At-Risk Working Group: Meeting #4
Date & Time: May 11, 2017 1:30-2:30pm
Location: Conference call line
Attendees:

Amanda Alexander | Deputy Chief of Elementary Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
John Davis |Chief of Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)
Charlene Drew-Jarvis | Graduate, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS); Senior Advisor, KIPP DC PCS; former Ward 4 City Councilwoman
Erika Harrell | DC Prep PCS parent; Member, My School DC Parent Advisory Council; member, DC School Reform Now; member, PCSB Parent & Alumni Leadership Council (PALC)
Emily Lawson | Founder & CEO, DC Prep PCS
Karen Williams | President & Ward 7 Representative, State Board of Education (SBOE)
Darren Woodruff | EL Haynes PCS, Benjamin Banneker HS parent ; Chair, Public Charter School Board (PCSB)

Call Summary:

Ramin Taheri went through the Meeting 4 Resource Deck (sent to members on 5/10/17) with the At-Risk working group members on the call. He also talked through the working group template (slide 5) and asked the working group to think about the recommendations they make as mission statements that should drive future policy-making efforts.

Task Force Member Comments/Questions:

- Q: Are we talking about at-risk students at all levels?
  - A: Yes, mostly at-risk secondary students but we also talked about facilitating the data transfer for the elementary to middle school transition.
- Q: What about a statement like "All kids need to read by the third grade"?
  - A: This is certainly something we should include; should we build in a policy proposal with that as an indicator of the policy's success?
- (Ramin) One place for our group to start making recommendations is this information exchange because it's the low hanging fruit; if we look at slide 10, what kind of theory of change could we put forward?
- Comment: The earlier we intervene, the better the student's chances of success are. We at least need to facilitate the data transfer between elementary and middle school; what about the PK to elementary transition?
  - (Ramin) There are other transition points we should also include; our overall recommendation should be at a higher level. It could be something like "Make sure students at key transition points are best prepared for the transition." Then, we can include both types of transitions as part of overall higher level recommendation.
- Comment: What is students' readiness to be in school? Is there an assessment or do kids just come into school and teachers figure it out?
  - Kindergarten readiness is one way at readiness at an early age.

- We should look at transitions earlier. There need to be early assessments of readiness.
    - Teachers and PK programs already do extensive assessment within months of enrolling.
- Comment: I definitely agree with that theory of action; we would love to have more PK readiness assessments but charter funding doesn't go that low. How do we set a policy that is not just kind of another requirement for schools to do something? Are there required assessments by the state and if so would charters be required or choose to participate? If schools do give a particular assessment, can we make additional resources available based on that? How do we encourage schools to adopt those early intervention programs?
- Comment: Details about the implementation of these policies should be built into considerations for the policy and theories of actions.
- (Ramin) It seems like our group is thinking about looking for indicators at the earliest stage possible, given the success of the 8th to 9th grade data transfer process and how indicators pop up in 8th grade that show how the student will do in HS.
- Comment: Are there other pre-attending school activities that kids need to do to be prepared for school and that families need to do for kids? Like immunization.
- Comment: Attendance and truancy need to be looked at. There are so many things schools can and should do on their own because when there are issues with attendance and truancy, if the school reports them to CFSA, it can damage the school's relationship with the family.
    - If there were more effective intervention at the elementary school level, that would set a pattern.
- Comment: Attendance is low-hanging fruit for us to take on; we can't solve achievement gap issue if we don't solve attendance.
    - There is the Truancy Task force and different things happening in other places; there is no coherence and coordination between the different efforts. The city needs to make it a priority to coordinate across agencies around attendance and truancy.
- (Ramin) We could have a theory of action on attendance that relates to coordination.
- Comment: At the school level, we have no idea what happens with a case after we have reported it. In some cases we don't find out anything until the child ends up switching schools. This doesn't have to happen.
    - The mobile kids are the kids that have the attendance issues.
- Comment: When families have truancy issues, they get threatening letters that are not helpful. There is no human element to the process, no attempt to sympathize with whatever the family is going through. The tone of the letter is "you could have your rights as a parent taken away".
    - Do people ever call or make home visits?
- Comment: In Boston, when they call their CFSA equivalent organization about truancy, things are different and more effective. There are interagency relationships.
- (Ramin) How could a cross-sector approach help with #4 on slide 8? ("Ensure at-risk students have positive adult relationships that provide social and emotional 'anchor' in school")
- Q: What does anchor mean?

- o A: An anchor could be one adult in a school has a positive relationship with a student in a school.
- Comment: A system for supporting these students needs to be built into the system; many teachers are already doing this.
  - o Nurses serve as a consistent adult in students' lives.
  - o This could be seen as "resource optimization" so that every at risk student has an anchor; it could include piloting a system like anchor teachers, but it is essentially better using adults who are already in schools.
- Comment: Staff members could go through additional training to better serve as anchor adults for students.
- Q: Are anchors only for students with no parents? Or students with no strong adult relationships?
  - o A: No; there is data to support significant boosts in outcomes for students if students have at least one strong relationship within the school. Students might have relationships with adults outside of the school but that having a strong relationship within the school is key.
  - o Even if an adult parent or family member is supporting a student educationally and financially, students need even more emotional support when they are transitioning from childhood to adolescence, etc.
- Q: Is anything happening now with the idea of anchor teachers in any sort of systematic way?
  - o A: Teachers will have "lunch with the teacher" and let kids have lunch with the teacher and will make themselves available for kids to come and talk to them.
  - o At some schools, the counselor is good at building relationships and reaching out to parents or referring them to other resources.
  - o Some schools have an advisory period. Advisory teachers probably don't have enough time to spend on each individual student but it is another person who gets to know a little bit more about a child.
  - o One of the ways we use at-risk funds is as an investment in your whole school to serve high numbers of at-risk kids. We have a counselor at every campus
- Comment: Would it be helpful to consider more formally asking schools what their practices are and how they are working with at-risk kids? We could make a survey and we should particularly seek input from schools in which we see high value-added for at-risk kids.
  - o We should ask schools to record the needs of kids who are considered to be at-risk.

The call ended at 2:31pm