



**D.C. Open
Government
Coalition**

Digging into DC: Education

How to find almost everything
you've ever wanted to know about
DC schools

Presenters include:

- **Thomas Susman**, Founder, D.C. Open Government Coalition (D.C. OGC)
 - **Miranda Spivack**, journalist and open government expert, D.C. OGC Board Member
 - **Sandra Moscoso**, Parent activist and D.C. OGC board member
 - **Sheree DeBerry**, D.C. Office of Open Government
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Digging into DC

Thomas Susman

Founder, D.C. Open Government Coalition

D. C. Open Government Coalition

The Coalition was established in 2009.

Early activities included advocacy for the Open Meetings Act that passed in 2010.

The Coalition also has pressed for the Office of Open Government to enforce the Open Meetings Act, review FOIA implementation and generally lead transparency work throughout the executive branch.

In 2015, the Coalition provided research on privacy and access to police video nationwide, leading to the Council adopting the most open access anywhere.

D. C. Open Government Coalition

In 2019 the Coalition and others successfully opposed drastic changes to D.C. FOIA, the open records law, and advocated for expanding its coverage to include individual charter schools.

In 2020 the D.C. Council voted to apply the Open Meetings Act to trustees' meetings at D.C. charter schools, as the Coalition and community partners had urged for years.

Following years of advocacy, in 2021 the Police Reform Commission recommended and the D.C. Council Chairman introduced legislation to open police discipline records.

Digging into DC

Miranda Spivack

Journalist and open government expert

D.C. OGC Board Member

I have a question about my child's school. Where do I go for information?

D.C., and every state has some type of open records law, commonly referred to as Freedom of Information Act (FOIA), or Open Records Law.

But first - try to get information the old fashioned way. Ask the school administrator or secretary, or your child's teacher. The information you want already may be out in the public, and easy to obtain.

If that doesn't work, you can file an open records request for many types of information from D.C. Public Schools. Charter schools, while publicly funded, are less open and may be harder to get the information you are seeking.

Some open records basics

If something is enforced, inspected, licensed, or purchased, there is probably a public record.

The screenshot shows a web browser at the URL dcra.dc.gov/page/permit-records. A red banner at the top contains the text: "As a reminder, construction is not permitted on federal and District Government holidays including January 18 and 20 in observance of Martin Luther King Jr. Day and Inauguration Day." Below the banner is the link coronavirus.dc.gov. The navigation bar includes the DCRA logo, menu items for RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, RESOURCES & TOOLS, ABOUT US, and CONTACT US®, and a search bar with the text "SEARCH...".

Businesses

Business Registration

▶ Licensing Services for Businesses

▶ Inspections
Professional Licensing

Permitting

▶ Get a Permit

▶ Plan Reviews

Permit Records

▶ Energy and Green

Building

Small Business Resources

Enforcement Action

Vacant Buildings

Permit Records

Looking for specific Permit Records? Save yourself a trip and get any record from the comfort of your home. Don't see what you're looking for? No Worries! Below you will find a few options to locate the records you are searching for.

[View DCRA Records Online \(eRecords\)](#) +

[Search for Digital Land Records \(SurDocs\)](#) +

[Visit DC Property & Permit Center](#) +

[Check your Permit Application Status \(SCOUT\)](#) +

Your right to get records is in the law!

The District of Columbia Freedom of Information Act, or FOIA, DC Code §§ 2-531-539, provides that any person has the right to request access to records. All public bodies of the District government are required to disclose public records, except for those records, or portions of records, that are protected from disclosure by the exemptions found at **DC Code § 2-534**.

You can use FOIA -- Be a Knowledgeable Requester

Even sensitive records can be accessible

It can take a while (be patient)

It can be technical (ask for help)

Use the press if possible

Know the limits (records only)

Your right to attend meetings: – in person & virtual!

- Local School Advisory Team
- Public Charter School Board
- State Board of Education

<https://www.open-dc.gov/public-bodies/meetings>

Meeting requirements

Notice

- Date, time, location & agenda must be posted 48 hours before

Closed meetings

- Same notice requirements
- Reason must be explained

Digging into DC

Sandra Moscoso

Parent Activist

D.C. OGC board member

What Information Do Parents and Caregivers Frequently Request ?

Learning

- Does the school have a good academic reputation?
- What is the curriculum? What can I expect my student to learn?
- What is the feeder pattern of the school? (What MS and/or HS does the school feed into? What are the reputations of those schools?)

Resources

- Will our school budget be sufficient to meet student needs?
- Will my student's school offer the same resources that other schools offer?
 - Specials
 - Extra curriculars
 - Special needs support

** [See Qs developed by MySchoolDC "by parents"](#)

“Academics and Learning” Info: OSSE

Office of the State Superintendent for Education (OSSE) collects data across schools

- Collects standard data across DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools
 - Overall DC School Report Card (system level): <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard>
 - School by school snapshots (not disaggregated): <https://osse.dc.gov/dcschoolreportcard/schoolsnapshot>
- Lacking context
 - Focus on snapshot of academics, rather than how the school succeeds at growing/developing student performance

“Academics and Learning” Info: MySchoolDC

My School DC website enables families to compare offerings across schools. Useful in helping to identify program offerings, where schools are located, how to apply and enroll in the lottery

- Collects standard data across DC Public Schools and DC Public Charter Schools
 - <https://find.myschooldc.org/>
- Lacking context
 - Focus on snapshot of standardized test results, rather than how the school succeeds at growing/developing student performance

“School Resources and Budget” Info: DCPS

Scrutiny around school budgets is year round, but tends to concentrate around the city’s budget formulation season (Jan-May).

- DC Public Schools have Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs), who are elected by families and teachers to advise the principal in making decisions around budgets and other school matters.
<https://dcps.dc.gov/page/local-school-advisory-teams-lsat>
 - LSATs are subject to Open Meetings Act
 - LSAT capacity varies
- DCPS holds budget hearings (in theory, should be held by Mayor):
<https://dcpsbudget.com/budget-process-timeline/>
- DC Council - Committee of the Whole holds hearings on oversight and budget development:
<https://lims.dccouncil.gov/Hearings/>

Resources

- DC Public Schools school-level budget sheets that reflect enrollment, size of faculty,
<https://dcpsbudget.com/>
- DCPS Budget comparisons: <https://dcpsbudget.com/dashboards/fy24-submitted-budgets-2/>
- DC Council (in response to oversight requests)
<http://chairmanmendelson.com/category/circulation/>

“School Resources and Budget” Info: DC Charters

DC Charter budgets data includes school level breakdown by staff and non-staff costs, but no context around size of workforce, school enrollment

Resources

- <https://dcpcsb.org/school-budgets>

Education Policy Information

There are several 'big picture' education policy conversations underway.

- Student Assignment/Boundary Study: <https://dme.dc.gov/boundaries2023>
- Master Facilities Plan: <https://dme.dc.gov/mfp2023> (meets Thurs July 13, 6-7:30pm)

Resources:

- Deputy Mayor for Education's Ed Scape data analysis on neighborhood and student demographics, enrollment patterns, school facilities, and more <https://edscape.dc.gov/>
- DC Auditor: <https://dcauditor.org/report/measuring-what-matters-more-and-better-data-needed-to-improve-d-c-public-schools/>
- OpenDataDC (OCTO) <https://opendata.dc.gov/>

DC School Watchdogs and Analysts

If you're looking to dig into information and data about DC schools, you're in good company. Below are parent/community watch dogs who collect, analyze, and share government-collected/issued information about school budgets, policy decisions, and more:

- Dr. Mary Levy - long-term DCPS budget expert (former consultant to the city): <https://twitter.com/MaryLevy17>
- Dr. Betsy Wolf - federal education researcher by day, DCPS parent 24/7: <https://twitter.com/betsyjwolf>
- Valerie Jablow - education watchdog and blogger: <https://educationdc.net/>
- David Alpert via <https://dcschools.info/> - founder of GGWash, now blogging about DC schools w/ focus on data.
- 21st Century School Fund: <http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/DCPortal.asp>
- Coalition for DC Public Schools and Communities: Convene all Ward Education councils to advocate on behalf of schools. Leverage the work of Drs. Levy/Wolf, etc <https://www.c4dcpublicschools.org/>

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Sheree DeBerry

D.C. Office of Open Government