



July 23, 2014

To Members of the DC Advisory Committee on Student Assignment:

The July 15th meeting of the committee included a discussion of mandatory preferences at certain schools for “at risk” students.

We would like to request that the recommendations of the committee not include specific recommendations of any preferences – mandatory or voluntary – with respect to charter schools. This is for several reasons:

First, the general issue of charter school preferences is complex and recommendations should not be made without substantial analysis of impacts. This analysis has not yet been done. For example, when PCSB led a council-mandated committee to examine neighborhood preferences for charter schools, we found that such a preference could have an adverse impact on children living in Wards 7 and 8, who disproportionately travel out of their neighborhoods in search of quality schools. We recognize the issue of preferences for “at risk” students is different, but it, too, could have a variety of unintended impacts that would need to be explored. For example what would be the impacts of students who were low-income but not “at-risk” (SNAP or TANF recipients)? These impacts would be different if the preference was mandatory or if it was voluntary, but even voluntary preferences will have impacts that should be considered carefully. The need for analysis is heightened by the fact that the “at-risk” designation was created less than a year ago.

Second, there is substantial discussion around the city about a variety of preferences that could apply to charter schools. The Council just approved a voluntary preference for students with disabilities. A leading candidate for Mayor has charter school neighborhood preference as part of her education plan. And there has been ongoing interest in cross-LEA feeder patterns – within and among DCPS and charter schools. If these preference are not considered carefully and holistically they could interact in unpredictable ways and result in a system difficult to implement and impossible for the average citizen to understand.

Third, as a general matter PCSB has a bias towards a simple, clean lottery that treats all children equally. For us to support any preference we would need to be convinced that a strong public interest case outweighed the basic merit of treating everyone the same. We do not believe this case has yet been made.

Finally, while the committee has been admirable in its efforts to reach out to community groups and neighborhoods, we continue to believe that the composition of the committee is not the right one to make specific recommendations for charter schools. We are comfortable with broad recommendations that a separate group – one that includes charter LEA representatives –

should study these issues and make specific recommendations. But we do not believe a committee that has no charter LEA members should make specific recommendations that apply to charter schools.

Rather than making specific new recommendations, we believe the language currently in the June version of the report appropriately addresses the issue:

30. The city and relevant stakeholders should address key issues related to information sharing and coordination between the two public school sectors such as:

- Public school openings and expansion, closings, relocation, co-location.
- Capital program investment.
- Alignment of grade configurations.
- Distribution of “at-risk” students in public charter schools

On the broader issue of collaborative planning, we look forward to discussing this further at our upcoming meeting. We have many examples of successful collaboration already under our belts and are ready to discuss constructive ways we can keep making progress in the future.

Thank you for considering our views and for the many hours each of you has contributed to the committee.

Sincerely yours,



Scott Pearson
Executive Director, PCSB



Clara Hess
Chief Operating Officer, PCSB