

Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force: Breakout Group Call #2: By-Right Charters Brief

Date & Time: Monday, October 17, 1:00-2:00pm

Facilitators: Jennifer Comey

Note-taker: Hannah Holliday

Participants: Charlene Drew-Jarvis, Darren Woodruff, Erika Harrell, Irene Holtzman, Kevin Clinton (on behalf of Anthony Williams), Emily Lawson, Kemba Hendrix, Caryn Ernst

Call Notes:

The facilitator began the discussion by reviewing the first of the four purposes of the by-right charter policy proposal as written in the brief sent out to the task force members prior to the call.

Discussion about the Description and Purpose section:

- Some of the initial resistance to the idea of by-right charter schools could come from a lack of knowledge about how the idea would be implemented, given funding concerns (some discretionary funds are only available to charters that are citywide schools). To make people comfortable, there should be more information available to understand how a by-right charter school would actually function in the District.
- It was not clear to one of the task force members how the by-right charter option reduces student mobility. If the primary reason for charters not enrolling students mid-year is that there is no payment for taking on additional students, the LEA Payment Initiative should solve this issue without implementing another policy.

The facilitator clarified that throughout this discussion, the group should assume that the LEA Payment Initiative has been implemented. This means that funding would follow students and that public charter and traditional public schools would gain funding as students entered the school and would lose funding as students exited the school.

- The by-right charter option seemed like a highly disruptive policy to one task force member. They instead recommended focusing more on addressing mobility across sectors before looking at charter schools' mid-year enrollment patterns and the creation of a by-right charter school. Implementing too many policies simultaneously (such as the LEA Payment Initiative, the proposed transfer policies, and the proposed by-right charter school) would make it difficult to measure the effectiveness of any one policy on reducing mobility.
- It was noted that the school leader perspective would be important for determining the feasibility of a by-right charter and that other task force members were not in support of putting a school in the position of being the only school of its kind.
- One of the task force members who is a school leader noted that even though the policy does not directly address mobility it does work across the sectors to better serve students. A pilot program could be a good starting point to determine in which specific cases a by-right charter would work best. It could be a good opportunity to experiment across sectors to improve the quality of options available to students.

- Given that a by-right charter school does not address the specific problem of mobility, it is unclear if the group is trying to find a remedy for the mobility problem or if the group is more interested in changing some charters to by-right schools.
- The solution doesn't have to specifically reduce mobility. Given that DCPS takes virtually all of the new students, it will spread out and share the responsibility of serving mid-year entrants and transfer students.
- The reasoning behind a by-right charter is also to create high-performing by-right charter schools in high need areas in order to provide higher quality schools for students in those areas.
- The idea behind by-right charters would be to better handle the burden of mobility and to increase the number of quality seats in areas that did not have those options available.
- The purpose of this call should be to establish the overall mission of a by-right charter school rather than think through all of the operational issues.

The facilitator went over the other three purposes of by-right charter schools: “help promote stronger bonds with the community surrounding the public charter school;” “provide a high-quality school option in an area of need;” and “ensure a more equitable system to share the responsibility for serving students mid-year.”

Discussion about the Description and Purpose section: (continued)

- Are charter schools not taking transfer students because they don't want to or because the funding does not follow the student? The reasons why charter schools aren't taking students mid-year are unclear.
- Charter schools are not financially incented to enroll new students mid-year; the schools are paid based on enrollment count as of early October.

The facilitator clarified that when considering the by-right charter proposal, the Task Force should operate under the assumption that the LEA Payment Initiative had been in place for at least a year.

- The LEA Payment Initiative addresses the issue of better distributing transfer students to charter schools by providing funding for students enrolled mid-year.
- Part of the problem is that charters have the option of whether or not to take in mid-year transfers, whereas DCPS does not get that option. Some charter programs don't want to enroll students mid-year. Charter schools with special programs in particular might avoid enrolling transfer students.

The facilitator directed the task force members to look at the three different proposed options for creating a by-right charter school and noted that both option 1 and option 3 involve the use of a DCPS facility.

- DCPS already has the ability to take a school and contract it to a charter school.

Point of clarification from the facilitator: Charter schools that have a contract with DCPS, like Scholar Academies, do not have the same flexibility and autonomy as a regular charter.

- The major focus of this proposal is to give charters the ability to establish a boundary that doesn't overlap with DCPS and is in a high need area.
- Any charter boundary would necessarily require a change of DCPS boundary.
- Through collaboration efforts, a boundary could be established.
- A task force member expressed that they do not support a by-right charter school because it would throw off the boundaries that were previously drawn during the boundary process. DCPS can already negotiate contracts with charter schools. Being a by-right school would constrict a charter and they would lose significant autonomy. How does the Scholar Academies contract work?

The facilitator noted that there would need to be follow-up information provided on the Scholar Academies contract with DCPS, but mentioned that the most basic autonomy a charter would have to lose would be its enrollment policy.

- A charter would have to lose more of its autonomous policies than its enrollment policy to serve as a by-right school.
- It is possible that creating a by-right charter could be a way to get around working with the union and around engaging with the public on creating a new school.
- Would a student have more than one school of right?
- Point of clarification: does the term "by-right" mean that only students that are living within a certain geographic distance could attend that school?
 - A school could enroll students out of boundary through the My School DC process if they had additional open seats.
- Many if not all of DC's high performing schools have students who are out-of-boundary and this process is how they attract certain students. How does creating a by-right charter benefit a broad range of families?
- A by-right charter creates the possibility of a high-performing school in an area where mobility might be an issue and where there might not be many options for students.
- There is an incorrect assumption that if a previously successful charter network creates a by-right charter school with all new staff, new administrators, and new teachers, they are guaranteed to have all the same success they achieved at their other schools.
- Some school leaders would like the advantages that come with creating a neighborhood school and with being part of a community.
- Instead of creating a by-right school, the prerogative should be to explore how to replicate the successes in both sectors without changing schools from one sector to another.
- Many schools have been successful and have already been evaluated by PCSB. An option could be to only allow an existing Tier 1 charter school to transform into a by-right school. This would give students quality options in their neighborhood now as opposed to taking the time to initiate a study of what is working in DCPS and then trying to restructure. The focus should be on coming up with a solution for students that could be implemented as soon as possible.

The facilitator noted that a task force member, who was not on the call and who is a school leader, had shown interest in shifting their school to becoming a by-right school.

- Are there charter schools that serve a large portion of their surrounding community without being a by-right school?

The facilitator recapped the discussion so far and posed a final question: Would a by-right charter school proposal be more palatable if it came with a DCPS facility?

- More information will be available about how prepared schools are to accept mid-year students after the LEA Payment Initiative has been initiated. After schools start receiving funding for mid-year transfer students, a by-right charter school that comes with a DCPS facility might be something that is attractive to new charters. Currently, charters have no control over where they end up. The element of the proposal that states that if a by-right charter were created, it would have to be run by a successful charter network that is already in DC could be altered. PCSB could consider an existing high-performing network or a new operator with an impressive proposal that PCSB likes.

The facilitator noted the time and that given the lack of interest in the by-right charter school proposal from the task force members on this call, the entire task force would need to discuss the proposal and assess if there is enough interest to bring it to the community.

The call ended at 1:51pm