

DRAFT
Advisory Committee on Student Assignment: Complete Meeting Summary
Meeting(s) #4, January 30, February 19, 2014¹
Thurgood Marshall Center, 1816 12th Street, NW, 6:00-8:00 p.m.

Introduction

Abigail Smith, the Deputy Mayor for Education welcomed the group and thanked them for their patience with re-scheduling the meeting after the snow day cancellation of the original meeting date on January 21st. She thanked those members who participated in one of the two Committee webinars on Policy Brief #3 that were held December 31st and January 17th to review the data presented.

Agenda and Meeting Goals

The Agenda for the meeting included:

- Update on public input and schedule
- Brief overview of Policy Brief #3
- Describe framework for student assignment/choice scenarios
- Work in small groups to develop a student assignment/choice scenario for D.C.
- Full committee to discuss preliminary proposed scenarios

The goal is to have the Advisory Committee develop three to four preliminary scenarios for student assignment and choice policy reform for D.C.

Update on Public Input and Schedule for Upcoming Outreach

The technical team presented a brief “Summary of Public Outreach/Input,” describing public input over the past month and updating the schedule for outreach in the up-coming months (see meeting materials). This included the Council Committee on Education’s Roundtable on January 27th with testimony from Deputy Mayor Smith (see meeting materials).

The Technical Team reported that an additional Focus Group targeting participation from Wards 7 and 8 will take place February 20. A Powell Elementary School PTA group used the “Community Guide to Conversations on D.C. Student Assignment and School Choice” as a basis for discussion, supplying notes of their discussion to the DME which will be shared with the Committee

The Team is ramping up to start public outreach for Working Groups which will vet policy scenarios that will be developed by the Committee. Working Groups will be scheduled in late March and April. Outreach from DCPS and the Public Charter School Board and the DME is expected to begin next

¹ The Advisory Committee Meeting was originally scheduled for January 21st but was snowed out. The meeting was re-scheduled for January 30. However as not all Committee members could make that meeting, a second make-up meeting was scheduled for February 13 - - but that meeting was snowed out as well. The second make-up meeting finally took place on February 19th. Notes for both make-up meetings are combined here; both meetings had the same agenda. Statements and commentary from the February 19th meeting are shown in italics. The list of participants indicates who attended each separate meeting.

week and will eventually include ANC's, the Council and neighborhood list serves. There will be targeted outreach to those areas where participation was light for focus groups: wards 7, 8, 5 and 2. Sign-up started in October; there were a total of 196 people signed up city-wide as of today. A summary report of the Focus Groups will be available from the Technical Team in two to three weeks.

Individual Advisory Committee members will be hosting or attending many public meetings concerning Advisory Committee issues within the next few weeks including a meeting for U-Street area parents on February 8th and one in Ward 4 on February 11th. Advisory Committee members are encouraged to take part in or host meetings; the Technical Team will share details of dates and times if desired by the organizers. *The Deputy Mayor urged members to let the Technical Team know if they would be hosting meeting or if they wanted the Technical Team there. They will be scheduling more meetings in Wards 7 and 8; meeting dates are on the website. She asked that members continue to submit information on their individual out-reach efforts.*

Members' Commentary and Questions on Public Input and Scheduled Outreach

- One member asked how the Working Groups would function as working sessions with so many people signed up already.
 - The Technical Team agreed that there would be an increased burden on the Technical Team to develop workshops for large numbers of people.

- *Another member questioned whether Working Groups should start in April due to the set-backs involved with the January snow days.*
 - *The Technical Team acknowledged that the Working Groups would now not be starting until April; more information should be available next week.*

- Another asked if the numbers of the people signed up so far for Working Groups skewed toward wards 3, 4, and 6 as did the Focus Groups.
 - The Technical Team replied that so far, that was the case.

- One member asked for guidance concerning any conflicts of interest in being invited to attend an already scheduled meeting as a committee member versus a parent/community member.
 - The Technical Team responded that there were no limits to committee members speaking from their own experience. Another member responded that each of the committee members is also a citizen who has personal experiences and attitudes which should be fairly explained. However, Committee members need to bring all community concerns back to the group as a whole.
 - Co-Chair Smith cautioned that from her own experience it would be wise to explain to people that the Committee is just at the beginning of the process and a lot of ideas have come up with no clear path as yet. Otherwise some people may take an isolated remark as evidence of decisions in one direction or another.

New Charter Schools Non-regulatory Guidance from the Department of Education

The Technical Team provided a recent guidance document from the federal Department of Education concerning charter school student assignment. This document should be added to the Committee members binders with the Meeting #1 documents: Charter Schools Program, Title V, Part B of the ESEA, Non-regulatory Guidance. It provides for charter school admissions to allow lottery weights for low-income students or those that are educationally disadvantaged in order to further school integration.

Members' Commentary and Questions on Guidance Document

- The Technical Team was asked to define “non-regulatory guidance”.
 - Although it is termed “non-regulatory guidance”, agencies generally respond as if it were gospel.

Brief overview of Policy Brief #3

This portion of the agenda was omitted in the interest of time because members had participated in Webinars on this topic earlier in the month. *The Technical Team urged the Committee to consider the policy brief as a draft for comments because their names would be on it eventually.*

Appendix B, Boundary Participation Data Table

The Committee was asked to look particularly at Appendix B, the Boundary Participation Data Table. Abigail Smith remarked that community members had thanked her for posting the data tables on the website in Excel so they could be easily manipulated.

The tables show the extent to which people who live in a school's boundary are using the local school. Simon Elementary is an example where all 605 age-appropriate public school students in that boundary are attending 86 different schools with 146 attending Simon. Simon's total enrollment was 270 students and the in-boundary participation rate was 24% (146 in-boundary students / 605 age-appropriate public school students in the boundary).

Members' Commentary and Questions on Guidance Document

- *The Technical Team has been considering how to determine the minimum data that the Working Groups will need to work with, requesting any Committee members' suggestion on this.*

Developing a framework for student assignment/choice scenarios: Small Workgroups

The Advisory Committee was tasked with coming to very preliminary scenarios for school assignment. A worksheet aided organized discussion among the groups (see meeting materials), and the members divided into four self-assigned groups (*two groups for the smaller February 19th meeting*) with a Technical Team facilitator with each.

Members decided which group to work with understanding that there was no commitment to one type or another but rather it was an exploration of what each would mean and require. The groups were encouraged not to be constrained by existing policy but to consider what would be best for the District. Reference to assignment plans in other cities described in November's Policy Brief #2 was suggested. They worked for 45 minutes to develop an initial trial description of a scenario considering what implementation

tools would be required by the city and the implications for families and neighborhoods of each of their scenarios.

The groups were formed around:

- Mostly Neighborhood: two groups (January 30)
- *Mostly Neighborhood (February 19th)*
- Neighborhood/Choice (January 30)
- Mostly Choice (January 30)
- *Mostly Choice (February 19th)*

The worksheet broadly outlined five types of student assignment on a continuum ranging from (1) all neighborhood assignment, (2) Mostly Neighborhood assignment, (3) 50/50 (Neighborhood/Choice) assignment, (4) Mostly Choice assignment, through a theoretical (5) All Choice system.

The worksheet indicates which Wards are essentially functioning with which types of assignment today: Ward 3 falls within the “All Neighborhood to Mostly Neighborhood type, Ward 2 fits between the Neighborhood/Choice and Mostly Choice type, Wards 1, 4, 6, 7 and 8 land in the Mostly Choice type and Ward 5 trends between the Mostly Choice and All Choice types. This describes the current situation where 80% of Ward 3 students use their geographically assigned schools and 17% of Ward 5 students use their geographically assigned schools. *(This characterization does not take into account students accessing schools through feeder pattern rights.)*

Based on the student assignment model a member chose to be in, each of the groups were asked to first list all the elements that go into their model of choice, second to consider the implementation tools such as attendance patterns, feeder patterns, etc. which would be required, and third to envision the implications for various broadly considered communities, families, transportation and the administrators or school operators who would be affected.

The scenario sets are just general descriptions of possibilities. In the All Neighborhood scenario every child has an absolute right to an elementary school, middle school and high school but no rights except for the geographically assigned school with a boundary or zone. 95% of the school districts in the United States use some form of this system.

Probably the solution won't be at one end of the spectrum or the other -- there are many points in between. The task is to try to identify the elements of your scenario and then find the right tools to get there and finally consider what the implications would be for the city as a whole. The “tools” are not exhaustive and are provided simply as examples. At the January 30 meeting there was a fair bit of diversity in where people ended up; people shifted.

Members' Commentary and Questions

- *The Deputy Mayor acknowledged that there have been questions from Committee members about their role in making programmatic recommendations. She explained that*

the DME is actively engaging with DCPS in discussions around the implementation of possible Committee recommendations. She reported that DCPS is very open to ideas and possibilities that we are bringing back to them.

- *One member asked that under Neighborhood/Choice, it states that “City divides into attendance areas aligned to each of its publicly funded schools” Does this imply that charters will have neighborhood preference?*
 - *No. The Team replied that the statement was meant to describe what rights students have and what the city has done; these are just examples.*
- *One member remarked that within the framework of the worksheet what is missing is the question about: What is the problem we are trying to solve? The goal seems to be equitable access to quality options in every ward. A policy overlay would help us get there – for instance, are we to consider recommendations for where charters are located?*
 - *As a starting place, the guiding principles may provide the policy overlay with trade-offs depending on the scenario (i.e. maybe limit choice in hopes of improving neighborhood schools, while still balancing that with some access to choice).*
 - *The DME noted that as she has been attending and listening to community groups and focus groups there are a few key themes that have consistently come up:*
 - *Equitable access to high quality public schools (acknowledging that everyone has a different definition of high quality)*
 - *Predictability*
 - *Neighborhood schools, especially for elementary school students*
- *A member commented that in an election year we need to take care that the Advisory Committee’s work is not dismissed –guiding principles would be welcomed first to influence decisions and also as a means of proceeding in an aspirational way. When do we build in that discussion around aspirational, high-level requirements?*
 - *The DME agreed that the point was fair but noted that a discussion around the guiding principles would consume the entire meeting. In considering scenarios the high level aspiration is not really going to change much - - but the next level is more practical – what policies could deal with overfull schools, for example?*

Group Report-Outs

Mostly Neighborhood #1² (January 30):

The group considered a choice set of schools within a large zone but depended on huge assumptions including the need for real quality options as a baseline within each larger zone. They presumed that there would still be specialized schools throughout the city but more equitably disbursed than at present - - whether these specialized schools would be selective application or lottery ones the group did not determine, but mentioned they would be specialized schools at the high school level only. They talked about a set-aside of possibly 10% at the high school level for out-of-boundary students,

² Because of the larger number of Committee Members who chose “Mostly Neighborhood” at the January 30 meeting there were two discussion groups facilitated for this scenario.

but whether this applies to the specialty schools as well was not discussed. The choice set would include charters in areas where there are not DCPS schools readily available. They discussed the need for greater charter oversight to make this possible especially with respect to charter location. They looked at the need for predictability and kept coming back to that and quality schools as fundamental.

Mostly Neighborhood #2 (January 30):

The group was concerned that as a city we are not at the required school quality level yet and would need to invest significantly to ensure attractive schools exist within every neighborhood boundary; we can't continue to have robust curriculums available in one area and not in other areas. The group discussed how the co-location of magnet programs within the high schools could attract more people in and bring a sense of security for families, and could also be a way to bring up quality in all schools and improve the equitable distribution of quality schools throughout the city. They talked about a 10% set aside for out-of-boundary students as well. The group acknowledged the challenges that come along with a neighborhood system, such as the existence of student mobility and how to deal with that. The city would still need to have a robust set of choices and charter schools available city-wide to make a neighborhood system work well. They also talked about closing existing city-wide elementary schools.

The group grappled with how to make a neighborhood system work with the continued growth of charters and specialty schools. The tools they thought might be required for this effort would be mainly incentives and potentially caps on enrollment. A potential guaranteed seat at PK4 grade level might be part of their proposal as a way to strengthen neighborhood ties to schools early on at the school. There was no consensus on this: discussion included set-asides, maintaining diversity (socio-economic diversity), and having more gifted and talented programs.

Some members of the group acknowledged that the requirement to close and/or limit charter expansion or some other limits on choice may potentially be needed in the future. We have huge concentrations of quality schools in some areas and school quality deserts in other areas of the city. Planning should be more robust and deliberate in terms of curricular offerings.

Members' Commentary and Questions on Mostly Neighborhood #2 Scenario Proposal

- A member asked what the difference was between what we have now and this scenario.
 - Members responded that one difference is the possibility of a guaranteed right to a PK4 seat at your neighborhood school. Policies outlined are not much different but making a clear commitment to actually following them would allow for a robust neighborhood system. Properly aligned feeder patterns have the potential to strengthen schools. For instance, opening Woodson as a true STEM program would have strengthened it as a destination for the surrounding feeder schools. Investing in MacFarland would have provided a middle school feeder for the robust early childhood elementary school populations that surround it. Charters are also developing predictability as they expand from PS through 12th grade in one LEA.

Mostly Neighborhood (February 19)³:

This group considered first a neighborhood base with choice layered on that: elementary schools would be primarily neighborhood based with geographical boundaries. At the PK3 and PK4 level the stress on families to get into their local school might be reduced with neighborhood preferences for these grades. Choice would remain available, but the number of choices might be limited under this scenario. An out-of-boundary set-aside percentage was mentioned as a possibility for students from low-income neighborhoods to access schools outside of their neighborhood.

The group discussed how neighborhoods without nearby schools (or without quality schools) could use charter schools to fill in the gaps by having them provide a neighborhood preference and other robust rights of access. Charters might be intentionally located in such places already. There was an assumption of more coordinated planning between DCPS and public charters.

Middle schools would be assigned on a cluster/choice set model with two to three elementary schools feeding into multiple middle schools. At the secondary level more choice was envisioned but with an emphasis on supporting high schools to be solid anchors in their neighborhoods. Locating more specialized academies within comprehensive high schools was considered as a way of establishing highly sought after programs more equitably throughout the wards. A choice of two or three high schools might be available by application.

Neighborhood/Choice (January 30):

The group decided on controlled choice sets to provide predictability from elementary school continuing to middle school and potentially opening up at the high school level - - but they did not get to that point in the discussion. Within elementary school choice sets there would be, for instance, five schools within the choice set - - but one might be more attractive. The question is how to deal with capacity issues among the cluster of schools. Possible solutions are to cap enrollment, have families rank schools based on preferences, or assigning by proximity. But in any of these cases, a family would be guaranteed to at least one seat within the choice set.

Some middle schools and high schools would pursue programmatic alignment and act as another feeder. Elementary schools might be aligned programmatically as well but it would be very difficult to structure.

High school application would be city-wide and there would be magnets at the secondary level within comprehensive high schools as a way to attract families.

The assumption is that charters would exist but would have incentives to participate in the choice sets. There would be incentives for charters to join the choice sets and/or other links between charters and neighborhood schools.

³ There was no time for a general report out after the small group discussions on February 19. The facilitators combined notes into a matrix circulated at the February 24th meeting the following week.

Members' Commentary and Questions on Neighborhood/Choice

- Members questioned whether city-wide high schools would in reality improve the options available to families.
- A member asked about sibling preference.
 - The group mentioned that they did not get to that question.
- One member commented that this scenario incentivizes DCPS to improve quality at all schools in these choice sets; it also might provide an advantage to charters who might pick-off students from within the choice set.
- Members asked what would happen with feeder alignment.
 - That group mentioned it would be part lottery and part application.

Mostly Choice (January 30):

There would be geographic boundaries at the elementary school level, with each school setting aside 10% of their seats for out-of-boundary students; the group struggled with the fact that some locations have little access to neighborhood schools. They assumed that all schools would be high quality and would be equitably accessible and that funding would be available to achieve high quality programs. Investment enhancements would be prioritized in low-income areas: adding specialized programs such as arts, music, STEM, etc. to these schools, with smaller classes and strong programming - - but these would not be magnet schools.

Middle and high schools would be a combination of lottery, application and selection based, with middle school application schools aligned to high school application schools. The remaining secondary places would be available 100% via lottery. In order to have program continuity for some elementary programs such as language immersion, students would be provided with a preference in the lottery for secondary schools offering the same program. Thus, feeders would not happen except in the case of dual language program preferences.

Part of the aim of this proposal is to provide more equity in students' access to schools. The purpose is also to level the playing field and take away the idea of separate but equal as determined by a student's address.

Members' Commentary and Questions on Mostly Choice

- A member asked how this scenario squares with the public's desire for high school proximity and predictability.
 - The group did not get to that point of discussing that question.
- Another member asked what happens if neighborhood populations overcrowd a school with the 10% set-aside?
 - It is assumed that existing boundaries will be adjusted to allow for 10% set aside.
- A member commented that NCLB created requirements for accessing higher performing receiving schools, but the rules only required schools to make room as

possible so the proposal's assumption would be that a set-aside could be interpreted flexibly.

Mostly Choice (February 19)⁴

There was a sense that choice would be reserved more at the secondary school level, and that elementary schools would have a geographical boundary along with out-of-boundary set-asides if space permitted at the school. Preferences would be provided for siblings, students from low income areas and to safeguard program alignment.

There would be no feeders from elementary to middle schools but some specialized middle schools would be established. High schools would increase program offerings especially in under-served neighborhoods. There was a general understanding that quality would need to increase city-wide to make this proposal work.

Next Steps

The Deputy Mayor congratulated the Committee on having turned a corner in terms of actually getting to the formation of rough scenarios. She will make every effort to find a time when the Co-Chairs and the Technical Team can update and involve those Advisory Committee members whose schedules were not compatible with the make-up meeting(s). One important consideration will be how to deal with posting a meeting summary on the developing scenarios before they are released publicly in draft form to the public.

Attendees January 30th

Co-Chairs:

- Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education

Community Representatives:

- Maryam Ahranjani, American University Washington College of Law; Marshall Brennan Project
- Denise Forte, Leadership for Educational Equity, DCPS parent
- Matt Frumin, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner 3E (ANC), DCPS parent
- Heather Harding, The Education Consortium for Research and Evaluation (EdCORE), PCS parent
- Faith Hubbard, Ward 5 Council on Education; DC Board of Library Trustees
- Kamili Kiros, Achievement Prep Board of Trustees; PCS parent;
- Ellen McCarthy, Urban Planning Consultant; Urban Planning Program at Georgetown University
- Cathy Reilly, Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators (SHAPPE)
- Sharona Robinson, Ward 8 Education Council; MySchool DC Parent Advisory Council; Ballou HS PTSA; Jefferson MS Academy PTA and Randle Highlands PTA, DCPS parent

⁴ There was no time for a general report out after the small group discussions on February 19. Facilitators combined notes into a matrix circulated at the February 24th meeting the following week.

- Evelyn Boyd Simmons, Advisory Neighborhood Commissioner 2F (ANC) Ed Committee; DCPS parent
- Eboni-Rose Thompson, Save the Children Organization; Ward 7 Education Council; Local School Advisory Team (LSAT) Plummer Elementary School

District Agency Representatives:

- Josephine Bias-Robinson, DCPS Chief of Family and Public Engagement
- Christopher Delfs, Senior Citywide Planner, DC Office of Planning
- Emily Bloomfield, Member, Public Charter School Board

Technical Team:

- Claudia Lujan, Office of Deputy Mayor for Education
- Cecilia Kaltz, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Jennifer Comey, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Mary Filardo, 21st Century School Fund
- Nancy Huvendick, 21st Century School Fund
- Alex Donahue, 21st Century School Fund

Staff:

- Clara Hess, Public Charter School Board
- Sharon Mar, DCPS Office of Family and Public Engagement
- Judi Greenberg, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Shanita Burney, DCPS Office of Family and Public Engagement

Attendees February 19th

Co-Chairs:

- *Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education*

Community Representatives:

- *Ed Davies, Children Youth Investment Trust Corporation*
- *Marta Urquilla, America Achieves/Results for America; PCS parent*
- *Martin Welles, Labor & Employment Attorney; Amidon-Bowen PTA; DCPS parent*

District Agency Representatives:

- *Ariana Quinones, Chief of Staff, Office Deputy Mayor for HHS*

Technical Team

- *Cecilia Kaltz, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education*
- *Claudia Lujan, Office of Deputy Mayor for Education*
- *Jennifer Comey, Office of Deputy Mayor for Education*
- *Alex Donahue, 21st Century School Fund*
- *Mary Filardo, 21st Century School Fund*
- *Nancy Huvendick, 21st Century School Fund*

- *Austin Nichols, Urban Institute, Senior Research Associate*

Not Attending:

Co-Chairs:

- John W. Hill, Jr., CEO of JHill Group and President of the DC Board of Library Trustees

Community Representatives:

- Wilma Bonner, Howard University, Retired DCPS principal and Assistant Superintendent
- Rev Donald Isaac, East of the River Clergy, Police, Community Partnership and Chair of Interfaith Council
- Dianne M. Piche, Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights

Staff:

- Iris Bond Gill, Office of the State Superintendent of Education
- Scheherazade Salimi, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education