

**DRAFT**  
**Advisory Committee on Student Assignment: Complete Meeting Summary**  
**Meeting #6, March 25, 2014**  
**Thurgood Marshall Center, 1816 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, 6:00-8:00 p.m.**

**Introduction**

Deputy Mayor for Education Abigail Smith welcomed committee members and introduced Kaya Henderson, Chancellor of DC Public Schools. Ms. Henderson thanked the Committee for their commitment and hard work. She reminded them that no one has all the answers to these really complex problems - - but stated that with lots of heads focused on the issues the outcome should be great. The team at DCPS has kept her completely in the loop about the Committee's work. She understands that they are engaged in an exciting and exacting process. Ms. Henderson emphasized the importance of the Committee's efforts and explained that she wanted to signal her interest and appreciation by her presence as an interested observer.

**Agenda and Meeting Goals**

- Reach consensus on the policy scenarios to be provided to the public
- Review the goals for community working groups
- Understand the process and criteria used for boundary revisions

**SCENARIOS**

**Guiding Principles for Scenario Development**

Ms. Smith asked the Committee if the guiding principles continue to feel right; she reminded them that this remains an iterative process, balancing the draft scenarios with the guiding principles:

- *Equitable access to high quality schools:* Where you live shouldn't determine the likelihood of accessing a high quality school.
- *Parental choice:* Families should have the ability to access public schools outside of designated schools assigned by residence.
- *Predictability:* It is important to provide a path of right to families through elementary school and beyond.
- *Neighborhood schools:* It is important to support the connections between communities and their schools.

**Basic Elements of Each Scenario**

The previous four scenarios have been collapsed into three by merging the two that were working with choice sets (the February Scenarios A and B). With each of the re-organized proposed scenarios the rules and rights for each grade level area have been defined to make them easier to compare including:

- Rules and rights for accessing DC public early childhood, elementary, middle and high schools

- Opportunities for choice
- Plans to differentiate access
- Relationship of schools to each other: feeder patterns, choice sets
- Necessary program changes
- Charter policy changes

There is some repetition but the technical team wanted people to easily be able to access the main ideas of each scenario. One question is which guiding principles are used or required by each scenario. Another is the challenge of implementation. But foundational to all of the scenarios is the issue of school quality. The Committee should look at fleshing out inconsistencies and un-tangling confusions so that each member is able to explain the rationale for each scenario – whether it is a policy they would agree with or not.

Ms. Smith emphasized that all the scenarios carry certain assumptions:

- Every student has the right to attend a DCPS school kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade.
- Every DCPS school will offer the same foundational program across elementary, middle, and high schools regardless of enrollment or location.
- DCPS will continue to have city-wide application high schools.
- Boundaries must be cleaned up to address over-crowding and previously closed schools.

Ms. Smith especially noted the enormous effort DCPS has made toward ensuring that foundational programs are available across all schools.

### **Members Commentary and Questions about the Basic Elements of Each Scenario**

- I have a question about the structure of the meeting today; do we intend to discuss all of this? If so, we will run out of time.
  - We want everyone to be clear on what each scenario involves. That's why we have scheduled the follow-up calls so at the community working groups we can all explain what each of them is aiming to do. Consensus on one scenario or the other is not the goal here.

### **Scenario A**

The technical team walked the committee through the major features of new scenario A with the three main points being: 1) An increased access to nearby quality schools at the elementary school level, 2) Equitable distribution of programs, and 3) An effort to balance capacity across schools. The early childhood level (PK3-4) is lottery-based with a preference for siblings as now, but at the elementary level there are choice sets of three or four elementary schools, which provide a right to one of the schools in the set (with sibling preference) in what is essentially a mini-lottery. The expectation is that one of the three choices would be a specialized elementary school (IB, STEM, language immersion, Montessori). The lottery would involve a 10% set-aside for students from areas with low-quality schools but only at the specialized elementary school programs.

At the secondary level middle school students would have a right to one of their two closest schools but there would be programmatic feeders as well. Again there would be a 10% set-aside for the special program schools provided for students from low-quality schools. There was not time to go into the implementation issues at the Advisory Committee meeting but the scenario would require significant expansion of specialized programs. All high schools would be city-wide with a proximity preference. Selective high schools would be by application and would also be city-wide and selective high schools would be more equitably placed across the city. However, there would be specialized academies in each of the comprehensive high schools. Charter schools remain city-wide.

### **Members' Commentary and Questions on Scenario A**

- With the right to the two closest middle schools, would the elementary school students have a right to the middle school with a specialized program - - even if it is not closest?
  - Yes.
- Can charter schools opt-in at any point?
  - Charter schools would be able to opt in after coordinating with DCPS on certain aspects, such as student access and transparency.
- There is a 10% set-aside lottery for elementary and middle - - but not high school?
  - Yes, there would be a 10% set-aside at the high school level too - - the idea is to open up choice at the high school level.
- Are sports included as programmatically specialized?
  - No, sports programs are extracurricular; preferences are only for specialized instructional models.
- With a choice set of three schools what if a majority of students chose one school?
  - One of the rationales is to distribute enrollment. Choice sets help to distribute enrollment by building some flexibility into the system. Scenario A does a lot to balance capacity among schools.
- It is difficult to overstate the amount of animosity to this scenario from what I've heard.
  - From the perspective of school planning, balancing numbers of students across schools is an asset.

- What is the best explanation from a parent's perspective? What does this do to increase quality or increase the number of desirable schools?
  - Not everyone from the sub-committee agrees and they tried hard to get past the assumption that "quality is the same everywhere". We know it is not. You could track your child programmatically and have a predictable school trajectory. The choice sets prioritize flexibility within your geographic area. The idea is that choice sets would be for schools relatively close to you so there is more predictability within your own neighborhood. The sub-committee talked about putting the proximity radius around the child's home **or** around the school - - some preferred the school as a way to help keep the neighborhood together.
- From a parent's perspective there are concerns around over-crowding - - a marker for quality - - **if** you can choose where you live.
- How does support for this scenario spontaneously spring forth? If there is only one good school in the choice set this sets people up and would foster resentment. Or would people just leave the city?
  - If, as a parent I am not thrilled with my neighborhood school, I know I have the same chance as everyone else to an out-of-boundary placement but I would at least get into a school near my residence.
- I don't know how I feel about choice sets. But with this scenario we need three very different programs at the set of schools to make them each attractive. Currently there is no particular system as to where academic programs are located; DCPS generally puts them where parents want them. With this scenario, DCPS would require more strategic program placement.
- The elephant in the room is that this process is not primarily to address quality - - but that's what parents want. Quality will drive us but we have to be up-front about the fact that we know the issue is quality but addressing quality is not within our purview.
- The assumption of quality is embedded in each of the scenarios. But in managing over-capacity in Ward 3 it doesn't help. At the high school level with a proximity preference it would make concerns

about crowding at Wilson more acute. The unintended consequences of this scenario may be bigger than the problems it solves.

- We need the impact analysis to help us with this but to do that, we need the scenarios first.

### **Scenario B**

This is the most familiar student assignment system. Committee members worked from the notion that families have complicated lives which makes predictability with a clear right to a place in “your” school important. At the same time there would be a liberal out-of-boundary system to provide choice and set-asides school-wide (not by grade) with a preference for siblings and a preference for students from areas with lower performing schools.

Under scenario B, early childhood PK4 classes would be a guaranteed at your neighborhood school with PK3 also guaranteed *if* it is offered. Schools without space for additional early childhood classes might rely on new, stand-alone early childhood centers. Most capacity challenges would be addressed by changing boundaries. There would be a 10% set-aside for out-of-boundary students at the elementary level. Elementary schools would feed by right to middle schools and then to high schools.

Middle schools would be large enough for comprehensive programs so that students would not have to decide on specialty programs at 5th grade. Out-of-boundary set-asides at the middle grades level would be 15%. This scenario provides for four new middle schools: Ward 4 north, Ward 4 south, a stand-alone middle school in the central city area and an application middle school in Ward 7 or Ward 8.

Specialty application high schools would continue but there would be specialized academy programs at each of the comprehensive high schools. Out-of-boundary set-asides at the high school level would be 20%. Preliminary feeder pattern recommendations were proposed and feeders from charters were discussed as a way that DCPS could invite charters to feed into middle schools or high schools if they would not replace DCPS students. Fully coordinated planning between DCPS and the charter sectors was a requirement.

### **Members’ Commentary and Questions on Scenario B**

- Why would charters want to feed into DCPS high schools? What would that do? These students would have two feeder rights.
  - This goes to predictability as a value when there is capacity and great potential in DCPS’s new high schools. There are a number of charters that end at 8<sup>th</sup> grade which would benefit from an automatic right to an area high school.

- There are annually 200 KIPP 8<sup>th</sup> graders who need a place to go to high school.
- Charter feeder rights would help to strengthen high schools. The concern is that it may disadvantage DCPS students so there may not be consensus on charter rights to feed into DCPS secondary schools.
- Do the elementary, middle and high school boundaries stack up in a pyramid?
  - Yes. Ward 7 for instance would stack completely into Woodson. The sub-committee recommended an application middle school at Ron Brown to which Houston, the elementary school very close to Ron Brown, feeds into by right.
- What about capacity? Would there be an optimal elementary school enrollment?
  - That would be different for different size buildings, and it would also consider the surrounding density of population and the participation rate. With the opening of Ron Brown, for instance, how to support high school programming would be an issue which is one reason why the sub-committee looked at charter feeder rights.
- Assuming all the schools are improved, how would one repatriate the charter families? Meridian, for instance, is planning to open a middle school at another location.
- Eastern High School's boundary is a challenge; the new boundary may not reach across the river anymore which would shut down Eastern's easy access from many Ward 7 neighborhoods.

### **Scenario C**

With Scenario C the focus is on increasing equitable access and investing significantly in specialized programming. The sub-committee took into account comfort and access for families. For early childhood there is a boundary right to one school at the PK4 level, the same as scenario B. There is an out-of-boundary process with a 10% set-aside at every grade level for students from areas with low-performing schools. This aims for more access to quality schools as it provides slots across the grade levels. The scenario requires more programmatic variety across the city with specialized programs such as IB, STEM, dual language and Montessori more equitably located. Current maps (attached) show that not to be the case now. The only feeders in this scenario are from specialized programs to corresponding specialized programs at the next level.

Scenario C introduces geographically large cluster sets at the middle school level, with boundaries for middle schools contiguous with those of the clustered elementary schools. Students would have a right to one of the cluster middle schools. The original thought was to have students access middle schools by city-wide by lottery but that seemed too difficult for 6<sup>th</sup> grade students. High schools would be city-wide with no proximity preferences.

This scenario plans to make all Ward 4 and 5 PS-8<sup>th</sup> grade schools into elementary schools with new stand-alone middle schools. More specialized middle schools and application middle schools would include McKinley Middle as a STEM school and CHEC 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> as a stand-alone dual language middle school. Ward 7 would have an application middle school as well.

### **Members' Commentary and Questions on Scenario C**

- Would the new middle schools be by application, or by lottery with preferences?
  - There would be a mix of application and by lottery middle schools and high schools. There was discussion of specialized programs to be added in Wards 7 and 8 but the committee had not come to any consensus as to specifics as yet.
- What about programs for students who do not have a clear path in mind but want to sample many possibilities?
  - We would want something desirable at each school but comprehensive high schools would have broad programs.
- Many parents may be upset with the emphasis on application and specialized schools - - do we make Deal an application school? There seem to be lots of inconsistencies here. How do we ensure a safety net for students without a proximity preference? It should be the obligation of this city to guarantee a neighborhood school as a choice. Without a proximity school this may discount the realities of where kids are; it really matters that they are able to travel between their homes and school quickly and easily.
  - These are all good questions; we need to understand the rationales better.
- If programs were equitably distributed east of the Anacostia I would see no need to travel to get to schools across the river. This is a social problem. I wish there were more choices; everyone should be able to take Spanish.

- This is the first take to rate scenarios and defining equitable access. There is not the consistency in quality we want now and we recognize that is currently driving choices and that is concerning. There is a lot of traveling now which empties out some neighborhood schools.
- What percentages of students are NOT traveling for high school now? What percentages of students don't attend their home high school now? One-quarter of all students go into the lottery.
  - At Wilson High School 46% of students attending the school live out-of-boundary.
- Everyone assumes quality and the importance of programming to quality; how we make neighborhood schools desirable has to be a priority.
- The problem is how to create choice so that people opt into their local schools.

## **PROCESS FOR REVISING BOUNDARIES**

### **Boundary Clean Up**

Much of the boundary clean-up is simply administrative; DCPS needs to have rational boundaries for its 71 elementary schools and PS-8<sup>th</sup> grade schools as they absorbed the 28 schools most recently closed. There are over 10,000 students living within these closed school boundaries. These changes have to be made while being mindful of overcrowded schools - - whether from in-boundary or out-of-boundary crowding. We are also revising for walkability and transportation challenges. A package of maps of the initial pass at preliminary proposed boundaries is included in your hand-outs.

The rules applied to boundary changes were:

- Start by changing as little as possible; many of the boundaries still make sense
- Manage school building capacity
  - Weigh grade-appropriate population in boundary, in-boundary participation rates and school capacity.
  - Distribute a deficit of students more evenly among adjacent schools as far as possible given the constraints of physical barriers, i.e. expand boundaries.
  - Distribute an excess of students more evenly between schools as far as possible, given the constraints of physical barriers, i.e. shrink boundaries.
- Maximize safety and walkability
  - Identify areas where walkability is limited with existing neighborhood schools.

### **Members' Commentary and Questions on Boundary Clean Up**



- Will these boundaries be shown at the Community Working Group meetings?
  - Yes, but this preliminary pass, they still will be refined.
- Boundaries matter depending on the accompanying assignment policies -
  - people's reactions will be very personal. Which policy you espouse depends on where you live.
- If I don't like my neighborhood school boundaries that will color my ideas about city-wide policies; should we address the policies first?
  - All the proposed policies are changeable but it is likely the public reaction will be affected by the wide-spread erroneous belief that changes have been set from the beginning according to a predetermined plan.
- We should be prepared for the big picture **and** for detail. Folks who have approached some Committee members want the details now; they want answers.
- The general scope should be clear but specifics will be required for getting to any widely held agreement. People should negotiate from their interest, not their position. We started with the interest – understanding the values before we got to the boundaries. The scenarios will be great for the community working groups in getting people up to speed. People need to think through the policy trade-offs but we need the maps too.
- Is Van Ness a proposed school with a boundary?
  - We are looking at population projections in the Van Ness area and are considering the possibility of re-opening Van Ness. This is also the only school that DCPS has committed to reopening.

## **ASSESSING THE PROPOSALS**

### **Community Meeting Plans**

Ms. Smith explained that she hoped that Advisory Committee members would participate in the community working groups, acknowledging that Committee work was already more than a full-time job.

What the Committee needs to get out of the community working groups is an overall sense of the public's thinking about all the issues the Committee has been wrestling with. Meetings will be in three parts, first with a section of informational stations to provide content and background on policy memos, agencies will be there such as OSSE with Learn DC, the Office of

Planning school age population forecasts, etc. Then there will be a presentation of the initial proposals with the third section being small facilitated discussion groups with work sheets for specific feed-back. The effort will be to make everyone feel that they can say what they think. People will be coming at this from very different points of view and we will try to meet people where they are with the three part organization for the event.

### **Members' Commentary and Questions on Community Meeting Plans**

- How this material is communicated is vitally important because we need to define things sufficiently to have a structured conversation.
  - The DME's office has brought on board a communications firm specifically to manage such communications.
- Everyone will be lobbying for what they want to see. If the meetings are one and one-half hours of community discussion then framing the scenarios has to be very clear.
- The approach has to be a range of policy provisions. We need to engage people to get a sense of what they can easily embrace, what are the challenges.
- Looking at the contrast in the three scenarios and where they overlap can create hostility and tension that may force a consistency where it is not really intended. People need to be prepared for Options D, E and F and feel like they can have input to modify the ones proposed during the community meetings.
- Maybe the scenarios need to be simplified by consolidating where they are the same; for instance, there are elementary school boundaries in each of these scenarios.
- There are many ways to present a range of policy ideas that will engender other ideas. Possibly condensing the ideas into three scenarios may create more drama than we need.
- What do we want for education in DC? This is the main issue.
- Defining scenarios by elementary school, middle school and high school options may help.
- Include a glossary of terms that defines out-of-boundary, high quality, etc. so people have all the puzzle pieces.
- Good facilitation is crucial – who is facilitating? Good facilitation will bring out good ideas and encourage new models.
  - DME and DCPS staff will facilitate and there will be training sessions for all the facilitators. This is how discussions on the budget and school closings were staffed.
- What is the role of Advisory Committee members at the community working groups; how engaged should we be?

- Ms. Smith stated that the technical team could have continued to narrow scenario definitions with the Advisory Committee but made the choice to go out to the public early with a broader range of possibilities because community feedback was needed. The DME feels comfortable with this approach. Advisory Committee members all have their own opinions and they will be hearing from their neighbors. Nevertheless we are approaching this process with an open-mind and are asking you to go into meetings able to do your best to articulate the scenarios even if you do not agree with them. We would like your help but on the other hand do not want you to feel uncomfortable. With the conference calls scheduled we need to continue to ask questions about the individual policies.
- It is incumbent upon every member to respond. Will there be talking points to help us articulate the scenarios and provide rationales at the working groups?
  - Reingold LINK communications has started mini-narratives of the scenarios. The one-pagers should tell the story in plain language so people should be able to engage.
- How real is the public participation process? There seems to be little participation from the non-English speaking public.
- Focus groups were biased but nevertheless we take them as gospel. It would be good to know that community working groups are truly diverse and truly representative.
  - There will be interpretation and day care at all the working groups; a three-four page out-reach plan has been put into place.
- There is immense detail and complexity to communicate. The three-pronged organization of the community working groups makes sense but we should try to distinguish policy models on that spectrum as there is a lot of over-lap and white noise between the scenarios. Try to boil down and simplify the policy content; we don't need too much detail. The purpose of these April meetings is to determine where the technical team should dig in further. Each scenario may need a story and descriptive title now with a greater level of detail later. We need to avoid going into in-depth modeling before we get guidance from the public.

### **Evaluating Scenarios**

- Predictability
  - Probability that students will know their school of right at each grade level
- Equitable access to high quality school(s)

- Probability of attending a high quality academic school based on ESEA school index
- Strengthening neighborhood schools
  - Median distance traveled to school
  - Projected in-boundary participation rate
- Parental choice
  - How liberal or controlled are the choice policies

### **Members Commentary and Questions on Evaluating Scenarios**

- I'm struggling with a couple of things:
  - 1) The collapsed scenarios presented today are from two sub-committees of four each and one of eight or nine and there was another sub-committee of one or two people. But the sub-committees needed to bounce ideas off each other and look at the larger scope; they required enough people and dialogue to hash things out thoroughly.
    - Some groups were much smaller, with only a handful of active members in them.
  - 2) Presenting a scenario where students travel assumes a certain amount of privilege. Families may be breaking their necks to do it successfully. It often takes an extended family effort to manage to get a sibling to an out-of-boundary school across the river on time every day. Most of these families would prefer to walk students to their neighborhood Ward 7 and 8 schools. Families need a reliable car and a salaried position in order to manage the time to do it. Most people don't have the luxury to travel.
  - 3) We know that everything is on the table BUT these scenarios are what currently exist. I don't know how to explain what is driving these scenarios and the community working groups won't be able to digest them. Working groups will need to leave those sessions understanding why these scenarios were put in front of them. We need to understand why people do what they do - - and people do make rational decisions.
    - A concern about controversy is not the focus; this is difficult and emotional material and a lot of back-and forth is to be expected. There is a contrast with the current situation and pragmatically where we want to be in the future. We have to think of both concurrently and consider how to set up policies that allow the city to move forward. At the same time we would be foolish to ignore the current situation. This may feel like an unsatisfactory answer but we have to strike a balance.

- I gravitated toward working on Scenario C because it was a purest scenario and a challenge. Over discussion the sub-committee experienced some regression to the mean, coming back to elementary school assignment by proximity, etc. These scenarios were set up to be discussed, to have holes punched in them. We need to provide transitions. As a parent I want more choice but recognize the reality of having a system which currently has no specialty schools east of the Anacostia. We need a transition for the next few years with grandfathering until more programs are in place – people must not be expected to change abruptly.
- I'm wrestling with two big issues. First, I think different people want different things: some want neighborhood schools but others do not want to be confined by their neighborhood situation and want their children to interact with a diverse set of other children. And it depends on what sort of neighborhood you live in. There are different values held in different neighborhoods. For some families, neighborhood is destiny – and that is disturbing to me. Second, we are talking about quality as if a switch flips when programs are introduced. The highest performing school districts have variability in quality. We have to be real about this in supporting neighborhood schools *and* options for those who want their children to go beyond a limiting neighborhood with families increasingly looking for diversity.

We want quality in every one of our schools but high quality is more than programming. We need people at a school to pull together. Various differing needs bump up against each other. It will take time but meanwhile the Committee is grappling with what is the best course of action?

- How do we define quality - - how are we judging it?
- Are we to accept these scenarios as they are?
- What if we don't agree [with the scenarios]?
  - Please hold those thought for a minute so we can get to the boundaries and analysis on the agenda. We have conference calls planned so the Committee will have extended time for deliberations.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

- Implementation feasibility
  - Ratio of projected enrollment to capacity for early childhood, elementary, middle and high school level
  - Taking feeder patterns into account as well

- Diversity analysis
  - Share of students by race/ethnicity enrollment in elementary, middle, high school level DCPS schools
- Projected future population gains
  - The implementation metrics will be run to take account of the projected increase in child population using status quo assumptions (sector share, % attending private school)

## **ATTENDING**

### **Co-Chair**

Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education

### **Community Representatives:**

Maryam Ahranjani, Marshall Brennan Project, American University

Wilma Bonner, Howard University, Retired DCPS principal, Asst. Superintendent

Ed Davies, Children Youth Investment Trust Corporation

Rev Donald Isaac, East of the River Clergy, Police, Community Partnership, Chair of Interfaith Council

Denise Forte, Leadership for Educational Equity, DCPS parent

Matt Frumin, ANC 3E, DCPS parent

Heather Harding, EdCORE, PCS parent

Faith Hubbard, Ward 5 Council on Education

Ellen McCarthy, Urban Planning Consultant and teacher, GWU/GT

Sharona Robinson, Ward 8 Ed. Council; Ballou HS, Jefferson MS, Randle Highlands PTA, MySchool DC Parent Advisory Council

Cathy Reilly, Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators (SHAPPE)

Evelyn Boyd Simmons, ANC2F Ed Committee; DCPS parent

Eboni-Rose Thompson, Save the Children Organization; Ward 7 Education Council; LSAT, Plummer Elementary

Marta Urquilla, America Achieves/Results for America; PCS parent

Martin Welles, Labor and Employment Attorney; Amidon-Bowen PTA; DCPS parent

### **District Agency Representatives:**

Josephine Bias-Robinson, DCPS Chief of Family & Public Engagement

Emily Bloomfield, Member, Public Charter School Board

Christopher Delfs, Sr. Citywide Planner, DC Office of Planning;

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

### **Technical Team:**

Claudia Lujan, Office of Deputy Mayor for Education

Jennifer Comey, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

Cecilia Kaltz, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

Mary Filardo, 21st Century School Fund

Nancy Huvendick, 21st Century School Fund

Austin Nichols, Urban Institute, Senior Research Associate

Michael Akin, Reingold LINK Communications

Fernando Guerena, Reingold LINK Communications

**Staff Members**

Iris Bond Gill, Dir. Grants Management & Compliance, OSSE

Shanita Burney, DCPS Office of Family & Public Engagement

Kaya Henderson, Chancellor, DC Public Schools

Clara Hess, Director, Human Capital and Strategic Initiatives, PCSB

Judi Greenberg, Special Asst., Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education

**NOT ATTENDING**

**Co-Chair**

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

**Community Representatives:**

Kamili Kiros, Achievement Prep Board of Trustees; PCS parent; (Ward 8)

Dianne M. Piche, Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights

**Technical Team**

Alex Donahue, 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund

Graham MacDonald, Urban Institute, Research Associate

**Staff Members**

Scheherazade Salimi, Chief of Staff, Deputy Mayor for Education