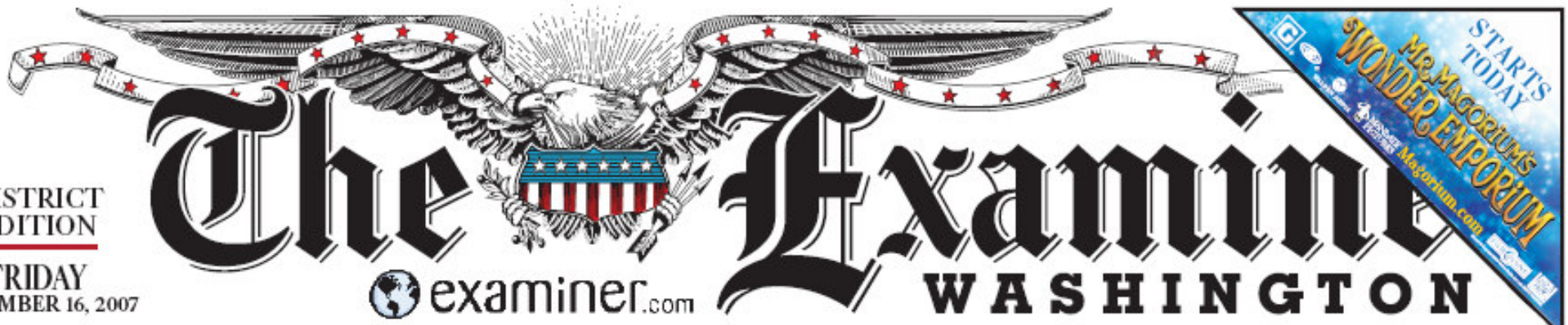


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Students and citizens offer schools budget advice

Fiscal 2009 budget
expected to be \$17M
more than in 2008

By Dena Levitz
Examiner Staff Writer

Complaints ranged from inadequate counseling and custodial staffing to a lack of attention to music and other arts education during a packed hearing Thursday night on the D.C. public school system's next operating budget.

Close to 70 community members testified during the rapid-fire session that Chancellor Michelle

Rhee was required to offer as part of the budget cycle.

Members of Rhee's staff explained that the operating budget in fiscal year 2009 is projected to be \$795 million, much of which is devoted to personnel and comes from city funds. The fiscal year 2008 operating budget was \$778 million.

Students were among those weighing in on the budget. Joshua Sprigg asked for increased and improved guidance counselors, especially at Eastern High School, where one counselor advises nearly 300 students.

"It takes days or even a week to fix students' schedules ... and they're often put back in classes they've already taken. It's upset-

ting," he said.

Students also cited building and materials problems like dingy bathrooms and textbooks littered with profanity.

One area that needs to be increased in the budget is support for facilities, members of the public told Rhee. DCPS must invest much more in custodians in order to maintain the progress being made on building improvements, said Nancy Huvendick, program director for the advocacy group 21st Century School Fund.

"If we don't add more custodians, we'll rapidly lose the headway we made this summer during the [repair] blitz," she said.

Speakers also defended the need for an HIV program now be-

ing taught to all 10th-graders by the nonprofit agency Metro Teen-Aids.

"In D.C. one in 100 kids age 13 to 24 are infected with AIDS," said Ifeoma Nwabuzor, a member of the volunteer corps City Year. "We can't just sit by and watch this problem."

Adam Tenner, representing the nonprofit, said federal funding for the program is about to run out, which means Rhee needs to funnel money into the effort or it will end.

Information relayed during the hearing will be considered as Rhee plans her operating budget, which she will submit to the mayor in early January.

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