

Testimony submitted

By

Ivan Frishberg,

Vice-Chair, Advisory Neighborhood Commission 6B

Commissioner, ANC 6B02

Testimony on behalf of ANC 6B

To the

Committee on Education

Budget Hearing

April 17, 2014

ANC6B presents this testimony in accordance with a vote of 8-0-0 with a quorum present and at a regularly scheduled and properly noticed meeting of ANC6B on February 11th, 2014.

Our Commission has taken the position that the education of our City's children be a top budget priority for the Mayor and the City. As this Committee knows all too well, the struggles of our schools have an extraordinary ripple effect through the economy and individual lives of Washingtonians.

Recently, the Education Adequacy Study, an independent [study](#) commissioned by the City found that we should boost funding for public education by more than 15 percent — or at least \$180 million a year — to ensure that schools have the resources they need to improve student achievement. We have no reason to dispute or challenge those figures but they do speak to the scale of change needed in the support for and management of our public school system.

We do want to acknowledge that the main topic of concern from our Ward has been the situation with Middle Schools, and it is clear that this concern was heard, to an extent, by DCPS and the Mayor as the budget reflects a shift in priority from the well established success and growth of our elementary schools to middle schools.

Our Commission's main areas of concern are:

1. Overall lack of parent confidence in DCPS schools. We have some incredible schools and amazing faculty both in our city and in our commission boundaries, yet the fact that only 25% of DC kids attend their in-bounds school signals that an alarming number of kids have a local school their parents chose not to enroll them in. Particularly this is true with middle schools, and in Ward 6 our situation is no different than the City as a whole even with the widely acclaimed success of our neighborhood elementary schools. The flight of kids from DCPS schools once it becomes time for middle school should be an enormous warning sign and yet we feel no urgency from DCPS with regard to the situation in our middle schools. Years have passed since the adoption of the Ward 6 Middle School plan and while there has been some progress it would not be fair to say that Ward 6 Middle Schools are anywhere close to where Ward 6 families want and need them to be. As we will discuss later, a central part of this lack of confidence is not just the performance of these schools, but the lack of transparency and apparent lack of long term planning around school plans. The apparent lack of commitment and a long term plan for individual schools encourages parents to pursue options elsewhere rather than investing with the neighborhood or in bounds DCPS school.

2. Capital investments and basic repairs are being delayed. We hold up Stuart-Hobson Middle School and Payne Elementary as an example of where the process for basic repairs and has been unacceptably delayed and undoubtedly has an impact on the children in that school. There are still some ceilings, exposed pipes and

other issues inside the building that weren't completed during the school's Phase 1 modernization. As a result, the school presents itself as a work in progress, rather than a place of learning. Our understanding is that the very recently announced shift in renovation money, while appreciated for Stuart Hobson, still isn't enough to finish that work and will leave the renovation incomplete for another year. The recent reshuffling of renovation dollars by the Mayor makes one point emphatically clear. There is more work to be done than there are resources from the City to do it. Continuing to move the end date of the Facility Improvement Program to the right, and moving dollars around from one project to another to create winners and losers without a transparent rationale just reinforces the perception that we are short on fingers as we face a leaky dyke.

The City needs both a greater investment of capital dollars into renovations and modernization and needs to conduct a more orderly, transparent and established long term plan for execution that reflects an overall strategy for DCPS and its other programs and initiatives.

3. The Boundaries and feeder system is under review and needs changes but the management structure seems just as flawed, resulting in disjointed academic programs as students matriculate through the system.

We commend the Deputy Mayor for Education for the process underway with regard to the student allocation process. The process has been open, transparent and the outreach across the City has been impressive. Our singular concern with regard to this process is that it is connected to other areas of DCPS planning that offer much less transparency or apparent method. The renovation and modernization process should reflect the updated boundaries, the management structures that follow the feeder patterns and the underlying strategy for strengthening neighborhood and in-bounds schools across the city.

Recent comments by members of the Council that have suggested we abandon this process are regrettable. We know it will not be an easy process but it is a well managed one, a needed one, and thus it is appropriate we stick with it as an important building block in school reform.

4. A lack of multi-year planning or transparency in the budget process. As the previously referenced study states, "...education budgeting, resource allocation, and financial reporting are not clear and easily traceable processes in DCPS or public charter schools." The study goes on to recommend establishing an online public education funding reporting system that provides annual education budget information. ANC6B views multi-year planning and budget transparency as more than just issues of good governance. Well communicated multi-year planning and budgeting create predictability and consistency from year-to-year, which in turn lead to parent confidence in their schools and the overall system. In 2013, last minute decisions to re-categorize schools from "large" to "small", removal of local budget autonomy from some schools and cuts to enabling budgets for libraries,

rocked parent confidence and created undue consternation among local school leadership. 2014 has seen some improvement in the budgeting process, with the Chancellor initiating contact with local communities in late November and committing to a more open and inclusive budgeting process. However, this improvement recently regressed when the Mayor and Chancellor unexpectedly announced dramatic shifts in expenditures for capital improvements, with little or no rationale given for the changes.

Additional issues with the budget process that have been raised in our community with regard to the current budget process are:

- Year to year budgets are presented only as budgeted amounts, not as final allocations.
- There is not transparency on the formula used until it is transmitted to the Council.
- There is no budget provided for new classrooms being set up to pay for tables, chairs etc.
- There should be attention given to how budgets and allocations account for mid-year transfers from Charter Schools.

5. Charter Schools. If the city is to move toward excellence in its public education system, it must come to terms with the current divide between the traditional DC Public School System of schools and the array of independent charter schools. Currently 42% of our City's children are enrolled at charter schools, yet there is inadequate coordination between DCPS and the charter community. This lack of coordination plays out in many ways to the detriment of students, taxpayers and the city as a whole. For example, DCPS has been very reluctant to allow charter schools to take over excess DCPS buildings, facilities that were designed to be used as schools with playing fields, gymnasiums, auditoriums, cafeterias and the like. Thus, charter schools are forced to locate private space wherever they can find it, almost always lacking in the attributes of public school buildings. This arms length approach by DCPS has led to the current situation where the city's budget pays for charter facilities up to three times over — first, through the annual capitol budget allocation to each charter school; second, by paying the cost of maintaining excess DCPS space that might otherwise be used by charters; and third, by giving private landlords who rent space to charters a tax deduction for making space available to charters.