

Family and Advocacy Focus Group  
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Staff:

Ramin Taheri  
Debra Eichenbaum  
Katrina Ballard

Task Force:

Mary Levy  
Hanseul Kang  
Alejandra Vallejo

- Facilitator reviewed purpose and goals of Task Force
- Participant: Were the goals given by council or determined by the Task Force?
  - Facilitator: They were developed from Task Force with focus group input.
- Facilitator reviewed structure of recommendations and introduced whole group activity
- Participant: Were the goals were created with the consensus of the Task Force?
  - Facilitator: The development of goals is on the DME website.
- Participant: Is there a voting consensus process?
  - Facilitator: We don't have a voting process in the task force. What the recommendations reflect are a year's worth of conversations in meetings, and working group calls. They change frequently as a result of more discussions. They are meant to capture all of the ideas and conversations that this group has had.
- Participant: If it was developed through an idea process. I feel concerned about looking at a lot of different ideas including a zip code lottery, which would imply to be giving preference of space to charter schools. If these weren't the consensus of the Task Force, I feel concerned about putting sticky notes on there.
  - Facilitator: If people feel strongly about the recommendation, we should definitely bring that up. It was an idea a few members brought up but will not necessarily be going into the report. If there are issues like that on the zip code lottery, we can bring that information back to the task force. There are other opportunities for engagement in the process.
- Participant: Can you say something about zip code lottery?
  - Facilitator: The zip code lottery was just one idea. It came about from questions about whether we would be able to identify students coming in Pre-K3 as at risk or economically disadvantaged and how to do that. Some people said that other jurisdictions used geographic areas and use what they know from census to help get that information and should we consider that. That was the extent of the conversation.
- Participant: It was a way to identify at risk students?
  - Facilitator: Correct.

At-Risk Working Group

## Objective 2

- Facilitator: Let's start with At-Risk 2 because it is all green.
- Participant: I really like this objective. This is a conversation that I've had with PCSB community outreach people regarding how we collaborate between public and charters around OST. As charters, they are constantly bombarded with opportunities from non-profits who want to serve their school communities. Often times they leave the opportunities on the table because they are already at capacity and these are missed opportunities for public schools. How do we get the information they're receiving to our public schools that don't have these programs? How do we fund them? For charters that are already set up as nonprofits to raise money, but our public schools are reliant on DCPS and supplement with parents. It would be using the capacity and skills that charters have mastered to help DCPS.
  - Facilitator: So part of it is the relationships with the potential providers?
- Participant: It is the relationships with providers and lessons learned and how to implement. I am a parent in the PTO. PTO just became a 501c3, which is a difficult process. If you're not experienced and don't know how to operate, it's very challenging. The public charter world has a lot of experiences that they could offer. They want to have that relationship, but there's no mechanism.
- Participant: This is a very important objective. I am not sure the four go far enough, but they definitely go in the right direction. Currently in DC, there is fetishizing of scores that schools students achieve. It is kind of a black box how schools achieve success or not. The specific strategies that are used including teacher training and working with families, whatever those are, need to be examined, shared, and discussed. Right now the approach is the opposite. It feels like whatever means you achieve scores, there are few questions asked. There is tendency to move the data points the wrong ways rather than sharing what we're doing right.
  - Facilitator: The origin of objective two was looking at schools that are "beating the odds" for at-risk student. Is there anything that we can identify? If we can identify it, can we replicate it? I don't use replicate to mean create another charter school. It is for any of our schools.
- Participant: I like that idea a lot. My concern is how you identify the schools that beat the odds. You can look at schools with 50% suspension rates and say that they are beating the odds, but maybe or maybe not. But, what are they actually accomplishing? If you use free lunch as the metric, then 60% schools are 100% disadvantaged. The category at-risk includes a spectrum of people, and the populations are very different. If you say one school is beating the odds over another school, one school may have more poor kids than the other. The ways of identifying schools have to be way more sophisticated than they are now.
- Facilitator: If this does become an official recommendation of the task force, I would envision that there would need to be a separate working group put together to see what we actually look at and how to do it. Think of this as a way to set forth a policy to figure out what works.
- Task Force Member: Grad Pathways had a rigorous way looking at it. That's critical. We have an example already in DC of people looking at it rigorously.

- Participant: I didn't vote against this. On its face, it looks shiny. I get a bit concerned when I read the implementation considerations. One says look at cross-sector credit recovery options. We all know how well that has been working. Without very careful monitoring, there could be rife for corruption with schools springing up for credit recovery with no supervision. Second, I live across from church with concentrated at-risk schools. It started with half enrollment and dwindled to ¼ what they started. I don't know whether putting high risk students together in one school will benefit them. I fear you can do something you think is a good idea with the opposite result. In Ann Arbor, there was magnet school known as the reform school and a lot stigma attached. It was not very effective.
- Facilitator: DCPS has a few academies doing well to provide students with an alternative path. Charter schools having been working pretty well as well. We're asking is this something the two sectors could do together to serve students? It is not about putting at risk students together.

#### Objective 4:

- Participant: My concern with this is – what we surmise is the core impetus of this objective is students are moving between schools all the time. There is a need for data-sharing because the student records are living in different places. Maybe the core issue is mobility. The task force has touched on that previously, but this objective isn't focusing on the core problem.
- Facilitator: The hope is better information sharing between schools will help with mobility. What about students leaving at terminal grade? Rise DC has a bridge to high school data exchange that has high participation. It follows the simple idea of a kid leaving 8<sup>th</sup> grade and goes to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, shouldn't the high school know his needs? We haven't even gotten there, but we're starting to get there. This will also help unexpected mobility.
- Participant: DCPS is working on the question of transitional grades like from elementary to middle and then to high school. They are working on a program to allow parents and students to give sample of the work and expectations for the next grade in order to make the transition academically and environmentally smoother for students. I think it may be implemented next year. Hopefully that program can address some of this.
- Facilitator: That's great because it is more student-facing. This is from the school perspective of giving schools information about the students.
- Participant: This will be led by the schools. When they see student is confused, it will give them the idea they need to work more to give students the support they need. It will identify needs before the academic year starts.
- Participant: Mobility should be on the agenda.
  - Facilitator: The first year focused on mobility with two recommendations being piloted.
- Participant: One of my disappointments of what has come out of the task force is that I thought they would identify midyear transfers as a problem. Recommendations that came out went in the other direction to facilitate more midyear transfers. I don't know how to say that because I'm not against sharing data, but it is wrong direction to be going. The task force failed to come up with anything to counter the very disruptive

process of kids being counseled out of schools midyear or bouncing around. It is hugely disruptive.

- Facilitator: Part of the process was looking at the data to see what's happening. It turns out that counseling out is a small part of it. The pilot is for us to collect information. One of the key aspects of My School DC is to know why people are transferring. The hope is it helps us better understand the program.
- Participant: I may have been misinterpreting. If I was approaching the task force as a set of businesses getting together to improve business model, it would go in this direction. If I was coming together as a group of people representing families with kids' education getting disrupted, I would have gone a different way.
- Facilitator: It's about uncovering the problem.

### Objective 3

- Participant: I put a red sticky on host events for community with trainings on attendance. I feel that most people know the importance of going to school every day. I put a red sticky because I feel uncomfortable training community members on attendance without addressing the root causes, it can feel patronizing.
- Facilitator: Every Day Counts (EDC) has been trying to implement some of these things and addressing root causes. The task force felt it needed to make a recommendation in addition to EDC. Focus group gave feedback on both sides – some people liked going out and helping people understand the importance of attendance, while others thought it was a personal responsibility issue.
- Participant: Where OST intersects with attendance, research shows that quality OST programs bolster attendance and there's a 6,000 student gap for OST programs. I am curious where the intersection is in proving programming and increasing attendance.
  - Facilitator: In my office, OST and attendance are handled in the same office.
  - DME Staff: OST recently opened in DME. We're working on creating more availability to all kids. We need more funding in order to do that. We are working on creating more quality programs and system to put in place.
  - Facilitator: It dovetails with EDC and is in the same work stream at DME.
- Participant: I put a red sticky on promoting school attendance in early grades. For younger children, I am an attendance skeptic. I am not convinced that being in school every hour every day is necessarily the best use of a child's time. The actual process of trying to force every family to get every kid to school involved a lot of bullying. Ultimately, they are trying to get parents to bully the children. If kids are too tired to get up or slow eating and parents are not letting them do things for themselves because they are running late, there's a potential harm in what it takes to force kids to school. If it were the most important thing and they were motivated to be there, then I would find out why they weren't there. Are there logistical obstacles? Do parents not have the means? Are there transportation problems? Should they be going to schools closer? Ask those questions. Conditional on the problem, leave them alone and let families make their own decisions. When kids get older it's a different story, but in early grades, kids have a lot of needs. I am far from convinced that those needs are met at school.

- Participant: I would offer another perspective. At Educare, we place a strong emphasis on attendance because provide a learning environment that unfortunately children aren't getting at home. I agree that we have to address underlying issues including transportation. It might be helping to set different nighttime routines. Students are learning and eating healthy meals with us, and we do support Pre-K students being in school, set good habits in elementary and middle school, and helping families understand that attendance is critical.
- Participant: I would say our Title I school has very high attendance. There are 50% at risk children. I see many struggling families and would love to get support on is if you're not at school right on time. Things come up like doctor appointments and many families rely on buses and metro transfers. They are making every effort, but don't have the luxuries that other families have in making every effort for child to be in school as much as possible. The rules are that if you're late, you can become marked absent. Families are missing out on wages and have absences reported and CFSA reported after 10 unexcused absences. We have the luxury they don't have. Quite frankly those voices are not in this room because they can't afford to be in this room. It is a little disingenuous for us to be deciding things for them. The realities of their lives are things we're attacking and discussing. There should be another avenue for collecting that information. You need to find a way for those parents working to get their students in school, they view as important.
- Participant: The piece of this I'm concerned about is kids who aren't coming to school because they hate it. Their experience is hateful. I am counseling families whose kids aren't coming to school. They hate school; there is something about the school experience that is a disconnect for them. I want a dialogue with families and students who are not coming to school about the reasons for that. May not be just about barriers, just what's going on in school that makes them hate school.
- Facilitator: In Every Day Counts, there is a Design Challenge with students to help design what school looks like. There are other pieces too that make school attractive and remove other obstacles to attendance. We are looking at what goes beyond what's being done.
- Participant: I think there is too little surveying of parents and teachers to get information about what the experience of students is like from the students' and teachers' perspective in a particular school.
- Participant: There is no collection of information for unexcused absence – no way to record it. Language should be switched to say "Improve efforts to support attendance." People like helping families get their kids to school. Propaganda and intimidation, the sticks not carrots, is disliked.
- Participants: I like what was said about voices in the room. My kids were at HD Cooke and there was traffic on Columbia Road, so kids were chronically late because buses were backed up. There was a punitive response with parents screaming at their children and creating awful relationships. Second, I have a lot of issues with how this relates to Objective 1.

## Objective 1

- Participant: If you are talking about more equitable distribution of at-risk students across the city, then you are talking about more at-risk children having to travel further to get to school. In either case, you are creating adverse effects on traffic patterns that will worsen attendance issues. I support neighborhood schools because walking to school means you don't have attendance issues.
- Participant: In an ideal world where all schools are equal and PTAs are equal, then neighborhood school would be ideal. I chose an at risk school not only for its dual language program but I could bring resources to school other parents might not. I spend 45 min in traffic every day. I agree with you about traffic, but not everyone lives in the right neighborhood to go to neighborhood school and not every neighborhood school is equal. To discourage parents from choosing any school in the district is against the point of the lottery system. I would argue for families looking for better opportunities to work on a guide. Looking at what real life is going to look like, traffic, time to wake up, I knew that when I chose my school. Families have to do that, but any parent no matter where you live is looking for best fit for their child.
- Participant: That's fine but when there paternalistic language about equitable distribution of at-risk students, does that mean forcing kids to go to other schools?
- Facilitator: That's just a language issue, so that's great feedback. The working group spent a lot of time working on that and diversifying schools by socioeconomic status.
- Participant: A lot of this discussion links to the other one. I have been looking at change in the planning. After I moved, my boundary was changed. I feel that I was switched to a lower-performing school and outside my own community. From an equity standpoint, there is a lot of affordable housing and Spanish speaking immigrants living there. I'm the only English speaker, so I can relate to their experience. Studies show that bilingual learning is beneficial for English Language Learners. I was supportive zip code and census tract for equal opportunities for those learners. Not everyone has that option. To have that completely determined by address, bilingual schools are in pockets. My neighborhood school is 45% ELL. They don't have opportunity and equal chance to go to a bilingual school, and that doesn't seem right because they're all surrounding us. Northern Columbia Heights is the highest concentration of Spanish speakers. There is a lot of affordable housing and they don't have the voice.
- Participant: I think that having economic diversity is super important. I'm an education policy person; research shows that it's needed for education. There is a sense in this city that every good idea becomes coercive. There are so many opportunities to create diverse educational environments that are not being done. Why can't Spanish speaking students go to bilingual school? Neither DCPS nor charters have responded to that. When my students went to Ward 3 schools, the schools were undesirable. A third of students were out of bounds, and it was very diverse. A lot of kids got their education in these schools. As more people in Ward 3 started going to school, out of boundary kids were not able to fit in the school. What kind of lack of planning would lead to that? At Wilson, we have the rule that half students have to be from out of boundary and if they aren't on time, they get kicked out. It wasn't enforced before. At Wilson, people don't like this and see it as a way to deal with school size. There as a time under NCLB where students who were from failing schools had a right to go to other schools. A lot of

students from Bolling Air Force base got bused around the city. Logistically they had a chance and someone provided a bus. All these ways to do it aren't coercive but take advantage of what people want. We need to talk to people about what they want. A lot of it is not about driving. Communities have borders with each other.

- Facilitator: The lottery preference or diversity recommendation will involve working with people. You went through 5-6 independent issues that go into any of this. We need to talk with people.
- Participant: One of the implications of this objective is on the neighborhood schools. If you have neighborhood school in high poverty neighborhood, then you are going to be busting up these schools and having poor neighborhoods not have neighborhood schools. Have you asked the people whether they really want to not have neighborhood schools? People vote with feet, but people want neighborhood schools. They want neighborhood schools better. I live in a nice neighborhood with a good neighborhood school, so I am aware of it being the community aspect. Not having neighborhood schools in poor neighborhoods seems incredibly unfair.
- Facilitator: Nothing on here is about shutting down neighborhood schools. This isn't a new regime on school choice but one small point of opening access for some at risk students.
- Participant: Neighborhood schools have been busting up. Next to everything I said, I also think it's hugely important for neighborhood and families. There needs to be a balance
- Participant: I just want to voice my support for lottery preference for Pre-K and kindergarten. It is an issue of parent choice. Parents with children from birth in a community based center may like it, but at age 3 parents feel pressured to go into high performing charter or out of boundary public school. It is a wrenching choice because they are taking child out of community based center where they might be thriving. We are excited about potential for children to remain at CBOs and to have high quality option.
- Participant: I want to voice concern for education navigators. In theory that would be great. My concern is right now, not sure if DC would be able to implement it equitably. One consideration is equal distribution in all wards. If it's not done in a fair way, it could create even more inequity.

#### Objective 5

- Participant: There has been an adequacy study. It is important and essential that we know whether at risk is efficient and how it is being spent. We don't know and it's a big problem.
- Participant: I am going back to original point about cross-pollinating and the disparity between schools with active group and schools well-resourced or those who can go after grant funding and supplemental money. When you look at report that came out, you see weighted at risk funding how PTOs supplement that funding. I would like to see that expanded but looking at how we can better support the groups looking to expand that work. At the end of the day, there is a finite amount of resources from the district. The need is much broader. Looking at funding and ways groups are trying to help supplement is important.

- Participant: A huge problem is unreported at risk because of the stigma of self-reporting. I am wondering if there's a more respectable, confidential manner to do this, which would require coordination with other social service entities. Not families with programs but if you go to Mary's Center, can you register your child for each school? We can find a way that guards their privacy and captures the information. Francis Stevens lost Title I status because environment is changing. Families didn't want to self-disclose. The entire school lost its certification and is going through the appeal process.
- Facilitator: One of the suggestions in related slides is adding WIC, in addition to TANF and SNAP.
- -Participant: My concern is a lack of understanding of the definition of resources. For kids at Title I schools, you do get funds but not a substitute for a robust PTA with hundreds of thousands of dollars. If we re-define and funnel money away from schools that have it not, adequately fund.
- Participant: Having served on LSAT and help with budget process, that process was chaotic. It was arbitrary and not transparent. It seemed like there were changes from year to year with no reason including midyear budget changes, multiple in a year sometimes. In that environment when you have earmarked funds, it is difficult to deploy appropriately. Don't know what you're working with. It is not exciting to talk about budget process and may not be strictly in this committee, but it is really hard to talk about this issue without talking about broader issue.

## OCS Working Group

### Objective 1

- Participant: It's not what's up there but what's not up there that's the problem. I thought the task force was going to make recommendations that would fix a huge problem, chaotic situation where schools open and close across the street from each other offering the same program. There's no citywide plan. This calls for sharing of information, but nothing about the city making citywide decisions about where schools can locate, where there are needs and aren't needs to have facilities to match the needs. This just says make information available. It's doesn't address the issue of all of the growth in the city has been in charter sector. The neighborhood sector is at risk. When the Illinois facilities fund made recommendations about closing low performing schools, the public rose up in anger. Still feel there's that kind of mentalist we're not getting at the planning process needed.
- Participant: I question a lot of the data (objective 2) if I go to Learn DC, it looks like there are 0 qualifying teachers. That's for multiple schools. If something as simple as that can't be caught, how can I trust any of the other percentages that are out there? Data has to be right before making decisions.
- Participants: We've been going to meetings for a long time. This is one of our chief frustrations with the process. One of the big motivators for the task force was the boundary process, to address the elephant in the room with the LEAs in parallel universes. There is no reason or incentive to coordinate. A carrot to incentivize coordinated planning seemed possible but this stopped short of that. This is just a good



faith agreement to talk about plans based on a model in Denver with authorizer and school district is the same vs. here where they are not bound to coordinate. Really troubling that through a 2 year process every time this came up we said we couldn't touch that. So many recommendations are to form future working groups or data sharing, and this was the opportunity and didn't fulfil to really coordinate on important issue. We will have future growth and more closings, doesn't address the problems.

- Facilitator: The goal is develop a framework for coordinating, and this is coordinating. We agreed at outset not to change the governance structure. Charter sector retains autonomy. Task force doesn't tell DCPS to close low-performing schools. The extremes on two ends: one say stop growth and the other say close low performing DCPS schools and turn them into charters. In the middle, what sorts of recommendations would you like to see? Contemplating a formal agreement for using the same planning processes, each agency discuss where schools go. Tell me more about what we should do.
- Participant: There is a very big problem, and I have more my taxpayer hat on. City is investing in redundant capacity. Charter set up near a school that is weak to get clients. Taxpayers are supporting both systems. This is an expensive for the city. Task force doesn't have the authority to solve this problem. None of this involved influencing the decisions. It can't tell the charters what to do. You have to change the laws to solve the problems. You're papering over the problem, but it's a charade.
  - Facilitator: You would want to change the law to stop charter growth?
  - Participant: I think that institutional creativity is needed. Unfettered opportunity to set up wherever with no regard to expense to the public is not a good way. Laws have to change.
- Participant: To concrete on that, I would love to see recommendation to PCSB they have a two-stage approval process. The first is for a charter, but then not fully approved until the Board approves the location. The current practice is wreaking havoc. This location will service the city's interest.
- Participant: That shouldn't be for charter board to decide.
- Participant: Neighborhood would decide.
- Participant: As someone who's not inclined to choose the boundary school, in my neighborhood. I'm in Columbia Heights and don't have preference for a school, no charter with elementary. I would love for charter to come to Columbia Heights. I'm pro-access. I do agree where they locate I understand it's based on affordability.
  - Facilitator: There are no facilities available to them.
- Participant: They are all clumped together and transportation comes into play, which is not fairly distributed. Incentive to put charters where dearth of activities where DCPS doesn't have desirable schools.
- Participation: I want to add on to data and information – important part as you're looking at these decisions. I would like to have DME focus on demographic information, which has been removed from many school profiles. When you look at them, as a parent, demographic information was an important part to look at. At a dual-language school, I want to know the community will foster that environment. It is important to know income level at school. Want daughter to have experience that would not be cookie cutter if we were to send her. I wanted diversity. Making that choice now with

the data available is hard because you can't find it anywhere. Need to know who you're affecting. Low income and how many?

- Facilitator: I would encourage you to look at Equity Reports. Part of the perceived disorganization is they're operating on their own information get them to operate on the same information. There was a broad ideal to establish a framework that is recognizable.
- Participant: This looks at unified school report card the school board is voting on. I'd have real concerns about taking data created for outward-facing snapshot for parents and using that for decision-making. Academic performance and other quality measures is something I have a real concern about. I used to work at Walker-Jones clinic, which had school, had abysmal tests but principal highly engaged and health fair everyone showed up. The kids of drug addicts loved their teachers. Then they were all gone because Michelle Rhee fired everyone. I have a real issue with deciding things based on academic performance. Teacher worked at low performing school for 25 years and put west of the park and they're winning teacher of the year awards.
  - Facilitator: Closures are not part of the conversation. We created a Venn diagram of what each sector wants. We couldn't spend time on time of the extremes because wouldn't get both sectors to agree.
- Participant: The problem of charter growth is where they go. There are parts of the city with excess demand and crowded schools, more people in those neighborhoods. I have nothing against charters that are trying to meet the demand. Someone should do it. It is a question of where. Part of the problem is facilities funding isn't sensitive to costs. Rent differences in the city, facilities allowance is the same regardless of location.
  - Facilitator: Part of this is getting at the idea of getting sectors to communicate together to make these decisions. There are not a lot of charters that want to go into ward 3 because they want to serve at-risk students.
- Participant: And they want cheap rent
  - Facilitator: I think they are mission driven as well. This is getting at joint planning, and you're discussing obstacles.
- Participant: One side of the room talking about at-risk kids and talking about desirability of giving them opportunities outside neighborhood, and then on the other side talking about not having charters opening outside those neighborhoods.
- Participant: On the data of academic performance, the state board large conversation about that. The group using the information on the report card, huge issues because they favor schools that enroll high test score kids. It can't be part of academic performance. The broader point that I want to make is the language about two sectors disagreeing and took that off the table. This shouldn't be a conversation about two sectors. In this decision group, not one of them is elected. We have taken huge decisions and concentrated at bureaucratic level. It doesn't take into account generally popular views because they are not elected. Conversation should be at a different level. Everyone is making a decision about a narrow point, so all individual personal decisions add up to community decision that no individual would choose. In the end, kids go to 78 schools. I can't imagine as a community we'd come up with that. The way this is set up we'll perpetuate it.

- Participant: I think tragedy of the commons is the word you're looking for. I think the way to incentivize charters to locate where they're needed without infringing on autonomy is taking an active role in providing facilities. The city has so far taken a passive role they can have facilities that we aren't using. I want to talk about page 8 of the handout, the proposed model for coordinated school planning. There is a lot of good stuff here. There is MFP, RFOs for reusing surplus school buildings. This is a sensitive topic for me because there is a DCPS building in my neighbor that is not being used for public education. It was closed in 1996 and is being leased to private schools. The current private school serves students from VA and MD, lobbying to get 50 year control of the site because they see writing on the wall, process is going on, neighborhood schools around them becoming overcrowded. They are lobbying to get this done outside of this process. A bill before the Council in 2017 to give a 50 year lease, but there is strong neighborhood opposition. I would like to make the recommendation that until this process can be established, that there be a moratorium of disposing of properties. If process is appropriate, not let people avoid it by hurrying it up. Once properties are lost, they're lost forever. There is no analysis, facilities planning nor RFOs. This is a sole source process. The only school considered is current tenant.