<p style="text-align:center">School Leader Focus Group
February 7, 2018, 5:30 pm – 7:00 pm
Capitol View Library (5001 Central Ave SE)</p>

- Facilitators:
  - Ramin Taheri |Office of the Deputy Mayor of Education (DME)
  - 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)
  - Mary Levy | Independent education analyst, Former DC Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Former Washington Lawyer's Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs
- Staff:
  - Mila Yochum | Executive Director, Office of Out of School Time Grants and Youth Outcomes (DME)
  - Jennifer Comey | Director of Planning, Data, and Analysis, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)
  - Katrina Ballard | Leadership for Education Equity Public Policy Fellow, Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education (DME)

- Facilitators reviewed the goals and purpose of the Task Force
- Participant: Why were these the goals? Before coming here, I went back and re-read the enabling legislation for charters, and the assumption is, if you're trying to meet those aims through collaboration, why did these goals emerge? There are a lot of themes through this, and I'm trying to connect these themes to the enabling legislation. If the whole thing came into being to do three big things, to what extent does collaboration help with those three things?
  - Facilitator: The Task Force came together to discuss what they thought would be best to discuss as issues across both sectors.
  - Facilitator: We wanted to make sure we addressed the larger issues families are facing on a regular basis. We were clear we weren't changing any laws, but where could we come together and have that be the base to grow from there? There's not enough communication between sectors, and parents know that. When transferring from DCPS to a charter, there's no information sharing, which is a huge issue. Families don't realize the options they have. That's how we got there.
- Participant: I work with 2,000 adults who are poor in DC, and they don't understand the system. It is clear the system wasn't put together for them. When we have focus groups for them, that's what emerges. How does this help with that? If it only serves middle class parents, we're moving to a city where you're upper middle class or poor. How does this serve them?
- Participant: In listening to the passion behind your words and understanding the demographics of my students and the parents I serve, what you describe isn't what I experience. The majority of everyone I serve are far from middle or upper-middle class. I

think there's a lot of interesting pieces to navigate, especially with folks at Ed Fest, where all schools are represented, and people can walk around to meet them.
- Participant: How do you learn about Ed Fest?
- Participant: It's publicized everywhere, on the news, TV, and radio. It's huge, you get one-on-one face time with schools, you can go around and ask schools about anything. Part of making sure when those opportunities arrive is making sure folks get there to get the information. 95% of my families don't have access to a computer, which is a requirement for My School DC, but we specifically have computers at school so parents and their friends can get access. We're making sure there's the will and the way, and we encourage people when there's information that they take advantage of it, so they can be more involved for the end goal of upward mobility, for their child and themselves.
- Facilitator: A lot of the issues being raised can be discussed with the recommendations.
- Participant: Yes, and there are charters that are serving most vulnerable populations. And there are many families that don't know about choice or have access. It's clearly a communication issue.
- Participant: Can you speak to what happens to recommendations?
- Facilitator: The Task Force was meant to run for two years, and we extended it a bit. Now over the next month, we have six focus groups scheduled. We will reconvene in March to make changes, and then we will go to citywide meetings. We will take the feedback and finalize the recommendations, and then they go to the Mayor. Last year, the Task Force moved forward on two recommendations related to mid-year enrollment and safety transfers, which moved to Mayor and are being piloted now.
- Facilitator reviewed the structure of the recommendations and provided an overview of the working groups.
- The participants reviewed the At-Risk Working Group recommendations.

At-Risk Working Group, Objective 5
- Participant: I put green on this poster because we have to look at definition of "at-risk" as it is currently written. It excludes adults completely, though there are 5,000 adults in the public education system. The definition relies on eligibility for human services programs to dictate funding, which are not the same needs. Sometimes if students are eligible, they're still not enrolled. We should think about how we talk about at-risk before it determines funding for schools. 10% of the population at my school are considered at-risk, but 100% are living in poverty with free and reduced meals. Schools need to have funding to provide services. Per pupil funding doesn't give us the resources we need for students to be successful.
- Facilitator: You can also refer to the policy and implementation considerations, which go into more details.
- Participant: I marked red because making sure funds go to students more in need makes me nervous. LEA leaders know their budgets the best, and they know their staffing needs. If we're directed how to spend, that limits ability to meet those needs.
- Facilitator: So additional funding based on need is good but we should not have constraints?
- Participant: Yes

- Participant: It's ok to require providing a justification for using the funds for accountability, but it should not be too specific.
- Participant: You want the decision-making to be as close to service provision as possible.
- Facilitator: The law says money is supposed to go to services on top of core services, but I wonder how you'd feel about the idea in Title I that if you have a population that's over a certain level of need, you can do schoolwide programs. The school has to justify it but can spend their funds throughout the system. Council was not thinking of adult programs, but they were thinking of schools where you had a mix of kids. If you have enough kids in school who use Title I, you consider it all targeted. How do you feel about that?
- Participant: The at-risk definition is hard to get to the point where it is all kids. That's the concern. And for accountability, it should be targeted, but the schools should have discretion for what that looks like because I'm afraid it could be a label for the kid who receives the services.
- Participant: I don't think it's always the kid who goes to classroom. We know some things about problems inherent in poverty, and we could identify those areas based on research. If you're a middle class parent and a kid is bullied, you know what to do, you have healthcare and can get counseling. That kind of behavioral therapy doesn't happen for poor kid.
- Participant: For example, that at-risk funding can allow the school to have a counselor with aggregate funds. But the school needs to target those children on the caseload. If there are three other children having challenges that are not in that category, they should get the services too.
- Participant: That time shouldn't be used for them.
- Participant: Whether you're in the definition or not…
- Participant: Does at-risk include special needs?
- Facilitator: Yes it includes them. We haven't spent a lot of time focusing on students with special needs, but we have discussed proposals how they are relevant to kids with special needs.

At-Risk Working Group, Objective 4
- Participant: I feel mixed. While in theory sharing information sounds great, in my experience, I have run into folks that inherited a lot of negative comments about the student, but it all comes down to structure. The staff was told to be on severe watch, but the child's issue is short of what was described. The reverse also happens. If I say we've had zero issues, and then there are some, it leaves a false sense of security.
- Facilitator: We were struggling about that too. One example is the Bridge to High School data exchange under Raise DC, which is sharing data from middle school to high school. Do you think it's the process or the information you get? Can you formalize it to make it work? Or is sharing information just less helpful?
- Participant: At this point, both. I'd rather know academics than trying to process culture/climate things.
- Facilitator: After working with over 3,000 families in DC for applying and enrolling to schools, not sharing data was a huge impediment to enrolling. For example, some

schools require a simple thing like bringing a report card. The family may go all the way to the school to enroll but then have to go home if they don't have the report card, and families have barriers to all that back and forth. Schools don't communicate with each other. Families decide just not to enroll. Some nonprofits help, but they are unable to help everybody, so some families fall through the gaps. Families with more resources can take advantage of it. We thought this recommendation could level the playing field.

- Participant: We see that from CBOs to Kindergarten programs, getting an IEP transferred is difficult. We have to give paper copies to parent, and that's silly.
- Facilitator: It does vary, and some schools very effective at it. If schools communicate regularly, the framework would allow families to access.
- Participant: I think it's critical. I say that as someone who has built databases on student information to get teachers to share with each other, so they know what each other is doing. That's challenging already. How do you know how to make the best decisions to help somebody if you don't share data? What is sharable, and how?
- Facilitator: I hear positive feedback on the importance of sharing. We can try to build in these considerations.
- Participant: There are some instances with SLED or systems like Easy IEP, we ask parents if they have the IEP and are re-enrolling, so they can check it off and bring it through. Anyone that has IEP will populate anyway. If you bring the IEP to me, I get to set up for you earlier. Sometimes it doesn't always cross over before school starts.
- Facilitator: So how can we encourage systemically sharing?
- Participant: Yes, also about attendance, one of the things to also consider currently – if a student is coming to me and has 44 absences the year before, that is a retention question now. How much fact finding do you want me to do? Because you shouldn't pass to the next grade, but you enroll in the next grade in your new school. I have to build a relationship with the family, and the first thing I grill you on is unexcused absences?

At-Risk Working Group, Objective 3
- Participant: For increasing awareness, daily attendance has become optional. If there's a snow day, you know there's a vast majority of students not coming. It takes true work to make it clear to folks, and it gets borderline threatening sometimes. We understand days when folks get sick, but sometimes it's, "I just couldn't do it today, the younger one is sick, so I didn't want to bring the older one." There needs to be understanding that it becomes lost instructional time, and you can't get that back. For pre-K 3 and 4 families, we have to go leaps and bounds and have them take it seriously. Combating that now is starting with those programs. Parents understand and know. It's lot of work – emails, phone calls, home visits, announced or unannounced. Tell them we don't want to have to report you on the 10th unexcused absence. I'm told on a regular basis that requiring kids being in the building every day is too much. If you brought a 1st grader to me that doesn't know 26 letters, we need to ask the parent that they're here every day to bring them up to speed. Families that go well beyond that aren't taken care of. I'm all red, because these are things we worry about on a regular basis.
- Facilitator: What can the Task Force do to move these recommendations forward?

- Participant: Talk to the parents and kids, host focus groups, ask them why don't they want to go to school every day.
- Facilitator: We've talked with students, families, parents. It's not for lack of contact. Every Day Counts! Is doing good things, what can we recommend on top of that, that would require cross-sector work?
- Participant: Outside of education realm?
- Facilitator: Bullet 3 is a sticking point for us because we know you have to understand the root cause. All of what you've said is something we've considered, and if attendance is an issue, what are the reasons for chronic absenteeism? How can we support families? It involves understanding what it is.
- Participant: I just think schools, and high schools are not good places.
- Participant: There was a great editorial in the Post by the valedictorian at Ballou. She said, "Why should I show up when the school has a temporary teacher all the time? Kids will show up to school when adults do their job."
- Facilitator: What are the different levers? Transportation is an issue, and school needs to be engaging. It can't be a boring place where you'll constantly be admonished and so far behind you can't catch up anyway.
- Participant: We've got to acknowledge we're not doing things in a customer-friendly way if the customers aren't willing to work with us. If they don't show up, you won't have a job. We need to engage students in what needs to be done.
- Participant: It's about the how – maybe focusing on early childhood is a good place to start. We've been doing a lot with families and so much is awareness and data, showing them attendance has a correlation with school success. Parents have to get younger kids to school.
- Participant: I like the way it's framed around a carrot and not a stick. I would hate to see some new punitive regulation if you don't hit attendance targets.
- Facilitator: Punitive is definitely not our focus.

At-Risk Working Group, Objective 2
- Participant: What are opportunity academies? We've got them now.
- Facilitator: Yes, that's what it is. Is there work where charters and DCPS could divide the labor and work together to be more effective in serving this segment of student population? DCPS has them and charter has them, but can two sectors come together to do this better?
- Participant: DCPS is doing some things with an opportunity academy now.
- Participant: I like anything about them working together. If it's a small pilot, that's a good way to get it started.
- Participant: We need to bring people together at the practitioner level to share what's working. That's what people want.
- Facilitator: One of the first things the At-Risk Working Group said was exactly that. We need to get information out there, and this month we're launching a Community of Practice to do that.

At-Risk Working Group, Objective 1

- Participant: I put a red for the objective specifically. From my perspective and understanding what the world was like before and after My School DC, I do not see a disparity between folks being able to identify a school because of pedigree or family salary. This includes our work with 8th graders for getting them into high school. We don't see families limited to access. I haven't experienced it, and our school is 95% underserved.
- Facilitator: That's very good input. In the My School DC post-lottery applications, we saw that families who missed the lottery tend to cluster in economically disadvantaged areas. This might help those families. Hearing from your feedback tells us not to spend energy on this objective, because it's not the most important.
- Participant: I think the opposite – we created workshops for parents so they understand the lottery. When your day is driven by social services appointments, parents pick the school nearest to them. We have a lousy system across Ward 8 with technology infrastructure. Students spend less than 10% time on task, and we tell parents their child won't compete in the world you never see. Once they hear that, they ask what school in Ward 8 has technology, and how far do I have to go? There are lots of poor, uneducated immigrant parents who don't understand the system. Everyone tells me, we understand the system and don't use it because we're lazy. No, I am reacting against that.
- Participant: I strongly agree. Many parents who haven't understood how to access and need hand-holding are the most vulnerable families.
- Participant: It's my responsibility for the 8th grader and parent to understand entire system before the deadline for high school. I take that responsibility. Whoever has them at present has the responsibility to do that. For me, My School DC should be for all options, private schools, Catholic schools, all the options. We figure out what's most suitable and figure out the right way for them. It's the right responsibility for them.
- Facilitator: So you're doing that.
- Participant: There are 22,000 infants and toddlers in city, 75,000 are enrolled and 14,500 are not. If 4,000 are 3-year-olds, they're not in a program, so who will tell them to get there? My point is, My School DC is working for a majority of people, but there's a highly vulnerable section of our population not accessing it because of food on the table or getting evicted, but we need to give them a boost.
- Participant: We need a purposeful navigator. Early childhood people in Ward 8 are living at the poverty level themselves.
- Participant: I have no question about that and believe my folks don't live in the greatest means. I grew up in Ward 8, I get it. Where I used to live is now fancy townhouses. There are specific things you need to get, and you want to make sure you work for them. There are so many things happening, but your child has the opportunity to go to Duke Ellington, but they need to show up for the audition. We have to have the courageous conversation in making the way and not leaving out any option. What avenues would you imagine are available to reach out or get to folks that aren't automatically enrolled in program? Ads for My School DC are on the radio, news, buses, how else do you spread the word that this is here? PAVE is out. There are so many things and means.

- Participant: In DC, the public school population is high poverty. We're not saying you don't serve high-needs students. There are families at the most vulnerable and because of that chaos, they are not writing down the number on the bus or getting to the audition. We are splitting hairs about high-poverty populations, but there is a pretty defined subset of population, and maybe we need to tinker that.
- Facilitator: Everyone agrees we need to provide information about schools with at-risk students. Whether it's a citywide or government agency, how would we do it? What is the best way to get it done? Maybe we can establish a working group to figure it out.
- Participant: Regarding the lottery preference for Pre-K from CBOs, universal pre-K community organizations are the hardest hit. Children are losing because Pre-K kids are trying to get into high performing Kindergarten schools and need to apply in Pre-K3. Lots of parents would like to stay all five years, but they have to leave at Pre-K3 because they need to get into Kindergarten. That also puts a lot on infants and toddlers.
- Participant: I agree.
- Participant: Schools that stop at Pre-K are losing people at Pre-K3 and 4 ages because they are going to Kindergarten for elementary when they could benefit from staying with us. We could transition them from Pre-K4 to Kindergarten. Individual strategies are helpful, we could sit down with families, and the 1-1 option is really helpful.

Opening, Closing, and Siting Working Group, Objective 1
- Participant: As a charter, we aren't given buildings. How should I think about that, where do facilities come into this?
- Facilitator: Facilities are a tough nut to crack because we don't have a lot of buildings to hand out. The goal is to ensure we have a way to ensure two sectors together make decisions. Not if you do this, I'll give you a building. Instead, we aim to plan together to consider what the consequences might be for moving to a particular neighborhood or opening a particular program. We want to ensure we're looking at same data and regularly engage the public, ensuring it lasts. Each charter LEA is its own entity, but PCSB would be signing an agreement to coordinate together. We wouldn't change the governance structure but establish a framework for working together. Facilities are not answered in this, but it's the first step to think about solving this issue together.
- Facilitator: I would drive your attention to the policy and implementation considerations. The common lottery is an area both sectors could coordinate. School report cards are a big issue, and we can figure out what that means when transferring from one school to another.
- Participant: It begins with data and understanding what we know across schools. We don't know what we know. When we ignore the community, we do it at our peril because they turn on us in ugly ways. In Ward 8, they have made it plain they don't want K-12 charters for anything.

Opening, Closing, and Siting Working Group, Objective 2
- Participant: It's critical. We are running out of space and facilities. We've made bad decisions about which buildings we let go for all the wrong reasons. We need to figure

out how to hold onto whatever we've got and creatively use it. We are about to make the same mistake with government buildings. You can only create so much real estate. Data working with office of planning, looking at demographic trends, looking at where people are going.
- Participant: In terms of quality, for a charter to get an enrollment ceiling increase, we need a certain level of performance. To fill facility to capacity. There's a performance a metric for traditional public schools as well to determine what stays open and closes. There's not a measure that's the same across sectors.
- Participant: I agree, for this to be common, I would expect common expectations, otherwise the process would be fruitless.
- Facilitator: do you mean using data the same way?
- Participant: I'm not sure how data navigates or guides decisions for opening, getting another building, closing or continuing. If we're going to do it and become more commonly aligned, it should work both ways. I also see a slippery slope. We are looking at public schools surrounding my school, and that easily would mean those schools would close and become charters because the public side couldn't get a handle on it. Common expectations should be at forefront.
- Participant: When we were looking for a facility, a study was done where it showed projected growth and capacity of high performing schools in that area, and it helped us make our case to try and get our building.
- Participant: There was a great study by Ampersand and Ed Forward that shows that by ward and grade level from a year ago.
- Facilitator: The DME data resource page recently put up fact sheets and interactive maps, a precursor that could help.

Opening, Closing, and Siting Working Group, Objective 3
- Participant: Part of this gets at expectations with respect to planning decisions across sectors. Trending toward uniform across the city. A lot of times it's difficult to find that information.
- Participant: We need to use systems of information sharing that exist already. ANCs meet, and people without computers go to ANC meetings. We should have a relationship with them so they get your data out there and use it. Traditional neighborhood and community decision-making is critically important. It's not just schools in schools. Schools are insular places. There are some other public entities to get this information out, and it's incumbent on you all to figure out how to connect with them.