CROSS-SECTOR
COLLABORATION
TASK FORCE
REPORT

November 9, 2018

DME ★
OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MAYOR FOR EDUCATION

WE ARE WASHINGTON
DC
GOVERNMENT OF THE
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
MURIEL BOWSER, MAYOR

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Dear Mayor Bowser,

It is an honor to present the final report of the Mayor's Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force. In your transition plan, you pledged to "work to increase collaboration between and amongst our public school sectors," while "recognizing that the number one priority across both sectors is the delivery of a high-quality education to every child in every neighborhood in the District of Columbia." As a Task Force, we have taken that pledge to heart. This Report contains recommendations that are the product of a concerted and honest effort to identify problems, think critically about possible solutions, and listen to the residents of the District.

Over the last two-plus years, the Task Force's work has been animated by one overarching truth: while the last decade has seen tremendous progress in the quality of public education in DC, we must strive for continuous improvement. Despite growing enrollment in both DCPS and our public charter schools, substantial investments in education, steadily rising test scores, improving graduation rates, an increasingly diverse population, and an exemplary school lottery system that improves access to DC's many school options, important work remains. Through cross-sector efforts to improve effectiveness, efficiency, and student outcomes, we can do more to raise the bar for all of our students.

DC is special. Together, our public education sectors are at the vanguard of a nationwide education reform movement that has produced extraordinary gains among students from all backgrounds, especially those who were once left to languish in systems that were poorly resourced or clumsily managed. We have a robust system of school choice, a large and high-performing charter school sector, and an innovative and rapidly improving traditional school system that serves as a model for systemic reforms in areas such as teacher recruitment and evaluation. But we know that whatever progress each sector has made on its own pales in comparison to what we can achieve through a process of meaningful coordination and collaboration. We hope that this Report serves as a catalyst for that process.

We view these recommendations not as an end, but as a beginning; this is the first step toward ensuring that all of our public schools—both district-run and charter schools—work for all of our students. We invite you to take that step with us.

Sincerely,
Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force

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Executive Summary

Mayor Bowser's Transition Plan cited a need for "increase[d] collaboration between and amongst our public school sectors to ensure the sharing of resources and best practices, recognizing that the number one priority across both sectors is the delivery of a high-quality education to every child in every neighborhood in the District of Columbia." The Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force was the most visible effort to fulfill that promise. The recommendations contained in this report are intended to serve as a basis both for immediate action and for further policy development.

DC as a Leader in Cross-Sector Collaboration

DC is recognized nationally as a leader in bridging the divide between district-run public schools and charter public schools.[1] Our successes stem from a thoughtful, sustained commitment to collaboration at all levels, from Mayor Bowser, to the leadership in each public education sector, down to the individual school leaders across the District. Nowhere is this more clearly exemplified than in the Task Force, though some of our most notable achievements in cross-sector collaboration and citywide coordination have occurred outside of this initiative. My School DC, for example, is a common lottery system that includes over 90 percent of all public schools, traditional and charter, and is hailed nationally as an exemplar of district-charter collaboration.[2]

Goals of the Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force

First convened in February 2016, the Task Force was charged with developing clear and fair recommendations on how to improve the coherence of public education in DC through increasing collaboration across and among public schools in both sectors. At its inception, the Task Force conducted a series of focus groups to gather input and feedback on possible goals for the group. The final list of goals received broad community support:

1. Improve the experience of parents and families understanding and navigating their public school options.
2. Develop methods for information-sharing with the public and across public school sectors.
3. Develop a framework for coordinating processes on school openings, closings, and facilities planning.
4. Promote enrollment stability.
5. Identify educational challenges that need to be addressed through cross-sector collaboration.

The Task Force's work has touched on each of these goals, and our recommendations reflect an honest and collaborative effort to identify cross-sector solutions to problems facing students and schools in both sectors.

Areas of Focus

The bulk of the Task Force's tenure was spent in two working groups focusing on (1) improving outcomes for At-Risk students; and (2) the opening, closing, and siting of schools. These working groups produced a series of recommendations for cross-sector solutions to citywide education problems.

Overview of Working Group 1 – Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students

The Task Force's first working group focused broadly on identifying areas in which citywide, cross-sector efforts can dramatically improve outcomes for students who are at risk of academic failure. After several months of examining research, hearing expert presentations, and deliberating internally, the working group developed a number of proposals. In broad terms, these proposals are organized around issues such as the identification and expansion of programs that serve At-Risk students effectively; equity of access and opportunity for At-Risk students across schools and sectors; options for disengaged youth and students who are off-track for graduation; and the effective use of data and information.

Overview of Working Group 2 – Opening, Closing, Siting Schools

Our city's planning processes for public schools—including what types of programs or models to offer, whether underperforming or underutilized schools should be closed or redesigned, and when and where to open new schools—are the subject of intense debate and scrutiny among policy experts, advocates, school leaders, and families. Our unique education governance structure, with Mayoral leadership and Council oversight, an independent chartering authority, and an approximately 50/50 share of students between district-run schools and public charter schools, has led some interested observers to believe collaboration is not in the best interest of either sector; still others believe that charter-district competition is inevitable and is a zero-sum game. These sentiments highlight both the difficulty and the importance of the Task Force's work, and they are why the possibility of a cross-sector model for school planning is a potentially transformational step in DC's education reform movement. The Task Force's Opening, Closing, Siting (OCS) working group tackled this contentious issue, attempting to build a framework for meaningful cross-sector collaboration related to educational planning in DC.

At the outset, the OCS working group agreed that progress would require first coming to some agreement on common ground, pushing to the side those issues or viewpoints most likely to intensify disputes between sectors and least likely to lead to consensus recommendations. From the DCPS side, for example, some might suggest a moratorium on new charter schools; from the charter sector, some might suggest an aggressive campaign to close low-performing or underutilized DCPS schools and turn them over to charter operators. Rather than engaging these views, however, the Task Force wisely sought to identify areas of potential compromise. To accomplish this, we spent several meetings outlining issues in a Venn diagram depicting the varying interests of the public, DCPS, and the charter sector in order to identify shared areas of concern.

Promoting Enrollment Stability

In its first year, prior to breaking into the working groups described above, the Task Force focused on Goal 4 (promoting enrollment stability) and released two recommendations in February 2017 that led to pilot projects in school year 2017-18.

Community Engagement

Originally, the Task Force planned to issue a final report in February 2018, but it extended the timeline to allow for a robust community engagement process on the draft recommendations. Completed in March 2018, that process included a series of focus groups with sessions for school leaders; teachers and other school staff; families and advocacy groups; and policy experts and other government agency partners. The Task Force also hosted two citywide community meetings and an open comment period.

Final Report and Recommendations

Our Report consists of a number of sections. First, the Report contains a series of high-level recommendations, called "Objectives," that track the work of the two aforementioned working groups. Second, the Report details the initial recommendations moved forward as part of the Task Force's focus on Promoting Enrollment Stability. Finally, the Report includes "Additional Areas of Need," a section that details recommendations in areas in which the Task Force was unable to spend significant time.

Recommendations on Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students and on Coordinating Planning Decisions (from Working Groups)

• Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students
  o Objective 1: Invest in Efforts to Identify, Share, and Expand Programs that Serve At-Risk Students Effectively
  o Objective 2: Increase At-Risk Students' Access to High Quality Programs
  o Objective 3: Bolster and Support Citywide Efforts to Improve Attendance
  o Objective 4: Expand and Strengthen Citywide, Cross-Sector Efforts to Share Data and Information
  o Objective 5: Provide the Resources Necessary to Ensure the Success of At-Risk Students
• Creating a Framework for Coordinating Planning Decisions
  o Objective 1: Ensure that Planning Decisions in Both Sectors are Based on Common Data and Information
  o Objective 2: Establish a Coordinated Planning Cycle that Meaningfully Incorporates Public Input

Recommendations on Promoting Enrollment Stability

• Create a centralized mid-year entry and transfer process for public school students.
• Create a system for LEAs to reserve or otherwise make available "hardship" seats that are separate from school waitlists in order to serve students who meet certain hardship criteria.

Recommendations on Additional Areas of Need

• Area 1: Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities
• Area 2: Streamlining Services for English Learners
• Area 3: Attracting and Retaining Excellent, Diverse Educators
• Area 4: Continuing Our Commitment to Cross-Sector Collaboration

Each of the sections outlined above contains more specific recommendations and policy considerations which, taken together, will serve as a basis for concrete action by policymakers, further exploration by researchers and advocates, and fodder for discussion within the broader education community.

How to Read this Report

Format of the Report

This report consists of several sections, organized generally to correspond with the different issues addressed by the Task Force.

The recommendations emanating from the Task Force's working groups on Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students and Coordinating Planning Decisions are organized into subsections containing differing levels of recommendations. Each subsection is headed by an "Objective," which represents the high-level recommendation for each issue area. The At-Risk section, for example, contains five such "Objectives," which range from "Invest in Efforts to Identify, Share, and Expand Programs that Serve At-Risk Students Effectively," to "Provide the Resources Necessary to Ensure the Success of At-Risk Students."

Under each "Objective" is a brief explanation of the context of the issue, the information that the Task Force examined, and other relevant information, such as feedback gathered during community engagement sessions. Thereafter, the section contains "Recommendations." These recommendations are more detailed than the "Objectives," directing focus to particular areas of concern or anticipated need. Under Objective 1 in the At-Risk section, for example, is Recommendation 1.2, "Explore ways to identify and evaluate promising practices from individual schools or LEAs that are getting the best results for At-Risk students."

Finally, within each "Recommendation" are yet more granular recommendations or other policy considerations that the Task Force felt necessary to raise to the attention of those officials and entities that are ultimately responsible for implementation. Under Specific Recommendation 1.2 in the At-Risk section, for example, is 1.2.3, "Identify the cost and obstacles to scaling successful program offerings."

In addition to the sections containing the two working groups' recommendations, there are sections on "Promoting Enrollment Stability," which contains the recommendations the Task Force moved forward after its first year; and "Additional Areas of Need," which contains recommendations on issues to which the Task Force was unable to devote significant time, but nevertheless felt were essential to include in this report.

Commonly Used Terms and Abbreviations

DCPS: District of Columbia Public Schools
PCS: Public charter schools
PCSB: District of Columbia Public Charter School Board
LEA: Local Education Agency
OSSE: Office of the State Superintendent of Education
DME: Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education
SBOE: District of Columbia State Board of Education
NAEP: National Assessment of Educational Progress
UPSFF: Uniform Per Student Funding Formula

II.
BACKGROUND

Purpose of the Task Force

DC is recognized nationally as a leader in bridging the divide between district-run public schools and public charter schools.[3] One prominent example of our two public education sectors working together to improve the experience of students and families is My School DC, the common lottery system that includes nearly all public schools, traditional and charter, and is hailed as an exemplar of district-charter collaboration.[4]

Mayor Bowser, in her administration's Transition Plan, recognized the value of meaningful coordination between traditional public schools and public charter schools but promised to "increase collaboration between and amongst our public school sectors to ensure the sharing of resources and best practices, recognizing that the number one priority across both sectors is the delivery of a high-quality education to every child in every neighborhood in the District of Columbia."[5]

Guiding Principles of the Task Force

First convened in February 2016, the Task Force was charged with developing clear and fair recommendations on how to improve the coherence of public education in DC through increasing collaboration across both sectors. Co-chaired by the Deputy Mayor for Education and former mayor Anthony Williams, the Task Force began with over 20 members, including the Chancellor, the State Superintendent, the executive director and the chair of the Public Charter School Board, parents, community members, and other LEA leaders.

At the Task Force's inception, DME conducted a series of focus groups to gather input and feedback on possible goals for the group. The final list of goals—focused on accountability and transparency, coordinated facilities planning, and student mobility—received broad community support:

Task Force Goals:

1. Improve the experience of parents and families understanding and navigating their public school options.
2. Develop methods for information sharing with the public and across public school sectors.
3. Develop a framework for coordinating processes on school openings, closings, and facilities planning.
4. Promote enrollment stability.
5. Identify educational challenges that need to be addressed through cross-sector collaboration.
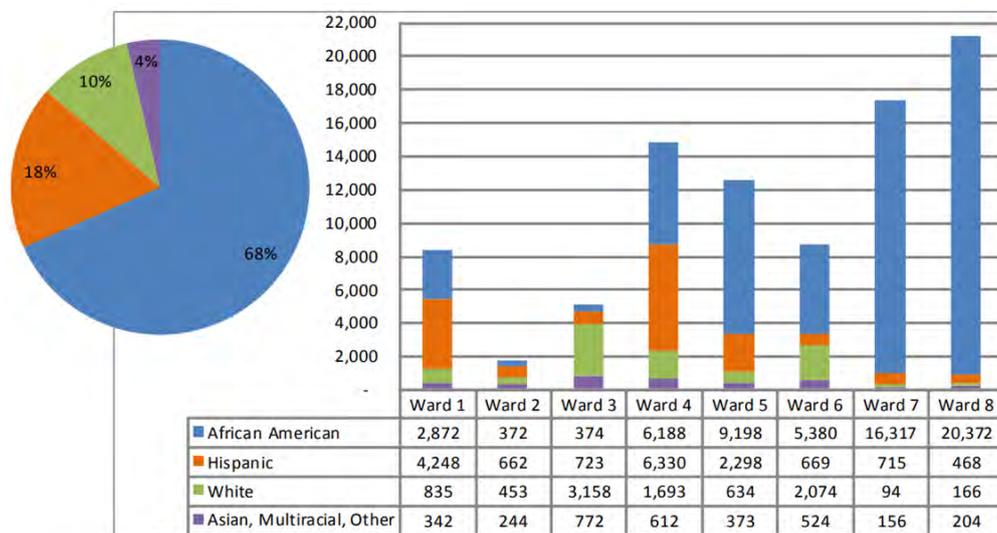
DC's Education Landscape

In the field of ecology, the term "ecosystem" means a collection of interdependent, structured systems and communities that are governed by general rules, forces, or principles.[6] The term "ecosystem" applies to education, as well; in DC, for example, our education ecosystem has a number of systems and communities that interact with and depend on one another. Each sector, each government agency, each LEA, and each individual school community is connected to the larger ecosystem. In some ways, "cross-sector collaboration" is merely shorthand for the governing rules, forces, or principles that can facilitate—or hinder—an efficient and effective public education ecosystem.

DC's public schools are transforming. Following years of declining enrollment, our public schools have grown by 10,000 kindergarten to grade 12 students over the last five years.[7] Over the same period, test scores on the NAEP have improved steadily.[8] Moreover, our physical plant—our city-owned school buildings—have seen generous improvements, with most schools having undergone some form of modernization. But our progress has been uneven. There remains a stubborn and unacceptable gap between the opportunities afforded to students of different races and socioeconomic strata, as evidenced by achievement data. Our vastly improved facilities landscape has left some behind, especially those students in public charter schools, which struggle as a sector to secure adequate and appropriate space in which to educate students. Some schools experience overcrowding while others are under-enrolled.[9] This is all against a backdrop in which DC, while growing, continues to find it difficult to retain middle-income families and those with older children.

Demographics and Enrollment

DC's educational landscape is complex, and rapidly changing demographics are reshaping neighborhoods and their schools.[10] Our overall population has been growing rapidly, with over 700,000 people now calling DC home. With growth has come change; DC's black population, for example, is now less than 50 percent of the overall population,[11] down from 60 percent in 2000 and 70 percent in 1980.[12] Our public schools, however, continue to serve a population that is predominately black and low-income, with concentrated areas of poverty in certain wards, neighborhoods, and schools.

	Ward 1	Ward 2	Ward 3	Ward 4	Ward 5	Ward 6	Ward 7	Ward 8
■ African American	2,872	372	374	6,188	9,198	5,380	16,317	20,372
■ Hispanic	4,248	662	723	6,330	2,298	669	715	468
■ White	835	453	3,158	1,693	634	2,074	94	166
■ Asian, Multiracial, Other	342	244	772	612	373	524	156	204

Note: Excludes 541 students whose addresses could not be geocoded/whose ward could not be assigned.

Share and Number of All Grade Public School Students by Race/Ethnicity, by Ward of Residence, SY16-17, Source: DME, *Citywide Fact Sheet, SY2016-17*

Public school enrollment has been steadily increasing for almost a decade. In school year 2010-11, total enrollment—all students in public schools, DCPS or charter—was about 75,000;[13] today that number is over 92,000.[14] The biggest drivers of this increase are growth in the number of students attending public charter schools and, across both sectors, increased enrollments in grades pre-K3 through 5.[15]

Nearly half of the District's public school students (47 percent) are considered At-Risk, meaning they are experiencing homelessness, are in the District's foster care system, qualify for TANF or SNAP, or, for high-school students, are one year older or more than the expected age for the grade in which they are enrolled. Additionally, nearly a tenth of our students (7 percent) are experiencing homelessness, 14 percent receive special education services, and 12 percent are English learners.[16]

Student Performance and Outcomes

Overall, test scores for both DCPS and charter schools have shown improvement over the past several years. The percentage of students scoring proficient or above in reading and math on the PARCC assessment is marked by consistent increases across all subgroups. When performance is compared across subgroups, however, large and inexcusable gaps in performance are evident between white students and students of color and between At-Risk students and non-At-Risk students
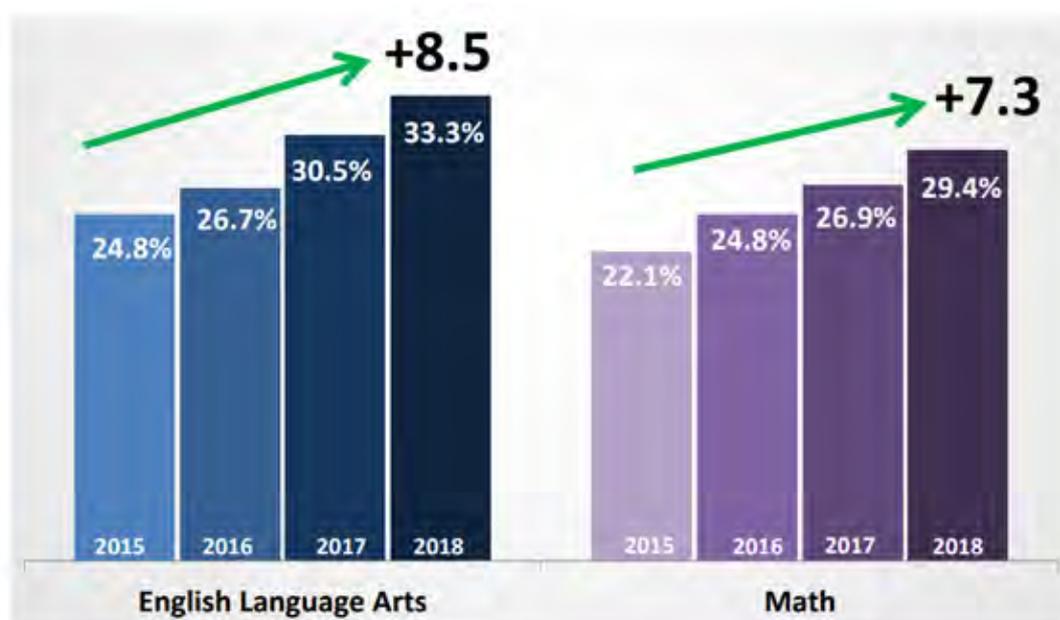
Source: OSSE, DC's 2018 PARCC Results

School Choice

We have a robust system of school choice in DC. About half of all public school students (47 percent) are enrolled in public charter schools, which are citywide schools that students typically access through the common lottery system, My School DC. Within DCPS, roughly half of all students attend schools that are not their in-boundary schools. In other words, taking DCPS and charter enrollment as a whole, just one-quarter of all public school students in DC attend their in-boundary school.

Map 1: Overall Trends in DC PARCC Scores for Public School Students
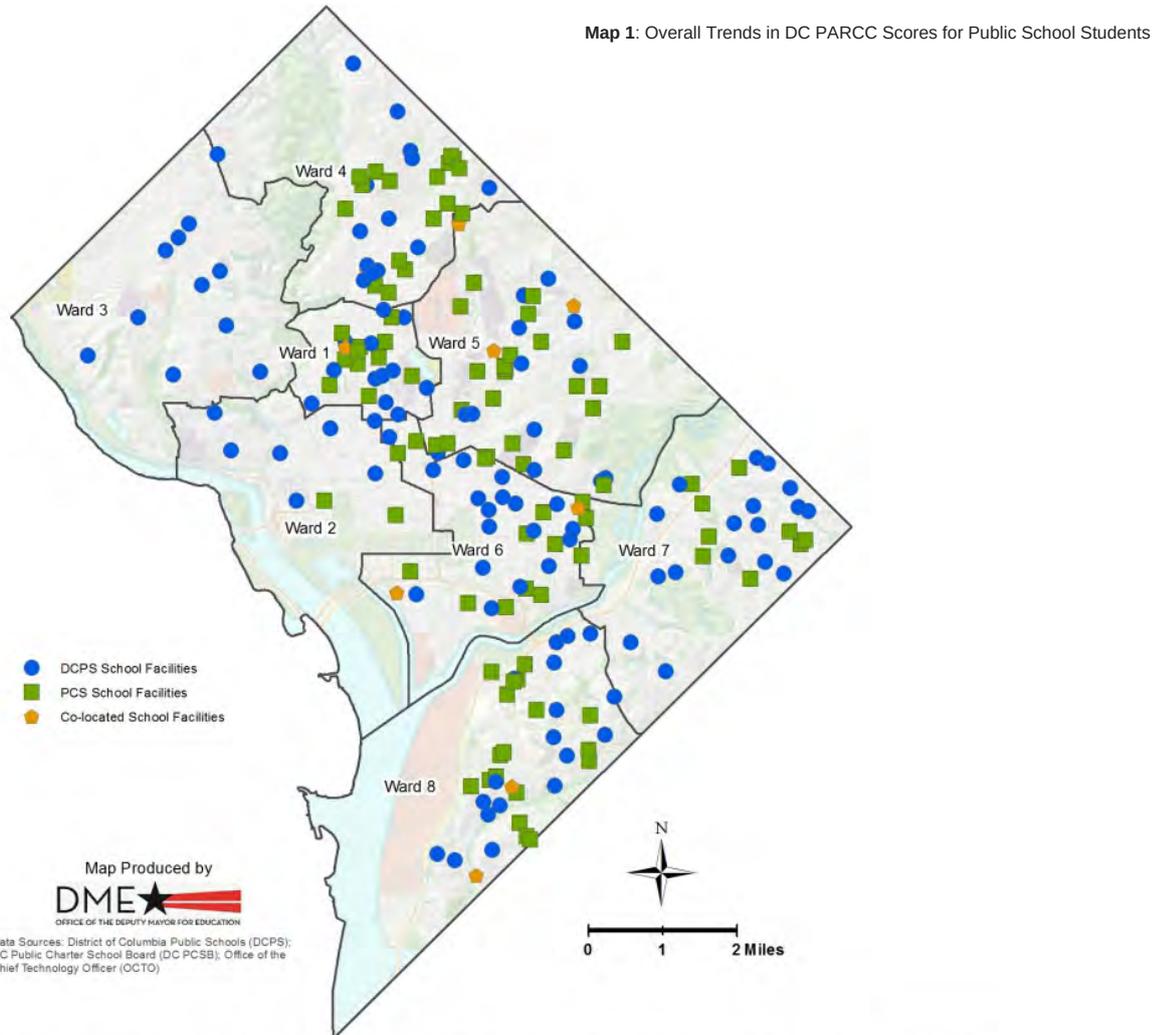
Note: Bancroft ES/Briya PCS (co-located) , Marie Reed ES, Murch ES, Watkins ES, and Duke Ellington School of the Arts were in temporary locations for SY16-17

We have 67 different LEAs in DC; one is DCPS, and the rest are public charter school LEAs. There are currently 239 public schools in DC: 116 DCPS, and 123 public charter schools. A school may be located in multiple school buildings; alternatively, a building may house multiple schools in the same LEA or from different LEAs (referred to as a co-location) with the same grade configuration or a different grade configuration.

Vision for Public Education in DC

Excellent By-Right Schools as the Backbone of School Choice

> **VISION FOR DC SCHOOLS: VERSION #1**
>
> *"Ensure the success of every student by providing high-quality school options, through excellent by-right schools and innovative public schools of choice that are open to all."*

> **VISION FOR DC SCHOOLS: VERSION #2**
>
> *In order to meet the needs of all students and ensure their success, DC is committed to providing excellent and dynamic school options through by-right public schools and public schools of choice so that every child receives a world-class education.*

As a Task Force, we were unable to devote the time and attention necessary to articulate a thoughtful, detailed vision for public education in DC. We did, however, grapple with a vision statement, a process that highlighted some of the fault lines in the debate about the efficacy of school choice. We began by putting forward a seemingly simple statement focused on the success of all students and the importance of providing high-quality choices (see Version #1). Some members on the Task Force, however, felt that "success" was not adequately defined and that the vision should focus more on meeting students where they are. Additionally, some members had reservations about prefacing "public schools of choice," which refers to both charter schools and DCPS schools, with the term "innovative." These members argued that our choice-based options go beyond merely innovative, new models—they provide a comprehensive, proven approach to educating our children.

In the second, third, and fourth versions, we attempted to address various concerns related to the nature of school choice. Some Task Force members noted, for example, that although half of all DCPS students attend a school that is not their by-right, assigned school, we should preface "public schools of choice" with "citywide" so as to distinguish between by-right schools (even those with high proportions of students "choosing" to attend from out-of-boundary) with choice-based schools that have only a citywide draw. Others suggested that "by-right" be prefaced by "DCPS" to indicate that public charter schools are currently unable to provide any preference to students living in the surrounding neighborhood.

In the end, we never came to agreement on a vision statement, but then that was not the point of the exercise. Our attempt to articulate a vision statement was meant to be a vehicle by which we discussed, as a group, the steps and obstacles to achieving a cohesive, coordinated, citywide approach to education.

> **VISION FOR DC SCHOOLS: VERSION #3**
>
> *In order to meet the needs of all students and ensure their success, DC is committed to providing excellent and dynamic school options through by-right public schools and citywide public schools of choice so that every child student receives a world-class education.*

> **VISION FOR DC SCHOOLS: VERSION #4**
>
> *In order to To meet the needs of all students and ensure their success, DC is committed to providing excellent and dynamic school options through by-right public schools and citywide public schools. of choice so that every child student receives a world-class education.*

An Honest Understanding of Our Different Public Education Sectors

In moving closer to a truly citywide approach to public education, we must first reconsider some of our preconceived ideas about each sector's role in educating our students. We must recognize, for example, that our public charter schools are, first and foremost, public schools, and that they require and deserve the support commensurate with that distinction. Likewise, we must concede that our largest LEA, DCPS, whether because of its size, its legacy commitments, or the special esteem in which it is held by many in DC, often faces unique issues and obstacles not relevant to our public charter schools.

And we must agree that cross-sector collaboration is a net positive. Collaboration between sectors can refine, not stifle, competition; it can help preserve, not erode, autonomy. We must move past the notion that public education in DC is a zero-sum game, that each sector should maintain some hostility toward the other in order to ensure its own survival in a battle for market share.

Quality as the North Star

Our vision for the future must, above all else, focus on maintaining our upward trend in school quality and performance. We know, from listening to students, families, educators, and policy experts, that quality and opportunity are paramount. This sentiment was echoed in a recent survey of parents, which revealed that DC families, when looking at school options, consider proximity— the distance they have to travel to school each day—to be significantly less important than characteristics such as teacher quality or the presence of an academically challenging curriculum.[17]

All of our students deserve and should expect an excellent education, and it is incumbent upon us, as educators, policymakers, parents, and community members, to make it happen. It is an exciting moment in the history of public education in DC. We are closer today than ever before to achieving a cohesive, citywide approach to educating all of our students, one that does not make unnecessary or unhelpful distinctions between our district-run schools and our public charter schools. We desire a city in which all students have excellent public school options, regardless of where they live or what they look like; a city where all public schools have the resources and support they need from their government; and a city where our public education sectors are not adversaries, but are amicable competitors working together to further the shared goal of improving outcomes for all students.

Community Engagement Process

Over the course of the two-plus years of the Task Force's work, we engaged with the community in myriad ways and for different purposes. Public input has been crucial to guiding the work of the Task Force, from capturing feedback on concerns related to current policy and practice; increasing awareness of the landscape of public education in the District across the public and charter sectors; gathering information on what issues the public prioritizes; and soliciting suggestions on potential pathways forward.

Establishing a Roadmap for our Work

At the outset, we made substantial outreach efforts to engage with school communities, community groups, religious organizations, ward-based education councils, and other members of the public in order to determine the roadmap that would guide the work of the Task Force.

The guiding principles were written with the purpose of grounding the work of the Cross-Sector Collaboration Task Force in Mayor Bowser's vision of a high-quality public education for every student in every part of DC. Beginning in early 2016, DME hosted a series of focus groups and community meetings to gather input on priority areas on which the public thought the Task Force should focus. Through focus groups, community meetings, online surveys, public roundtables, LEA meetings, and Task Force meetings—always open to the public—the Task Force's guiding principles and goals were born.

Collectively Refining our Recommendations

The Task Force continued to engage the community as we moved forward in developing recommendations. Beginning in February 2018, we undertook a robust community engagement process, holding several focus groups, citywide community meetings, and an open, online comment period. Residents across all eight wards engaged in the process, which was focused on the review of the proposed recommendations that the Task Force's two working groups had created. The community served as a "gut check" to determine whether or not any particular policy recommendation reflected the purpose, spirit, and goals of the Task Force.

To gather this feedback, various focus groups reviewed the recommendations set forth by each of the working groups. These included school leader focus groups, family and advocacy focus groups, policy expert focus groups, teacher and school staff focus groups, and general citywide meetings. DME staff and Task Force members created poster boards summarizing the recommendations. We then asked members of the public participating in focus groups and community meetings to walk around the room, read each poster, and use red or green "sticky" notes to indicate their approval of or adisagreement with each recommendation. We then used these "sticky" notes to guide open conversations about each recommendation. Through this listening campaign, the Task Force was able to gather invaluable feedback and refine our draft recommendations.

III.
RECOMMENDATIONS

Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students

The "achievement gap" in education refers to the disparity in academic performance between groups of students, most often used to describe the troubling gaps between black and Hispanic students at the lower end of the performance scale and their white peers, or the similar academic disparity between students from low-income families and those from more privileged backgrounds. With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001,[18] closing achievement gaps among these various student groups became a focus of federal education policy, and schools and districts were for the first time required to disaggregate student test scores and other performance data by student characteristics to enable better comparisons between groups.[19] The attention given to the various student segments, however, did little to improve the achievement gaps particularly among the most vulnerable students.[20] It is on that group of students, and those gaps in opportunities, that the Task Force's working group on At-Risk students focused.

A Subset of a Subset

The term "at risk" entered the public discourse in 1983 following the Reagan-era Commission on Excellence in Education's policy report, A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform. Charged with assessing American instruction, identifying challenges, and setting forth recommendations, the Commission addressed the reality of the disenfranchisement of individuals absent the "…skills, literacy, and training essential to this new era." "At-risk," in this broader context, may refer to students who are also termed "high-need" or "underserved."

In DC, the term "At-Risk" has a very specific meaning, used as part of our funding formula, the UPSFF:

> District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) student or a public charter school student who is identified as one or more of the following: (A) Homeless; (B) In the District's foster care system; (C) Qualifies for the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program or the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program; or (D) A high school student that is one year older, or more, than the expected age for the grade in which the student is enrolled.

While this definition certainly captures some of the students in DC who require and deserve additional resources and support, it is also true that the definition describes merely one subset of "high-need" students while not necessarily covering the universe of students who face obstacles to academic achievement. "At-Risk" does not include students with disabilities, for example, or students who are English learners. The Task Force debated whether the focus of the At-Risk working group should be the students fitting within the narrow definition of "At-Risk" as used for funding purposes, or a much wider range of students who have needs that are not currently being met by our public schools. Although we ultimately elected to rely on the former, we did so with the understanding that, as a threshold question, the working group would examine whether the UPSFF definition of "At-Risk" sufficiently captures the array of students who are underserved.

Identifying Cross-Sector Solutions to Citywide Problems

Beyond debating whether to expand the scope of discussion to include issues facing students not captured in the UPSFF definition of At-Risk, the working group grappled with a perhaps larger question: which issues lend themselves to actionable, cross-sector solutions? In the end, a few important themes emerged, all of which fit under a broader goal of increasing equity. First, focus our resources on what works. The working group felt strongly that, despite obvious and indefensible gaps in the aggregate, there are several bright spots at the school level. We should know what works and expand on it. Second, improve access for At-Risk students. The working group was particularly concerned about the persistent segregation in DC and how it affects school performance and school choice. Third, improve attendance. Although the Every Day Counts! campaign is well-supported and foundational to further action, we must do more to ensure that our students are in school, learning. Fourth, share information. We must be able to break down silos not only between schools, but across sectors and across other, lesser known chasms, such as those that exist in both sectors between elementary and secondary schools. Finally, ensure funding reaches our At-Risk students. We have witnessed several successive years of expanded funding for our public schools, but questions remain about how well those funds work on behalf of our students, and in particular our At-Risk students.

To be sure, these are not the only issues relevant to the success of At-Risk students. But moving the needle on some of these questions could lead to substantial positive impacts on the students in DC who are most often left behind. The following recommendations reflect that effort.

Objective 1: Invest in Efforts to Identify, Share, and Expand Programs that Serve At-Risk Students Effectively

The Problem

In order to accelerate the improvement of educational outcomes for At-Risk students, we must be able to identify evidence-based practices that support tailored academic achievement for At-Risk students and expand upon these programs. At-Risk youth and their families have multiple needs that are not likely to be successfully addressed solely by single-response, stand-alone initiatives. By focusing resources on early intervention and programs that improve outcomes for off-track youth, we can facilitate successful transitions to adulthood characterized by matriculation into post-secondary institutions or employment career tracks. Both nationally and in the District, various programming efforts have been proven to achieve positive results with At-Risk student populations. To improve effectiveness and efficiency of these programs, we need to increase collaboration across public schools in identifying and expanding effective models for serving At-Risk students.

The Context

Nationally, there are extensive models, strategies, and examples of successful evidenced-based practices designed to serve high-need students specifically. One design, for example, is the Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) model. CSR methodologies are based on the premise that by encouraging schoolwide improvements, from curriculum to school management, outcomes for disadvantaged students will improve. CSR programs target high-need schools and approach the problem through a comprehensive lens, choosing research-based reforms that strengthen the entire school and transform the way it functions in a replicable manner, rather than simply adding one experimental program on top of another. Research on the achievement outcomes of schools that have implemented the CSR methodologies for five years or more shows consistent improvements across schools of varying poverty levels. We can do more to identify and implement such practices in DC.

In DC, we have seen the success of some local initiatives and reforms geared toward mitigating the effects that poverty and lack of access can have on the achievement of At-Risk students. Raise DC, a local collaborative of schools, government agencies, community-based and philanthropic organizations, and businesses, presented information on the Graduation Pathways [i] project to the Task Force. They identified key takeaways from their work, some of which caught the attention of the working group, such as the finding that over a quarter of the variation in high school outcomes can be predicted by the end of grade 8.[21] The Graduation Pathways Project is driven by a coordinated effort among key partners to dramatically reduce the number of off-track students over the next five years. They found that fortifying the transition from grade 8 to grade 9, expanding access to timely credit recovery, and advancing policies that allow flexible and varied paths to graduation deserve support and investment. In all, the Graduation Pathways project—and Raise DC's work in general—provides fertile ground for further policy development.

[i] The Graduation Pathways project is a detailed assessment of our citywide high school graduation rate to catalyze education agencies, school leaders, and civic partners around a common set of data to act on a shared vision that every student has a path to graduation and to focus Raise DC's current collective efforts in four critical areas.

Moreover, we know that poverty does not determine destiny for our public schools. Indeed, DC has some high-poverty schools that are beating the odds both overall and with specific subsets of high-risk students. Education Reform Now and EmpowerK12 recently released their Bold Improvement Schools Report recognizing high-poverty, fast-improving schools that are rapidly narrowing the achievement gap[22] as measured by the Growth Index.[ii] This is in addition to recognizing Bold Performance award-winning schools, boasting proficiency rates at least 10 percentage points higher than schools with similar demographics. The District has recognized ten Bold Improvement Schools (5 DCPS and 5 public charters) and 17 Bold Performance Schools (4 DCPS and 13 public charters).[23] Quantitative data and qualitative research identified that Bold Improvement and Bold Performance Schools shared four major traits: (1) a pervasive culture of and commitment to high academic expectations for every single student, (2) deep investment in teacher quality, (3) support for the whole child and for families, and (4) drive to access additional resources and autonomy. We must do more to find and expand on programs and schools, irrespective of sector, that possess these traits.

CALLING ASSISTANT PRINCIPALS!

Community of Practice Opportunity on Trauma-Informed Practices

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Cross-Sector Community of Practice on Trauma-Informed Practices

Evidence has shown that childhood trauma "can have a direct, immediate, and potentially overwhelming impact on the ability of a child to learn," and that by appropriately responding to trauma, educators can decrease its impact on the performance of At-Risk students. As such, a collaboration between DME, Education Forward DC, Relay Graduate School of Education, Georgetown MedStar, and Turnaround for Children launched a community of practice open to DCPS and all public charters on trauma-informed practices. Over 25 assistant principals made a year-long commitment to engage with and deepen their knowledge of a variety of trauma-informed practices and their scientific basis and manifestations. Joining together regularly from September 2018 to June 2019, this action-research orientated program allows assistant principals the opportunity to collaborate and develop action-research projects to better meet the needs of students and families in their schools. Together, assistant principals are working to integrate practices that promote healthy social-emotional development and resilience for all students. After the September kick-off, all assistant principals shared their excitement about working cross sector to learn and collaborate for the benefit of all DC students no matter their school choice.

[ii] Median Growth Percentile (MGP) is a measure of a student's growth on standardized assessment from one year to the next, as compared to other students with a similar achievement history.

Recommendations

Sharing effective practices across sectors provides an opportunity to disseminate innovation from successful and forward-thinking educators and schools.[24] This not only benefits more students, but also breaks down some of the mistrust and political baggage that so often is tied to the district-charter dynamic. Education leaders pursuing such efforts should be intentional about building strong foundations for successful and sustainable work. As noted by EmpowerK12, "most proposals for collaboration have focused on matters of policy, but the shared practices we observe across Bold Improvement Schools indicate that collaborations can and should focus on practice as well as policy." [25]

1.1: Explore ways to identify and evaluate promising practices from individual schools or LEAs that are getting the best results for At-Risk students.

    1.1.1: Explore the possibility of citywide, cross-sector definitions of common elements of school design and program offerings at the schools getting the best results with At-Risk students.

    1.1.2: Identify and build on existing evidence-based practices, and ensure that such practices are scalable and subjected to statistical rigor.

    1.1.3: Identify the costs and obstacles to scaling successful program offerings.

    1.1.4: Expand on–and make available citywide–effective practices for ensuring the presence of positive, in-school "anchors" that support students and help reduce the number of students in high school who are not on track to graduate on time, possibly as part of the Every Day Counts! initiative.

    1.1.5: Explore wraparound service delivery options for implementing a broad-based continuum of care and linking youth and families to a variety of services.

1.2: Collaborate across sectors to focus resources on early intervention programs and early literacy development.

    1.2.1: Engage parents and families in developing and implementing proposals to improve early childhood language and literacy development.

    1.2.2: Explore the feasibility of a citywide public campaign to highlight and promote early literacy.

    1.2.3: Identify and expand access to evidence-based programs designed to promote early literacy.

1.3: Create opportunities to share best practices for serving At-Risk students across sectors and LEAs.

    1.3.1: Plan and facilitate a convening and/or community of practice for cross-LEA practitioner-level working groups.

    1.3.2: Explore the feasibility of a coordinating framework or authority for family support collaborative groups.

    1.3.3: Consider a commitment among sector leaders to collaborate in identifying and replicating effective models for serving At-Risk students as part of a coordinated school planning process.

1.4: Create more cross-sector options for education, training, and credentialing for our off-track and disengaged youth at all ages and grade levels.

    1.4.1: Examine policies that would allow LEAs/schools to provide students with cross-sector credit recovery options.

    1.4.2: Investigate options around creating cross-sector "opportunity academies."

    1.4.3: Develop and support multiple pathways to career and postsecondary options, leveraging best-in-class providers, regional and national employers, and postsecondary institutions.

Objective 2: Increase At-Risk Students' Access to High Quality Programs

The Problem

Today, for the first time ever, more than half of the K-12 population in the United States is made up of students of color.[26] Meaningful diversity, however, remains elusive. Nearly 65 years after Brown v. Board Of Education, our nation's public schools remain starkly segregated along racial and economic lines in spite of mounting evidence showing that "racial and socioeconomic integration is one of the best design principles for creating successful schools that produce strong results for students and society."[27] Conversely, school segregation negatively affects the achievement gap.[28] In DC we face both extreme segregation and persistent gaps in achievement and opportunity.

The Context

In examining issues of segregation and concentrated poverty, the Task Force looked at the distribution of At-Risk students across schools and neighborhoods. The Task Force was particularly interested in the relationship between concentrated poverty in schools and the achievement and well-being of the students served by those schools.

With respect to academic performance, At-Risk students do not generally fare well; in 2018, only 18.4 and 15.7 percent of At-Risk students met or exceeded expectations for grade-level learning standards in language arts and math, respectively.[29] This is compared to 33.3 and 29.4 percent for all student groups.

Academic Performance by Subgroup

In general, the geographic distribution of At-Risk students mirrors the socioeconomic stratification of DC. More than half of all public school students living in Ward 7 (58 percent) and Ward 8 (67 percent), for example, were identified as At-Risk in school year 2017-18; by comparison, only four percent of Ward 3 students were At-Risk. Housing segregation in DC, like in many major urban districts, is one of the leading factors contributing to segregated schools.[30] Student academic performance aggregated by Ward is reflective of the percentage of At-Risk students living within each Ward.

Academic Performance by Ward

Non-At-Risk Students by Ward
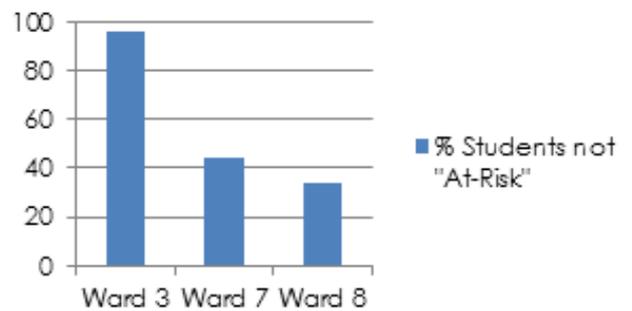
At the school level, there is wide variability in the concentration of At-Risk students, with 37 schools having less than 20 percent At-Risk enrollment (23 DCPS schools and 14 public charter schools) while another 18 schools had enrollments greater than 80 percent At-Risk (13 DCPS schools and 5 public charter schools).

On the question of how a concentrated population of At-Risk students affects overall school performance, the Task Force learned that, within DCPS schools, the performance of both At-Risk and non-At-Risk students decreases as the percentage of At-Risk students increases.[31] Within DC's public charter schools, the average performance of At-Risk students is largely not affected by changes in a school's At-Risk concentration. The performance of non-At-Risk students, however, decreases slightly as the concentration of At-Risk students increases.

In various focus groups and community meetings, the Task Force heard repeatedly that school choice favors those who have real options—an assigned school that is high-performing, for example, or a favorable feeder option due to its programmatic offerings (e.g., dual-language programs). If a family from Ward 8, for example, feels compelled to opt out of their by-right school because that school is failing, but their only options are schools with long waitlists or schools that are unlikely to admit new students, can we truly say that this family has a choice? Likewise, the Task Force noted that choice is constrained by the availability and effectiveness of transportation options. What if a family's only choice is a school that is an hour's commute away?

Additionally, the Task Force placed an emphasis on the inequities inherent in the availability and use of information. There are important efforts to make identifying quality schools simple, such as PCSB's School Quality Reports, which rate all public charter schools in three tiers, and OSSE's forthcoming STAR rating system, designed to allow true comparisons across all public schools, DCPS and charter. My School DC allocates significant resources every year to outreach, distributing school and lottery information to low-income and language minority communities. Nevertheless, our school choice system is still perceived by some Task Force and community members to benefit families who are most "in the know" and able to navigate the system.

Finally, the Task Force members discussed the importance of diversity itself. One study suggested that "reducing school segregation—in particular, reducing racial disparities in exposure to underprivileged classmates—might lead to meaningful reductions in racial achievement gaps." The Task Force members concluded that investigating ways to intentionally pursue increased diversity in our schools should prove beneficial to all students.

Recommendations

In the end, a major theme that emerged in the Task Force's discussions was opportunity—opportunity to access information and resources to identify high-quality options that are convenient; opportunity to access the most in-demand schools; and opportunity to understand and make informed choices about educational options. The recommendations below reflect the Task Force's attempt to consider cross-sector proposals to help bridge the "opportunity gap" and make our public education sectors work better for all students, especially those who are At-Risk.

2.1: Develop and support programs to provide At-Risk students and families with all necessary information and resources to access excellent educational options across sectors and succeed in school.

 2.1.1: Work with a partner organization (e.g., DC School Reform Now) to develop an "education navigator" program to provide individualized counseling on school choice options for families throughout the My School DC process.

 2.1.2: Streamline school-quality information available to families.

 2.1.3: Investigate ways to better connect students and families with the agencies responsible for providing mental health supports, including mental health services provided in schools, and understand preexisting advantages and disadvantages to accessing resources and services.

2.2: Explore the development of policies and programs designed to increase access to high-quality schools by At-Risk students and to decrease the number of schools serving a high concentration of At-Risk students.

 2.2.1: Explore ways in which to leverage the lottery, including optional preferences or weights, to increase access to high quality schools by At-Risk students, whether pre- or post-lottery.

 2.2.2: Explore ways to increase the share of At-Risk enrollment at schools who serve fewer than 25 percent At-Risk students.

 2.2.3: Consider the appropriate threshold for eligibility for an At-Risk preference (e.g., only schools with less than 25 percent At-Risk students may implement the preference).

 2.2.4: Examine and develop methods to identify rising pre-Kindergarten students who may be At-Risk.

 2.2.5: Explore the development of an enrollment preference for At-Risk PK3, PK4, or K students matriculating from a CBO-managed childcare or preschool program.

 2.2.6: Explore data around students who travel across the city to attend a higher-performing public school to identify potential transportation policies or programs (such as city-run school buses on high density routes).

 2.2.7: Consider ways to facilitate the development of cross-LEA and cross-sector feeder patterns to provide greater predictability and stability for students and families.

2.3: Explore the development of cross-sector policies and programs designed to increase socioeconomic diversity in schools.

 2.3.1 Consider developing a citywide diversity plan with benchmarks for At-Risk students or students from low-income families, potentially through the establishment of zip-code or census tract lottery to create deliberately diverse schools.

 2.3.2 Consider additional funding incentives, at the student, school, or LEA level, designed to increase socioeconomic diversity.

 2.3.3 Explore innovative mechanisms for increasing school diversity, such as the establishment of zip-code or census tract lottery to create deliberately diverse schools.

Objective 3: Improve Attendance

The Problem

Attending school every day is essential to academic success and well-being. Attendance is eight times more predictive of course failure than prior test scores.[32] All children are required to attend school from age 5 to 18.[33] Truancy is defined as being absent from school for ten or more days without a valid reason (unexcused absences). In contrast, chronic absenteeism is defined by missing more than 10 percent of school days, including both excused and unexcused absences. Both have a negative long-term impact on children.

Chronic absenteeism has become an issue receiving national attention because missing school for any reason impacts ability to read by third grade and likelihood of graduating high school. Nationally, chronic absence by 6th grade is a leading indicator for high school dropout.[34] Attendance Works has estimated that over one in every ten students is chronically absent nationwide, but the challenge is even more severe in DC and inequitably impacts our most vulnerable students.[35]

In DC, one in four students is chronically absent, and the rates are even higher for the District's youngest learners and high school students. In 2016-17, one-third of pre-K students and more than half of high school students were chronically absent. Additionally, economically disadvantaged students in DC are 2.2 times more likely to have been truant than wealthier peers.[36]

The Context

Researchers categorize the underlying causes of truancy into four groups: (1) student-specific factors, (2) family-specific factors, (3) school-specific factors, and (4) community-specific factors (Table 1).[37] The importance of these factors has a great deal to do with the age of the student. For example, kindergarten absenteeism is most strongly related to family factors (e.g., children whose parents' work schedules make it difficult for them to get their children to school each morning). Teenage truancy, conversely, is more frequently associated with student- or school-factors, such as fear of bullying or disengagement with school.

Student-specific	Teenage motherhood, low academic performance and repeating grades, lack of caring relationships with adults, negative peer influence, bullying
Family-specific	Low family income, low parent involvement, unstable housing, at-home responsibilities, stressful family events conflicting home and school priorities, language differences
School-specific	Poor conditions or lack of school facilities, low-quality teachers, teacher shortages, poor student-teacher interactions, geographic access to school, less challenging courses and student boredom
Community-specific	Availability of job opportunities that do not require formal schooling, unsafe neighborhoods, low compulsory education requirements, lack of social and education support services

Factors related to absenteeism, Source: REL Pacific, *Review of research on student nonenrollment and chronic absenteeism* (2014)

Students with good attendance in K and 1st grade (missed nine or fewer days both years) are 47 percent more likely to read on grade-level after 3rd grade than their chronically absent peers (missed 18 or more days each year).[38] Nationally, students in early grades can have the most severe chronic absenteeism, not only hurting their future achievement but also establishing inconsistent attendance patterns families and students often continue into later grades.[39] DC's investments in free, universal pre-K are leading the nation; however, since pre-K attendance is not required, not all families in DC are taking full advantage of this opportunity.

An Urban Institute study of DC Public Schools' pre-K programs found that families saw pre-K as an opportunity for socialization and adapting to school, while the staff viewed pre-K as crucial for learning important academic skills.[40] This mismatch in understanding the importance of early childhood education likely contributes to high absenteeism rates in pre-K. The study also found that pre-K students often experienced interrelated barriers to attendance, such as health issues, parents' employment situations, homelessness, and transportation challenges.

Another subgroup disproportionately represented in truancy rates in the District includes students of color. During the 2016-17 school year, about two-thirds of the absences held by black and Latino students were unexcused compared with about one-third for white students.[41] Families are required to submit excuse notes within five school days after the student returns to school, a challenge for some families and an administrative burden for schools. While many attendance counselors aim to focus their work on providing supports and attendance interventions for students, they often spend their time tracking down excuse notes.

Truancy laws in DC mandate that schools refer truant students from ages 5 to 13 to the Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA) and students who are 14 years or older and miss 15 days of school without an excuse to the Court Social Services Division of the Superior Court of the District of Columbia as well as the Juvenile Division of the Office of the Attorney General.[42] Students with more than five unexcused absences must receive interventions from the school's Student Support Team (SST) to help them with any barriers to attending school, which aims to avoid referrals to court and CFSA.[43] Some schools in DC, however, have upwards of 90 percent of students chronically absent, and truancy requirements and regulations can often overwhelm available resources at these schools. Throughout the Task Force's public engagement, we heard concerns about the punitive nature of the city's attendance and truancy policies.

In addition to the importance of maximizing learning time to narrow the achievement gap and minimizing referrals to the child welfare and criminal justices systems, chronic absenteeism will soon also factor into schools' performance ratings. Under ESSA, school attendance will be incorporated into DC's statewide accountability system, using both in-seat attendance rates and chronic absenteeism rates.

In June 2017, the Task Force heard from the DME's office about Mayor Bowser's Every Day Counts! initiative, which seeks to ensure every student in Washington DC attends school every day through a public awareness campaign, an inter-agency task force, and investments in evidence-based strategies for improving attendance. The campaign has helped to spread information about the importance of attending school every day. Bus and bus shelter ads, social media posts, and traditional media placements in newspapers have run throughout the 2017-18 school year. DME has conducted over 4,000 individual conversations on school attendance at over 30 public events, collecting signatures for the Every Day Counts! pledge from students, families, and community members. Hundreds of students and families have received incentives for improved and good school attendance during the 2017-18 school year.

In addition, the Bowser Administration has championed several important issues to boost student attendance, such as expanding affordable child care and providing free access to public transportation. In 2017, Mayor Bowser challenged the DME to create 1,000 new child care seats, and the Mayor's budget included historic investments in childcare subsidies and refundable tax credits for families. Under the Kids Ride Free program, transportation on Metro is free for students who attend public schools in DC. As raised several times during our community engagement process, however, parents and families want additional transportation supports for young students who cannot take public transportation alone and for students who travel across the city to attend their school of choice.

Creating a Chronically Absent list on Aspen.

- Directions for creating a 'hotlist', a snapshot and running attendance reports weekly/monthly.
- 1: Create a list on Aspen for only your Chronically Absent Students. "Hotlist"
    - On Aspen- Click Student Tab
    - Select each student identified for your "hotlist"
    - Show selected under options tab (make sure all students are selected)
- 2: Create a Snap Shot for "Hotlist"
    - Under Student Tab- Select Options
    - Snapshot-New-Name it/Create
- 3: Run "hotlist" report to identify any absences of students on the list.
    - Select Reports-Principal Attendance
    - Dates-Students to Include select Snapshots
    - Search Value-Type name of the list=0
    - Click Unexcused

Defining CHRONICALLY Absent Students

- **Defined as-** "missing 10 percent or more of a school year -- approximately 18 days a year, or just two days every month. And across the nation, 5 to 7.5 million students are chronically absent"
- At TUBMAN, we chose to define these students through the previous years attendance data as students who have missed 15 or more days of school in the 2016/2017 school year
    - HOW?
        - Using Aspen, we created this list by searching the students who fell under this criteria
- OUR target students (**Hotlist**) = 80 students (some families) for the current 2017/2018 school year

Cross-Sector Community of Practice on Attendance

In response to the draft recommendation to foster school- and practitioner-level sharing of best practices, DME launched a cross-sector community of practice on attendance, which meets monthly to learn from local and national experts to improve schoolwide attendance and reduce chronic absenteeism. For instance, at a recent meeting, the attendance team at Harriet Tubman Elementary School—where the rate of chronic absenteeism has steadily decreased over the past three years—presented its "Hotlist" reporting practices.
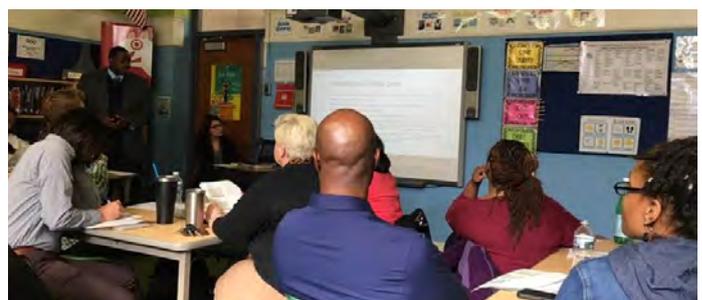
Recommendations

Early success of Every Day Counts! programs such as Show Up, Stand Out (SUSO), Alternatives to Court Experience (ACE), Parent and Adolescent Support Services (PASS) led the Task Force to recommend identifying practices that are working and ensuring that such practices are scalable and subjected to statistical rigor.

Throughout our community engagement on the draft recommendations, the public discussed many nuanced challenges to school attendance. Accordingly, this objective not only recommends ensuring a robust, cross-sector commitment to the Every Day Counts! initiative but also advises exploring new ways to collaborate on addressing barriers to attendance for particular segments of the student population. The Task Force recommends focusing efforts on At-Risk students and early childhood grades and involving parents of young children to develop and strengthen the perception that early childhood grades are an essential part of the education curriculum. To better understand what interventions can help the subpopulations in the At-Risk categorization, the Task Force added a recommendation to explore ways to incorporate root-cause analyses into existing and future efforts to improve attendance.

The Task Force has discussed at length the lack of structures in place for cross-sector sharing of best practices for serving At-Risk students and recommends creating mechanisms for increased school and practitioner-level collaboration and sharing of best practices for improving attendance. The challenges and solutions for improving school attendance are also closely intertwined with other issues the Task Force examined, including reducing concentrated poverty, providing resources needed to serve At-Risk students, and expanding programs that effectively serve At-Risk students.

3.1: Ensure robust, cross-sector commitment to Every Day Counts! initiative with ambitious and measurable objectives.

    3.1.1: Build community and parent awareness of citywide attendance-improvement efforts.

3.2: Explore ways to further focus citywide efforts on the barriers to attendance for particular segments of the student population.

    3.2.1: Identify and build on existing, evidence-based practices, and ensure that such practices are scalable and subjected to statistical rigor.

    3.2.2: Consider furthering high-profile partnerships among government agencies, local sports teams, and public schools to further support a citywide attendance campaign.

    3.2.3: Identify ways to incorporate root-cause analyses into existing and future efforts to improve attendance.

    3.2.4: Consider focusing efforts on early childhood grades and involving parents of young children to develop and strengthen the perception that early childhood grades are an essential part of the education curriculum (even if not compulsory).

3.3: Foster school- and practitioner-level collaboration and sharing of best practices across sectors.

    3.3.1: Create mechanisms to assist LEAs in adopting best practices and allowing practitioner-level collaboration, possibly through a convening and/or community of practice.

Objective 4: Expand and Strengthen Citywide, Cross-Sector Efforts to Share Data and Information

The Problem

Nationally in 2016, 84 percent of public high school students graduated within four years of starting 9th grade.[44] That same year in the District of Columbia, while graduation rates had steadily increased throughout the decade, the four-year graduation rate was 69 percent. Research has identified several measurable factors present in middle school that are predictive of off-time graduation and high school dropout, with "26 percent of the total variation in students' high school outcomes [being] observable by the end of 8th grade."[45] Understanding these factors is vital for ensuring student success, but such data are rarely transferred from one school or LEA to another during student transition points.

Currently, there is only inconsistent sharing across schools and LEAs of important academic and social-emotional data about students, and this sharing tends to be informal, based on staff relationships. In contrast, online consumer experiences, activity, and usage are compiled utilizing adaptive algorithms to produce end-user preferences or provide viewing or purchase recommendations. Such customization should not be limited to web-based interfaces or digital or social media. We have an opportunity to formalize data-sharing at key transition points across the K-12 continuum to proactively prepare for students' needs.[46]

The Context

Many types of data support student learning extending beyond test scores,[47] including academic data, demographic data, testing data, actions data (e.g., attendance, behavior, extracurricular activity, etc.), teacher-generated data (e.g., observations), and student-generated data (e.g., homework).[48] Much of these data can be useful in predicting future student outcomes.

Raise DC presented its methods of data analysis for "off track" secondary students who are unlikely to graduate on time. Raise DC's Graduation Pathways Project "widely engages education agencies, schools, and civic leaders to act on a shared vision that every young person in the District of Columbia, no matter how far off track they may be, has a path to graduation." The Graduation Pathways Project found:

- Many of the risk factors for not graduating on time can be identified by 8th grade (i.e. receiving special education or English-learner services, being over-age for the grade, absenteeism, etc.).
- About half of 9th grade students become off-track after their first year of high school, and only 5 percent of those off-track students go on to graduate on time.
- One-quarter of all 9th grade students in DC become disengaged from school immediately and on average earn 1.9 credits and attend 62 percent of the school year (just seven schools serve over half of these students).

Using early warning indicators for identifying "off-track" students can increase a school's capacity to target resources and interventions toward these students.[49] To help students' transition to 9th grade and increase graduation rates, Raise DC and OSSE created a Bridge to High School Data Exchange. This program allows the LEAs serving a student in 8th grade to provide early warning indicators to the high school which then can engage its resources to act on the data proactively. Such indicators should be valid, actionable by schools, meaningful, easy to understand, and aligned with the priorities of the schools/districts.

Student Characteristic		Student 1 (African American)	+/- Effect on Graduation Likelihood		Student 2 (African American)	+/- Effect on Graduation Likelihood
Baseline Graduation Rate		91%			91%	
Math Grade 8 CAS		Proficient	0%		Below Basic	-11%
Reading Grade 8 CAS		Proficient	0%		Basic	-12%
SPED		No	0%		Yes	-12%
LEP		No	0%		No	0%
CFSA/DYRS Involvement		No	0%		No	0%
Overage		No	0%		Yes	-12%
Grade 8 Absences		2	-1%		6	-2%
Grade 8 Fs		0	0%		1	-6%
Grade 6-8 Suspensions		0	0%		0	0%
Chance of Graduating On-Time		90%			36%	

Source: *Graduation Pathways Project Summary* (September 2014)

The table above highlights the divergent profiles of two African American students and presents their likelihood of graduating on time (within four years of entering 9th grade) given certain reported characteristics or factors from 8th grade. In the model above, both students entered the 9th grade with a Baseline Graduation Rate of 91%, however, when reported scores or identifying factors like standardized tests (CAS), special education (SPED), Limited English Proficiency (LEP), over-age, attendance, grades, and suspensions are calculated, the chances of graduating on time changes. Specifically, as a consequence of below basic and basic ratings on standardized tests, Student 2 is 11% and 12%, less likely to graduate on time, respectively. When the remaining factors, taken in concert, are accumulated and deducted from the initial 91% Baseline Graduation Rate, Student 2 has a 36% chance of graduating on time. In contrast, Student 1 with Grade 8 Absences totaling two is 1% less likely to graduate on time as a consequence and overall has a 90% chance of graduating on time. Simply, two students with divergent personal and academic profiles by grade 8 have wildly different chances of graduating on time.[50]

Compiling and reporting early-warning data—especially for At-Risk students—can be invaluable for ensuring students stay on track for graduation. We know that disengagement from school is a gradual process and that students send identifiable signals that they are on the path to dropping out.[51] We must do a better job of heeding those signals and ensuring the success of At-Risk students.

Recommendations

The strategic use of data has the potential to transform education into a personalized experience that meets the needs of individuals and ensures that no student is lost along the way. In discussing where to focus efforts for supporting students who are At-Risk, the Task Force agreed there are opportunities to better support students all along the continuum of education, even before the 8th to 9th grade transition. Acknowledging DC's unique challenge with students transitioning frequently across LEAs, the Task Force agreed that an expansion of the Bridge to High School Data Exchange could be beneficial. But other data are important and useful as well. Community members highlighted the importance, for example, of schools effectively sharing data and information on students with special needs, as long as such sharing is rooted in asset-based thinking and is protective of students' rights.

The recommendations below reflect the Task Force's hope for a paradigm shift; we must move from a world in which a lack of data and information contributes to students falling through the cracks, to a world in which the strategic and effective use of data helps ensure that educators and schools are in the best position possible to serve our At-Risk students.

4.1: Explore the expansion of the RaiseDC Bridge to High School Data Exchange to facilitate school-to-school sharing of data at additional transition points along the education continuum.

> 4.1.1: Monitor, report, and make necessary adjustments to existing data exchange efforts, including the Bridge to High School Data Exchange.

4.2: Collaborate across sectors to understand the needs of schools and LEAs with respect to the effective use of student data and information.

> 4.2.1: Explore the creation of a citywide technical assistance program for schools that are sending and receiving data and information at key transition points, and whether a government agency or nonprofit entity should manage such an effort.
>
> 4.2.2: Explore the feasibility of launching a citywide data platform or clearinghouse to allow all schools to access student records as appropriate.

Objective 5: Provide the Resources Necessary to Ensure the Success of At-Risk Students

The Problem

Increased funding for education is generally a positive development—a larger pie tends to benefit all students. A more nuanced view, however, reveals additional questions about the inadequacy of funding relative to what is required to properly and effectively serve high-need students. The Task Force frequently revisited the question of whether the UPSFF definition of "At-Risk" sufficiently captured the population of the District's underserved students or if a more targeted approach would better capture the range of students who have needs that are not currently being met by our public schools. Additionally, the Task Force returned often to questions of adequacy and effectiveness. How much money, for example, would it take to ensure that At-Risk students are put on equal footing with students not experiencing poverty or trauma? Knowing that a recommendation to increase spending, without further explanation, offers little meaning or merit, the Task Force questioned whether we have done all that we can to understand the actual needs of At-Risk students.

The Context

The Task Force was not alone in seeking these answers. Following the creation of the DC Public Education Finance Reform Commission in 2010, DME commissioned the DC Education Adequacy Study to examine the city's method for allocating local operating dollars to the District's public schools. DC has a system of allocating operating and facility maintenance funds that begins with a foundation (base amount for each student) and allows for supplemental adjustments centered on "weights" (i.e. percentage increases from the foundation) based on student needs. With a goal of establishing "fair and transparent allocation of resources" for all students attending public schools, in 1998 DC created the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula (UPSFF). The legislation required annual payments be made to DCPS and public charter schools based on a calculation using a formula that was a uniform amount per enrolled student. As originally envisioned, the amount allocated per student would vary given specific characteristics, including grade level and special learning needs. The original formula did not, however, contemplate a weight for students considered at risk of academic failure.

The resulting final report commissioned by the DME, *Cost of Student Achievement: Report of DC Education Adequacy Study in 2013* attempted to address the fundamental question of what it actually costs to provide an educational experience that would enable all DC students to meet academic performance standards. Moreover, the Adequacy Study recommended not only increases to the baseline UPSFF, but a separate weight for students at risk of academic failure in addition to the current indicators (e.g., Special Education Levels 1-4, English learners). In Fiscal Year 2014-2015, the At-Risk weight was incorporated and received initial budget approval.

Initially, the Task Force debated whether the mechanism for assessing economic disadvantage—eligibility for TANF or SNAP—could unfairly exclude some students from low-income families who, for a number of reasons, may not qualify for these programs. This skepticism was echoed by community members. In engaging with the public, the Task Force heard, for example, that some immigrant families are hesitant to share information necessary to assess eligibility for public assistance.

Category	Proposed Instructional UPSFF Weight Before Federal Revenue Adjustments	Proposed Instructional UPSFF Per-Pupil Allocations Before Federal Revenue Adjustments	Proposed Instructional UPSFF Weight After Federal Revenue Adjustments	Proposed Instructional UPSFF Per-Pupil Allocations After Federal Revenue Adjustments
Base-Level Funding		$11,344		$10,557
General Education				
Preschool	1.18	$13,386	1.15	$12,141
Prekindergarten	1.18	$13,386	1.15	$12,141
Kindergarten	1.00	$11,344	1.00	$10,557
Grades 1–3	1.00	$11,344	1.00	$10,557
Grades 4–5	1.00	$11,344	1.00	$10,557
Grades 6–8	1.01	$11,457	1.01	$10,663
Grades 9–12	1.09	$12,365	1.10	$11,613
Alternative[1]	1.95	$22,121	1.73	$18,264
Special Education Schools	1.09	$12,352	1.17	$12,352
Adult Education[2]	1.00	$11,344	1.00	$10,557
Identified Learning Needs Add-On Weightings				
Special Education Level 1	0.89	$10,096	0.88	$9,290
Special Education Level 2	1.10	$12,478	1.08	$11,402
Special Education Level 3	1.80	$20,419	1.77	$18,686
Special Education Level 4	3.19	$36,187	3.13	$33,043
Special Education Capacity Fund	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
English Language Learners	0.58	$6,580	0.61	$6,440
At Risk	0.52	$5,899	0.37	$3,906

Recommended UPSFF Base Funding Level and Weights, Source: *Cost of Student Achievement: Report of DC Education Adequacy Study* (2013)

Beyond accurately measuring for poverty, the Task Force also questioned whether the components of the At-Risk designation appropriately account for the gradation of risk factors among students in the At-Risk category. Again, this criticism was reiterated during the Task Force's community engagement process, especially among educators and school leaders. One school principal, for example, noted that the At-Risk category encompasses a large spectrum of students with "some students having more indicators of risk than others. You should want the money to follow the most At-Risk side of the spectrum."

Finally, several Task Force and community members suggested that the At-Risk designation could include additional, more nuanced indicators, such as lack of connection to school, teen pregnancy or parenting, or parental academic achievement. Of these, the Task Force was particularly interested in a measure of exposure to childhood trauma. Research by the U.S. Centers for Disease Control suggests that exposure to trauma—as measured through Adverse Childhood Experiences, or "ACEs," such as emotional abuse—impacts long-term health and wellness. These trauma indicators operate on graded dose-response, which means that as the dose of the stressor increases, the intensity of the negative outcomes and health risk increases. However, other task force members cautioned about the practical obstacles to using self-reported data. Indeed, one of the benefits of the current definition is that it relies exclusively on data already held by the DC government, and thus requires no supplemental data collection from schools or families.

With regard to the use of funds, recognizing that simply increasing funding may not yield improved outcomes, the Task Force sought to understand whether At-Risk funding, as it now stands, is used efficiently and effectively, at both the LEA and school level. As with much else in public education in DC, however, such an inquiry is not straightforward given the inherent differences between DCPS and public charter schools, the challenges associated with gathering data, and the establishment of mechanisms for assessing and measuring outcomes.

Reports on the use of per-pupil At-Risk funding in charter schools are produced annually by the PCSB in its At-Risk Funding Report and by DCPS in its Proposed Annual Budget and Budget Guide(s). At-Risk funding used in both sectors is typified by social and emotional support staff such as social workers, mental health counselors, and school psychologists. Additionally, At-Risk funds can help schools provide technology in the classroom, child care before and after school, and extended school year opportunities. Questions remain, however, about how and how well these funds are used by schools. Some critics, for example, have pointed out non-compliance with "supplement not supplant" requirements that apply to DCPS – meaning that some schools use At-Risk funding to support other programs and services, not merely those designed to improve achievement among At-Risk students. Independent DC budget analyst Mary Levy found that upwards of 47 percent, or more than $22 million, of At-Risk funds were spent on "items that all schools are otherwise entitled to under DCPS' school staffing model" in FY 2017. The Task Force recognizes that these critiques may highlight more than mere non-compliance or "supplanting," but rather illustrate the greater issue regarding the pressures that LEAs and schools face in balancing the needs of all their students given budgetary constraints or pedagogical approaches that seek to avoid segregating students. Regardless, a nuanced, transparent understanding of the true costs and requirements of effectively serving At-Risk students is a threshold step toward ensuring the success of all our students and families.

Recommendations

The Task Force proposes the following recommendations following discourse and input from stakeholders and experts, as meaningful considerations moving forward.

5.1: Explore the possibility of reexamining the definition of "At-Risk" for the purpose of per-pupil funding.

> 5.1.1: Consider moving to a trauma-based definition of At-Risk that more fully accounts for the gradation of risk among our high-needs students and directs additional funds to those most affected by adverse childhood experiences.

> 5.1.2: Consider whether immigrant students who are not yet eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are excluded from At-Risk status.

> 5.1.3: Consider whether time limits on eligibility for TANF can impact At-Risk designation, and whether Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) eligibility could be an additional eligibility criterion.

5.2: Explore the possibility of conducting a school-level needs analysis across all LEAs to better match resources to student and school-level requirements.

> 5.2.1: Consider whether a government entity (e.g., DME) could manage or commission a school-level analysis of need with respect to resources for At-Risk students, modeled on the Master Facilities Plan's focus on the condition of individual facilities.

> 5.2.2: Explore the use of a survey instrument, for teachers, administrators, and possibly families, designed to identify gaps in supports and services provided to At-Risk students.

> 5.2.3: (cf w/ Objective 1) Study of "what's working" – where practices are improving At-Risk student outcome measures (both academic and socio-emotional/intermediary measures) and related costs.

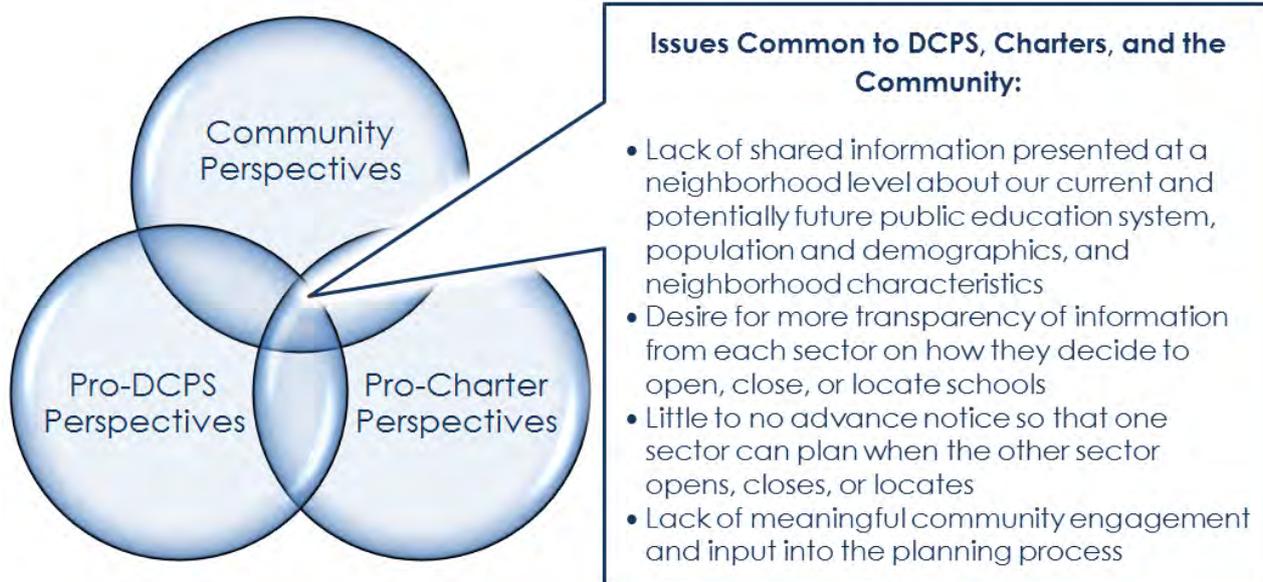# Creating a Framework for Coordinating Planning Decisions

DC's planning processes for public schools—including what types of programs or models to offer, whether underperforming or underutilized schools should be closed or redesigned, and when and where to open new schools—are the subject of intense debate and scrutiny among policy experts, advocates, school leaders, and families. Our unique education governance structure, with mayoral leadership and Council oversight, an independent chartering authority, and an approximately 50/50 share of students between traditional schools and charter schools, has led some interested observers to believe that charter-district competition is inevitable and is a zero-sum game. Almost all support some level of collaboration between charters and districts, but the level and type of collaboration—from the informal sharing of best practices to the active coordination of school siting and other policies—is a source of significant debate and disagreement.

Building Common Ground

The goal of the Opening, Closing, and Siting group (OCS) was to "develop a framework for coordinating processes on school openings, closings, and facilities planning." Both sectors, however, have supporters with entrenched views, making compromise difficult and challenging any effort to establish a common framework. From the perspective of some in the charter sector, for example, new charter approvals must keep pace with a perceived demand for more quality school options and a growing population. This faction likewise believes that underperforming DCPS schools must be closed more aggressively, clearing the way for more city-owned school buildings to house new charter schools. On the other hand, some in the DCPS camp argue that charter growth must be slowed or halted, and that the proliferation of public charter schools prevents traditional public schools from thriving. Additionally, they argue that both sectors have a mismatch between programmatic capacity and enrollment, reflecting a glut of available seats that would suggest a need to curtail the opening of new schools from either sector.

We attempted to tackle these contentious issues by first establishing some common ground. Our working group began its discussion with a Venn diagram exercise, summarizing general concerns related to opening, closing, and siting schools from stakeholders in DCPS, public charter schools, and the broader community. Over the course of several discussions, we outlined a variety of possible areas of focus for the working group, ranging from purely DCPS concerns to charter-centric issues. Additionally, members of the Task Force from both sectors noted some common concerns of the broader public, such as a feeling that the community is not adequately informed by either sector about the decision-making process for opening or siting schools.

Removing those issues that were unlikely to lead to fruitful conversations or compromise, we settled on three shared concerns; these fall in the center Venn diagram. Broadly, these concerns reflect problems with the use of data and information, transparency and communication, and community engagement.

Issues Common to DCPS, Charters, and the Community:

- Lack of shared information presented at a neighborhood level about our current and potentially future public education system, population and demographics, and neighborhood characteristics
- Desire for more transparency of information from each sector on how they decide to open, close, or locate schools
- Little to no advance notice so that one sector can plan when the other sector opens, closes, or locates
- Lack of meaningful community engagement and input into the planning process

Agreeing to limit our conversations to the space in the center of the Venn diagram proved difficult; nearly every conversation seemed to veer away from the established middle ground and back toward the areas where agreements seemed impossible to achieve. This tension rendered compromise—and the development of recommendations—difficult. Despite this difficulty, the OCS working group relied on the middle ground of the Venn diagram to focus on areas in which better coordination across sectors would have positive impacts on students and families. These include:

- identifying common data and information that should inform program and facilities planning decisions in both sectors and by the city as a whole;
- establishing processes for securing and considering public input on planning decisions; and
- aligning each sector's decision-making timelines, thus allowing dialogue and communication between sector leadership about decisions that can improve coordination.

The following recommendations reflect that effort.

Objective 1: Ensure that Planning Decisions in Both Sectors are Based on Common Data and Information

We know that DCPS and PCSB both rely on information—demographic data, enrollment patterns, academic performance—in making key planning decisions, such as whether to open a new school, whether to change a school's programmatic focus, or whether to serve a particular geographic area. Each sector, however, tends to use its own information, leading to planning decisions that may look wise from one perspective but ill-advised from another. This is not the case elsewhere; other jurisdictions across the country take a more holistic, regional approach to planning, using data and information to ensure that planning decisions—including facility and construction use—are not made in a vacuum, but instead reflect commonly-understood demand signals.

In attempting to address the problems inherent in having two sectors make decisions based on often misaligned data, the OCS group looked to other cities for inspiration and guidance. We spoke with senior leadership from Denver Public Schools about what Denver calls its "Strategic Regional Analysis," "a key planning document that details the current state of enrollment, capacity and school performance by region and identifies gaps in each area to guide future decisions."[52]

We began discussing what a citywide planning process could look like in DC. As noted by some members of the working group, however, DC and Denver are not exactly alike, most notably in that Denver Public Schools operates that city's traditional public schools and also authorizes Denver's public charter schools. In DC, of course, the PCSB is independent. That said, Denver and DC have similarly-sized public student populations and a shared commitment among civic leadership to support both traditional and charter public schools. Moreover, both cities have struggled to adequately serve their large numbers of students from low-income families, students receiving special education services, and disengaged youth. Like DC, Denver has made some notable strides; in 2017, for example, Denver Public Schools made record gains on its statewide standardized assessments. Perhaps more important, Denver has achieved these successes through a sustained commitment to district-charter collaboration. Under Denver's approach to school planning, its "portfolio management process," traditional district schools and public charter schools work together to make decisions and address challenges like turnaround efforts, school closures, and funding policy.

Recommendations

Borrowing from Denver, the OCS group agreed that DME should generate annually a Strategic Citywide Analysis—hereinafter called an "EdScape," as in education landscape—that will inform decisions by both sectors on programmatic offerings, new school and program approvals, and school improvement efforts. The EdScape will provide a uniform basis for decision-makers in both sectors, helping to pinpoint what is in demand at traditional public schools and charter schools to better focus on meeting the needs of the District's students and families. Recognizing that the utility of the EdScape will depend on the extent to which each sector commits to relying on it as the primary source of information for planning decisions, we further agreed to recommend that the appropriate education agencies—DCPS, PCSB, etc.—execute a meaningful agreement to use the EdScape to jointly improve the way planning for public education is done in DC.

1.1: Collaborate across sectors to develop an "EdScape," a common set of data and analyses that look at gaps and needs in public education on citywide and neighborhood levels.

    1.1.1: DME, working collaboratively with DCPS, PCSB, and OSSE, will prepare and disseminate the EdScape on an annual basis.

    1.1.2: The strategic analysis should include data on and analyses of a variety of factors, such as: student demographics, schools and facilities, academic performance, student demand, enrollment transitions, neighborhood factors, degree of choice, student needs, feeder patterns, program types, transportation time, student-teacher ratio, growth projections, and capacity, among others.

    1.1.3: Create and make public an interactive format to allow for information to be useful to a wide variety of stakeholders.

    1.1.4: Ensure opportunities for public input and engagement during the development of the EdScape.

1.2: Commit to incorporating the EdScape and its findings into school planning decisions in both sectors.

    1.2.1: Develop a formal agreement among education agency executives to meet regularly to consider planning questions and discuss the findings of the EdScape.

Objective 2: Establish a Coordinated Planning Cycle that Meaningfully Incorporates Public Input

We know that there is significant frustration felt by policymakers in each sector—and by the larger community—about the apparent lack of coordination or overarching strategy in school-planning decisions in DC. Some lack of top-down orchestration, of course, is by design and considered beneficial: neither sector wishes to have its core decision-making functions dictated by the other sector or by another agency, and a core charter school principle is to be welcoming to strong and innovative new school proposals. That said, OCS working group members agreed early on that more coordination could help address fundamental problems, such as school "deserts," school configurations and locations that don't work for most families, a perceived lack of transparency, and an inadequate community-engagement process.

Working Group

The working group spent some time learning about the processes now extant in both sectors in DC.[53] What emerged was a picture of two very different approaches reflecting different orientations. PCSB's charter approval process, for example, is clear and consistent, from the timing of decisions (applications are accepted twice a year, in the fall and spring) to public engagement (PCSB notifies ANCs and the DC Council, hosts a town hall, and holds a public hearing) to the evaluation of each application (done based on four elements, one of which is community feedback gathered at the public hearing). Given facility shortages, the impracticality of securing a facility two years before opening, and the fact that all charter schools have citywide enrollment, most PCSB charter approvals are made before there is a specified location. This contributed to a view expressed by some members of the Task Force that PCSB's public engagement efforts are not authentic or sufficiently robust.

DCPS's process, in contrast, is less clear. As a government agency, DCPS's planning process is subject to different requirements; DCPS must obtain mayoral approval, for example, of any capital and operating investments prior to opening a new school. That said, in analyzing potential openings, DCPS focuses on identifying sufficient enrollment demand for the new school, looking at factors such as the projected change in local population, the likely impact on demand based on the proposed program focus, and the landscape of competitors and their growth trajectory. While DCPS emphasizes community impact and feedback, it has no clear guidelines for gathering input or for notifying the public of potential decisions.

One area where there are glaring deficiencies is in the use of facilities. Most prospective charter schools, as noted, have not finalized their location or identified a possible facility at the time of their application. Likewise, DCPS is not regularly engaged in discussion with PCSB or with individual charter LEAs about the possible sharing of school buildings (through partnerships or co-locations) or leasing options. Nor do the sectors discuss with each other on a regular basis the likely impact of any particular opening on the broader education landscape; however PCSB does coordinate with DCPS when it appears likely it will close a school, both to enroll displaced students from shuttered charter schools and, in some cases, to take over these schools.

Moving Toward Greater Coordination

In attempting to identify potential avenues for increased coordination, the working group again looked to other jurisdictions for guidance. We reviewed information about cross-sector collaboration around planning in Denver, New Orleans, Oakland, and Philadelphia. Each of these cities has in place some combination of facilities planning agreements, information-sharing arrangements, and/or cross-sector policies on opening and closing schools. Denver, for example, approaches school planning through its "portfolio management process," wherein traditional district and charter schools work together to make decisions and address challenges like turnaround efforts, school closures, and funding policy.

As mentioned, Denver's governance structure differs from DC's, but Denver was an imperfect guidepost in other ways as well. In December 2017, some members of the Task Force, along with senior staff from DME, DCPS, OSSE, and PCSB, visited Denver to meet with colleagues and counterparts in Denver's public school system, Denver's charter school sector, and the city's broader education community, with the overarching goal of learning more about Denver's approach to district-charter collaboration. While attendees found the trip informative, it also served as a cautionary tale. One takeaway from the trip was the changing nature of the school planning environment in Denver and how that has affected district-charter collaboration. Denver Public Schools has recently witnessed slowing or declining enrollment and changing demographics related to gentrification. Competition for students seems to have increased significantly, in part because of demographic trends but also because of a sense that Denver Public Schools—as the traditional public school system—redoubled its efforts to win market share away from public charter schools.

Much of the growing tension in Denver stems from a shortage of available facilities for charter schools, an issue raised often by the charter sector in DC. Several Denver speakers alluded to the fact that, when Denver Public Schools first executed a cross-sector collaboration compact in 2010, Denver enjoyed a surfeit of vacant buildings, such that the school system was able to extract a number of concessions from charter schools in return for facilities access. Now, however, as the supply of vacant buildings has dwindled, the willingness on the part of the charter sector to enter into collaborative efforts has likewise diminished. This fact proved instructive to the deliberations of the OCS working group, which agreed that while Denver has much to admire, DC must chart its own course.

Recommendations

In the end, the working group agreed on a model framework for coordinating with each sector's planning processes.[54] Informed in part by what we learned from other jurisdictions, the model framework calls for a coherent, cross-sector approach to school planning that honors the independence of each sector while aligning planning timelines to create the opportunity for collaboration while affording opportunities for the public to provide input at multiple stages. What the working group intends by recommending a "model cycle" is for planning decisions in both sectors to be cyclical and coordinated. Most important, from the perspective of students, families, and the wider public, a coordinated cycle would be clear and understandable.

2.1: Create and adopt a model cycle for coordinated, cross-sector educational planning that incorporates common lottery and school report cards, use of common data and analyses, and coordinated processes for school and program development and improvement.

2.1.1: Ensure that any model cycle is consistent with the current governance structure and considers the autonomy, independence, and unique role of each sector (e.g., DCPS's role in providing a core system of by-right schools; PCSB's exclusive authority to approve new charter schools).

2.1.2: A model cycle should include and incorporate, at a minimum, the following:
- Common lottery (My School DC)
- Accountability information (including OSSE's common school report cards)
- Common data and information (EdScape)
- Process for surplussing and disposing of vacant school buildings
- Mechanism to coordinate development and improvement processes, including approval and siting of new schools and programs (MOU among education agency executives)

2.1.3: Ensure that any model cycle is consistent with OSSE's implementation of ESSA accountability requirements.

2.1.4: Ensure that any model cycle clearly defines the roles of each relevant agency, including DME, OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB.

2.1.5: Research and adopt effective approaches from other jurisdictions that use common information to inform cross-sector planning decisions, as appropriate.

2.1.6: Develop concurrent application and approval windows for new schools with DCPS and PCSB.

2.2: Commit to coordinating and sharing information between and among leaders of DME, OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB.

2.2.1: Include in the MOU or agreement recommended under Objective 1 a stipulation that policymakers will meet regularly to foster open communication about planning decisions and to identify mutually beneficial areas of collaboration.

2.3: Ensure that a coordinated cycle includes regular and predictable opportunities for public input and engagement.

> 2.3.1: Explore the establishment of a public master timeline that includes significant dates for each sector's planning process as well as the city's facilities processes, including capital planning and surplus building disposition.
>
> 2.3.2: Establish a working group of DCPS, PCSB, charter LEA, and DME representatives to make recommendations for a master cross-sector timeline.
>
> 2.3.3: Explore the development and adoption of a citywide guide to gathering community input for new or expanded programs and schools, including recommendations on issues such as how to provide the opportunity to submit public comment remotely and how each sector gives weight to community input, among others.

Promoting Enrollment Stability

Over the first year of our work, the Task Force examined issues related to enrollment stability, with a specific focus on mid-year mobility—students who enter, exit, or transfer school mid-year (after October 5). We know that the majority of students who transfer mid-year go to DCPS schools rather than to charter schools. As a result, DCPS experiences a significant net increase of students over the course of the year, while public charter schools experience a net decrease. This imbalance puts a strain on DCPS school staff, students, and resources. In addition, a high level of mid-year mobility—also called "churn"—is correlated with lower student performance, underscoring the critical importance of enrollment stability.[55] What's more, this is true both for the students who are moving between schools as well as those students already enrolled at schools experiencing high rates of mobility.

When we began examining mid-year mobility, many on the Task Force assumed that most students who move to a new school in the middle of the year are moving from a charter school to another school, whether charter or DCPS. That turned out to be only partly true. Based on the most recently available data from SY13-14, we learned that the vast majority of students (92 percent) stayed in the same school in which they started the year. Of the eight percent of students who moved mid-year (6,118 students), most (4,706, or 77 percent of all mid-year transfers) moved into or out of public education in DC (e.g., transferring from out of state or from a private school). The remainder of the transfers (1,412 students, or 23 percent of all mid-year transfers) consisted of students who moved within public education in DC, either DCPS or public charter schools. These students either transferred within the same sector (743 students, or 12 percent of all mid-year transfers) or switched sectors (669 students, or nearly 11 percent of all mid-year transfers).

In addition, we learned that students who move mid-year tend to be some of our most vulnerable. Within this group, for example, students who are economically disadvantaged, students receiving special education services, African-American students, and male students are all disproportionately represented.

Learning from Other Jurisdictions

The Task Force looked to other jurisdictions to learn what works—and what doesn't—in attempting to reduce harmful mid-year mobility. Relying on the pro bono assistance of Education Counsel, who compiled and synthesized volumes of data and research,[56] we learned that:

- Mobility, generally, is complex, with a variety of causes and contributing factors, including student mobility due to voluntary (e.g., moving homes) or involuntary (e.g., eviction) factors.
- Mobility is common. A national study found that a majority of students in the U.S. make at least one nonpromotional school change during elementary school with a sizeable minority making at least two changes. A study of elementary schools in Chicago Public Schools found that only 50 percent of students remain enrolled over a three-year period in the typical Chicago elementary school.
- Mobility can have an independent impact on student achievement and on overall school/district performance, even in the presence of other factors.

Other cities have attempted to address mobility, with varying success. Some prominent examples are:

Los Angeles, which has a two-track transfer system. Inter-district transfers are handled through a centralized process of granting individual permits to students; this appears to have been developed as part of an effort to reduce transfers out of the LA Unified attendance zone. Intra-district transfers (including transfers to district, magnet, specialized, and affiliated charter schools) are not centralized and only require agreement between the two schools involved that adheres to district policy.

New Orleans, which has established new policies that limit student transfers after October 2 to a handful of special circumstances (medical, safety, and childcare hardships). Although the specific impact of these policies on mobility has yet to be fully assessed, the process has added clarity to the number of students citywide requesting to move schools at different times in the year and given administrators greater control over the process.

In crafting recommendations, we sought to address some of the most common issues identified in DC and nationwide. We hoped that our recommendations would ensure:

- Students entering mid-year have equitable access to all available options to find the school that best matches their needs. This will promote more stable learning environments for entering students and students already attending schools.
- The receiving school is equipped to provide students who enter mid-year a supportive and appropriate learning environment based on the timely sharing of key information about the mid-year entrant from the student's previous school.
- Students in crisis have more timely and appropriate options for a mid-year placement across DCPS and charter schools.
- Policymakers gain greater insight into why students enter and transfer mid-year to inform future policies to reduce mid-year mobility.

These recommendations formed the basis for two pilot programs during the 2017-18 academic year, summarized in more detail in the following pages.

Recommendations

1.1: Create a centralized mid-year entry and transfer process for all public school students across sectors.

1.1.1: My School DC should manage the centralized process, relying where possible on the existing processes of the common lottery.

1.1.2: Consider including students who wish to enroll in their in-boundary DCPS school after October 5.

1.1.3: Consider requiring schools to provide their available seats after October 5 including out-of-boundary seats for neighborhood DCPS schools and all seats at public charter schools, citywide DCPS schools, and selective DCPS schools to My School DC.

1.1.4: Collect information on why mid-year entry and transfer occurs to develop future policies on how to reduce unnecessary student mobility and promote enrollment stability.

1.1.5: Acknowledge that the program would be contingent on the Common Lottery Board approving that My School DC shall take on this additional responsibility.

1.2: Create a system for LEAs to reserve or otherwise make available "hardship" seats that are separate from school waitlists in order to serve students who meet certain hardship criteria.

    1.2.1: DME should manage a working group to determine threshold matters, such as the appropriate "hardship" criteria.

    1.2.2: Consider ways to allow LEAs to identify the specific number of hardship set aside seats and notify My School DC about the availability of their hardship set aside seats.

    1.2.3: Consider the role of the DCPS Student Placement Office and other support agencies, like the Metropolitan Police Department.

Summary: Mid-Year Entry & Transfer Program Pilot

Background

In March 2017, the Task Force advanced two recommendations related to Goal 4 (Promoting Enrollment Stability). One of those recommendations was to create a process to ensure that all students entering schools mid-year went through My School DC, the common application system, even students seeking to enroll at their in-boundary school. The goals of this change were two-fold. The first was to ensure students entering mid-year have equitable access to all available options to find the school that best matches their needs, promoting more stable learning environments for entering students and students already attending schools. The second was to increase our knowledge about why students enter and transfer mid-year to inform future policies to reduce mid-year mobility.

Implementation

Application. My School DC enhanced its software to take applications for SY2017-18 through the end of March 2018. This meant updating its application and waitlist management system to allow for the concurrent acceptance of lottery applications for SY2017-18 and 2018-19. Beginning October 6, all families looking for a seat mid-year were required to call My School DC so that a staff member could complete their application and administer the survey. Upon submission, there were two possible outcomes for these applications:

1. Applicants who applied either to their in-boundary K-12 school, or to a charter school without a waitlist that wanted new students after the enrollment count, would receive an automatic offer.
2. Applicants to other charters, out-of-boundary DCPS schools, and PK3 and PK4 were placed on waitlists.

Automatic Offers. For the first time since the inception of DC's common lottery system, in addition to accepting applications for available out-of-boundary and charter school seats, My School DC required an application for K-12 students seeking to enroll at their in-boundary school. Students who applied to their in-boundary schools received an "automatic offer" of admission. Students also received an automatic offer if they applied to one of the seven charter schools that opted in and indicated they had available space through the My School DC website. Applicants were given a deadline of 48 hours to indicate whether they would accept the automatic offer by enrolling at the school. Schools that did not opt in were still able to send offers from their existing waitlists, but those offers were traditional waitlist offers and not "automatic" offers.

Survey. My School DC accepted applications from October 6, 2017, through March 23, 2018, for students seeking a seat during the 2017-18 school year. During this time period, in addition to completing the application on the parent's behalf, My School DC surveyed families to gather information on why they were seeking a new school. After the My School DC staff completed the mid-year application and explained the results (automatic offers or waitlisted), they would administer the survey. If the family consented to share their reasons for seeking a new school, the My School DC staff entered the general reasons offered and categorized them using 41 set categories (marking all that applied) and asked if this was the first time a student changed schools for elementary, middle, or high school.

The administration of the survey and collection of applications allowed My School DC staff to refer families to other agencies when the reason for transfer warranted assistance for the problems that led them to seek out a new school. My School DC staff made 77 referrals to agencies like the DCPS Student Placement Office, the Ombudsman, and OSSE.

Communication and Training. To maximize participation and minimize confusion to families, My School DC implemented a comprehensive communications effort that included publishing information on the My School DC website, placing reminders in education agency and school bulletins, and creating a repository of outreach material delivered by hand and easily downloadable to schools. Since DCPS schools enroll the majority of students transferring mid-year, and because taking applications for in-boundary students was a large sea change for DCPS school staff, My School DC focused a significant amount of its effort training DCPS registrars and school staff on the process by:
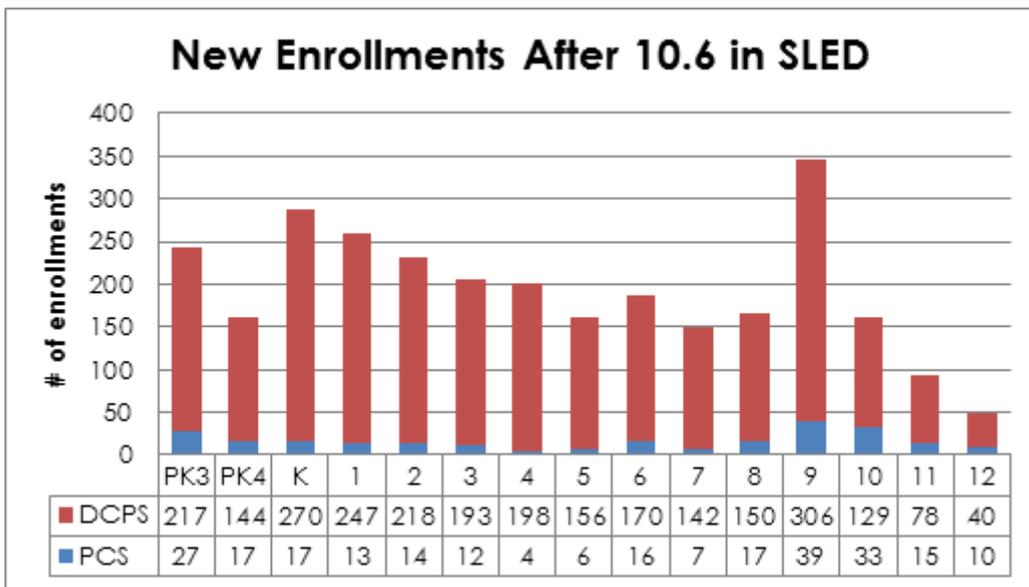
1. Holding two webinars to introduce the program and train staff on how this would change the mid-year enrollment process for schools and families. Of the 107 DCPS schools identified as potentially taking mid-year students, 52 schools participated in the webinar. My School DC sent a link to the webinar video, along with supporting materials, to all DCPS registrars including those who did not actively join the webinar live.
2. Visiting DCPS schools in person to deliver outreach material, train registrars and school staff on the program, and explain how My School DC would administer the survey. My School DC staff visited 92 schools possibly affected by the program, prioritizing schools with historically high mid-year enrollment rates.
3. Creating and distributing material for school staff that outlined the process including a one-pager with instructions, FAQs, the feeder pattern for the school, along with cards for distribution to families with My School DC contact information.

Participation and Survey Results

Participation. During the period of October 6, 2017 through March 23, 2018, there were 1,944 unique applicants who came through My School DC. Of these:

- 69 percent of those applicants were first time applicants after October 5th; the rest were adding schools to an existing application
- 39 percent applied only to their in-boundary school
- 1200 applicants received an automatic offer. Most of these automatic offers (767) were from their in-boundary DCPS school.

During this same time period, according to DC Statewide Longitudinal Education Data (SLED), the District had 2908 new enrollments across both sectors. 91% of those enrollments were in DCPS schools.

New Enrollments After 10.6 in SLED

	PK3	PK4	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
DCPS	217	144	270	247	218	193	198	156	170	142	150	306	129	78	40
PCS	27	17	17	13	14	12	4	6	16	7	17	39	33	15	10

Of the 2908 mid-year enrollments, only 37 percent (1077) came through My School DC.

Survey Results. My School DC collected 1768 survey responses, with only 62 applicants declining to take the survey. Most applications and survey responses came from families already residing in DC, in contrast to the data i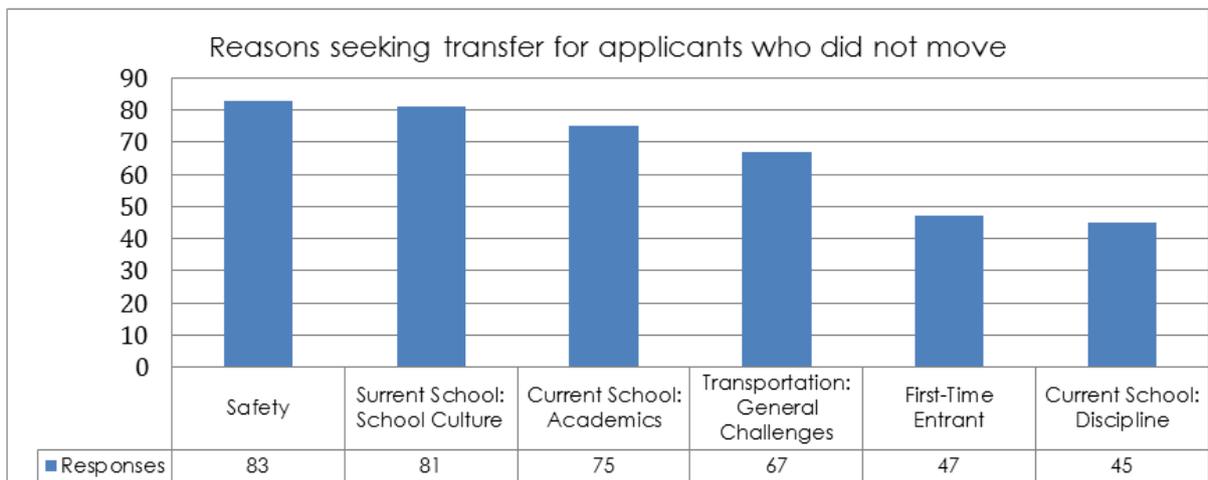nitially presented to the Task Force which found that the majority of mid-year enrollments came from families transferring in from outside of DC.

Reasons for Seeking Transfer (Multi-Select)

Reason	Responses
Moved: Education Not a Factor	513
Transportation: General Challenges	195
First Time Entering School	180
Transportation: New School Convenient	167
Custody Change	154
Current School: School Culture	148
Safety: General	146
Current School: Academics	132
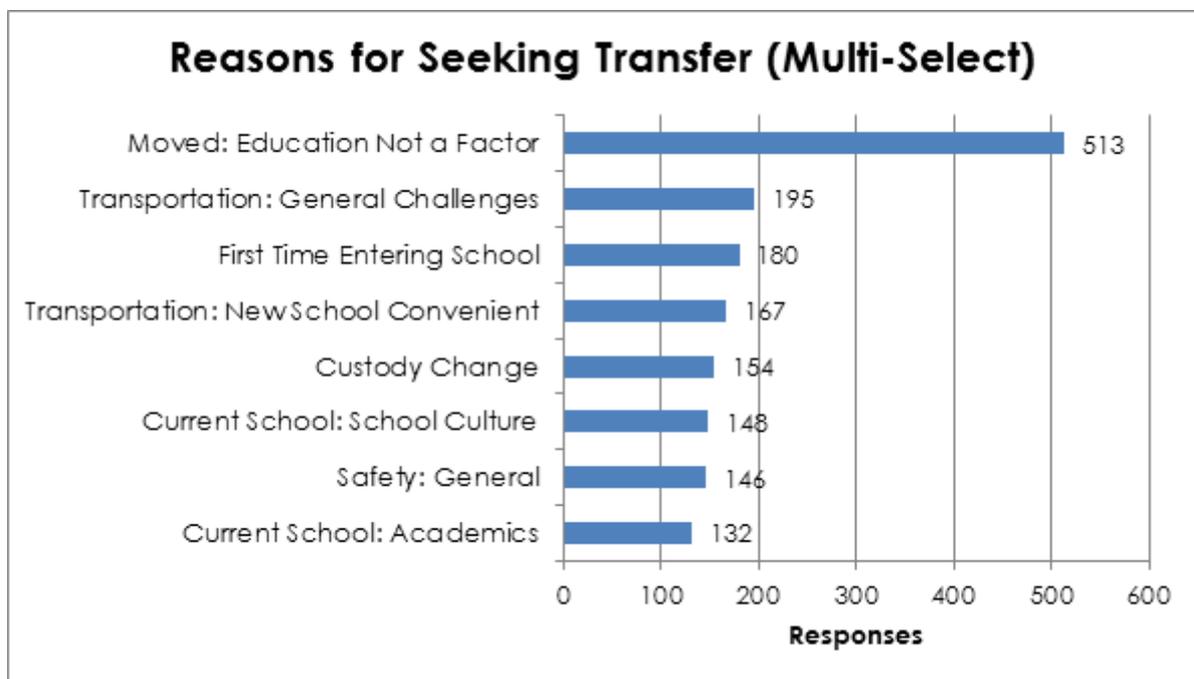
In terms of reducing mobility between schools, the survey responses, especially of those applicants who did not move but wanted a transfer, indicate that safety, dissatisfaction with current school's culture and academics, and transportation are motivations for a late transfer.

Reasons seeking transfer for applicants who did not move

	Safety	Surrent School: School Culture	Current School: Academics	Transportation: General Challenges	First-Time Entrant	Current School: Discipline
■ Responses	83	81	75	67	47	45

Discussion

Implementation of the mid-year process had challenges in both sectors. Very few charter schools opted in to the automatic offer process – meaning there were few that had no waitlist and also wanted to automatically offer seats to students after the enrollment count. Most of the seats that were made available were not at highly demanded schools, as those schools could simply make offers from their waitlist. Creating a mid-year process did not solve two main issues with mid-year entry: (1) schools are not financially incentivized to enroll students after October 5; and (2) the most popular schools in both sectors already have long waitlists which cannot be bypassed by new mid-year applicants.

From the outset, DCPS staff articulated skepticism that the additional steps in the enrollment process for in-boundary families were a fair tradeoff for the intended benefits. While DCPS did see value in stabilizing mid-year enrollment at higher churn schools, they also wanted to serve those students and voiced concern that there would not be much redistribution without the financial incentive attached. The Common Lottery Board agreed with the concerns and voted to move forward with the pilot year. DCPS was reluctant to communicate the new process to school staff at the same time critical changes to the enrollment audit process were being implemented. My School DC agreed to delay training and communication to schools to avoid overloading staff, but the delay negatively impacted both the number of applications and surveys received in October and November. Results were also impacted by the fact that this would be a hold-harmless year for DCPS–meaning that they would not be penalized in the My School DC audit for enrollments outside of the application process–resulting in a lack of motivation for many of the schools to use the mid-year application.

The administration of the survey collected some valuable information for future policy change by eliciting personal stories around why a student was seeking to transfer. My School DC staff successfully surveyed applicants once they called the hotline and tried to administer it delicately, but the survey still felt like an intrusion to some families. Often the student or family member relayed sensitive information about their situation while at the front desk of a school. The My School DC hotline staff also expressed concern that the survey interfered with the normal trust and consultancy needed for them to help families.

Next Steps

When the mid-year application process was conceived, there was also a push for LEA payment reform, which made sense as a dual effort to centralize a process to access mid-year seats and increase those seats made available. The payment reform effort is now suspended. Additionally, DCPS is not motivated to continue requiring in-boundary K-12 applications next year in the mid-year. DCPS has articulated that the application is an additional barrier to mid-year enrollment for families and schools, without benefit to schools or families.

The Task Force recommends keeping the extended mid-year application period through My School DC but turning off the in-boundary requirement and survey work streams with the understanding that those can be restarted as soon as there is the impetus for schools to engage. Without a clear incentive for school participation, the mid-year process is confusing to families and the collection of in-boundary mid-year applications is too burdensome for schools of right.

The results of the survey underscore the importance of coordination between district agencies and schools to enhance safety and transportation for students across the District. Additionally, enhanced mediation efforts between schools and families might serve to reduce the number of students seeking to transfer for school culture related issues. Strengthening the Offices of the Student Advocate and Ombudsman to resolve complaints would lessen the need for families to find a new school at a trying time in their lives. Similarly, robust support of the DCPS Student Placement Office could help to place students more quickly into their in-boundary school (or another DCPS school if the in-boundary school is not appropriate), reduce time out of school, and lessen the anxiety these students currently face at a vulnerable time in their educational journey.

Summary: Safety Transfer Program Pilot

Background

The second of the two recommendations related to Goal 4 (Promoting Enrollment Stability) that the Task Force advanced in March 2017 was to create a program allowing students experiencing certain "hardships"—with that term to be defined by a working group tasked with implementing the recommendation—to transfer to a new school without regard to whether that school maintained a waitlist. As envisioned by the Task Force, a Safety Transfer Program would provide students in crisis better access to timely and appropriate options for a mid-year placement, across both DCPS schools and charter schools. The Task Force believed the process would assist students in finding a school that best matched their needs, thereby reducing the likelihood of repeated transfers and promoting more stable learning environments both for transferring students and students already attending the receiving schools.

Working Group

Beginning in May 2017, DME led a working group to determine the appropriate process for implementation of the Task Force's recommendation. The working group was composed of representatives from DME, My School DC, DCPS, and charter LEAs. For the latter members, DME staff contacted a number of charter LEAs to gauge their interest in participating in the working group and the pilot, including notices in the "Wednesday Bulletin" published by the PCSB, appearances at the quarterly meetings of charter LEA leaders, and individual outreach. The original group of participating charter LEAs consisted of E.L. Haynes, KIPP DC, Democracy Prep, DC Prep, and Rocketship.
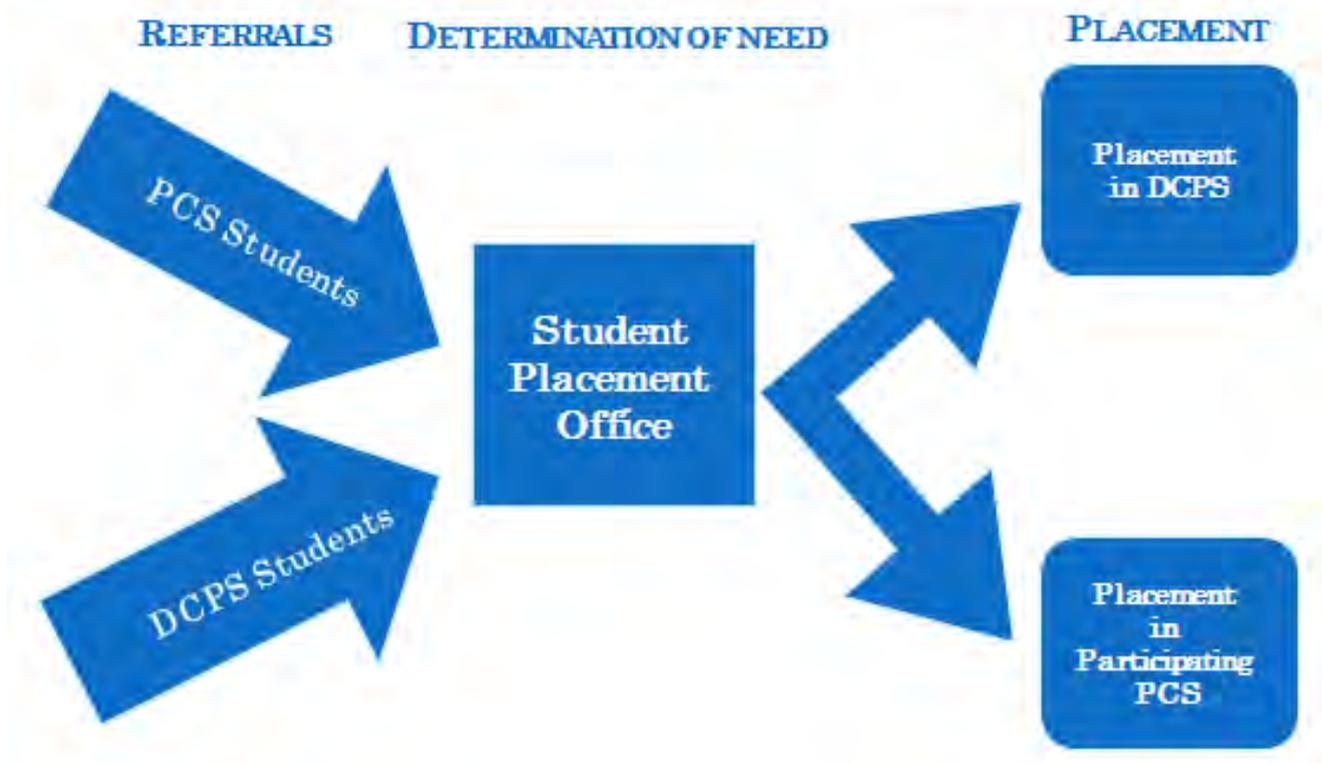
Implementation

Defining "Hardship." As an initial matter, the working group sought to define the term "hardship." As originally discussed by the Task Force, "hardship" transfer seats could be available based on one or more of several criteria, including (1) medical reasons; (2) safety reasons (including bullying); (3) a change in legal or educational custody or guardianship; (4) a non-voluntary change of residence within DC, if the move has created a hardship in getting to school; or (5) an expulsion or other non-voluntary transfer. The working group determined that, for the initial pilot year, the transfer program would be limited to safety-related reasons. The group came to this conclusion for two reasons. First, the group believed that the limitation would reduce the likelihood that the process could be exploited as a loophole in the common lottery. Second, because there is an existing regulatory framework supporting the transfer of students who are victims of a crime, codified at 5-E D.C.M.R. § 3809 (Individual Student Victim Transfer Option), the working group decided that a limited safety-transfer program would reduce administrative burden and complexity, making implementation in school year 2017-18 achievable.

Criteria for Safety Transfers. The regulatory framework supporting the transfer of students who are victims of a crime sets forth criteria under which a student may seek a transfer, including (1) "a violent crime committed on school grounds, during school operating hours, that has been substantiated by the LEA," and (2) a pattern of harassment or sexual harassment pursuant . . . that has been substantiated by the LEA." The working group adopted these criteria. In addition, the working group elected to include as an additional criterion a pattern of bullying or harassment that has been substantiated by the LEA.

Framework and Process for Safety Transfers. Given that the goal of the Safety Transfer Program is, in part, to expand access to mid-year placements in charter schools, the working group struggled initially in identifying a process for LEAs to transmit information to each other. Ultimately, after considering several alternatives such as email protocols, text chains, and closed message boards, the working group decided that the DCPS Student Placement Office was best positioned to manage the process, given its experience administering mid-year transfers for crime victims.

Basic Conceptual Framework for Safety Transfers

REFERRALS — DETERMINATION OF NEED — PLACEMENT

PCS Students → Student Placement Office → Placement in DCPS

DCPS Students → Student Placement Office → Placement in Participating PCS

Determining the most effective and efficient process for facilitating a safety transfer was a difficult and evolving issue for the working group. The basic concept entailed DCPS schools and charter schools—via school leadership, not through students or family members—contacting the Student Placement Office (SPO) directly to initiate the process. Thereafter, the SPO would work with school leadership to verify that the criteria for a transfer were satisfied and that the student (and the student's family) was interested in a transfer. The SPO would then individually contact participating charter LEAs or other DCPS schools to determine whether a placement was possible. At all times, a student's in-boundary DCPS school was considered an option (assuming that the student was not seeking to transfer from his or her in-boundary DCPS school).

Discussion

From the outset, it was clear that the Safety Transfer Program Pilot suffered from numerous deficiencies. First and foremost was a lack of participation on the part of charter schools. While multiple charter LEAs were part of the pilot program, only two—E.L. Haynes and KIPP DC—operate high schools, the grade band during which most safety transfers tend to arise.

Second, the process for communicating information from LEAs to the SPO—and vice versa—was not clear and led on multiple occasions to instances in which LEAs felt uncomfortable about discussing specific student information. Although the working group convened several times in an attempt to refine the process, the unique nature of each potential transfer precluded any clear solution. In addition to the issues related to sharing student information, the time constraints inherent in a potential safety transfer further complicated the internal review process for many LEAs; while the working group agreed that each LEA contacted by the SPO had 48 hours to respond, the tight timeline tended to exacerbate LEAs' relative lack of comfort with the process.

Finally, there was a lack of familiarity—and, likely, trust—between and among the SPO, the charter LEAs, and the wider working group. As between the SPO and charter LEAs, this lack of familiarity varied widely, with some LEAs having long-established relationships with SPO staff. Efforts to cultivate and strengthen these relationships will prove vital to the success of a program that depends on interpersonal communications.

Next Steps

The Task Force believes that work on the Safety Transfer Program Pilot should continue. In the future, we hope that the working group can specifically address the issues identified above regarding participation, information sharing, and the development of working relationships between and among LEAs and the SPO.

Additional Areas of Need

In a coordinated, citywide approach to public education, all issues are relevant in a conversation about cross-sector collaboration. Given our limited time on the Task Force, however, we chose to devote our work to the aforementioned areas. That said, we recognize that there are several high-priority issue areas that merit additional attention, including special education, services for English-learner students and families, and the recruitment and retention of a diverse and outstanding teacher force. We address these areas and make initial recommendations below

Area 1: Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

In defining the parameters within which to focus its discussions and recommendations, the At-Risk working group reluctantly agreed to limit its inquiry to the UPSFF definition of "At-Risk" students, thereby excluding from consideration some traditionally underserved subgroups of students, such as students with disabilities and English learners. With regard to the former category in particular, the working group expressed deep misgivings about not being able to devote the time and resources to identifying potential cross-sector approaches to improving outcomes for a group of students persistently facing the largest achievement gaps in DC.[57] These misgivings were echoed by the community in the several focus groups and public engagement forums held to discuss the Task Force's draft recommendations; several community members expressed surprise and disappointment at the fact that "At-Risk," as used by the Task Force, did not encompass some of our most vulnerable students. In response, the At-Risk working group agreed that the ultimate report should, at the very least, acknowledge some of DC's deficiencies in serving students with disabilities and recommend initial steps to understand the landscape of students and services, what works and what doesn't, and where there may be opportunities for cross-sector or citywide solutions.

Obviously Lackluster Results but no Obvious Path Forward

There is no question that DC can improve its efforts to serve students with disabilities. As of the 2017-18 academic year, only 5.7 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded expectations (having scored a 4 or 5) on the English/language arts section of the PARCC, and only 6.4 percent scored that high on the math section.[58] These are demonstrably unacceptable numbers. Additionally, contrast these results with the citywide averages, which were 30.5 percent and 26.9 percent, respectively, for ELA and math.

This achievement gap is not unique to DC. Nationwide results on NAEP, for example, show a significant and persistent gap between the performance of students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers.[59] Yet in DC, the overall achievement and the gaps in performance between students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers tend to be comparatively worse than in other states and urban areas.

Some have suggested possible explanations for the relatively poor performance of students with disabilities on PARCC and other standardized tests, ranging from insufficient access to inclusive classroom environments to higher opt-out rates among students with disabilities.[60] While plausible, these theories likely represent only part of the story; as a group, after all, students with disabilities are not monolithic, but vary widely with respect to disability type, impact on education, and access to effective instruction and services. In the end, without a better, more nuanced understanding of our public education ecosystem's strengths and weaknesses in serving these students, we cannot hope to make real progress in the near term.

Recommendations

1.1: Undertake a rigorous landscape analysis and needs assessment of our public education sectors and their ability to adequately serve students with disabilities.

    1.1.1: Define and summarize DC's continuum of services, across sectors, and identify gaps.

    1.1.2: Identify areas in which specialization (within types of schools, within sectors, etc.) might be effective, and areas in which collaboration across sectors can produce economies of scale, better outcomes for students with disabilities, and other efficiencies.

Area 2: Streamlining Services for English Learners

Another traditionally underserved subgroup not included in the city's definition of "At-Risk" is our English learner (EL) population. The population of children from immigrant families is growing faster than any other group of children in the United States.[61] Each year the District welcomes to its public schools over 2,000 ELs with varying linguistic needs, not to mention the multitude of other supports and services these students and their families require to adapt to a new environment.

ELs not only face linguistic barriers, but are often also new to American culture and our complex education system, experiencing separation from family, dealing with trauma related to immigration, and facing a complex political climate as it pertains to immigration. Given the unique and diverse challenges ELs face in accessing a high-quality education, they tend to experience lower outcomes and perform significantly below their peers academically. Yet, just as students with disabilities, ELs, despite having needs that are not being sufficiently met by our public schools, are excluded in the District's classification of "At-Risk" students.[62]

2018 PARCC scores illustrate the achievement gap ELs experience with only 18.8 percent meeting or exceeding expectations in English/language arts, as compared to the citywide average of 33.3 percent. Even in math, only 20.9 percent of ELs met or exceeded expectations compared to the citywide average of 29.4 percent.

To best meet the diverse needs of these students and their families, District schools recognize that resources and services that extend beyond linguistic barriers are critical. While DCPS already offers a Welcome Center to provide support to newly enrolled EL students across its 116 schools, each individual charter LEA has improvised its own system using its own limited resources to support newly enrolled ELs. The Welcome Center, funded by DCPS, provides services to 25-30 families on average per month whose children do not end up attending DCPS. The inconsistency and duplicate efforts, often re-testing students who have already been tested by the Welcome Center, creates conflicting messaging and wastes already limited resources.

Arturo Martinez, Day Principal at The Next Step Public Charter School, and Elba Garcia, Executive Director of DCPS's Language Acquisition Division, working together as part of the Georgetown McDonough Executive Masters in Leadership program, drafted a proposal to solve this problem through the creation of the DC English Learner Support Center (DC-ELSC), streamlining services for all of the District's students and their families. Immigrant students exist across DCPS and charter schools alike, and at an increasing rate. ELs comprised 12 percent of DCPS student enrollment in 2016-2017, increasing to 14.6 percent in 2017-2018, while they comprised 6.6 percent of all charter enrollments in 2016-2017, increasing to 7.5 percent in 2017-2018.

Creating one citywide support system would guarantee a more consistent, efficient, and cost-effective method of meeting the needs of students and families who are currently being underserved, yet are constantly coming into our city's schools. Streamlining these efforts across all LEAs will increase the capacity of these centers. By combining efforts into one ELSC for all of the District's students, we can provide families streamlined services including enrollment, the school system structure, citywide services, residency verification, transportation information, testing and eligibility for ESL services, foreign transcript validations, interpretation services, immunizations and access to health insurance, and immediate access to DC ONE cards for transportation.

Recommendations

2.1: Explore the creation of a citywide, centralized English Learner Support Center (ELSC) to align resources in an efficient, cost-effective manner, providing services to all of the District's immigrant families with school-aged children.

> 2.1.1: Explore services provided by the DCPS Welcome Center and the support systems currently provided by all other LEAs in order to create a comprehensive list of program offerings for the ELSC.
>
> 2.1.2: Engage city agencies and stakeholders currently providing services to identify current redundancies in and value of services currently offered across LEAs.
>
> 2.1.3: Determine whether a government agency or nonprofit entity should manage the ELSC.

Area 3: Attracting and Retaining Excellent, Diverse Educators

We know that DC is a popular destination for teachers. DCPS, for example, has been recognized as a leader in modernizing public school teaching through human capital reforms that include innovative evaluation systems, a focus on differential retention, and the creation of new teacher-leader pathways. Likewise, our charter schools are some of the finest in the nation, and many offer pathways to a rewarding, meaningful teaching career that are unavailable elsewhere. Yet year after year, the District faces acute teacher shortages and high teacher attrition, and we heard often during our community engagement events that DC needs to do more to keep its excellent teachers. All of which led us to include teacher recruitment and retention as an additional area in need of a citywide, collaborative focus.

Getting and Keeping Talent in the Classrooms

With teacher shortage areas in the double digits, it is no secret that the District is struggling to draw teachers to DC classrooms, indicating a clear need to develop strategies to attract, retain, and support high-quality people to improve student outcomes. Investing in talent is investing in our students; our students deserve nothing less than teachers of the highest caliber.

Further, for schools to thrive, they must be able to retain their most effective teachers. Teacher attrition is not unique to the District; in 2015, the US Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics produced a study that found that 17 percent of teachers with fewer than five years of experience left teaching permanently, but the number is even higher in urban districts. In SY2016-17, 200 teachers—nearly 5 percent of the entire teaching force—left DCPS before the school year even ended.

The District needs to invest in finding effective ways to recruit and retain highly-qualified teachers. In particular, given the Task Force's attention to the District's At-Risk students, efforts focused on filling vacancies or retaining teachers in either hard-to-staff subjects or high-need, low-performing schools is critical.

Diversifying Talent in the Classrooms

Strategically increasing the diversity of our teaching force is the final area of need that the Task Force prioritized to combat achievement gaps. Research shows that students of color thrive when taught by teachers from backgrounds with which the students also identify—particularly relevant in DC when considering that in SY2016-17, 90 percent of all students across DCPS and charter schools in the District were students of color. According to a study from the Institute of Labor Economics in 2017, when black children had a black teacher between third and fifth grades, boys were significantly less likely to later drop out of high school, and both boys and girls were more likely to attend college."[63] Yet the teacher work force is predominantly white and female. Nationally, across public and private elementary and high schools, 77 percent of teachers are women, and 80 percent of teachers are white.[64] DCPS teacher demographics offer some areas of promise, however. While the percentage of female teachers—76 percent—closely aligns with national statistics, only 32 percent of DCPS teachers identify as white.[65]

Including Teachers in a Prosperous DC

Teachers are an essential component of a thriving middle class. We know that Mayor Bowser has made inclusive prosperity a focal point of her economic agenda, and keeping teachers in DC can be a significant part of that effort. Other jurisdictions have considered offering tax credits or deductions to increase the likelihood that teachers remain in the classroom and to set an innovative alternative standard for how to increase teacher compensation. In addition, recruitment and performance bonuses and tuition reimbursement have also been shown to support efforts to fill vacancies and keep teachers in the classroom.

Strategically offering these incentives to teachers, and potentially prioritizing credits to teachers who teach significant percentages of underserved students (e.g., teachers of ESOL or Special Education or teachers in schools with concentrated poverty), would be an innovative method to add to the value of teaching in the District and incentivize teachers to stay in the profession, and in the District, longer.

Recommendations

3.1: Invest in citywide efforts to recruit and retain a diverse, highly-qualified teaching force, and explore incentives to ensure that teachers are part of a growing middle class in DC.

> 3.1.1: Support efforts to incentivize filling vacancies in high-need subject areas and schools with high percentages of At-Risk students.
>
> 3.1.2: Explore the possibility of financial incentives, including housing, to support teacher retention and residency in the District.
>
> 3.1.3: Gather data on attrition to drive targeted retention programs.
>
> 3.1.4: Explore strategies for the District's hiring process to more meaningfully attract candidates of color, special education teachers, and STEM teachers (e.g., including intentionally creating diverse hiring committees, partnering with teacher preparation programs, including those at minority-serving institutions, etc.).

Area 4: Continuing Our Commitment to Cross-Sector Collaboration

We believe that a vision for public education in DC must begin with the promise of providing an excellent education for all students. In DC, with a large and thriving charter sector and a robust system of school choice spanning both sectors, it's clear that real, meaningful cross-sector collaboration is a prerequisite to that vision.

In a paper published last year, the Center for Reinventing Public Education described the several stages of cross-sector collaboration, moving from a point at which there is little or no cross-sector work, through intermediate and advanced stages, and, finally, to the "embedded" stage, where collaboration between sectors is a "defining feature" of a city's education offerings.[66] At the embedded stage of cross-sector collaboration, leaders are able to plan "strategically to ensure good schools in all neighborhoods, better serving all children." [67]

Although we have not yet achieved "embedded" collaboration, we have made headway on several important projects and issues that fall squarely within the intermediate and advanced stages. The Task Force itself was an important effort to begin the hard work of moving both sectors toward greater coordination. Moving forward, however, with much work yet to be done, we need a clear and sustained effort to bridge the charter-district divide and take a citywide approach to public education that honors the independence of each sector while recognizing that each shares the primary goal of serving all students well. Through ongoing collaboration, all of our LEAs can achieve tangible results, such as improving instruction, aligning policies, addressing inequities, and improving efficiencies. Students and their families can experience increased access to high-quality school options, streamlined school information and enrollment systems, and better services for our vulnerable student populations. Forging a new path of ongoing collaboration will be challenging work, requiring substantial time investment.

How exactly can DC ensure a continuing commitment to cross-sector collaboration? In some ways the work will continue without outside encouragement; there are countless examples of individual schools and LEAs working across sectors on programmatic partnerships, professional development, and the sharing of best practices. To reach the "embedded" stage, however, the vision and commitment to a coordinated, citywide approach must begin at the top.

Recommendations

4.1: Explore the creation of a Mayoral advisory board or commission on cross-sector collaboration.

> 4.1.1: Ensure that the board or commission includes ample public representation from both sectors, including students, alumni, parents, and families.
>
> 4.1.2: Consider the best ways to capture public input from all neighborhoods and constituencies, including through targeted outreach or strategically sited public meetings.
>
> 4.1.3: Consider whether the board or commission should advise the DME, leadership in either sector, or all of the above, and the form and timing of such advisory functions.

V.
APPENDICES

List of Recommendations

Improving Outcomes for At-Risk Students

Objective 1: Invest in Efforts to Identify, Share, and Expand Programs that Serve At-Risk Students Effectively

1.1: Explore ways to identify and evaluate promising practices from individual schools or LEAs that are getting the best results for At-Risk students.

> 1.1.1: Explore the possibility of citywide, cross-sector definitions of common elements of school design and program offering at the schools getting the best results with At-Risk students.

> 1.1.2: Identify and build on existing evidence-based practices, and ensure that such practices are scalable and subjected to statistical rigor.

> 1.1.3: Identify the cost and obstacles to scaling successful program offerings.

> 1.1.4: Expand on–and make available citywide–effective practices for ensuring the presence of positive, in-school "anchors" that support students and help reduce the number of student in high school who are not on track to graduate on time, possibly as part of the Every Day Counts! Initiative.

> 1.1.5: Explore wraparound service delivery options for implementing a broad-based continuum of care and linking youth and families to a variety of services.

1.2: Collaborate across sectors to focus resources on early intervention programs and early literacy development

> 1.2.1: Engage parents and families in developing and implementing proposals to improve early childhood language and literacy development.

> 1.2.2: Explore the feasibility of a citywide public campaign to highlight and promote early literacy.

> 1.2.3: Identify and expand access to evidence-based programs designed to promote early literacy.

1.3: Create opportunities to share best practices for serving At-Risk students across sectors and LEAs.

> 1.3.1: Plan and facilitate a convening and/or community of practice for cross-LEA practitioner-level working groups.

> 1.3.2: Explore the feasibility of a coordinating framework or authority for family support collaborative groups.

> 1.3.3: Consider a commitment among sector leaders to collaborate in identifying and replicating effective models for serving At-Risk students as part of a coordinating school planning process.

1.4: Create more cross-sector options for education, training, and credentialing for our off-track and disengaged youth at all ages and grade levels.

> 1.4.1: Examine policies that would allow LEAs/schools to provide students with cross-sector credit recovery options.

> 1.4.2: Investigate options around creating cross-sector "opportunity academies."

Objective 2: Increase At-Risk Students' Access to High Quality Programs

2.1: Develop and support programs to provide At-Risk students and families with all necessary information and resources to access excellent educational options across sectors and succeed in school.

> 2.1.1: Work with a partner organization (e.g., DC School Reform Now) to develop an "education navigator" program to provide individualized counseling on school choice options for families throughout the My School DC process.
>
> 2.1.2: Streamline school-quality information available to families.
>
> 2.1.3: Investigate ways to better connect students and families with the agencies responsible for providing mental health supports, including mental health services provided in schools, and understand preexisting advantages and disadvantages to accessing resources and services.

2.2: Explore the development of policies and programs designed to increase access to high-quality schools by At-Risk students and to decrease the number of schools serving a high concentration of At-Risk students.

> 2.2.1: Explore ways in which to leverage the lottery, including optional preferences or weights, to increase access to high quality schools by At-Risk students, whether pre- or post-lottery.
>
> 2.2.2: Explore ways to increase the share of At-Risk enrollment at schools who serve fewer than 25% At-Risk students.
>
> 2.2.3: Consider the appropriate threshold for eligibility for an At-Risk preference (e.g., only schools with less than 25% At-Risk students may implement the preference).
>
> 2.2.4: Examine and develop methods to identify rising pre-Kindergarten students who may be At-Risk.
>
> 2.2.5: Explore the development of an enrollment preference for At-Risk PK3, PK4, or K students matriculating from a CBO-managed childcare or preschool program.
>
> 2.2.6: Explore data around students who travel across the city to attend a higher-performing public school to identify potential transportation policies or programs (such as city-run school buses on high density routes).
>
> 2.2.7: Consider ways to facilitate the development of cross-LEA and cross-sector feeder patterns to provide greater predictability and stability for students and families.

2.3: Explore the development of cross-sector policies and programs designed to increase socioeconomic diversity in schools.

> 2.3.1 Consider developing a citywide diversity plan with benchmarks for At-Risk students or students from low-income families, potentially through the establishment of zip-code or census tract lottery to create deliberately diverse schools.
>
> 2.3.2 Consider additional funding incentives, at the student, school, or LEA level, designed to increase socioeconomic diversity.
>
> 2.3.3 Explore innovative mechanisms for increasing school diversity, such as the establishment of zip-code or census tract lottery to create deliberately diverse schools.

Objective 3: Bolster and Support Citywide Efforts to Improve Attendance

3.1: Ensure robust, cross-sector commitment to Every Day Counts! initiative with ambitious and measurable objectives.

    3.1.1: Build community and parent awareness of citywide attendance-improvement efforts.

3.2: Explore ways to further focus citywide efforts on the barriers to attendance for particular segments of the student population.

    3.2.1: Identify and build on existing, evidence-based practices, and ensure that such practices are scalable and subjected to statistical rigor.

    3.2.2: Consider furthering high-profile partnerships among government agencies, local sports teams, and public schools to further support a citywide attendance campaign. [For early grades and transitions to high school]

    3.2.3: Identify ways to incorporate root-cause analyses into existing and future efforts to improve attendance.

    3.2.4: Consider focusing efforts on early childhood grades and involving parents of young children to develop and strengthen the perception that early childhood grades are an essential part of the education curriculum (even if not compulsory).

3.3: Foster school- and practitioner-level collaboration and sharing of best practices across sectors.

    3.3.1: Create mechanisms to assist LEAs in adopting best practices and allowing practitioner-level collaboration, possibly through a convening and/or community of practice.

Objective 4: Expand and Strengthen Citywide, Cross-Sector Efforts to Share Data and Information

4.1: Explore the expansion of the RaiseDC Bridge to High School Data Exchange to facilitate school-to-school sharing of data at additional transition points along the education continuum.

    4.1.1: Monitor, report, and make necessary adjustments to existing data exchange efforts, including the Bridge to High School Data Exchange.

4.2: Collaborate across sectors to understand the needs of schools and LEAs with respect to the effective use of student data and information.

    4.2.1: Explore the creation of a citywide technical assistance program for schools that are sending and receiving data and information at key transition points, and whether a government agency or nonprofit entity should manage such an effort.

    4.2.2: Explore the feasibility of launching a citywide data platform or clearinghouse to allow all schools to access student records as appropriate.

<u>Objective 5: Provide the Resources Necessary to Ensure the Success of At-Risk Students</u>

5.1: Explore the possibility of reexamining the definition of "At-Risk" for the purpose of per-pupil funding.

> 5.1.1: Consider moving to a trauma-based definition of At-Risk that more fully accounts for the gradation of risk among our high-needs students and directs additional funds to those most affected by adverse childhood experiences.
>
> 5.1.2: Consider whether immigrant students who are not yet eligible for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) are excluded from At-Risk status.
>
> 5.1.3: Consider whether time limits on eligibility for TANF can impact At-Risk designation, and whether Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children (WIC) eligibility could be an additional eligibility criterion.

5.2: Explore the possibility of conducting a school-level needs analysis across all LEAs to better match resources to student and school-level requirements.

> 5.2.1: Consider whether a government entity (e.g., DME) could manage or commission a school-level analysis of need with respect to resources for At-Risk students, modeled on the Master Facilities Plan's focus on the condition of individual facilities.
>
> 5.2.2: Explore the use of a survey instrument, for teachers, administrators, and possibly families, designed to identify gaps in supports and services provided to At-Risk students.
>
> 5.2.3: (cf w/ Objective 1) Study of "what's working" – where practices are improving At-Risk student outcome measures (both academic and socio-emotional/intermediary measures) and related costs.

Creating a Framework for Coordinating Planning Decisions

<u>Objective 1: Ensure that Planning Decisions in Both Sectors are Based on Common Data and Information</u>

1.1: Collaborate across sectors to develop an "EdScape," a common set of data and analyses that look at gaps and needs in public education on citywide and neighborhood levels.

> 1.1.1: DME, working collaboratively with DCPS, PCSB, and OSSE, will prepare and disseminate the EdScape on an annual basis.
>
> 1.1.2: The strategic analysis should include data on and analyses of a variety of factors, such as: student demographics, schools and facilities, academic performance, student demand, enrollment transitions, neighborhood factors, degree of choice, student needs, feeder patterns, program types, transportation time, student-teacher ratio, growth projections, and capacity, among others.
>
> 1.1.3: Create and make public an interactive format to allow for information to be useful to a wide variety of stakeholders.
>
> 1.1.4: Ensure opportunities for public input and engagement during the development of the EdScape.

1.2: Commit to incorporating the EdScape and its findings into school planning decisions in both sectors.

> 1.2.1: Develop a formal agreement among education agency executives to meet regularly to consider planning questions and discuss the findings of the EdScape.

Objective 2: Establish a Coordinated Planning Cycle that Meaningfully Incorporates Public Input

2.1: Create and adopt a model cycle for coordinated, cross-sector educational planning that incorporates common lottery and school report cards, use of common data and analyses, and coordinated processes for school and program development and improvement.

  2.1.1: Ensure that any model cycle is consistent with the current governance structure and considers the autonomy, independence, and unique role of each sector (e.g., DCPS's role in providing a core system of by-right schools; PCSB's exclusive authority to approve new charter schools).

  2.1.2: A model cycle should include and incorporate, at a minimum, the following:
    •Common lottery (My School DC)
    •Accountability information (including OSSE's common school report cards)
    •Common data and information (EdScape)
    •Process for surplussing and disposing of vacant school buildings
    •Mechanism to coordinate development and improvement processes, including approval and siting of new schools and programs (MOU among education agency executives)

  2.1.3: Ensure that any model cycle is consistent with OSSE's implementation of ESSA accountability requirements.

  2.1.4: Ensure that any model cycle clearly defines the roles of each relevant agency, including DME, OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB.

  2.1.5: Research and adopt effective approaches from other jurisdictions that use common information to inform cross-sector planning decisions, as appropriate.

  2.1.6: Develop concurrent application and approval windows for new schools with DCPS and PCSB.

2.2: Commit to coordinating and sharing information between and among leaders of DME, OSSE, DCPS, and PCSB.

  2.2.1: Include in the MOU or agreement recommended under Objective 1 a stipulation that policymakers will meet regularly to foster open communication about planning decisions and to identify mutually beneficial areas of collaboration.

2.3: Ensure that a coordinated cycle includes regular and predictable opportunities for public input and engagement.

  2.3.1: Explore the establishment of a public master timeline that includes significant dates for each sector's planning process as well as the city's facilities processes, including capital planning and surplus building disposition.

  2.3.2: Establish a working group of DCPS, PCSB, charter LEA, and DME representatives to make recommendations for a master cross-sector timeline.

  2.3.3: Explore the development and adoption of a citywide guide to gathering community input for new or expanded programs and schools, including recommendations on issues such as how to provide the opportunity to submit public comment remotely and how each sector gives weight to community input, among others.

Promoting Enrollment Stability

1.1: Create a centralized mid-year entry and transfer process for all public school students across sectors.

> 1.1.1: My School DC should manage the centralized process, relying where possible on the existing processes of the common lottery.
>
> 1.1.2: Consider including students who wish to enroll in their in-boundary DCPS school after October 5.
>
> 1.1.3: Consider requiring schools to provide their available seats after October 5 including out-of-boundary seats for neighborhood DCPS schools and all seats at public charter schools, citywide DCPS schools, and selective DCPS schools to My School DC.
>
> 1.1.4: Collect information on why mid-year entry and transfer occurs to develop future policies on how to reduce unnecessary student mobility and promote enrollment stability.
>
> 1.1.5: Explore the possibility of the Common Lottery Board approving My School DC to take on this additional responsibility.

1.2: Create a system for LEAs to reserve or otherwise make available "hardship" seats that are separate from school waitlists in order to serve students who meet certain hardship criteria.

> 1.2.1: DME should manage a working group to determine threshold matters, such as the appropriate "hardship" criteria.
>
> 1.2.2: Consider ways to allow LEAs to identify the specific number of hardship set aside seats and notify My School DC about the availability of their hardship set aside seats.
>
> 1.2.3: Consider the role of the DCPS Student Placement Office and other support agencies, like the Metropolitan Police Department.

Additional Areas of Need

Area 1: Improving Outcomes for Students with Disabilities

1.1: Undertake a rigorous landscape analysis and needs assessment of our public education sectors and their ability to adequately serve students with disabilities.

> 1.1.1: Define and summarize DC's continuum of services, across sectors, and identify gaps.
>
> 1.1.2: Identify areas in which specialization (within types of schools, within sectors, etc.) might be effective, and areas in which collaboration across sectors can produce economies of scale, better outcomes for students with disabilities, and other efficiencies.

Area 2: Streamlining Services for English Learners

2.1: Explore the creation of a citywide, centralized English Learner Support Center (ELSC) to align resources in an efficient, cost-effective manner, providing services to all of the District's immigrant families with school-aged children.

> 2.1.1: Explore services provided by the DCPS Welcome Center and the support systems currently provided by all other LEAs in order to create a comprehensive list of program offerings for the ELSC.
>
> 2.1.2: Engage city agencies and stakeholders currently providing services to identify current redundancies in and value of services currently offered across LEAs.
>
> 2.1.3: Determine whether a government agency or nonprofit entity should manage the ELSC.

Area 3: Attracting and Retaining Excellent, Diverse Educators

3.1: Invest in citywide efforts to recruit and retain a diverse, highly-qualified teaching force, and explore incentives to ensure that teachers are part of a growing middle class in DC.

> 3.1.1: Support efforts to incentivize filling vacancies in high-need subject areas and schools with high percentages of At-Risk students.
>
> 3.1.2: Explore the possibility of financial incentives, including housing, to support teacher retention and residency in the District.
>
> 3.1.3: Gather data on attrition to drive targeted retention programs.
>
> 3.1.4: Explore strategies for the District's hiring process to more meaningfully attract candidates of color, special education teachers, and STEM teachers (e.g., including intentionally creating diverse hiring committees, partnering with teacher preparation programs, including those at minority-serving institutions, etc.).

Area 4: Continuing Our Commitment to Cross-Sector Collaboration

4.1: Explore the creation of a Mayoral advisory board or commission on cross-sector collaboration.

> 4.1.1: Ensure that the board or commission includes ample public representation from both sectors, including students, alumni, parents, and families.
>
> 4.1.2: Consider the best ways to capture public input from all neighborhoods and constituencies, including through targeted outreach or strategically sited public meetings.
>
> 4.1.3: Consider whether the board or commission should advise the DME, leadership in either sector, or all of the above, and the form and timing of such advisory functions.

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