

OCS Working Group Off-Cycle Call

November 16, 2017

Attendees:

- Caryn Ernst | Watkins ES, Stuart-Hobson MS parent; former PTA president, Capitol Hill Cluster School; member, Capitol Hill Public School Parent Organization (CHPSPO)
- Mary Levy | Independent education analyst, Former DC Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Former Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
- Scott Pearson | Executive Director, Public Charter School Board (PCSB)
- Shanita Burney | Deputy Chief, Community Engagement, DCPS

Call Summary:

- Facilitator Ramin Taheri introduced the goals of the call and how they relate to the upcoming November Cross-Sector Meeting.
 - o Went over the recap of the October Cross-Sector Meeting.
- Facilitator read the community engagement question, including what should be in the recommended guidelines (slides 7 and 8).
- Taskforce Member: I want to review what we already do at PCSB. When we receive a new round of applications, we host a community meeting to discuss the applications received and open the floor to input. We also have a public hearing with the various applicants present, which is an opportunity for any member of the public to address the Board about applications. In addition, we accept public comment on the applications.
 - o For existing schools who are applying to grow, we also have a public hearing.
- Taskforce: That sounds like the process for opening a school, what about closing schools?
- Taskforce: When we close a school, the process is defined in the law. The Board has a meeting about whether to initiate the revocation process. We have an upcoming meeting about that on Monday. Any member of the public is welcome to address the Board at that vote. If the vote passes, the school may request a public hearing. Then there's a special meeting at the school itself where the staff presents why they think the school should close, and there's an opportunity for members of the public to address the Board. After that hearing, the Board usually waits a week, so if there's any late public comment coming in, we have a chance to review. Then there's a final meeting with a vote on the closure.
- Taskforce: What about school siting?
- Taskforce: For any school siting, we have a public hearing where the school presents, and members of the public can address the Board at that public hearing. Usually the vote is done the following month, and sometimes in an emergency, we'll have the vote the same night. It's pretty rare, and we say if there are any objections, we won't vote the same night. Generally, we hold the public hearing and vote later. If it's contentious, we have delayed the vote and engaged with the community and school to have multiple public hearings on the matter. For example, one school proposed an expansion, and there was concern from neighbors about traffic and parking. We had engagement with community, DPR, DOT, to come up with a parking transportation plan to address the neighborhood concerns.

- Facilitator: It seems PCSB wants to ensure the public has multiple opportunities to provide input. Addressing the transportation concerns is an example of taking input and working with agencies and the community to get a solution. Do we want to say we want to see those things moving forward?
- Taskforce: You're asking really broad questions. I'm having a tough time answering these questions. I can give very high-level guidelines that need to be out there related to any decision, but we need to get more specific.
 - o We should have a centralized place for people to get all information about any school opening, closing, and siting decision. There needs to be an annual schedule posted there where anyone can go find out the process and when decisions will be made. They need to be set, so you know throughout the year when to go give input. Especially opening and closing. It should be a schedule set at the beginning of the year and kept consistent.
 - o Meetings about opening, closing, and siting should be held at a time that's reasonable and a location reasonable to get to. PCSB meetings are difficult to get to, and sometimes you need to wait until 10 pm to speak, and not everyone can do that. We need a space to provide comments and input remotely if someone can't make it to a meeting.
 - o For siting, because it's location-specific, we need guidelines around a process for public engagement and timing around school siting decisions. At minimum, we should give 3-6 months advance notice about school siting decisions. We should set a process for how the public is engaged. For example, if it's a proposal to put a school in a neighborhood, the process should tell where and how notices get posted for meetings. I am constantly amazed how hard it is to find out when and how those decisions are made in my neighborhood. There should be a clear process and centralized place. We can proactively push out of information, to ANCs, existing schools and community organizations. People need lots of advance notice, and public meetings are accessible in that community. We need opportunity to give remote input.
 - o We need citywide processes around opening and closings, schedule transparency, accessibility, and then for siting, community-specific processes. Closings are community-specific too.
- Taskforce: You're right it's unfair to ask people to wait until 10:00 pm to address the Board. We made a change; public comment is now at the start of the public hearing. When we have it at the end, the public would comment, but the Board couldn't respond. People felt even though their comments were heard, people felt like no one listened. We switched the order so the public comment goes first, so people go early, and the Board can respond.
 - o There is a central place where all decisions and meetings are posted, the DC Register. All of our public meetings and comments are all posted to the DC Register. I appreciate it's not as easy to come to PCSB meetings because they are not around the corner, but we are in a central location, a block from the Metro, and we're geographically in the center of the city. What's convenient for one person is inconvenient for someone else.
- Taskforce: Meetings about specific schools should be held at that site.
- Taskforce: We do have a meeting at the school for closing decisions.

- Taskforce: It should be the same for siting. Opportunities for remote input... DC Register is not intuitive for people in the general public to go to about schools. If DCPS is talking about OCS with another system, DME or OSSE should be a centralized place that's intuitive for people to go to. Also links to strategic analysis and other information at your fingertips... don't know what the DC Register is and I'm involved in schools.
- Facilitator: Maybe a recommendation out of the taskforce could be that DME or OSSE compiles information and makes it readily available.
 - o Taskforce: PCSB is going to move forward and do what they do, but at the bare minimum, there should be merged access to information.
 - o Facilitator: I think DCPS would say they're moving forward with process as well, but we want them both to be more in sync. It's coordinating, not merging. This is fertile ground for us to have information get out to the community in a clear, easy-to-access way. It's a good level of specificity to talk about next time group meets.
- Taskforce: I would add DCPS has best practices about getting information out, but we're always more than flexible about new and innovative ways to get information to families and the community. I wouldn't say we'll just continue to do it the way we've always done it.
- Facilitator: Would DCPS be open to having someone compile the information and have a master schedule so the public knows about when decisions are made?
- Taskforce: Yeah, we have something similar now that could be used as a benchmark. We have a public calendar. Sometimes we can predict what the general topic would be, like in November and December, it's about budget. Sometimes the topic is a moving target depending on what comes up, but absolutely, we'd be open to that.
- Facilitator: Any other thoughts? We heard the process from PCSB, not sure what DCPS may do with decisions like that in the future?
- Taskforce: Not closing any schools. With respect to opening and siting, I can speak generally. We often create a community working group around some type of new programmatic effort. That group is reflective of parents, teachers, school leaders, and community members. That group has to apply, get selected, and meets regularly with the planning team. They are expected to serve as representatives for their stakeholder group. Depending on the situation, it could be larger. It's less likely for citywide engagements, more neighborhood and area-specific. We look at other ways to get information out, like surveys or using our community action team, website, listserv, and Parent Cabinet to get information out. We could build on these.
- Taskforce: I have other elements to address on community engagement. One is timing. I think we need community engagement at the beginning of processes. We also need to have it right before final decisions, when it's clear what's being proposed, but we need to go back and forth. We only need one opportunity to engage in the middle when we have some idea of where we're going to let people comment. If it's a long, drawn-out process, I would say more than once in the middle.
 - o Denver has some kind of weight given to community input in decisions about replacement schools. We need to tell people what they can reasonably expect. Is it one of many factors or given great weight? That makes it clearer to everyone what the input means and how much intention it's entitled to get.
- Taskforce: PCSB gives great weight to comments from local ANCs. Whenever we have any vote on technical or routine matter, we proactively notify the relevant ANC. We

make sure the Board is aware of their comments. If we vote contrary to their comment, we document the comment received by the ANC and then explain reason why, given the great weight to ANC's views, we took the other vote. But voting contrary to the comment doesn't happen often.

- Taskforce: That sounds like the Federal regulatory process. That's good.
- Taskforce: ANCs are great places to go, and I'm glad PCSB does that. I have had experiences from Commissioners that are thrown in at the last minute. ANC representatives are not always in the position to respond before they've had a chance to go gather input from stakeholders. Maybe we need to talk to ANCs about what amount of time is needed.
- Taskforce: PCSB must notify ANCs 30 business days or 45 calendar days before we take a vote.
- Taskforce: That's not nearly enough time to get feedback from constituents. They're all volunteers, and they need time to figure out what's going on.
- Taskforce: That's plenty of time.
- Taskforce: They have meetings they need to schedule for people to come give input.
- Taskforce: That's why they were elected, to collect input. They should be able to get back to us in 45 days.
- Taskforce: What are the ANC processes for other decisions in the city?
- Facilitator: I suggest we look at zoning and other decisions. We can look into that. *[Note: Governing bodies are required to give ANCs 30 days notice.]*
- Taskforce: One other element is the form in which the engagement takes place. We've talked about meetings and formal comment periods, plus community work groups. Sometimes a better way is to have a specific group of people tasked to look at something. One of the purposes of community engagement is to help the government make better decisions. To make better decisions, they need to be informed where the pitfalls and enthusiasm lie. A workgroup a good way to do this, and we could specify that for certain steps.
- Taskforce: ANCs can get involved in community workgroups.
- Taskforce: Typically, it's great when we can have ANCs sit on the community working group; it's an ideal not always feasible, but keeping ANCs involved in discussions is necessary.
- Taskforce: It's helpful to have a community engagement calendar, ideally for the year – it's helpful for getting the right people in the room. It's really hard to have lots of meetings across the city if people can't plan to be there. DCPS has a different strategy this year to have engagement mapped out, even though some don't have topics. We're leaving some flexibility and room for when things do come up.
- Facilitator: Would it be valuable from the citywide perspective to just give an opportunity for people to give input on education planning, irrespective of sector?
- Taskforce: I mean when we want to engage folks in the next year, it would make sense to think about what types of forums -citywide and other opportunities – and have some dates on the calendar, if that fits with overall strategy. If we determine we want folks to come together cross-sector throughout the year to give feedback on a select number of things, even if not all mapped out, it might make sense to think about that in advance.
- Facilitator: That makes sense. In my mind, PCSB has a well-defined community engagement process. The DCPS team is expert in engaging the community, and are there

plans to record those strategies in a formal way? Our job is to think about what aspects overlap where we can engage on community decisions broadly. We can think about specific points in time the sector can communicate with each other and then with the community.

- Taskforce: When you say a community engagement process that's well-defined, are you talking about in general how each sector engages stakeholders across the gamut of issues, or just respect to opening, closing and siting? We do have a process and standards for closing in particular. We could make it more clear and put it on paper for opening and siting.
- Facilitator: That would be great – specifically about opening, closing, and siting. The PCSB process is well-defined, like the federal process for defining roles, responsibilities, and timelines. DCPS probably has all sorts of expectations and expertise in engaging the community, but I would love to see how that would work with other decisions as well, specifically with opening and siting.
- Taskforce: We can do that.
- Taskforce: If PCSB proposes a new policy, the process is like the federal process. When we are dealing with other matters like citing, and opening, we include every public comment. We summarize the comments received, and we give a staff recommendation, which is the process used by the DC City Council.
- Facilitator: Any other specific thoughts?
- Taskforce: There is potential for a lot of coordination that might help the public.
- Facilitator: That's the goal, to make it a better product for students and families.
- Taskforce: On the chart you sent out with the wheel and the circles, it talked about two sectors making their decisions concurrently. That could mean at the exact same time. When we discussed with DCPS, the processes aren't completely lined up and might be difficult to line up. They happen in roughly the same season. "Contemporaneously" might be better wording.
- Facilitator: Yes, that makes sense. When I send out information for the November meeting slides, we will talk more about what they each mean, and we can refine.
 - o Next steps: We will compile notes and summarize. The OCS group should see and think about this ahead of the next meeting.
 - o Will look to ANC question about their timelines.
 - o Next meeting on November 28, at Education Counsel.

The call adjourned at 11:49 am.