

September 14, 2015

Mayor Muriel Bowser
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Re: DC Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We are pleased to see that Deputy Mayor for Education Niles is launching this important effort on cross-sector collaboration and coordinated planning.

The members of our Coalition are deeply committed to these priorities as outlined in our founding principles (see [here](#) and attached as Exhibit A) and look forward to working with her on this project.

As your Administration works to set-up this task force, we wish to emphasize three points.

1. Build on the recommendations from the Student Assignment Committee that received a clear message from a wide cross-section of city residents,
2. Maintain an open and transparent process, with extensive public access to information, and
3. Include a majority of city parents and community leaders on the task force.

Genesis and Vision

After the most extensive public engagement on education in the District in a generation, the Student Assignment Committee heard a clear message from District residents. Based on that message, the Committee outlined a Vision for education in the District of Columbia, calling for policies that would ensure “a city-wide system of high quality neighborhood public schools of right complemented by a diverse set of high quality public school options” (See Exhibit B).

The DC Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force grows out of the recommendations of the Student Assignment Committee (see Exhibit C), and was intended as part of the method through which we could advance that Vision as a city. *The Task Force should build on the extensive work already done and use as its compass point the Vision articulated in the Student Assignment Committee process.*

Process

We understand the rationale for conducting certain Task Force meetings in private with minutes summarizing the discussion posted afterwards. That was the method successfully used in the Student Assignment Committee process.

In the Student Assignment Committee process, however *the public also had timely access to data, analysis and policy options that informed the Committee; as well as many opportunities for the public to participate in discussions with each other and Committee members about the policy issues being considered.* It is essential that a similar dynamic take place with the Task Force and we are heartened that you aspire to achieve it.

Composition of the Task Force

Increasingly, the education leaders in the city have recognized the need to ground education policy on input from the parents and communities most directly affected by those policies. The Chancellor has established a Parent Cabinet and is engaging Ward Education Councils. The Public Charter School Board has formed a Parent Advisory Group.

The issues to be addressed by this Task Force could have a substantial impact on the nature of our education system and the fabric of our communities. The policy recommendations proposed by the Task Force must be guided by community input.

We, therefore, urge you and the DME to empanel a Task Force that is majority District of Columbia residents who are connected to constituencies that will inform them and the Task Force—including parent, community, and faith-based leaders.

One set of organizations, part of our Coalition, providing community leadership across the city on these issues is the Ward-based Education Councils. Another such organization is the Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators (S.H.A.P.P.E.), also representing community and school leaders across the city. As you and the DME consider nominations for the Task Force, we urge that you give significant weight to individuals put forward by these groups, as they will represent every ward and bring broad input into the discussions.

Thank you and the DME for your time and attention to these matters and we will look forward to working with you on this project as it moves forward.

Sincerely,

Ward 1 Education Collaborative
Ward 2 Education Network
Ward 3 – Wilson Feeder Education Network
Ward 4 Education Alliance
Ward 5 Council on Education
Capitol Hill Public School Parents Organization (“CHPSPO”)
Ward 7 Education Council
Ward 8 Education Council
DC Language Immersion Project
DC Fiscal Policy Institute (“DCFPI”)
21st Century School Fund
Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators (“S.H.A.P.P.E.”)

Exhibit A

Six Principles for Public Education in Washington, DC

We believe that to reach our goal of providing the educational opportunities all children and communities deserve, our city must embrace the following principles:

1. Ensure all families have access to high-quality DCPS schools in their neighborhoods – a predictable, matter-of-right path from preschool through high school.

The message from the public in the [Deputy Mayor for Education's \(DME's\) Student Assignment process](#) was clear: Families and communities in all parts of the city want the assurance of matter-of-right schools in their neighborhoods that are safe, academically challenging learning environments. While residents want the ability to select alternatives, they do not want to be at the mercy of a lottery for access to a school that can fully meet the needs of their children and community.

2. Focus resources on students and communities with the greatest need.

Matter-of-right schools are thriving in some parts of the city and not in others. Schools serving children with the greatest need often lack the resources they require and face the highest staff turnover. To address these inequities, we must:

- Fully implement the recently [enacted “at-risk” weight](#) in the funding formula.
- Ensure magnet and specialty programs are available equitably and actively promoted across the city and encourage diversity in our schools.
- Strengthen early childhood education through outreach to communities, wrap-around services, community schools and family resource centers.
- Continually assess the resources needed and proven best practices to meet the challenges schools face serving children with the greatest economic, educational, and social needs.

3. Require coordinated planning between the [District of Columbia Public Schools \(DCPS\)](#) and the [Public Charter School Board \(PCSB\)](#) to build a core system of stable DCPS neighborhood schools with a complementary set of alternative options.

- Currently there is no overall strategy for how we will meet the educational needs of our children and communities and how we will spend nearly one fifth of our tax revenue each year to do so. We must have coordinated planning, overseen by an accountable city agency, with active community input, to consider proposed modernizations, expansions, closings, and openings of any school.
- Build on the recently opened DCPS office of planning to strengthen strategic planning, including vertical planning within feeder systems.
- Collect and disseminate successful policies, programs and practices identified in both the DCPS and charter sectors to facilitate both sectors learning from each other.

4. Responsibly manage our financial resources

- Use coordinated planning to avoid duplication of functions between DCPS and the charter sector, and between the school systems and other DC agencies.
- Improve transparency of the DCPS budget, and commence budget planning in the fall so that individual schools can thoughtfully set priorities by the end of spring.
- Require full transparency of charter school budgets, including how dollars paid to private entities are used and require that all payments are subject to LEA audits.
- Commit to provide DCPS and each charter LEA the funding required to meet the needs of their students. The compass point is adequate funding, not mathematical parity between schools and LEAs with dramatically different needs.

5. Broaden assessment measures to focus on student growth and use multiple measures to assess a quality education.

The District should follow the lead of other districts that are diversifying measures of student achievement and teacher and school effectiveness in order to provide parents with accurate information and enable the city to provide targeted support where needed.

- Ensure all students have a well-rounded curriculum in all matter-of-right schools.
- Reduce the emphasis on snapshot measures of proficiency toward measures that focus on student growth. Schools must be judged on the breadth and depth of subjects taught, their engagement of students, and the culture of learning they foster.
- Make public data disaggregated by income, race and geography, with actual scale scores, so it can be better used to determine whether all groups are making progress and focus resources most effectively going forward.

6. Ensure families and community members have reliable ways to exercise the right to participate in public education decision making. The research is clear that community engagement and ownership are key to improvement.

- Strengthen and support mechanisms such as Local School Advisory Teams (LSAT) and School Improvement Teams (SIT) to engage communities in school planning.
- Support or create parent/teacher or home school organizations at all by-right schools.
- Build on mechanisms such as the Budget Taskforce, the [DCPS Parent Cabinet](#), the [elected school board](#), the [PCSB Community Advisory Group](#) and [DME](#) taskforces to secure ongoing oversight and community input in decision making for our schools.

Exhibit B

Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries
Prepared by the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, page 6 (August 2014)

Vision for Public Schools

The recommendations for student assignment policy, school boundaries and feeder pathways were developed to support a vision for a city-wide system of high quality neighborhood public schools of right complemented by a diverse set of high quality public school options.

The District of Columbia boasts some of the highest performing public schools in the nation and national models (both locally developed and imported from other states) of highly successful and innovative schools. These success stories are found within DCPS zoned schools, selective DCPS schools, and the charter sector. The clearest message from the hundreds of parents who participated in this process was that all families want the right to access the best of what the District of Columbia provides students. Reaching that reality will require:

- Improvements in neighborhood schools, particularly those serving low income communities, so that every school offers comprehensive, rich, and challenging programs, fueled by a positive school culture.
- Methods, systems, structures, and policies in place that support coordination, cooperation and joint planning within DCPS and between DCPS and the public charter schools.
- An adequate number of seats in DCPS zoned schools to ensure equitable access to a school of right; and
- Reduced travel burdens for both DCPS and charter school students, particularly for low income families and communities.

Exhibit C

Final Recommendations on Student Assignment Policies and DCPS School Boundaries
Prepared by the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment, page 13 (August 2014)

Better Planning Across Public School Sectors

There was widespread recognition that devising student assignment policies that support a core system of high quality neighborhood schools of right without consideration of the role played by DC's charter sector would lead to policies that do not realistically foster the stated goals of predictability and access to high quality schools close to home for families across the District. As such, the Committee worked to identify areas where we could bridge student assignment policies across sectors.

The Committee strongly believes that a discussion of the decision making surrounding public school openings, expansions, re-locations, school siting, and capital investments is needed, and that policies, such as proposed in Recommendations 23 and 24, to give at-risk students priority in the lottery in schools serving few at risk students, should apply to both DCPS and public charter schools. Unfortunately, based on objections to Recommendation 23 the representative of the Public Charter School Board resigned from the Committee. The Committee echoes the public sentiment heard throughout this process that the city must develop the means to plan its public education infrastructure across sectors and to identify the policies that should apply across sectors. To advance these objectives, the Advisory Committee makes the following recommendation.

Recommendation 42:

The Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) shall establish a task force of relevant stakeholders, including representatives from a diverse sample of LEAs and schools, parents with students in DCPS and public charter schools, as well as residents and community leaders to make recommendations to the Mayor on the following:

- Methods and systems for information sharing across sectors;
- Structures for increased accountability and transparent decision-making on school openings, closings, co-locations, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment across sectors; and
- Processes for securing and considering public input about school openings, closings, co-location, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment across sectors.

By the end of December 2014 the DME will appoint members and define the charge per the recommendation above and propose a timeline for the task force.