

Chancellor Parent Cabinet Meeting Minutes

Tuesday, July 14, 2015
5:30-8:00 PM
DCPS Central Office

Meeting Objectives

Meeting participants will:

1. Meet the DCPS Management Team
2. Engage the Management Team in a conversation around priority issues identified by the Parent Cabinet

Meeting Attendees:

- *DCPS Chancellor's Parent Cabinet Members: DCPS Chancellor's Parent Cabinet Members:* Nazanin Ash, Jessica Bonness, Connie Brown, E. Andre Cater, Olivia Chase, Camille Fair-Bumbray, Laurence Gill, Helene Klusmann, Michael Koppenheffer, Laura Levine, Corinne McIntosh-Douglas, Matthew O'Hara, Cristóbal Rodríguez, Shanti Sale, Kevin Sampson, Sweta Shah, Shameka Stewart, and Jerome Young
- *Not in Attendance:* Davena Archie, Vivian Guerra, Christena Howell, Kevin Sampson, and Tom Strike
- Chancellor Kaya Henderson
- *DCPS Staff: Office of Family and Public Engagement:* Josephine Bias Robinson, Chief; Shanita Burney, Deputy Chief; Cassandra Sánchez and Maurice Wilkins Jr., Community Action Team Coordinators; and Allison D'Aurora, Coordinator of Community Engagement.
- Pete Weber, Chief of Staff to the Chancellor; Dr. Nathaniel Beers, Chief Operating Officer; John Davis, Chief of Schools; Jason Kamras, Chief of Human Capital; Brian Pick, Chief of Teaching and Learning; Dr. Robert Simons, Chief of Innovation and Research; Scott Barash, General Counsel; and Ken Slaughter, Senior Legal Advisor

Notes:

Topic	Comments
Welcome	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The Parent Cabinet planned and will lead the agenda for this meeting to engage the Management Team in a discussion around priority issues they have identified after considering relevant issues in their school communities. Since the June meeting, the Parent Cabinet selected a planning subcommittee, comprised of one representative from each ward.
Focus Topics and Group Discussion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The subcommittee shared the three topics that members collectively decided to discuss with the Chancellor and the Management Team: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Equity of resources and responding to diverse student learning needs ○ Improving middle schools and stellar specialized schools across all

wards

- Engaging and involving parents in school-based decisions
- The subcommittee presented a series of questions to the Management Team on each issue to guide the discussion.

EQUITY OF RESOURCES AND RESPONDING TO DIVERSE STUDENT LEARNING NEEDS

Guiding Questions

- *What can schools do to ensure that all students along the learning spectrum are being challenged to meet their potential?*
- *Students and schools that are average performers are often overlooked compared to their high performing or low performing peers. What kind of support is DCPS giving these students and schools to ensure their success?*

Discussion

- Equity in programming is top of mind for the DCPS Management Team. Over the past three years, DCPS has invested in elementary schools, middle schools, and now high schools, to ensure all schools can offer a standard range of high quality programming. DCPS's budget gives schools the resources to offer those programs. For example, in elementary schools, DCPS ensured each school had the budget to support music, art, physical education, library services, and a world language. DCPS made similar investments in middle schools this past school year and high schools this upcoming school year, to support increased academic offerings, enrichment opportunities and supports.
- One lesson the Management Team has learned is there is a difference between equality and equity. Equality is when everyone has access to the same programs and resources. Equity is when these programs and resources are tailored to meet the differing needs of our school communities. One part of creating equity among our students and schools is setting these minimum requirements and then adapting the requirements to meet the needs of individual schools. DCPS works closely with our struggling schools to think about how to accelerate their achievement. There are two categories of equity: 1) structural inequities, which DCPS can address by adjusting its priorities and resources and 2) instructional inequities, which occurs when students are held to differing expectations to complete their work. The curriculum DPCS has implemented, along with Cornerstones - new anchor assignments - should help address this second category of inequity.
- Management Team asked the Parent Cabinet where they see inequities across their school communities. The Parent Cabinet provided the following examples:
 - Some schools' extracurricular programs do not thrive like other schools. For example, the middle school student band at Takoma Education Campus only has four students. Why can't this band program serve more students? Is it because middle school students participate in more activities? Or does the school not have the funding to serve more students?
 - Professional development often does not train teachers in the areas

	<p>where they need support. Teachers often get broad development around Common Core, but that does not equip teachers to adapt to their environments or address their students' needs whether those needs relate to cultural differences or special education. Professional development for special education teachers particularly needs to be addressed.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ School libraries are often an example of inequities between schools. Some libraries are old and outdated or the staff doesn't take the time to create an inviting environment by making relevant displays for students. ○ Students in Ward 7 are disproportionately exposed to traumatic events, which affects their performance in school. Academic equity is important, but DCPS really needs to think about how schools can adapt to support their student's needs beyond academics. Ward 7 schools also face high numbers of teen pregnancy, but many schools do not have adequate staff or counselors to support teenage parents. ○ Parental involvement is also important to creating equity, but it looks different across schools. Is there a way to pair highly functioning parent organizations with schools that don't have highly involved parent organizations to train those schools on best practices? ○ There are some higher performing schools that have achievement gaps and still need attention from DCPS to address concerns like behavioral issues. They are overlooked because overall, they have satisfactory test scores and proficiency rates. ○ DCPS needs to think beyond creating equity for all students and begin thinking about how it can help each student become the best they can be. What takes us from just equity to the notion of making every child a special project? ○ Parents do not understand that school budgets will always allow for certain staffing positions or other academic requirements. DCPS should do more outreach to inform parents on what they can expect to always be in their school budgets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The inequities that stretch across the city are reflected in our school system. DCPS strives to be the school system that forces the change for the better. There are many resource challenges facing DCPS, but one resource DCPS spends a lot of time thinking about is its teachers. Improving teacher quality comes down to two questions. First, do teachers have the will to help every single student in their classroom really be their best? And second, do teachers have the skill to achieve this vision? ▪ DCPS has made smart investments over the past few years to set these standards across all schools. It was the first investment DCPS needed to make to begin levelling the playing field. DCPS has to make other investments to continue this progress. The Management Team asked the Parent Cabinet for their feedback on what the next investment should be and how DCPS can improve its communications with families to make sure that every student has a great education. Parent Cabinet feedback included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DCPS needs to engage parents as their communication agents to initiate conversations with their peers across the district. ○ DCPS should invest in professional development or teaching programs
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	<p>that develop DCPS’ ideal teacher with the skills and will to help every student be their best.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DCPS needs to reach all parents – including those who have been disengaged with the school system – to volunteer in schools as teacher aids. Teachers then have more capacity to focus on instruction, and parents learn more about their schools. ○ There should be more opportunities for older students to serve as role models for younger students. In the past, there have been programs when upper elementary school students would help PK or kindergarten students read. <p>IMPROVING MIDDLE SCHOOLS AND STELLAR SPECIALIZED SCHOOLS ACROSS ALL WARDS</p> <p><i>Guiding Questions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ <i>What is DCPS’ plan to accelerate middle school renewal to stop families from opting out of DCPS during these grades?</i> ▪ <i>Is there a plan to create strong middle schools that are not part of the education campus model?</i> ▪ <i>Is DCPS working on a plan to create application/specialized middle and high schools in each ward, so families do not have to travel across the city to attend stellar schools?</i> <p><i>Discussion</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The investments DCPS made to improve middle schools for Fiscal Year 2015 were not just academic. With the \$17 million DCPS invested in middle schools, those schools scheduled more field trips, created new athletic teams, or began extracurricular music programs, among other enhancements. Creating a strong middle school is not just about academics; it is about serving the whole child. The Management Team would like to know: 1) What improvements have you seen and what is still lacking and 2) What does DCPS need to do to get parents to think about middle schools differently? The Parent Cabinet provided the following responses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ One problem with middle schools is that the students feeding into that school are coming in with very different elementary school experiences. Parents from higher performing elementary schools will choose different middle schools because they do not think middle schools are equipped to teach students on different points on the learning spectrum. The solution to that problem is more than setting consistent academic offerings or offering more field trips. Parents need to understand how schools are prepared to bridge the gaps in academic experiences. ○ Schools need to create an intimate learning environment for students, even if they have high enrollment. Students perform better in smaller learning communities. ○ DCPS needs to improve its branding because it is a well-functioning school system, but not all parents know this or believe this. At J.O. Wilson Elementary School, the majority of students receive free and reduced-priced lunch, but in one first grade class, only four students
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	<p>were below proficiency in math. Parents do not select DCPS because they do not believe these schools have the answers, but really, DCPS has a lot of the right answers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ DCPS should collect best practices from higher performing middle schools that have a strong reputation in the community. ▪ Building a strong school reputation takes time and effort from all parties: central office, school leaders, and parents. Some schools that have a good reputation now faced significant challenges seven or eight years ago. It took a strong school leader and a willing school community to make the top schools so great, including Deal Middle School, Leckie Elementary School, and Powell Elementary School. ▪ Parents often approach DCPS and ask how central office leaders are going to fix a problem. But DCPS can't solve these problems alone. When parents made a commitment to go in to a struggling school together and commit to making the changes with the school, great things happen. Oyster-Adams and Francis Stevens are examples of a school transformation that was led by parents. You can't just wait for something to improve but help make the improvement happen. ▪ The theory of "build and they will come" has not worked in DCPS. In most cases, parents do not choose the option they asked DCPS to create because they are worried that there are too many struggling students enrolled that will hold their child back from academic success. But research shows that in these environments, all students perform better. Our community has to acknowledge the truth that when schools hit a certain socioeconomic status, families leave. Parents are demanding options for their own students without considering what could work best for all students. This is part of the reason why DCPS has the highest per pupil spending in the country. DCPS continues to add on programs in response to parent and community feedback. ▪ DCPS has considered placing application schools in each ward but in the process has learned that there were not enough kids to support enrollment at all of these schools. This is a question DCPS struggles with because there is a risk of skimming off the high performing students in neighborhood schools to place them in application schools. DCPS wants all of its schools to be an attractive option for families, not just application schools. DCPS is rebuilding and making investments, so now DPCS has to determine what is working and how can it be scaled to create sustainable solutions.
Closing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The next meeting is September 9, 2015.