

## **Advisory Committee on Student Assignment: Meeting Summary**

**Meeting #12, June 24, 2014**

**Thurgood Marshall Center, 1816 12<sup>th</sup> Street, NW, 6:00-8:30 p.m.**

### **Welcome**

*Deputy Mayor Abigail Smith welcomed the group, remarking that they did not meet in April to make time for the six Community Working Groups. She thanked all the members who attended one or all of those meetings.*

### **Meeting Goals and Agenda**

The Technical Team opened up by showing a list of recommended policy items that still need clarification based on feedback received during the June community meetings.

### **Members' Commentary and Questions on List of Policy Items In Need of Clarification**

- One thing that is not on this list for clarification is a lot of people conflated the at-risk preference with the set aside policies. I think community members didn't realize that the set aside reserved seats were not just dedicated for at-risk students. Can we make it more clear who is eligible for the set-aside seats?
  - Deputy Mayor Smith agreed this should be added to the list for clarification and that people seemed to confuse the two policies and how they interact with one another. Separately, community members also raised substantive concerns about the at-risk policy, which will be discussed in further detail later in the meeting.
- The Technical Team also commented how the community was confused with the mobility questions posed during the June community meetings, and often times they interpreted that as student transportation and not about the transient issues of students switching schools.
- This could solely be me, but we often used neighborhood preference and neighborhood priorities in our conversations and I was getting caught up in wondering if they meant something different?
- The name "Center City MS" was confusing for many since a charter school already exists called Center City PCS and they didn't realize Center City MS was actually future Shaw MS.
- In the DC MAR right now specialized and selective schools are in one category? Should they be one category or should they be separated and have the at risk preference applied to those schools.
  - To me this raises the same issue we had with the charters, we wouldn't want to fill 100% of the available lottery seats with at risk students. It poses the same challenge we had with the charters.
  - Actually this applies more to an overarching policy question, and well table this discussion since it touches on a bigger question we'll discuss later on.

## Members' Commentary and Questions on Clarifying School Planning Recommendation

- I do not think we should be applying or recommending school facility planning policies for the district, but I do think it's important to make the determination whom will be making these decisions and it should be similar to the comprehensive planning between sectors.
  - The Technical Team responded and said that they are trying to create a framework that people could use in the future, but I agree with the earlier comment by a committee member that this recommendation should be put into the planning section of the report.
  - Is our recommendation that we do this whole body of policy work?
  - I think they are reacting to number #21 and #38. But I think they are coming into play in other places as well.
  - My question is if we don't define it, who does?
  - I think we need some recommendation and can't abandon it.
  - DME does MFP plan, so it makes sense to house it there and create a recommendation for the DME to create the guidelines and decisions for creating capacity triggers and school facility planning.
  - But there are two different components. One component is the assessment piece, which isn't the policy component and it is simply looking at data. I don't see that as overstepping the policy boundary. I see that advising the DME that this is something to include in the next facilities report.
  - The Technical Team's question is whether the committee feels that you would like to add more details to this recommendation concerning the facility triggers that should be used. Who ultimately should make the decisions based of the data? Whom should do the evaluation?
  - Is it anybody else's understanding that recommendation 38 & 39 are determined based off facility capacity, or are we still unsure that is the policy? I feel like there are two different things here.
  - You can tell capacity is becoming a hot topic now. Who decides the capacity numbers? If we set policies based off facility capacity then it becomes very important, especially for set-aside and at-risk policies. Thus we need to figure out who should decide that.
  - Facility capacity is based on the set-up of the school the programmatic needs for space. The number of PK3 & PK classrooms also is factored into the capacity number as well as special education classrooms, etc. Therefore, the capacity number could fluctuate from year to year based on the school's programmatic needs. So I think determining capacity should rest with the LEA since they know best the programmatic needs of the school.
  - For recommendation #21 we should state "conduct" versus prioritize.
  - Should we expect others to look at other indicators outside of just school utilization as a trigger? We could include leading indicators versus just lagging, and not just have people automatically fall into these categories solely on utilization.
  - The question is whether we want to solve for this? DO we want to add more clarity for the triggers?
  - If we flag capacity issues too soon at schools then the District may not take it for a real concern that needs to be addressed in the short-term.

- We'll come back to the other bullets since we address them later on with policy concerns section.
- I recommend #21 change ample wording.

**Areas of policy concern – Transportation Policies:**

**Members' Commentary and Questions on List of Policy Items In Need of Clarification**

- Can we go into the one mile calculation? Would this be based off walking distance? I don't think a half-mile is that far. The concern is that schools should be half-mile from the student's address?
- I think this issue came out of the concerns raised about River Terrace. There was a woman at Takoma and Savoy who raised the walkability issue at both community meetings.
- I agree, I don't think a half mile is that far as well.
- I think it is. If you are walking a mile with stroller or young child it could be difficult. I think we are struggling with the one size fits all policy. I think one mile could be too far to walk for 3 and year olds.
- I think we also need to think about the parents having to take the child to school and paying for bus fare as well.
- So maybe we should only apply this for young children, and do not extend it all the way up to 5<sup>th</sup> grade?
- Outside of the one size fits all model comment, we should also think about holding ourselves to reasonable standards. I don't think one mile is an unreasonable threshold. I am worried we create may create issue where we are tailoring the policies so much that we aren't really affecting many people with it. I think we should keep it at a mile.
- What do people from the Office of Planning think about this issue?
  - Well our agency for planning purposes, typically uses half-mile as the neighborhood catchment area.
- I get that a half-mile is the usual planning threshold, but I am concerned that applying it across the city will become an issue. How many more people would this affect if we went from one mile to a half mile?
  - The Technical Team did not have that exact information on hand, but replied that roughly (based on 2012 data) it would go from affecting 1,900 student to around 4,000 or 5,000 students.
  - Well then that means a lot more free metro bus rides for parents and it comes down to this being a fiscal issue in meeting the half mile policy.
  - But that number also affects the proximity preference as well which is a policy issue
  - It may not be our job to operationalize this and go too far into the details, but we should keep in mind there may be multiple parents taking the kid to school.
    - The child only needs to show a DC ONE CARD and then any parent can accompany them so I don't think this would be an issue.
  - I know a friend who currently has 5 school aged boys and has to drop them off in multiple locations and I know she is okay in handling this.

- I am having some concerns with the proximity preference and what this could potentially mean for the common lottery preferences.
- These two related policies do not have to be one in the same. For example, the proximity preference policy could be based off the 1 mile and providing free bus fare policy for parents could be based off the half-mile threshold.
- If we are thinking about this from a pure walkability standpoint, then a half-mile is the standard the Office of Planning uses.
- I don't think there is one size fits all for the city, and we need to feel comfortable with that.
- I think for me it's about cost. We have already been challenged by other officials in regards to how much the city will have to spend on these recommendations and I think we could get pushed on this from outsiders in regards to the cost of this policy.
- Also if the free bus fare for the parent is only based on the half-mile threshold, then it may not make total sense since we they will likely have to walk to a bus or a metro to get to school which could make it further, and this wouldn't solve the walkability issue.
- I am hearing we feel comfortable with keeping the bus fare policy recommendation at one mile? Alright, the Technical Team is going to go with that.
- What about proximity preference policy? Should that be kept at one mile too?
- I would like to know exactly how this would work? If your in-boundary school is more than one mile away from your home, then you get a proximity preference to your closest DCPS school?
  - Yes, and we calculated how many students would be impacted by this policy based on 2013 data, and it would only apply to 350 students using the one mile as the threshold. Others are excluded even though they are more than one mile from their assigned school since they do not have an active DCPS school that is closer, and often times with these students their closest school is now closed. The Technical Team tried to address issues if we could assign a student to their closest DCPS school, but couldn't solve for all instances because of capacity issues of surrounding schools, etc.
  - What is the current proximity preference that we have in place now in the lottery?
    - Right now it is defined by a theoretical box (3000 square feet around the elementary school, and 5000 square feet for the middle schools). There is currently no proximity preference for high school.
- With reference to recommendation number 10, we should not that there is already an existing committee called Safe Passengers to School that works on safe routes to school issues. Thus, we should reference that group within the recommendation so people do not dismiss this one since they are thinking a group already exists that works on these issues. I think we should include some

additional language on this one. The Safe Passengers to School group has been used in the past by DCPS for school closings.

**Areas of policy concern – Set-aside policies:**

**Members' Commentary and Questions on List of Policy Items In Need of Clarification**

- The Technical Team clarified that they were referring to the set-asides at the elementary level, 6<sup>th</sup> grade and 9<sup>th</sup> grade—all set at a 10% reserve for OOB students.
  - I heard concern from the community that the set-asides would be filled up by at-risk students and then there wouldn't be any room for other non at risk students.
- I am a little confused. But didn't we original have another set-aside policy for elementary at 10%, middle school at 15% and then high school at 20%. I would like to put that back on the table and think it might have been an oversight to leave it out as another OOB option.
  - I think the pivotal point from moving away from the 10%, 15% and 20% at the different grade bands was to set them at 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade instead to create new access points to enter into the OOB system.
  - I am bring up the 10%, 15% and 20% original set-aside policy, because I feel like if we had this policy as well it would make the community feel more comfortable that they wouldn't be locked into their in-boundary school and that additional OOB seats would be available to them.
  - Right now people don't feel like they have entry points into the OOB system, and 15% at middle school (MS) and 20% at high school (HS) feels more real for people.
  - Would the set-aside of 10%, 15% and 20% be across the entire enrollment for the school? And then at the MS and HS levels would this include OOB students at the feeder schools?
    - The Technical Team clarified that it would be an absolute count of how many students live outside the boundary used in the calculation of deciding whether the school met the 10%, 15% and 20% set-aside thresholds.
    - It is out of enrollment or capacity? I want to say its enrollment.
    - But if a school is already overcapacity and it's based on enrollment then you are using a much higher number then if you would have used facility capacity.
  - The Technical Team explained how most elementary schools fulfill 10% set aside since we are counting special education students, whether you moved out of the boundary but still attending and therefore almost all of the elementary schools already are meeting the 10% threshold.
  - So we should look at the small number of schools it will affect, and if it's a big problem then we can decide but I do not think the 10%, 15% or 20% set-aside policy will be a big issue in terms of building capacity.
  - The Technical Team confirmed they that the committee landed on using enrollment versus capacity for the set-aside threshold determination.

- The idea with the policy for additional set-asides at the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grades is to provide additional opportunities or access points where families can apply OOB and not feel like they have to get in at elementary in order to get into the middle and high school they would like to attend. Whereas the 10%, 15% and 20% could be fulfilled with those coming through feeder pattern. So opening up additional new seats at 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade provides additional access points.
  - And would the 10% of 6<sup>th</sup> grade seats be based on capacity or enrollment? If capacity then LEA needs to define it.
  - I am intrigued with the idea of using capacity since you do not know your enrollment until mid-summer so it could make sense to have it capacity here to plan more effectively for the following school year.
  - Right now at Deal, there are currently no OOB seats opening up.
  - There has been some debate with others on whether the set-asides at 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade could work at Deal and Wilson. Some scenarios show that it could work, while other assumptions show that it would be tight or couldn't work. And I pushed on this policy to pressure test it and I say we leave it in there as an aspiration to get to in the future.
- Since we are keeping the 6<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade additional set-asides in and not sure how the assumptions will play out in the future we can write within the recommendation that they should look at capacity again in the future prior to implementation. I think they should look at it SY17-18 before lottery opens up in SY18-19.

**Areas of policy concern – At-risk policies:**

**Members' Commentary and Questions on List of Policy Items In Need of Clarification**

- The biggest concerns we heard during the community meetings was that the middle class families would be pushed out. Also, wondering how it would work for those at the cusp for meeting the threshold, such as those at 28% and 29% at-risk. Another implementation concern was how an individual student would elect they were an at-risk student and if they would have to designate themselves as such in the lottery application.
- Who are we considering middle class families? Everything else we are very specific with concerns, and for me middle class it too broad of a class.
  - It is people who live in an area with access to a non-high quality program and would like to go to the list of 20 schools that are currently designated as providing the at-risk preference, but these families do not qualify for the preference because they are not on TANF, SNAP, etc.
- The enrollment of the school at-risk may not necessarily reflect the economic make-up of the surrounding neighborhood area.
- What if we did the at-risk preference up to the 10%, 15% and 20% set-asides? This would help solve for the Hearst issue which has a lot of OOB seats and wouldn't want to flood all seats with at-risk students. You would only need to guarantee or apply at-risk preference up to the threshold for the OOB set asides.

- Instead of lowering the initial trigger or at-risk threshold for the schools who need to offer the preference (still remains 30% at risk), then apply a different percentage of seats reserved for at risk students?
- I think we are trying to solve for two things. The first is to deal with the concern that we need to increase access to middle class families for the OOB lottery. The second is implementing effectively the schools that have high OOB seats available, but meet the threshold since currently enroll low percent of at-risk students.
- I want to make sure we are hearing this right. If we are allowing more middle class families to go to non-neighborhood schools then this may be in direct conflict with what we have been striving for with other policies in supporting neighborhood schools as a priority.
- You could think of it as an interim solution until quality improves?
- I accept that as a more palatable solution, but this is counter to what our overall goal is.
- What's the compelling argument not to include citywide or selective schools? It is because we selective schools there is no lottery and instead have their own admissions' process so we would be introducing new policy for them?
- I think selective schools shouldn't be exempt.
- When there is more eligible students than there is room at the school, then I think there should be a weight for at-risk students.
- I am not opposed to this policy, but if we switch or add in a new proposal that the community has never seen before there could be potential back lash from the community.
- So we could possibly raise that serving at-risk students at selective schools is an issue for selective schools as well, but recommend anything formally and instead state that they should take a look into it.
- The at-risk preference should apply to citywide schools. But there is another issue of proximity? We should not have proximity if they don't have a boundary. The schools are currently not equitable dispersed throughout the city so they shouldn't have proximity preference.
- The Recommendations use of parity came up a lot in community meetings and what does that mean?
  - Personally I like this generality so depending on the community, you can tailor the feeder pathway to what the community wants.
  - I am okay with the language as it is, and the use of parity since it's broad enough to tailor it to the community.
  - Sometimes when you say parity, people can feel like when you aren't specific enough and that they are getting screwed without more details.
  - I think the problem is bigger than that. If we have programmatic feeder pathways, for example, Cardozo you have people opting out of the feeder pathway. So someone needs to have the job to see if the feeder pathway makes sense for the surrounding community. There are some uneven challenges with some of the current and new feeder pathway systems that need specific attention and creativity to make it work.
- I think it is part of our charge to rationalize these feeder pathways. I think you add in another recommendation urging DCPS to conduct ongoing vertical planning. Planning from bottom to top can help make the feeder pattern pathway even stronger. We need to make sure the set-up language reflects this and fix the parity language.

- I have policy concerns with this area too since this allows more choice to folks who don't want to go to their in-boundary schools. I played with a date of when DCPS should establish a date of when they need to create a programmatic program. Specialized programs is also part of the vertical planning pathway.

General Comments:

- Am I the only one testifying? I think it is hard for people with full time jobs, and you are not sure when you are slated to testify that day. Are we encouraging the community to testify and use this as an opportunity to provide feedback for those to participate in an alternative way from the community meetings held?
- We know there are around 40 people signed up to testify and all testimony will be public.
- There is already a narrative that has been put out there so this is an opportunity to shift the dialogue. I could hand in written testimony. It's about what we heard so it doesn't get lost with new mayor and council members.
- Is the list of 40 or so testifying the usual suspects? Can that list be shared?
  - Yes we can share that list with you all.
- I call for one more meeting to cover the remaining outstanding items. I think the two slides covering specific feeder and boundary issues makes sense to do with specific AC members who know that area best.

**Areas of policy concern – Phase-in policies:**

**Members' Commentary and Questions on List of Policy Items In Need of Clarification**

- We still need to cover phasing in. The main issues with these sections was whether OOB at DCPS schools or charter schools would be grandfathered in or if they would be treated as new students in SY2015?
  - How are these students any different from those who plan to go to ES? They do not want to exercise their current elementary school rights, but still want maintain their existing rights in the future.
  - This group is saying that they should retain their geographic rights and should be grandfathered in.
  - I think you should only affect DCPS students and policy effects those in the moment so if they aren't attending DCPS in-boundary school then they shouldn't be grandfathered in and maintain their previous geographic right.
  - Our rationale for phasing in was to keep cohorts and families together to finish out the terminal grade and not disrupt their school experience. And this doesn't fit either of those rationales.
  - This also applies to those exercising OOB DCPS schools or private school.
  - I don't think these students should be included in the phasing in policies. They still have time to go back to DCPS in-boundary school in SY14-15 and still exercise MS and HS feeder pattern if they wish to do so.
- We could add timeline to when the MS be built to help with the phasing in policies?
  - I proposed adding one more year of grandfathering for students assigned to a new middle school. This way they could maintain both the current and new rights for first

year of when the middle school is open to make them feel more comfortable in trying out the new middle school and not feel like they have to give up their current rights either.

- Opening a new school is really messy the first year, and this would buffer them.
- Why would year 2 be any different than year 1? It makes more sense with 2-years, so you encourage them to go the first year and if they don't like it they still have a chance to go back to the current rights.
- Are we saying the new middle schools' implementation should be smoother, or are we trying to help the families who have to move and go there?
- We will need to revisit this conversation and other outstanding items during the additional meeting scheduled for the committee.

Josephine Bias-Robinson, DCPS representative, stated that her role on the committee is to listen and provide feedback where she can. She also makes sure DCPS is abreast of what is going on. The Chancellor would like to set up a meeting with the advisory committee the week of July 14<sup>th</sup> to discuss how the process is going along and reinforce the support she stated she has in the video she created for the community meetings. She doesn't want this process to become undone due to politics. She does appreciate the time and thought that went into this, even if their agency may differ on certain proposals recommended, and supports the body of work as a whole. The meeting will be a closed conversation and outside of the committee meetings. She will not be able to provide all the answers, but this would be an opportunity to hear firsthand and provide feedback on to help you all get through to the end of the process. This will be a night meeting, and it will likely be held here before the start of the next committee meeting.