Opening, Closing, and Siting Working Group: Meeting 7 (Task Force Meeting 15)

Date: June 27th, 2017

Goals for meeting:

- Continue discussion of SRA
- Finalize theory of action, policy proposal, and/or draft recommendation
- Present to Task Force
- Determine next steps

Meeting Summary:

Jenn Comey went over the first few slides regarding the Strategic Regional Analysis (SRA) in Denver and what Brian Eschbacher from Denver had discussed during the mid-cycle call (slides 5-7). She noted that Brian talked a lot about where the SRA feeds into the whole cycle of opening, closing, and siting schools. She then asked the working group members to share out their reflections and thoughts following the call with Brian.

Task Force Member Comments/Questions:

- Comment: I thought it was interesting that Denver has 20% excess capacity within their regions and that they came up with a unified way to identify capacity in schools and decided there should be a range from 100% to 60% capacity. It makes sense to me to plan a system with excess capacity and then not judge schools by their capacity.
  - Facilitator: He did say that if some schools are very low, it causes the same problems with under capacity, such as budget issues, that we experience here in DC.
- Comment: One thing I noticed is that the area of all their regions is about twice the size of the area of DC. This affects their context.
  - They also encourage students to stay within the regions by providing transportation within that region. If you enroll late, you go where a seat is available in your region.
  - Facilitator: It's important to note that DC's ward boundaries are adjusted every decennial census to keep the populations numbers about the same. I'm not sure how Denver's regions are aligned.
- Comment: They also don't guarantee you a seat at one particular school – students are guaranteed one seat within a choice set (or grouping of schools).
- Q: Did the boundary process propose choice-sets (choices within particular zones) like the ones in Denver?
  - A: Yes, we did propose choice-sets as one of the proposals and the sets of choices included charters. It didn't get a lot of support.
    - We proposed them at the elementary and middle school levels.
    - Comment: The framing there was different; we were aiming at a different goal. The Denver goal is having 80% of students in a quality seat but the boundaries process was more about looking at boundaries and revisiting them.
- Comment: If we were to propose choice-sets again, there would need to be robust public engagement because clearly that proposal was not well supported during the boundaries process.
- Comment: Also in Denver you have choices outside of Denver public schools and public charter schools; you can enroll in a neighboring district.

- Comment: However, if you enroll in a school outside of your school of right, you lose your right. The right follows the students in Denver.
    - Q: Was that idea of the right following the student discussed in the boundary process? Where did that go during the boundary process?
        - A: It was within the cadre of things we looked at during that process.
- Facilitator: If we recall, Brian asked about how DCPS plans for whom is going to show up and enroll. He said that in Denver they have a lot of control over making sure that students go somewhere that is a good fit for them. There's a lot of policy making that goes into making that possible.
    - Comment: But if that is the case, what if you choose to leave a school during the year?
        - A: Your right follows you. For mid-year, you only get a right to whatever space is available rather than a right to a specific school.
- Facilitator: So what can we learn? What has to be the same for how we use an SCA here or the processes around an SCA that we develop here? What has to be different?
- Comment: Their regions are 25 square miles. That's half of our city. When you have a larger area, you can expect a higher percentage of students will choose to stay in their region.
    - Comment: Maybe we would have to cluster wards or neighborhoods here. There is clearly value in looking geographically to see where students go.
- Comment: Another key difference is that when Denver has a school that is low-performing, they close it. That doesn't happen here.
    - Comment: They close the school and then they put in different programming. They do not necessarily move the students to another school.
- Comment: And when they restart, Denver Public Schools' community engagement sounds incredibly robust. I like the idea that they have the structures built so the district can apply to be the replacement school of a school that is being restarted. Unless you purposely set that kind of structure up, the district wouldn't have the wherewithal to apply to be that new school.
- Comment: Another key difference is that Denver is one district and can be the charter authorizer. They have a unified need to know where there is capacity and where there is not. We have different views on whether there is over capacity or not. We look at things from two different lenses here:
    1) one that sees fewer high quality seats than students and sees that as under capacity
    2) one that sees seats and no students for those seats and sees over capacity

  This tension needs to be resolved and maybe the SCA would assist in resolving this tension.
- Facilitator: The SCA may not resolve this, as there will be different users with different areas of focus and they will use the information differently.
- Comment: We can assume that the SCA would have multiple analyses. Denver's goal of green or blue anchors things in a different way in their SCA. Once we have a citywide accountability, do we use that to guide how we look at capacity?
- Comment: Brian also acknowledged that low-income students are in lower rated schools and that most of those closures are happening in those low-income schools. Are those ratings leading to decisions that are going to harm those low-income students? It seems to me that there may be a problem with the quality measure.
- Comment: However, there are two kinds of closures: closures that are displacements and closures that are restarts. I am curious to know if Denver does one or the other or both.
- Facilitator: It seems like we should be specific about looking at "closures with displacement" and "closures with restarts" as two different things.
- Q: In the past, DCPS used to do school restarts a lot, right?
    - A: It was not a restart; it was a reconstitution under No Child Left Behind (NCLB): a firing of all the staff and the hiring of new staff. It sounds like those restarts have a lot more things

going on, things like hiring a new operator, creating a new program plan and academic plan, etc. I don't know if Denver does this and if these changes go hand in hand when it does a restart

- o Comment: There was restart at Jefferson as well as at Eastern. For instance, when those restarts happened, they started with an entering class. So for Jefferson, there were two programs and two principals for a few years before the original school program was phased out.
- o Comment: When we think of a restart, it's more robust than an NCLB reconstitution.
- o Comment: It sounds like the restarted school is only working with newly arrived students rather than the previous student population, since the school is being rebuilt one grade level at a time.
- o Comment: There isn't a single model we've used at DCPS.
- Facilitator: Our punchline here can be that there are a lot of good things learned from Denver and it's worth teasing apart the difference between restart and reconstitution.

Jenn Comey reviewed the four shared problems that the working group is tackling and went through the sample working group template for the possible recommendation on common data and analyses.

- Comment: I don't think that this problem statement really captures the full extent of the issue. We need a way to have a more cohesive and coordinated public school system; there's a broader issue of needing to have a cohesive system of public schools.
- Facilitator: I think we were trying to get a first bite at the apple by trying to focus on data and analysis with this statement of the problem.
  - o Comment: If this is the only problem we are going after right now, let's go after this.
- Comment: I think the problem is definitely a lack of efficiency and a missed opportunity because no one is using common data to plan
- Comment: Both sectors are not efficient on their own when opening, closing, and siting schools. They are even more inefficient when you look at what both of them are doing.
- Comment: Let's add numbering so it is clear that "lack of coordination, inefficiency, and a missed opportunity to accelerate the improvement of public education in DC" are three separate parts of the problem.
- Comment: Depending on whom you ask, our interpretation of the problem is different. One side sees that there are not quality schools even though there may be DCPS school there and believes that the only option is to put another school there. I disagree with this. The two sides fundamentally don't see eye to eye.
- Q: Are you saying that the inability to analyze the data in the same way is the problem?
  - o A: No, I think it's about the interpretation of the data. I believe the way to approach the problem is improve a school (new resources, new programming, new teachers/leaders) that is there right now and the other person believes that to best serve children, they must put in an entirely new school (facility and program).
- Comment: I don't think we can tackle that problem until we do what this is proposing and have common data and analysis from which to work.
- Comment: I agree but even if we share data and analysis, we might not be able to solve the difference of interpretation.
- Facilitator: I think you're identifying a problem statement about the criteria of closing schools.
- Comment: One of the things we are not going to do is decide if the decision-making process should be different, right? If so, then we are affirmatively saying in bullet 2 of the policy

statement/recommendation section of the template that each sector continues to have the right to make its own decisions moving forward and I'm not sure I've agreed to that.

- Facilitator: The purpose of the group was not to change what the city is to be doing moving forward around decision-making processes. We are building our understanding to start moving toward thinking about decisions in both sectors.
- Comment: We should get this data so that each sector can make its own decisions; we haven't been asked to make the second part of the recommendation. I'm ok with leaving off the second part but to be clear, we are basically saying to stop at data.
- Comment: I do think that the city can have a lot to say about where schools go; this would not be through sticks but through carrots. I think out of this analysis, if one thing comes out of it, is that the city looks at where we need buildings and thinks through how we make them available. This can lead to a more rational way to site schools.
- Comment: In that case, we want the data to inform multiple parts of the decision-making process in which each sector will participate.
- Facilitator: What do we think about the theory of action on the template?
- Comment: The theory of action is a stretch but it has the word "allow" so that's why it could work. No one can do what they want to do without transparent data so the theory of action saying that the data and analyses would allow for these things to happen. I don't know if the common data and analyses will make these things happen; the theory of action stops short of saying that.
- Comment: We can recommend that certain things happen with the data. When I look at the cycle Denver has, what are the other things we expect the sectors to do together? They are process points rather than outcomes.
- Comment: This group could make recommendations about through what process things should happen with the data.
- Q: Is it fundamentally impossible to have a conversation around the difference in philosophy that was brought up?
- Comment: Ideas about restarting schools would be in separate recommendations, but these are still on the table. I thought the data recommendation was the end. It feels even easier to say step one (common data and analyses) is a nice step.
- Comment: We need to then look at the nine buckets of potential data analyses because they are included in the possible policy solutions on the template.
- Facilitator: The data would be cut in different ways.
- Comment: I've seen analysis recently that assumes a consistent percentage of students leave their wards. There need to be sensitivities included if certain assumptions change. We can't just plan based on fixed forecasts.
- Comment: There could be a look at environmental stress factors, etc.
  - Q: How would this inform opening, closing, and siting of schools?
    - A: Those factors are part of what you look at when trying to make those schools higher quality. I think those factors play into that decision making.
    - Comment: This kind of data might not directly inform opening and closing but it could inform what kinds of programming a new school there should have.
- Comment: The data could help you determine if you are going to collocate or if you need to minimize the amount of new siting to think about where to pull back on siting new schools and where to emphasize the improvement of existing schools.
- Comment: What is missing from this list of possible data analyses are parental programmatic preferences; parents on a survey have equally preferred everything. We hear from different pockets about where parents need things.

- Facilitator: That is contained or could be contained in the current demand analysis section. There are a lot of things to be worked out around this and that could be part of it.