused on collaboratively identifying persistent issues present in each facility, as well as process and communication improvements that could help reduce delays in the future. The key word there is collaborative, meaning participation and dialogue between school- and Central-level staff to solve problems together for our students. These are not photo ops; they are valuable opportunities to gather key stakeholders together and solve problems. I'm disappointed that the Chancellor was unable to join any of our school visits himself to observe this firsthand. I continue to believe that we work best when we work together, and I appreciate your reconsideration here.

The overwhelming takeaway from our school visits is that our buildings are not yet ready for students and staff to return for the first day of classes on Monday, August 28th. We are not even at a basic level of readiness, where we can accurately make statements like the following or check “ready” on the attached basic readiness checklist:

- All exterior doors close and lock properly and PA systems reach all parts of school campuses
- Electronic security systems and CCTV cameras all work without blind spots;
- The HVAC functions as designed, maintaining comfortable temperature and proper air circulation;
- The plumbing works consistently including toilets, sinks, and water fountains with no leaks; and
- There are no active roof leaks, and where the roof has leaked previously, we fixed the ceiling and floors have been fixed to remove any threat of mold and old carpets are removed.

I appreciate the urgency with which your teams are working to start next schoolyear with all our schools comfortable, safe, and prepared for learning. Please see my attached proposed “Basic School Readiness” checklist which references the standards above. I request a written update on the state of school readiness including a completed checklist for each campus no later than Friday, August 18th.

Please also see my attached high-level takeaways based on our June 2023 site visits. I would like the opportunity for us to meet to discuss my observations and ensure your plans to incorporate their resolution.

Thank you again for your partnership.

Sincerely,



Janeese Lewis George
Ward 4 Councilmember
Chairperson, Committee on Facilities and Family Services

CC:

Phil Mendelson, Chairman, Council of the District of Columbia
Tommy Wells, Director, Office of Policy and Legislative Affairs (OPLA)

June 2023 Council DPR & DCPS Site Visit Takeaways

Last month, Councilmember Janeese Lewis George, chair of the Council's Committee on Facilities and Family Services (CFFS), led site visits to 8 DPR facilities and 13 DC public schools across the city with facilities leadership from DGS, DCPS and DPR as well as members of the State Board of Education, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioners, and community members. Sites were selected in consultation with each Ward Councilmember to provide a cross-section of DGS' facilities maintenance overall and identify systemic issues to address through further oversight or legislation. The Committee appreciates DGS leadership, DCPS and DPR facilities leadership, as well as school staff members for facilitating each visit. There were several items of concern identified during these visits:

Heating, Ventilation and Air Condition (HVAC) Issues

- The air conditioning system in the Takoma Recreation Center in Ward 4, which began hosting children's summer camp the last week of June, was broken during our visit. The workout space at the Banneker Community Center in Ward 1 also has a broken AC system. Window units were installed in the basketball gym at the Jelleff Recreation Center in Ward 2 following our visit.
- Several schools also were experiencing HVAC issues including Langdon ES in Ward 5, Thomson ES in Ward 2, and Whitlock @ Kenilworth in Ward 7. DGS staff present at each visit pledged to do everything in their power to improve conditions before summer camp started in late June and schools starts in late August, but it is highly concerning that these issues were not resolved prior to our visits.

Active Security and Safety Threats

- Multiple DPR sites have been the targets of overnight thefts, resulting in the loss of expensive equipment and damage. Others had windows shot out amidst our rising gun violence crisis. DGS is responsible for the security of DPR sites through their Protective Services Division (PSD) in coordination with DPR's Office of Risk Management. Each should review their existing security assessments and ensure residents and staff are safe.
- Several schools also have ongoing security issues including over 75 open lock and door repair requests (median age open = 141 days) across the 13 schools visited, in addition to broken security cameras and malfunctioning security alarm systems at multiple sites. Several schools also shared issues with getting new keys produced, both electronic and mechanical, as well as trouble getting into locked student lockers.
- DGS should shift its prioritization system to rate exterior doors that do not lock or close properly as "emergency" work orders in need of stabilization within 24 hours of a request being approved.

Inadequate Trash & Recycling Collections

- DGS provides custodial services for loose litter in DPR facilities and manages the contracts for recycling bin and trash dumpster collections. DPW collects waste from park trash bins. Community members present at multiple sites complained of infrequent and inadequate solid waste collections across all facilities. *Overflowing trash and recycling bins were observed at nearly*

every DPR site visit. DPR leadership stated that permit holders are responsible for packing out their own waste, but this is not the general practice of residents nor are all users properly permitted. DGS should coordinate with DPW and DPR to augment current service levels to keep our facilities clean and the new policy should be to raise fees to pay for increased collections.

Salesforce Miscommunication and Training Concerns

- Especially in DCPS sites, staff at all levels had differing understandings of how to enter and manage work orders in Salesforce, the District’s computerized maintenance management system (CMMS). Sometimes the direction is to enter the same type of issue in separate work orders (ex: install door locks) and other times DGS’ preference is that such requests are entered once in a single request. Further, some school staff lack cell phones to enter work orders quickly and others did not know how to track related work orders – a process DGS uses to manage complex and multi-step requests. DGS and DCPS must collaborate on more robust Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for how to enter and track work orders. New training should be both required and accessible for all foremen, custodians, and logistics staff in schools by this next school year.
- As an example, the gray water plumbing system at Anacostia High School has apparently been malfunctioning for most of the past five years. During our visit there were many bathrooms offline and the on-site daycare center was closed due to the plumbing issues. DGS should train school-based staff on how to enter and manage work orders for complex systems like this.
- Relatedly, there appears to be issues with DGS’ Salesforce intake form wherein school staff enter inadequate or incomplete information with some requests. For example, a request to fix a broken door may involve an electronic issue or a mechanical issue (or both) but the form currently does not require staff to enter all potentially relevant information with each work order request. This contributes to frustrating delays as DGS staff and contractors visit a school to address an issue, but upon further inspection, realize that the request requires additional parts or expertise that they do not have with them.
- Unfortunately, DCPS and DGS still have not ensured operations staff at each school receive notification emails from Salesforce. This was an issue the Committee called out explicitly in our Fiscal Year 2024 budget report ([page 30 here](#)) *over two months ago* and has not yet been resolved. We understand the issue can be fixed simply by DCPS updating the distribution lists at each school to include all relevant staff, who would then receive automatic emails from Salesforce whenever a work order is marked complete – a source of much frustration and confusion among school staff.
- Further, DGS should allow front-line staff in DCPS and DPR staff to check “not complete” for work orders marked complete by a craftsperson but not actually resolved. DCPS and DGS have instituted a 14-day quality control process where school staff may check “confirm complete” for work orders marked complete by craftspeople – that is assuming they check Salesforce within this limited timeframe. Unfortunately, there is no automatic mechanism for them to state “not complete” which could allow further supervisory review or the return of a craftsperson to complete the work properly.

Data Quality Concerns

- Prior to each visit, DGS prepared a list of open work orders according to Salesforce. Unfortunately, a significant percentage of open work orders at each site represented resolved issues and/or duplicate requests – especially at DPR sites. This echoes recent findings from [the DC Auditor](#) that found DGS failed to properly manage work order data. I’m excited about the establishment of the new “LAST Team” responsible for cleaning up its data, but DGS management should also improve data quality on the front-end and maintain closer contact with site-based staff from DPR and DGS to ensure accurate records.

Pest Control Issues

- Pest control issues came up at several site visits across both DCPS and DPR. Rat burrows and rats themselves were observed at multiple sites during the site visits. DGS has a process by which teams from their environmental services team trap and manage pest issues in DPR and DCPS facilities. Unfortunately, current efforts may be inadequate. DPR should ensure DGS teams are visiting all sites on a regular schedule, and where issues persist, that efforts are augmented to better mitigate pest infestations.
- In DCPS facilities, where students regularly eat breakfast and snacks in classrooms, the environmental response team must ensure regular pest control efforts include those spaces – not just the kitchen and the cafeteria.

Ambiguous Agency Ownership of Issues

- Which agency is responsible for fixing sunshades or baseball/soccer field nets if they break? According to DGS and DPR staff, there is not a consistent answer. DGS manages landscaping in DPR sites, but in some circumstances prefers that DDOT service larger forested areas like at the Marvin Gaye Recreation Center. Unfortunately, DDOT disagrees and said in response to a 311 request, that they do not cut vines or shrubs. DGS and the Office of the Assistant City Administrator pledged to take this up with OUC’s 311 Working Group, but ambiguity like this breeds delay and inter-agency squabbling over who’s most responsible. Management from each agency should meet and identify persistently “sticky” issues together, then establish standard operating procedures for resolving disputes quickly.
- Requests to repair or replace custom and discontinued items fester for long periods of time. Each baseball and soccer field net apparently requires a custom creation, which is understandably a more complex and lengthy job to complete than other requests. Similarly, repairs to discontinued or unique playground fixtures require ongoing relationships with installers and companies who may have since gone out of business. DPR and DGS should develop processes to streamline procurement of customized equipment and replacement of bespoke or discontinued fixtures so that they too can be resolved in a timely manner.
- DCPS should clarify ownership and responsibility for audio-visual equipment in its auditoriums. This issue came up at Jackson-Reed High School, which has suffered from roof leaks and electrical problems in its auditorium. Once those issues are resolved, the matter of replacing broken AV

equipment remains and DCPS does not appear to have a clear answer for whether such expenses are paid for at the Central level or school level.

- Responsibility for maintenance of lockers also came up at multiple DCPS and DPR sites. DGS staff on hand said lockers are treated like furniture and other equipment: the responsibility of the client agency (DCPS & DPR) to maintain. DCPS and DPR facilities staff could not confirm. Amidst this ambiguity, front-line staff wait for months to decide who will pay for repairs, make the orders, and manage repairs.

Bathroom Supply Challenges

- DGS should clarify procedures for ordering new bathroom supplies in DPR sites. Staff at multiple DPR facilities complained of irregular replenishments of toilet paper, soap and paper towels. Such supplies are supposed to be delivered on a regular basis, but staff can also request more by submitting a work order. DGS should communicate its schedule for bathroom supplies deliveries and work with DPR's site-based staff to ensure all facilities are adequately stocked.
- In DCPS facilities, bathroom supplies are paid for with school's non-personnel funds (NPS) budget – a funding source allocated and managed at the school level. Unfortunately, this source also covers other supply categories like paper as well as pay for staff covering each other's classes (administrative premium pay). Therefore, bathroom supply budgets have been squeezed in some places amidst other legitimate needs. DCPS should consider allocating bathroom and health supplies through a separate funding stream to ensure adequate spending. Further, a recent TikTok "challenge" has contributed to the destruction and waste of many bathroom supplies and dispensers. DCPS and DGS must collaborate on how to keep our schools hygienic and clean for students and staff.

Better Communication around Issues "On Hold"

- Sometimes the most responsible way to address a maintenance issue is as part of a broader project, as opposed to a one-off request. If several doors need new locks, windows need to be fixed all at once, DGS may coordinate with DCPS to address the issue through a separate procurement. Unfortunately, this process is not always well communicated to school- or other site-based staff. During our site visits, multiple site-based staff reported not understanding what "on hold" meant or the timeline for issues put on hold.
- To reduce wait times, DGS should retain qualified staff or contractors to address such requests as they occur so that procurement delays do not contribute to safety or environmental risks. Such has been the case at several schools currently waiting for lock and door repairs to be addressed all together as a single project. DPR sites including Takoma Recreation Center had playground equipment issues present both this summer and in Summer 2022, apparently left unaddressed because DGS does not have an active contract with a playground equipment repair company. This is unacceptable.

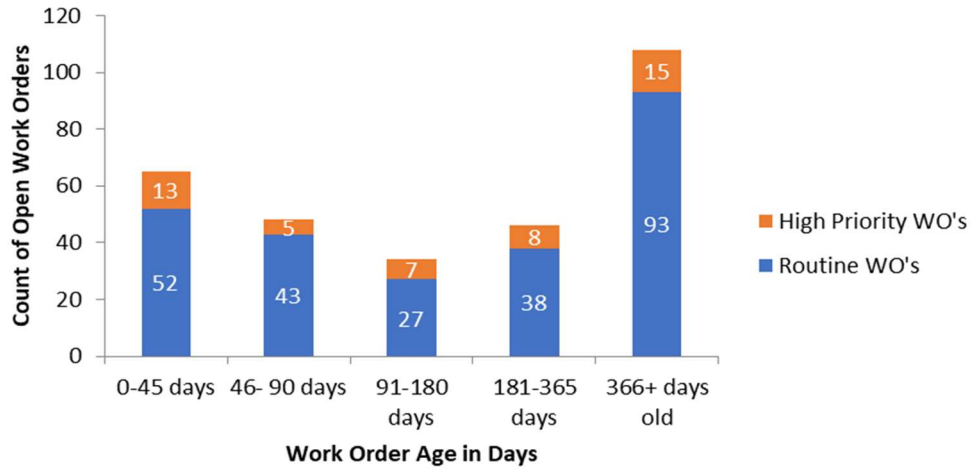
School Readiness in “Triage Mode”

- DGS and DCPS recently collected a top-10 list of open work requests from each DCPS school leader and are working to address those issues via the upcoming Summer Blitz. The Committee appreciates that DGS wants to be responsive to each school’s most pressing needs, but this suggests a triage-mode approach to school readiness which is highly concerning. Reducing the expectation for completion to whatever the school has named as its top-10 list lowers the bar unnecessarily, particularly for large schools or older schools, some of which have over 90 open work order requests. The Committee appreciates that life safety issues and HVAC issues are being handled outside of this top-10 list approach, but we feel strongly that all requests should have an avenue to timely completion.
- Further, it was also concerning to learn that DGS and DCPS were still developing the specific scope and plans for this summer’s blitz during the Committee’s visits in late June. It was our expectation that DCPS and DGS would have developed these lists prior to the start of the summer begin execution upon the completion of regular classes. Every day during the summer spent developing the summer maintenance plan is a day that could have been spent executing said plan. Again, this is concerning not only from a timing perspective, but is further evidence that DGS and DCPS could get more work orders completed if officials from each agency collaborated earlier.

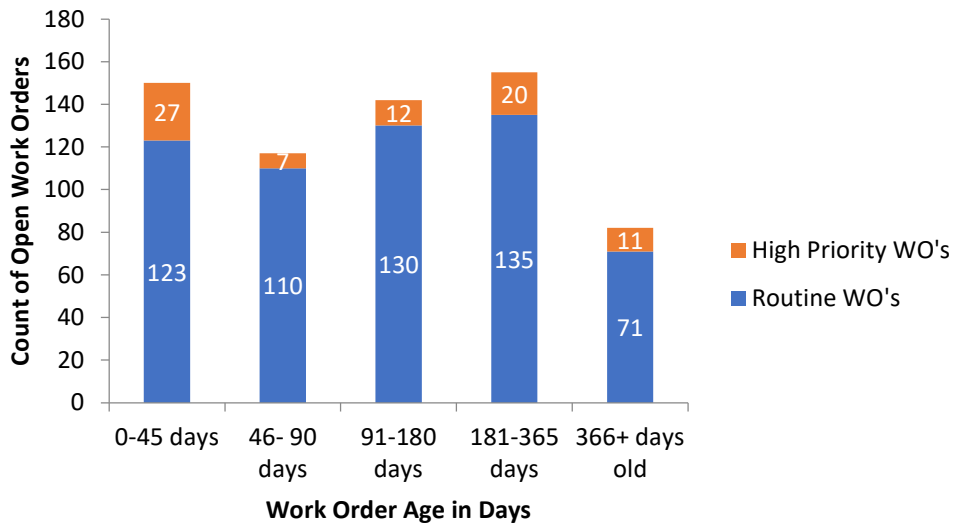
Routine Repairs Delayed, including DPR Swings and Gates

- At least one piece of playground equipment, especially swings and fences/gates, was broken or missing at each DPR site visit. Several playground work orders have been open for months despite their relatively standard nature: most swing sets use the same seats and chains, so DGS could keep such inventory on-hand for quick repairs. Several playground fences and gates were broken as well, some for lengthy periods of time, despite a standard design present in each facility. Playground equipment is subject to wear and tear, so DGS should institute systems to efficiently repair common issues. DGS and DPR/DCPS should order extra pieces for parts expected to wear out, so we do not need to wait for a new procurement to get replacement parts.
- Notwithstanding data quality issues identified above, DGS continues to struggle with timely closure of work orders. As shown in the first histogram below, of the approximately 300 open work orders across the eight DPR sites visited, only 65 (13 high priority, 52 routine; 22% of sample) have been open for 45 days or less – the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for routine work orders. That includes “high priority” work orders which are supposed to be addressed in 10 days or less. 108 work orders (15 high priority, 93 routine; 36% of sample) have been open for over a year. Further, over two-thirds of all open work orders are only at “approved” status – meaning they do not yet have an estimated completion date (ECD) assigned, leaving the community and DPR staff to wait and wonder when issues will be resolved.
- The second histogram showing the age of DCPS work orders by priority shows a similar pattern of delays. Only 150 of the 646 open work orders (27 high priority, 123 routine; 23% of sample) in DCPS sites were open 45 days or less at the time of our visit. 82 work orders (11 high priority, 71 routine; 13% of sample) have been open over 366 days or longer.

DPR Work Order Ages by Priority Level, CFFS June 2023 Site Visits

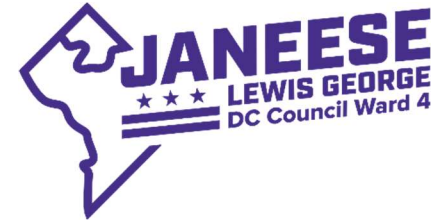


DCPS Work Orders Ages by Priority Level, CFFS June 2023 Site Visits



SY2023-24 Basic School Readiness Checklist

Context: This checklist is for a principal or their designee(s) to evaluate the preparedness of their facility for students and staff. Each item is written as a basic statement of facility readiness, meaning the minimally acceptable floor, not necessarily the final desired state. Please note that this checklist focuses on building systems and does not evaluate the adequacy of supplies or technology, which are also essential, but are outside the scope of this review.



Directions: Place a checkmark in the corresponding box below (“Ready” or “Not Ready”) that best describes your school:

| Domain | | Ready | Not Ready | Explain |
|-----------------------------------|---|-------|-----------|---------|
| Security | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ All exterior doors close and lock properly ○ All interior doors can be secured ○ CCTV cameras are all operable and record clearly ○ Intrusion detection alarm systems work ○ PA system reaches the full campus ○ External gates can be secured | | | |
| HVAC | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ AC and heat work as designed, and where broken, contingencies (ex: window units) are installed to maintain comfortable temperatures | | | |
| Plumbing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Toilets & urinals all flush properly and can be secured ○ Bathroom sinks all work properly ○ Water fountains all work properly | | | |
| Windows, Roof & Floors | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Windows intact & open/close properly ○ Roof is leak-free, and if previous leak, underlying issue has been resolved ○ Floors and walls are mold-free ○ Old or stained carpets removed | | | |

| Domain | | Ready | Not Ready | Explain |
|--------------------------|---|-------|-----------|---------|
| A.D.A. Compliance | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ People with disabilities can reach the full campus including upper floors ○ Elevators work properly | | | |
| Pest Control | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Free of rodents and rodent fecal matter ○ DGS regularly treats all interior and exterior spaces and provides extra treatment upon request | | | |
| Electrical | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interior lights all work properly ○ Exterior and parking lot lights work properly ○ Exit signs light up properly | | | |
| Salesforce | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Principal and all operations staff receive Salesforce notification emails ○ Principal & operations staff trained in Salesforce & work order management | | | |

School: _____ Date: _____

Name & Title: _____