

Better Planning Within and Across Sectors

A consistent theme throughout this process – both in public meetings and Advisory Committee meetings – has been the need to consider the role of charter schools in citywide planning efforts. There was widespread recognition that devising student assignment policies for DCPS without taking into account the environment created by DC’s charter sector would lead to policies that do not realistically foster the stated goals of predictability and access to high quality schools close to home for families across the District.

Concern about accountability and growth in the charter sector was widely shared by community working group participants. At the same time, participants did not want to undermine the autonomy of individual public charter LEAs in their educational decision making and operations, and many families are proactively choosing charter schools and want to maintain that option. Moreover, concern about planning was not just about the lack of coordination between sectors, but was also about the lack of internal DCPS capacity for investing and supporting the new student assignment and choice policies and recommendations.

Inefficient Use of Public Funds

A specific area of concern was the inefficient use of public funds due to the lack of facilities planning related to school openings, expansions, closings, relocations and co-locations. These concerns were expressed about inadequate DCPS planning, as well as about the lack of coordination between DCPS and the Public Charter School Board. Communities and families shared experiences with high concentrations of schools serving the same grade levels within close proximity and with no real programmatic distinction one from the other and voiced concerns about these schools impacting each other’s enrollment with no communication or policies to enable coordination. Communities expressed the need to understand why and how decisions about school locations were made and what consideration was being given to the impacts these decisions had on a community. As long as DCPS continues to serve as the sole system of by-right public schools, it must by definition maintain an inventory of schools across the city. That reality - juxtaposed with the lack of limitation on where any given public charter school is located – fuels this inefficiency.

The Advisory Committee echoes the community sentiment that the lack of city control over the enrollment, location, or capital investment of charter schools is a source of inefficiency on the part of the city’s use of public education resources. This raises the question as to whether or not the District has adequate policy and systems in place to ensure that public education operating and capital funds are used efficiently across sectors.

High Rate of Student Mobility

Another area of significant focus in community discussions was the high rate of student mobility between schools and its impact on both families and schools. This mobility is a result of family choice and school practice, including, but not limited to expulsion, suspension and mid-year transfer policies. The amount of movement between public schools – both DCPS and public charter - is a challenge for students and schools. Students who repeatedly change

schools have statistically worse outcomes, including significantly lower graduation rates. Furthermore, the impact of that enrollment churn on school culture and resources negatively affects other students. Current student assignment and choice policies do not account for the negative impact of student mobility and do not offer disincentives to limit this mobility.

Early on in the development of the charter sector, these issues had a much more limited impact on schools and families. At this stage, when nearly half our students attend charter schools, that is no longer the case and it is important that we understand and address these issues. The charge of this committee was not only to update DCPS student assignment policies but to also identify areas where we could bridge student assignment policies across sectors. For this reason, the Committee believes it is important for the city to prioritize tackling these issues in the near term, and offers the following recommendation.

Proposal 30 and 26: The Deputy Mayor for Education shall establish a task force of relevant stakeholders by January 2015 to make recommendations to the Mayor on the following:

- A system of information sharing across sectors
- A structure for decision making and accountability on school openings, closings, co-locations, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment
- A process for securing and considering public input about school openings, closings, co-location, student assignment, student mobility, and capital investment