

Good morning! Welcome to our annual
Celebrating Best Practices in Education event.
Thank you school leaders, school staff, parents,
students, community partners, Best Practice
Award winners, councilmembers Robert White

and Charles Allen, and the Deputy Mayor for
Education Paul Kihn for being here today. I am
Scott Pearson, the executive director of the DC
Public Charter School Board. First and
foremost, a huge thank you to the steel

drummers from Elsie Whitlow Stokes

Community Freedom Public Charter School.

What a beautiful performance! [clap]. I am also
impressed with the students in the video we
just watched. These students come from your

schools. This is truly a testament to the
incredible environment each of you have built
within your schools. Thank you for inspiring
your students and making their school
experience meaningful. Each of you have

created a quality school. When we developed the PMF eight years ago, we created the designation of Tier One to recognize the very best public charter schools in Washington, DC. And we did that for two reasons.

The first was as a market signal - a clear message to parents and guardians and students themselves to say, this is a school you should strongly consider. This is what quality looks

like. Because we know that choice doesn't work when the choosers aren't informed. A quality-driven choice system can only work when folks can identify quality and we created

Tier One so that everyone could know at a glance what were our highest quality schools.

And we see it largely working. Most of you in this room have waitlists. We see in the data

that demand is higher for Tier One schools. And I would just say as an aside that when I see Tier One schools with small waitlists, I can only wonder whether it's yet another example of prejudicial notions of race and class

that are so deeply baked into our society and each of us in this room. It is our hope that our tiering system can go a small way toward breaking down these ancient divides.

Tier One is not only a market signal. But we created Tier One for a second reason, and that was to recognize and celebrate our very best. We don't do this enough in

education. Our country doesn't do this
enough.

How ironic that, on the one hand, virtually
everyone agrees that a quality education is

fundamental, essential, irreplaceable. Without a good education no person can realize his or her god-given potential. Without a good educational system our society cannot advance, cannot address our greatest problems, cannot

create widely-shared prosperity, cannot have confidence in our future as a leading, prosperous and free society. I mean, who doesn't believe that education is important. And yet the irony is that we treat

our educators terribly. We pay you badly. We
peg you down the social pecking order. The
jobs of our teachers are unsustainable and yet
we ask more and more of you every year. No
suspensions. Differentiated instruction. Safe

passage. Data validation. Parent and
Community engagement. Home visits. Truancy
reduction. Mental health.

But you get the summers off! I

knew/expected that would get a laugh because for most of you school wraps up at the end of June and professional development starts at the beginning of August. And I'll bet lots of you

and your staffs are working at summer camps during July to supplement your incomes.

Against this, a Tier One event at a nice hotel sounds like small potatoes. And maybe it

is. But we really truly do want to take this morning to say, to you and to each of your teachers and staff and volunteers: thank you. The folks in this room provide nearly 20,000 children and adults in this city an

education nobody would have dreamt possible
in Washington DC 25 years ago. And not just in
Ward 3 but for all wards. In fact, for all wards
EXCEPT Ward 3! And not just for white kids but
black and brown and Asian students. And not

just for the educated elite of this city but for everyone, from the newly arrived immigrant to the learners living in a homeless shelter. Everyone has an equal shot at getting into your schools and everyone who gets into

your schools has a strong shot at success, at becoming a fully-formed adult, with dignity and self-respect and self-confidence, with the skills and knowledge and habits of life to support themselves and contribute to their

community. That's what you've created, that's what you're doing for our city. We don't honor you enough, we don't thank you enough. This morning we do. We say to each of you, on

behalf of the families you serve and the District
of Columbia you so enrich, thank you.

I want to leave you with two thoughts, both related to this issue around the sustainability of an educator's career.

The first is to suggest that you, our Tier One public charter schools, have the opportunity to find ways toward sustainability. I was speaking with a friend from Indianapolis who was bemoaning the fact that low public spending

meant that teachers salaries were too low there, with large classes, that were causing teachers to flee the profession. Per pupil spend there is \$8,000. He was thinking of launching a

major political effort to get it to \$10,000, which he thought would make a huge difference.

In DC, the per-pupil spend is closer to \$20,000. And I know it doesn't feel like enough

– because it isn't. Tuition at Sidwell friends is over \$40,000 – and they fundraise on top of it. But, acknowledging it should be more, it's at a level that an Indiana educator would imagine would solve all of her problems. And yet it

doesn't seem to. Our teacher turnover in DC is higher than in most places. Sometimes it feels that we are on this treadmill of churning through teachers, where we end up having to spend a fortune on recruiting and coaching and

long-term subs. What are the hidden savings in retaining our teachers, whether through higher pay or reduced workload? For example, would you need instructional coaches if most of your teachers stayed with you for seven years? How

many teachers would stay if they could job
share and work half time for a bit more than
half pay? I'm just throwing out ideas – you are
the experts, the ones closest to the issue. But
I'd remind you that you have unique

freedoms. You are public charter schools. You aren't unionized. You have exclusive control over your budgets and your personnel policies. And you have uniquely high per-pupil funding. I encourage you to use those

freedoms to find a way to make teaching work more sustainable. Perhaps what's holding you back is PCSB and our high standards of accountability. What I'd say is, if you want to try something bold, talk with us. Your idea may

be the only that solves the issue. I don't want to keep you from innovating.

The second concerns the growing demands we place on you and your staffs. Just in the past

year the city council has regulated or is about to regulate your discipline policies, how you work with non-English-speaking families, and how you hire your staff. We now have two evaluation systems, the PMF and the OSSE five-

star rating, which nearly doubles the data validation work you must do. The work we require of you for procurement contracts is greater than ever. Sometimes I feel like I am slowly witnessing the slow, steady,

reconstruction of the traditional public system
we were supposed to be the alternative to. The
fact that I'm part of this process is not only
ironic to me – given that I used to be a charter
school board chair – it's deeply painful. And yet

there is a logic and a rationale behind each turn of the ratchet. We're all good people, trying to do what's best. We play our roles. The council's is to legislate. PCSB's is to oversee. Yours is to educate. But it's also to

fight. To fight for your flexibility, to fight for what makes your schools special. Acting along neither PCSB nor OSSE or the Council can anticipate how our well-meaning actions will affect you. Only you can tell us – and the way

things are, you sometimes need to shout it at us. You have to constantly remind us that your freedom to innovate, your exclusive controls, and your ability to be able to focus your energies on student achievement and

well-being as opposed to compliance is not just a nice feature – it's the essential, the core, the heart and soul of what allows you to succeed. Only when you are in our faces

reminding us of this essential fact do we have a
chance to get it right.

I've talked enough. Now it's time to honor and celebrate and thank you for your immeasurable contribution to the well-being of our city.