

Charter School Leadership Position on Education Sector Planning for DC

The paramount goal of collaboration within and across the traditional and chartered public school sectors in DC is student achievement.

In the United States, Government has a legislative and moral responsibility to provide an excellent public school education for every child, because the law makes it mandatory for children to attend school. In the District of Columbia, attendance in school has been compulsory for children since 1864¹. In the mid-1990s, after at least two decades of abject failure on the part of the DC Government to successfully educate the overwhelming majority of its students, who were children of color from impoverished backgrounds, both Federal and local legislation was enacted to enable the creation of chartered public schools². The point and purpose of these new schools was and is that they will succeed in educating their students, free of bureaucratic encumbrances, or they will close. To remain open, they must succeed in educating their students.³

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District of Columbia	1864
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<http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0112617.html>

² The School Reform Act of 1996 DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA OFFICIAL CODE
DIVISION VI. EDUCATION, LIBRARIES, AND CULTURAL INSTITUTIONS.
TITLE 38. EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS.
SUBTITLE IV. PUBLIC EDUCATION-CHARTER SCHOOLS.
Chapter 18. District of Columbia School Reform (Public Charter Schools).

³ Public charter schools are independent, public, and tuition-free schools that are given the freedom to be more innovative while being held accountable for advancing student achievement. Since 2010, all but one independent research study has found that students in charter schools do better in school than their traditional school peers. For example, one study by the Center for Research on Education Outcomes at Stanford University found that charter schools do a better job teaching low income students, minority students, and students who are still learning English than traditional schools. Separate studies by the Center on Reinventing Public Education and Mathematica Policy Research have found that charter school

A recent analysis of the national charter school movement places DC as first in the nation for a strong and healthy charter school movement. Studying data from 26 states, the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools looked at 11 different factors to see how well charter schools across the country perform, grow and innovate. The District of Columbia chartered public schools sector was singled out as the best in this first-ever report in part because it serves a higher percentage of students who are low-income and from minority groups – and these students academically outperform traditional public school students. DC charter students, who make up 44 percent of DC’s public school students, also have higher year-to-year academic growth in reading and math compared to traditional public school students. Finally, DC schools were noted as innovative, with 29 percent of DC’s charter schools having one or more enumerated “innovative” programs ranging from an extended day, extended academic year, higher education courses and independent study. (PCSB, 1 October 2014)

As enrollment of public charter school students increases, calls for planning, collaboration and coordination have intensified on the part of policy makers and elected officials, in addition to traditional schools partisans. In fact, members of the DCACPS Board of Directors initiated Campaign to Achieve a Quality Public School Education for Every Child in the Nation’s Capital in 2006 and have continued to pursue this goal; and convened meetings to begin serious planning for DC’s education sectors in 2012 which were discontinued only after the sitting Mayor at the time indicated that his education team, including the Executive Director of the PCSB, intended to take responsibility for that task.

To develop public schools that successfully educate all students throughout the city, planning and collaboration must be undertaken inclusively and systematically – processes which have eluded education policy makers in DC to date. If collaborative planning is now an idea whose time has come, the charter school community eagerly accepts the call to participate.

students are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, stay in college and have higher earnings in early adulthood. (National Alliance for Public Charter Schools, website)

Planning and Collaboration Must Focus on Increasing Student Achievement

Basic Principles

- The Nation's Capital should ensure that all families have access to high-quality public elementary schools in their neighborhoods; and must provide for robust choices and specializations for public secondary schools, across the traditional and chartered public school sectors.
- By law, funding for chartered and traditional public school operating funding must be equal and uniform in DC.
- Assessment is a dynamic and critically important component of increasing student achievement. The planning and coordination effort should include continuous probing of what defines a quality public school, and how this is measured. Processes of deciding upon the mandatory year-end test given by the State should be inclusive of both sectors. [PCSB's performance management framework includes student growth (worth 40% of the PMF score for elementary and middle schools) as well as many other factors, including attendance, graduation rate, reenrollment rate, college acceptance, AP/IP, SAT/ACT.]
- With respect to facilities, hoarding of thousands of square feet of surplus school building space, keeping it from charter school use, is unacceptable. There must be complete transparency with respect to the disposition of surplus school buildings.
- Only the charter school authorizer, the Public Charter School Board (PCSB) will make final decisions on charter school opening, closing, expansion, and siting.
- Ensuring a quality public school education for every student should be everyone's business in DC. The general public must become more engaged and committed to the success of DC's students, beyond parental involvement. Charter schools now have over 400 individuals serving on individual charter boards, with direct authority over their schools. This is a substantive and significant way to participate in public education decision making, and to support the educational experience of our students.

How Charter and Traditional Public Schools Can Collaborate

- In order to give all public school teachers and students the benefit of all that has been learned about increasing student achievement, particularly among the children of color from impoverished backgrounds who comprise the majority population in DC's public schools, collaborative research projects and initiatives that allow DCPS and charters to join together on sharing best practices and

implementing initiatives that use best practices and systems for sharing research-based, data-informed, hands-on best practices must be put in place.

- PCSB leadership is willing to discuss sharing and agreeing to common data sets about City needs⁴, attempting to jointly identify common areas of greatest need, and using this analysis to inform its authorizing decisions as well as facilities disposition, and transportation routes. PCSB will consider, for example, a time when it would say to prospective applicants “we will consider any applications, but we have a particular need for xxx type of school in yyy neighborhood and we have a building to offer to a successful applicant” as a result of such discussions.

Recommended Solutions to Tough Policy Issues

- Two particular areas of concern should be discussed within and across education sectors, and with City agencies, immediately: wrap-around services to ameliorate the devastating effects of family poverty and distressed communities; and state-of-the-art education practices for students with special needs. The Community Schools Incentive Initiative, currently lead by OSSE, is an example of how DCPS, charter schools, and community partners are coming together to address the academic and non-academic needs of students and their families.
- Similarly, the entrenched problems of adult education (an estimated 40% of public school parents are functionally illiterate), English Language Learners and immigrant students, and re-engagement for disconnected youth, must be discussed across education sectors.
- Targeting of additional weights within the Uniform Per Student Funding Formula to adequately meet the needs of students at risk of failure is appropriate and should be studied continuously and implemented with fidelity.
- With respect to “Neighborhood preference” issues, Charter School Leaders are willing to consider this option on an absolutely voluntary basis.
- On a completely voluntary basis, Charter School Leaders are willing to consider voluntary preference in the lottery for poverty status.
- DC needs excellent alternative educational settings for long-term suspended and expelled public school students. At this time, there is no such learning environment for K-12 charter school students.

⁴The definition of need in a community is the gap between students there and the number of seats in high-performing schools. It does not mean “no competitors can locate nearby.”

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