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What the Mayor Won't Tell You About D.C.

By [Colbert I. King](#)
 Saturday, March 21, 2009; Page A13

This week ended with Mayor Adrian Fenty delivering a 2009 State of the District address that was most notable for what was left out.

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The [speech](#) did not report on the condition of the nation's capital.


It did not contain a word about the dramatic event with which Fenty started the week: his release of a [report](#) that our city has the country's highest rates of HIV infection and AIDS -- even "higher than West Africa," [said](#) the city's HIV/AIDS administrator, Shannon Hader. (A small quibble: "West Africa" is not a country. And while several nations in that region have HIV prevalence rates below the District's, rates in Nigeria, Togo and Ivory Coast are higher, [according to](#) the Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS.)

Fenty wasted an opportunity to level with the city.

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The D.C. AIDS crisis is scandalous.

In 1986, the District was one of the first cities in the country to appoint an AIDS director and an office to monitor the epidemic and care for the afflicted, as The Post's Jose Antonio Vargas [reported](#) in 2006. But things have gone downhill fast. Between 1998 and 2006, reported Vargas, the city distributed nearly \$500 million in federal and local funds to dozens of community groups charged with prevention, housing and health care.

What do we have to show for it? An astonishing 3 percent of residents who are infected with HIV or have full-blown AIDS.

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Where did the money go? David Catania (I-At Large), chairman of the D.C. Council's Health Committee, said: "Four years ago, this program was a joke, and there is no other way to put it." Yes, there is. How about "criminal" and "a crying shame"? More than \$500 million in taxpayer money down the drain, we're left with the highest HIV/AIDS rates -- and not so much as a peep of concern from the city's leader?

Fenty's speech was mainly upbeat, though he had a warning about the upcoming budget squeeze. He spoke on his top priority, education, which is now firmly in his hands. But he also failed to address directly an issue that screams for mayoral attention: the exodus of parents and children from D.C. public schools.

Last week, washingtonpost.com [reported](#) that the District's non-charter public schools suffered their steepest annual decline since the city started verifying student enrollment through an outside firm a decade ago. Enrollment last September was 45,190 -- down 8.5 percent from 49,422 the previous year. Public charter schools, however, recorded a 14 percent enrollment increase over last year. Today, charters constitute more than 36 percent of the city's public school enrollment.

Some charter schools even have waiting lists.

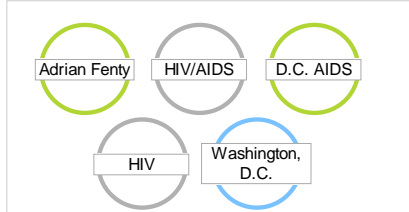
Fenty said: "The District of Columbia Public Schools is [sic] making great progress." That view is lost on the people who matter most -- parents.

The mayor stuck to the good stuff: a reduction in case backlogs in Child Protective Services investigations; putting more homeless families in supportive housing.

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