

Opening, Closing, and Siting Working Group: Meeting 9 (Task Force Meeting 16)

Date: July 25th, 2017

Goals for meeting:

- Finalize theory of action, policy proposal, and/or draft recommendation
- Determine the characteristics of community engagement processes around OCS
- Determine next steps

Meeting Summary:

Jenn Comey recapped the key takeaways from the July off-cycle call (Slide 4) as well as the sample report that the group discussed briefly during that call.

Task Force member Comments/Questions:

- We know we want to look at the data at a neighborhood cluster level and then we can aggregate from there.
 - It also makes sense to make it by high school boundary for DCPS.
- Denver doesn't just look by enrollment zones; they look at a regional level to think about how they can leverage enrollment zones as part of their strategy. When you're looking at data only at the feeder level (or even at the ward level), you're thinking about trying to have everything for students baked into a ward or feeder, which isn't always practical.
- We need to use the smallest unit we agree that we want and from there we can aggregate up; we will need to look citywide eventually. I agree that people will want to see the data from the small unit of analysis because they want to see how it affects them.
- When we think about smallest unit of analysis, we need to make sure it allows people to aggregate it up on their own.
 - Facilitator: Clusters don't aggregate by ward evenly.
 - It still needs to be interactive and dynamic as well as downloadable.
- Before this all goes into set of recommendations, the Task Force needs to look at whatever details are going out for public input.

Common Data and Analyses:

Jenn Comey directed the group to look at the Revised Common Data and Analyses Template (Slide 11):

- In Denver, is the planning process completely tied to the SRA, as in "because the SRA says X, we should do Y"?
 - Denver will say there is a shortage of available PK seats or something like that in a particular area. The solutions are disconnected from the SRA because Denver has a process called the Call For Quality Schools (CFQS) and out of that comes a set of proposals aligned with needs. When looking at the proposals, they are going to give the greatest weight those proposals that address the needs identified through the SRA.
- It seems like it could be very similar here.
 - It's a matter of determining what the DC-specific buckets that matter here are. We should agree on what we want it to say but all it should include what the data is generally saying, without saying what should be done about it.

- I am reacting to the language in the template that anchors our SCA around Denver and Oakland. It feels wrong that our policy is based on two regions that are so different from DC. We should include the buckets and what is specific to DC in the template.
- I'm struggling with the theory of action and statement of problem because they don't say anything specifically about opening, closing, and siting facilities. These both speak to data for improvement of public schools, not opening, closing, and siting. Specifically the word "efficiency" feels wrong.
 - An interpretation could be that our system is financially inefficient regarding facilities.
- The template needs to be better connected to opening, closing, and siting of schools.
 - This template is meant to show that common data and analyses represent a basic step. It's not that we don't want to work on opening, closing, and siting but that we need a common dataset to get started. This could be used by LEAs for their own school improvement. All the info is useful for opening, closing, and siting.
 - It's a leap to go from a dataset for school improvement to opening, closing, and siting. If the purpose of the data was school improvement, the buckets should be different.
- We are going to be collecting this data to inform OCS and master facilities planning. My question is how does this relate to MFP?
- We need an explicit goal for the purpose of the data we collect in the SCA. Is there a way to insert in here that one of the objectives of the data for the SCA is to inform MFP and OCS?
 - We need to make the intention of the data clear in the statement of problem and in the theory of action.
- I think that at some level quality is inseparable from OCS. We have to be careful drawing too fine a distinction between OCS and school improvement.
- Somewhere in this template we need to articulate that we are trying to move toward a strategic set of decisions to improve quality across the city.
 - We talked about "high performing options in every neighborhood," or something to that effect previously.
- I have concerns about ESSA definition of quality. It relies too heavily on proficiency levels. There is no growth measure for high schools. I am concerned that we will close high schools with low-income students that have low proficiency scores but that are having really great growth.
 - It feels like we are saying to kids in high-poverty neighborhoods that we are going to keep everything as is so long as there is growth and that we are not going to change what we do. When we see that 80% of the kids are scoring at level 1 at a particular school, it shows me we've made it OK for kids to be at that level. We cannot be OK with schools saying, "We are just going to try harder." However, as far as closure goes, we are not going to be mothballing schools. We should care about growth and reenrollment as well as what people say in terms of satisfaction. No data set should be used to say "because we see this now we are going to do that." Data should inform what will be done. My fear is that we will see the data and run from the very real difficult decisions that we need to make about how we approach our strategies.
 - We can't let the great be the enemy of the good and use that to hold off on making decisions.
- We are going to have a strategy to assertively diversify schools. When we have homogeneous schools that helping kids achieve at high levels, it's clear that they have raised the bar through their model. But when we have homogeneous schools that are not helping kids achieve, we have work to do on their model because they have not raised the bar. There are certain communities that have been disproportionately affected by openings and closings. Closures might not be in order, but models may need to be changed.

- Quality doesn't just need to be based on what is defined by ESSA; there are other metrics. We have to figure out a growth measure for high schools.
- Facilitator: Next steps around the template:
 - Tweak theory of action statement of problem
 - Include buckets of SCA information
 - Change the data portion to be less Denver and Oakland-focused

Community Engagement:

Jenn Comey asked the group to start considering and discussing the next area of concern: the lack of community engagement and input into the planning process.

Task Force Member Questions/Comments:

- We should think about what the community is not seeing and how to have them see more information earlier on in the process.
- There should be a public-facing timeline/calendar for the process.
- I like the idea of talking about where we want to be and backwards-mapping from there. However, we should also discuss where we are now.
- I like asking for feedback from the community around what they would like to see from the process. What are the issues in this area that we need to have this new process address? Their thoughts are also important for the SCA. Information about schools needs to be available to all stakeholder groups involved in a feeder network. For example, the Anacostia High School community needs to care about what's happening in the elementary level. There also needs to be space for alumni to give their perspective so we can learn about how the community thinks of this school. We can prevent missteps by creating the space to listen.
- Communication should be such that people what's going to happen and when so we don't have people saying that they didn't know. Who are the stakeholder groups around (ANCs, religious organizations) that also need to be engaged?
- What's our theory of action around community engagement and why we care? A possible theory of action could be that if there are folks directly impacted by a school, having them be enthusiastic and supportive will strengthen the school.
 - In addition, that community engagement isn't just for a short period of time; it needs to be continually built up.
- Community engagement will look different when there is a vacant or new facility vs. a preexisting school.
- PCSB doesn't include community engagement as part of their closing process. We don't have any cases where PCSB has decide to close a school and the community has come out in support of the school. There is a different benefit for the neighborhood and different engagement involved when the school there is citywide.
- Should the PCSB engage the community rather than the individual school engaging the community?
 - Their job is not managing a portfolio of schools; they are fostering independent schools so their job is not to establish need or decide where schools are opening.
- Is the point that we think the community should drive the decisions or is it more about shared transparency? The role of the community is not to make the decisions.
 - To me, it's about informing decisions but if decision-makers are not using the information, then it's just community education and not engagement.

- What is our theory about why we value community engagement? It is hard to engage and take in information when the level of understanding is not the same. We have to start with community education to increase fluency. We should think through a cycle of engagement. When are there natural spaces for community engagement? That sort of calendar prepares the community to see where we want to go and get ready to engage. Sometimes, we ask them to engage after our priorities and budget have been set. This feels disingenuous.
- The process needs to be transparent. The element of surprise does not foster trust and does not lead to successful engagement. We should be transparent about what things at the school level trigger certain actions on the part of the decision-makers. If the community knows that certain triggers exist, then they will know that DCPS will do something. That way, when closure is on the table, it's not a surprise because 2 years before the closure, something was triggered that made DCPS look at the school differently.
- We should work backwards. How much time does it take to build up a new school? In Denver, we knew decisions about schools would happen in June, etc.
- Some people just don't want change. However, sometimes those people have interests in their disagreement that we can address. If we engage, we can say that although we moved forward with change, here's how we are going to address their concerns moving forward. School communities should not be surprised. And they should know where they are able to affect decision-making and where they are not able to affect decision-making. We as a Task Force should be making recommendations on things that should be included in the process of how decisions are made.
- We need to give people an opportunity to respond. People are still traumatized from the last round of closures. People hearing that this body recognizes this trauma and doesn't want to repeat that would do a lot for people in our city.
- Community engagement does not necessarily mean that people are driving decisions but that they know what their input will influence. People feel like they get ignored so that's where there needs to be clarity around why we are asking for input.
- Structures matter a lot; a calendar is a great structure. We should all think about structures that would make a difference re: engagement. What structures have worked well in other places?
 - When there is a calendar and a cycle, and people see real engagement happen over and over, that is how trust is built.
- We will need to engage back on what we hear from communities.
- We will need to think differently when we think about existing schools v. new facilities. The goals for community engagement are different depending on the situation.

Jenn Comey noted that all three of the remaining areas of concern (community input, timing, and transparency) would be discussed together moving forward because there was so much overlap between them during this conversation.