

Tuesday, October 9, 2018

Mayor Muriel E. Bowser
Government of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Suite 406
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

Please find enclosed a report that is the result of engagement with Ward 8 families, teachers, school staff, administrators, students, youth service providers, civic leaders and concerned neighbors around the selection of the next Chancellor for the District of Columbia Public Schools system. Through an online survey and a town hall meeting on Thursday, October 4, 2018, we asked those who live and work in our community to weigh in on what qualities were important for the next leader of our district to embody in a time of transition for our public schools.

You know, as we do, the next Chancellor will have a tremendous impact on the future of public education in the District of Columbia. Schools are the center of our quickly-changing communities and the anchor of opportunity and prosperity for the children and families within them. Now, more than ever, we need a leader with the experience and perspective to raise the bar so that all of us are ensured a fair shot at a pathway to the middle class.

We encourage you to take these viewpoints into account as you and the selection committee collaboratively review or recruit candidates for this position. Ward 8 is home to nearly one in five of our city's school-aged children and has for too long bore the brunt of deep inequalities in access and opportunity. We believe that children and families across the city have much to gain from a process wholly inclusive of our perspective and responsive to our voices. It is with that belief that we submit the enclosed recommendations.

Sincerely,

Representative Markus E. Batchelor
DC State Board of Education (Ward 8)

The Ward 8 Education Council

Cc: Members of the Our Schools Leadership Committee; Members of the Council of the District of Columbia; Members of the District of Columbia State Board of Education; Deputy Mayor for Education Paul Kihn.

Our Schools. Our Choice.

Ward 8 Town Hall and Survey Report on the Selection of the Next Chancellor of the District of Columbia Public Schools

Submitted October 9, 2018

The State of Ward 8 Schools

Ward 8 is home to over 16, 400 students, nearly one in five of the school-aged population in the District of Columbia, and 20 of DC Public Schools' 115 school communities. They include:

Anacostia High School	Johnson Middle School	Patterson Elementary School
Ballou High School	Ketcham Elementary School	Savoy Elementary School
Ballou STAY High School	King Elementary School	Simon Elementary School
Boone Elementary School	Kramer Middle School	Stanton Elementary School
Excel Academy	Leckie Education Campus	Turner Elementary School
Garfield Elementary School	Malcolm X Elementary School	
Hart Middle School	Moten Elementary School	
Hendley Elementary		

Our children, nearly half of which live below the poverty line, attend public schools in their neighborhood and in communities across every ward in the city. While most student groups are seeing steady increases in performance, growth for our students most in need are still far to slow. According to the most current available data, 62% of students who attend Ward 8 schools graduate high school, 17% are deemed college-ready in English Language Arts and 14.9% are deemed college-ready in math.

Ward 8 schools and families face persistent issues with inequity in resourcing; disproportionately high teacher and principal turnover; lack of safe passage; home and community-based trauma; barriers to attendance and chronic absenteeism; and other issues that schools must work collaboratively with government and the community to tackle.

The children and families of Ward 8 have a large stake in the selection of the next DCPS Chancellor, who must begin to aggressively tackle all of these issues on day one. We submit the following recommendations that encapsulate our common vision for the qualities and experience we need in the next leader of DC Public Schools.

Our Next DCPS Chancellor

Through an online survey and a town hall meeting on October 4, 2018 at Garfield Elementary School, we engaged over 100 parents, students, educators, youth service providers and other concerned neighbors around their priorities and hopes for the next Chancellor of DC Public Schools. The recommendations below are a synopsis of the areas with the largest consensus among the diverse group of stakeholders.

Academic and Professional Experience

- 1. Our next Chancellor must have experience in both the classroom and leading an urban system.** We believe that the next leader of DCPS should have experience as a classroom teacher, a school administrator and have a demonstrated body of work leading a school system similar to our own. We believe they must be knowledgeable of and equipped to handle the various challenges of an urban public school system. That includes serving a broad array of communities and constituencies with diverse concerns and needs. They must have a resume that demonstrates a deep and personal understanding of the system from the bottom-up.
- 2. Our next Chancellor must have a proven record of closing gaps and promoting equity.** The most dismaying of the issues facing our school system is the [persistent gap in achievement across our city](#). After over a decade of aggressive school reform efforts, the gaps between low-income students of color and their more affluent peers have remained enormous. The achievement/opportunity gap is the most important issue our next Chancellor will face and they should come to the District of Columbia with a proven record of driving up achievement and closing persistent gaps with a real plan to achieve it here.
- 3. Our next Chancellor must have a record of recruiting, nurturing and retaining high-quality educators.** [A recent report](#) commissioned by the DC State Board of Education shows that DC Public Schools have a teacher and principal turnover rate higher than the national average and higher than comparable urban school districts with available data. The rates are highest in communities with larger numbers of at-risk students, nowhere higher than in wards 5 and 8. We know that high turnover is disruptive to students' learning, building culture and school improvement efforts. The next leader of DCPS should have a record of providing educators with the support, flexibility and voice to develop professionally and shape instruction. This includes working collaboratively with teachers unions and being responsive to employee concerns. This should also include a reevaluation of the IMPACT evaluation system and its adverse impacts on morale and performance.

Priorities on Day One

- 1. Our next Chancellor must define equity with our communities in mind.** We believe that equity must be a District-wide priority in philosophy and practice, benchmarked by the upward mobility of our most challenged students in our most challenged communities. Our next leader of DCPS should help shape instructional programs & offerings, classroom design, professional

development, and other investments that will provide the young people in our community with a fair shot to a pathway to the middle class. Additionally, the next leader of DCPS should understand the equity of professional development, instructional programs, and resources for teachers may vary from ward to ward. They should work collaboratively with our community to find the need and with government and community partners to fill gaps.

- 2. Our next Chancellor must use data as a flashlight, not a hammer.** For far too long, school data has been used as a mechanism to punish, reprimand or fit a narrative; not as a way to honestly and openly measure our progress and work collaboratively to improve as a system -- together. Our next Chancellor should have a record of and a willingness to use data as a tool to help teachers improve, not to fire them; to help schools better serve students, not to frequently and abruptly change leadership or change course; to have an honest dialogue with the community, not to fit a narrative based on political calculation.
- 3. Our next Chancellor must be hyper-focused on students with special needs.** There is no group of students falling further behind or that feel the most underserved than our students with special needs. The next leader of DCPS should ensure that every school community is equipped to provide every student, no matter their ability, with the resources and support they need to be successful. That means proper staffing and space allocation, stringent oversight of IEP service delivery, resources for English language learners and their families and disciplinary policies that take these circumstances into account and utilize restorative practices.

System Management

- 1. Our next Chancellor must end the barrage of mandates and initiatives.** Educators and administrators bemoan the constant churn of new mandates and initiatives coming from DCPS Central Office that constantly upend planning and disrupt progress. For example, one educator who attended our town hall exclaimed “Why are we switching from *Tools of the Mind* [, an early childhood curriculum to improve children's self- regulation and academic skills] when we just got good at *Tools of the Mind*!?” Knee-jerk decisions at Central Office oftentimes ignore the inability for a big system to turn on a dime and ignores the premise that even the best tools take time to retrofit and streamline. We ask our next Chancellor to help alleviate the “burnout” associated with constantly introducing new initiatives, curriculum and mandates without fully measuring the success of those we were using before.
- 2. Our next Chancellor must reevaluate food services.** The transition to outsourcing the delivery of school meals in 2008 was done with the promise that costs would be lower for the system and quality of meals would improve. Nearly a decade later, confirmed in a [2016 report by the DC Auditor's Office](#), DC Public Schools' costs have only increased. The system spends more on meals than other comparable school districts. Ironically, the quality of food -- by most accounts of students, school staff and families -- has not improved at all. The Auditor's report concludes, and DCPS agreed at the time, that there are long-term benefits to bringing food service delivery back in-house, including increased accountability for quality service. Our next Chancellor should take

another hard look at how we provide every student with safe, appetizing and nutritious meal options.

- 3. Our next Chancellor must cut the red tape and leverage partnerships that serve students and families.** Educating a student is the work of an entire community and DC Public Schools should do all it can to empower youth-serving organizations and other community partners to fulfill their part of our collective responsibility to our schools and families. Our next Chancellor must provide the opportunity for community organizations (both long-standing and new / innovative) to find their place as a part of school communities. That means helping to provide more resources like space and partnerships that help raise achievement, break down systemic barriers and enrich students' lives. We should commit fully to the [community school model](#) that provides the infrastructure, staffing, flexibility and resources necessary to fulfill the need of every student and every family.

The Face of DCPS

- 1. Our next Chancellor must have a record of honesty, integrity and transparency.** Our families deserve a Chancellor that has a record of maintaining the integrity of their office, that plays by the rules and that is committed to being open and honest about where our school system is and where we need to go. The next leader of DCPS will have to rebuild trust in our system and its leadership after a series of missteps and scandal. Choosing a person with a proven record of going above and beyond to be open and transparent will be a critical step in the right direction.
- 2. Our next Chancellor must be accessible and community-focused.** The DCPS Chancellor is the public face of our school system. For too long, our community has been frustrated with one-off engagement and the inability to access those with decision-making authority. We believe the next leader of DCPS should be not only present in our community, but responsive to our voices. We also believe the next Chancellor should redouble our commitment to raising the voices of students, teachers and parents, nurturing and welcoming their ability for advocacy and leadership.
- 3. Our next Chancellor must create channels of communication that work.** Many Ward 8 schools and communities are hamstrung by fragmented networks of communication that makes engagement with families more difficult, but even more important. DCPS has a role to play. The next leader of DCPS should expand the Office of Family and Public Engagement and use all the resources at its disposal to analyze barriers to engagement and find innovative solutions to include families in the academic lives of their students.