

**Testimony to the Committee on Education  
For the Performance Oversight Hearing on District of Columbia Public Schools**

**Taliyah Cook  
Young Women's Project, Peer Advocate  
February 18, 2016**

Good morning Council Member Grosso, my name is Taliyah Cook, I'm in the 11th grade, and I attend Calvin Coolidge SHS. I am 16 years old, turning 17 at the start of March and I enjoy cosmetology and dealing with youth my age or younger. I would love to work in something related to the cosmetology fields or become a lawyer one day. I plan to work hard and go to college to achieve all my long-term goals. In addition, I work at The Young Women's Project educating youth about safe sex and distributing condoms. At YWP, there is diversity of students throughout DCPS, and I have enjoyed meeting new people and hearing about their experiences, especially when it comes to academics.

I'm here to testify about the education offered at my school and how it relates to education equity throughout the city. I will also make recommendations about how at-risk funding needs to be spent.

Education Access at Coolidge

In Coolidge, we also follow DCPS' guidelines. We need 24 credits to graduate. These are: 4 English credits, 4 Math credits, 4 Science credits, 2 World Languages, .5 Art credit, .5 Music credit, .5 Health credit, 2 Physical Education credits, and 3.5 electives. Electives help to build up your credits, explore your interest, lighten up a demanding class schedule, etc. In Coolidge, there are about 18 electives to choose from, and there are 5 AP courses offered at Coolidge: English literature/composition, English language/composition, U.S. history, world history, and Calculus AB.

AP Classes allow you to start on your long-term goals, if you plan to attend college. They give you college credits and prepare you for the start of college. Why not give every student this opportunity? Every student has the advantage to be more prepared for college if they take these courses, but throughout the city, many schools don't offer them. Anacostia only offers 3 AP classes, and schools like Cardozo and Ballou have less than 6, while School Without Walls has 21 AP course. The schools with fewer AP course do not tell all the students about them, and it can be hard to figure them which courses your school offers. It is unfair to those who would really like to take these courses and it's taking away the possibilities someone could have

had to further him/herself in life. I want to take a lot of AP courses and it's not enough. Sometimes they don't even give many to 11th grade. In my AP math course, we are learning stuff from Algebra I but we are supposed to be learning more. It's very annoying. I want to learn more.

### A Typical English Course at Coolidge

Even in AP courses that my school does offer, we are not getting AP-level education. Higher achieving students are generally placed in AP courses because they move quicker than others and have outstanding work. However, in my school AP Courses are very slow, because people who are not fit for that class manage to work their way in them. Every human is different; there's some who are quick to pick up on something and there's some who need more time for the task.

For instance, in AP English class we are learning T.T.R.A.P (Topic, Tone, Rhetorical Strategies, Audience, and Purpose) which we've been on for weeks. In class, a lot of kids know the answer, but she'll call on someone who does not fully know the information, which makes the class go beyond slower. Any teacher should do that, but if it is taking two to five minutes to answer one simple question it takes up time. The teacher should work with those students individually, maybe after school. In addition, when we are doing T.T.R.A.P it is the warm-up, so we are spending about 30 to 40 minutes on the warm-up leaving us with an hour or 50 minutes to learn our actual objectives.

In this way, students who want to have a rigorous academic experience are cheated out of their time and courses. They have to sit waiting for the other students to finish learning while everyone else may already have the lesson down. Not to even mention the fact that this puts more pressure on the teacher. Teachers have to make sure they are not boring the fast learners, but still make sure the slower learners are getting the lesson. No matter what classes you are in, AP, honors, or regular courses, they all feel the same. It just makes the whole class for everyone harder and time and education should never be thrown away.

### At -Risk Funding

Often, the schools with the fewest number of courses, and lower academic standards are the schools with highest-level of at-risk students. DC decided to create a fund especially for at-risk students, which is a good thing, but the way that this money is spent, should be revised if we want to make educational equity a priority.

At-Risk Funding is when a school receives additional money to help meet the needs of lower-income students. When you are at risk this means that you are homeless, eligible for SNAP, eligible for TANF, in the foster care program, over-age high school student or unable to graduate or go to college. In the last two years, it's hard to pin-point what this money was spent on. This money is given to schools and then they spend it on their staff, but we should see how getting one more art teacher, or English teacher will affect at-risk students, and the school's education as a whole.

In Coolidge there are 401 students and there are 76% at-risk rate, that's more than half of the school. In Wilson there's 1,878 students and 31% are at-risk rate, which means there's a big difference. Wilson receives 1.1M for at-risk funding for , whereas Coolidge receives 568.8K for at-risk funding. I understand that Wilson has more students, but as you can see, they have a lot of academic supports already in the school. So I think more at-risk funds should go to Coolidge so that they can build up their academic support structures. These Investments should be taken seriously to actually lower the at-risk rate at lower-income schools. If this was taken into account, we can start with tutors, advanced teachers, social workers, afterschool activities that work to catch students up to their grade level., etc.

**To conclude, here are my recommendations:**

- More advanced education opportunities' such as, more APs, electives, and after school programs in all schools. There should be a baseline for how many APs, and electives each school should have.
- Advanced teachers will be great for Coolidge. I do not think they should change the teachers; however, they should teach them better teaching skills. Furthermore, I believe teachers should move from basic lessons and teach students more college level work, so students could know what to expect in college. I would prefer that classes are whole class discussion and not so much of independent work. Independent work just causes students to get frustrated and try to make up things because they do not understand, but when working as class you get more ideas and peers help their peers understand the lesson more because the teacher will just keep explaining the lesson in difficult ways.
- The school should work to fix the unbalanced classes, by getting recommendations from teachers. If this is done, Coolidge will have many students taking the lead of their education and we would have more working students.

- After school groups for more learning instead of credit recovery and sports. After school groups are important because slow learners can come after school and get their work done, and it gives students study time. After school programs would make Coolidge a better school as a whole because it helps students receive better education in better learning environments. In Coolidge classes students are very disruptive and rowdy, so this makes it even harder for students to receive information.
- Make a plan to spend at-risk funding in a way that we can see how at-risk students will be benefitted.

Thank you for listening to my testimony.