

Advisory Committee on Student Assignment: Meeting Summary
October 28, 2013
Thurgood Marshall Center, 1816 12th Street, NW
6:00-8:00 p.m.

Attendees

Co-Chairs:

- Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education
- John W. Hill, Jr., CEO of JHill Group; President of the DC Board of Library Trustees

Community Representatives:

- Maryam Ahranjani, American University Washington College of Law; Marshall Brennan Project
- Wilma Bonner, Howard University; Retired DCPS principal and Assistant Superintendent
- Ed Davies, Children Youth Investment Trust Corporation; Board of Member for Crossroads Academy Baltimore Public Charter School
- 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
- Dianne M. Piché, Leadership Conference on Civil & Human Rights
- Cathy Reilly, Senior High Alliance of Parents Principals and Educators (SHAPPE)
- Evelyn Boyd Simmons, ANC 2F Ed Committee Co-Chair; DCPS parent
- Marta Urquilla, America Achieves/Results for America; PCS parent Ward 4

District Agency Representatives:

- Josephine Bias-Robinson, DCPS Chief of Family & Public Engagement
- Emily Bloomfield, Member, Public Charter School Board
- Kimberly Driggins, Deputy Director, DC Office of Planning
- Ariana Quinones, Chief of Staff, Office of the Deputy Mayor for HHS

Technical Team

- Alex Donahue, 21st Century School Fund
- Mary Filardo, 21st Century School Fund
- Nancy Huvendick, 21st Century School Fund
- Cecilia Kaltz, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
- Claudia Lujan, Office of Deputy Mayor for Education, Project Manager
- Austin Nichols, Urban Institute, Senior Research Associate

Staff

- Clara Hess, PCSB

- Sharon Mar, DCPS

Not in Attendance

Community Representatives:

- Rev Donald Isaac, East of the River Clergy, Police, Community Partnership; Interfaith Council
- Ellen McCarthy, Urban Planning Consultant; The Urban Planning Program at Georgetown University
- Bobby White, Burrville ES Local School Advisory Team (LSAT); current grandparent and former parent of children whom attend or attended DC public schools and DC public charter schools

Staff

- Iris Bond-Gill, OSSE

Introductions

Co-Chair Abigail Smith, Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) welcomed the members and thanked them for their willingness to serve. She introduced the Co-Chair, John Hill, and the technical team. She then asked members to introduce themselves.

Challenging Landscape for Families and the City

The DME reviewed the challenging landscape for families and the city, and remarked on the tremendous change the District has experienced since the last systematic re-drawing of school boundaries in 1968 and how these accumulated changes have contributed to growing complexity, confusion and uncertainty.

The DME then asked the committee if there were any other points to add that highlight DC's challenging landscape for families and the city.

Members' Commentary and Questions:

- Understanding this landscape might be clearer if the committee keeps in mind the fact that the two sectors, the traditional DCPS schools and the charters, are separate systems with separate governance and accountability systems. This situation could be perceived as an asset or a deficit but the rules, regulations and accountability of the two sectors are different.
- The fact that we have an enormous number of schools adds to the tension for families who have a supermarket of schools to choose from which is often confusing and difficult to navigate; parents lack the certainty of boundaries and a clear path through feeder patterns.
- With two public education sectors, the challenge for city planning plan will ultimately get harder and harder with a dual system; the question is whether to go where the river takes us or make a plan for where we want to go.

- Now that some DCPS schools rival private schools, the economic reality of property values will be a driver for the public’s consideration too. It is also important to consider the overall economic landscape of the country, because families are likely to come back to the public system if they no longer can or are willing to pay for private school due to a weak economic environment.
- A concern was raised regarding the limited amount of “good school supply” of where schools are located throughout the city. Both the heightened level of school supply and disparate availability of good supply play into gentrification as well.
- There is also a disparity in access to data across the digital divide which impacts the ability of people to access choice.
- Experiences in different parts of the city are getting more and more different. We need to look at where growth is happening in relationship to school buildings and population shifts - - this challenge should be looked at in the context of other neighborhood challenges as well. The District has a heavy lift in relation to managing over- and under-enrolled schools.
- There is simply confusion on the part of many parents as to what feeder patterns are and how they work, especially with respect to which high schools the education campuses feed into. People should understand that feeders represent the schools that a student has a right to attend.

Goals of Initiative

The DME reviewed the goals of the initiative, and stated that the committee’s first priority is making recommendations on DCPS boundaries and feeder patterns. That said, given the fact that the city has a robust and growing charter sector that currently serves 44% of public school students, the Committee cannot do this work without considering and looking at charter school data and trends. It is also important to understand that the Mayor has the authority to make decisions about DCPS policies, but he alone cannot move any recommendations regarding changes to charter school policies. The Committee may decide to recommend changes for public charter schools, but these recommendations will require engaging additional stakeholders and will likely require legislative action to implement. Given the importance of both public education sectors, it is important to have committee member representation from both sectors.

Members’ Commentary and Questions:

- School assignment is the primary task and school choice is secondary - - but choice figures into it.

- One dilemma is that in some areas of the city, practically speaking, some charters seem to function as neighborhood schools. The Chancellor has even indicated that some kind of formal agreements between charters and DCPS neighborhood schools may be possible. Where charter schools are located in relation to neighborhood schools will be something to consider; however how to factor this in will be difficult but certainly relevant. And that is a real concern in some areas where closed DCPS buildings are being awarded to charters. The frequent mobility of the charter schools is another factor to consider since many of them operate in temporary locations and are not necessarily fixed in one location for the long-term.
- Another dilemma is that the Committee cannot ensure that the recommendations they provide to public charter schools are implemented, which could then undercut other recommendations set forth by the Committee. Thus, might the Committee provide multiple recommendations, or a set of tiered recommendations that include possible scenario analyses contingent on whether public charter schools implement the Committee's recommendations?
- There seems to be a presumption now that parents will travel some distance from home to get their children to preferred schools. DC parents for decades have traveled away from their neighborhoods to access schools but we cannot assume parents want to continue to travel, and thus we need to pursue proximity as a value. The group has to consider what currently exists as well as what might or could be. In many ways we may have the cart before the horse, and should be looking at school offerings first (what it takes to make a school attractive) and at boundaries second.
- In order to make this project a usable and valuable one, the student assignment and boundary work should be coordinated alongside city planning in general and work within the realities of a city. We need an integrated solution that intersects with the broader planning for the District and understand how this process will inform other areas of city planning.

Charge of the Advisory Committee; Norms and Expectations

DM Smith reviewed the charge of the committee members and proposed norms and expectations for the group, including that members should serve as ambassadors for the process and be open minded and respectful of each other's opinions. She emphasized that the Committee should come together to create recommendations that are good for the entire city, and not represent one particular school or location.

Role of the Technical Team

Staff members from the 21st Century School Fund and the Urban Institute will translate the Committee's ideas into a report and recommendations. They will be writing in draft, with on-going opportunities for revision, so that it reflects the best thinking of the group. The technical

team will also be conducting focus groups, working groups and issuing surveys to provide more and different types of feedback for the Advisory Committee.

Members' Commentary and Questions:

- Are the Advisory Committee Meetings open to the public? The DME responded saying that Committee meetings are closed to the public. The rationale behind this decision was to ensure that members felt open and comfortable exploring and discussing sensitive issues in the group without the concern that it will be taken out of context and shared publicly. However, everything that comes out of this process will be public. Agendas, meeting summaries (statements will not be attributed to individuals), documents and presentations shared with the Committee will be posted on the DME web-site. There will be a variety of opportunities for the public to provide input - - surveys, focus groups, working groups, and on-line commentary. In addition, the DME confirmed with the DC General Counsel that since this is not a public body it is not subject to the District's open meetings laws.

Schedule

Proposed recommendations from the Committee are scheduled to be publicly released in May 2014, followed by city-wide community meetings to gain feedback. The final plan will be released in September, providing approximately one school year notice, as is required by the Budget Support Act. The changes will take effect for the 2015-16 school year but these changes are expected to include grandfathering clauses that will help ease the transition for affected families.

Members' Commentary and Questions:

- People need at least a year before implementation even with the expectation of grandfathering.
- Overlaying the timeline for the Advisory Committee on the up-coming political process presents a possibly more dynamic and treacherous scenario; with the primary election in April, the preliminary recommendations in May and the final Advisory Committee recommendations released in September, we need to guard against our work being captured by the political environment.
- There will be heightened interest in this work because of the election cycle and how the DME responds to it is important. Broad outreach is required along with an expectation that the DME will conduct briefings and meetings with many different constituencies.

Decision Making Process

The decisions about DCPS attendance zones, feeder patterns and out-of-boundary enrollment are all exclusively under the authority of the Mayor and do not require Council approval. Any

recommendations that affect public charter schools would have to be made by the PCSB and/or the City Council and cannot be unilaterally changed by the Mayor.

Members' Commentary and Questions:

- It should be clear that there will be no popular vote on this initiative; Mayor Gray makes the final decision and then is responsible for implementing recommendations - - or he might choose not to act, or decide to delay.
- Do the Advisory Committee recommendations go to the Chancellor and PCSB before or after the city-wide community meetings? The Chancellor and PCSB, represented in the Committee, will help make this process iterative. Preliminary recommendations will be reviewed by the Chancellor and the Public Charter School Board before the city-wide community meetings, but after the working groups meet in March and April.
- The Advisory Committee has the opportunity to revise its preliminary recommendations after the city-wide meetings are held in May and June and before the final Committee report is issued in August.

Guiding Principles

Committee members were asked individually to rate a set of possible guiding principles for the Committee's work. The Committee then broke into four small groups and were tasked with trying to reach consensus on how to rate each principle. The groups worked to reach consensus but concluded that there was not enough time and the exercise would be continued at the next meeting. The guiding principles worksheet is located on DME's website under the Student Assignment and School Boundaries Initiative webpage; however, some examples include predictability, proximity, opportunities for racially and culturally diverse school experiences and maximal choice for families.

Next Steps

The Committee discussed changing the meeting times to a 4:00- 6:00 schedule and possibly on Tuesdays, but the group was unable to find a time that better fit most schedules and the discussion will be re-visited.

Committee Members were asked to do the following before the next meeting:

- Read and comment on the draft policy memo which will become the first part of the eventual Committee Report.
- Review and comment on the draft meeting summary that will be distributed next week.
- Familiarize themselves with the information included in the binders