



**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
THE JOHN A. WILSON BUILDING
1350 PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE, NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20004**

Charles Allen
Councilmember, Ward 6
Chairperson
Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

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Business and Economic Development
Education
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August 21, 2018

Muriel Bowser
Mayor of the District of Columbia
Executive Office of the Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dr. Charlene Drew Jarvis
Sylvia Mathews Burwell
Our Schools Leadership Committee Co-Chairs
via email

Dear Mayor Bowser, Dr. Jarvis, and President Burwell:

With the search process for a new DC Public Schools Chancellor now underway, we are at a critical moment in the future of public education in the District. The opportunity – and indeed, the challenge – before us is to find the best person to lead DCPS forward, to build on our accomplishments but also to repair the public’s lost trust in our schools and their leadership. This person must be ready to tackle head-on -- with urgency and honesty -- the many challenges facing our schools including the achievement gap, truancy, high teacher and principal turnover, and ensuring every child in DC can attend a great neighborhood school at every age. As a member of the Council’s Committee on Education and a DCPS parent myself, I know how important this work is and the crucial role the Chancellor plays in the success of every aspect of our public education system.

With that in mind, I recently met with a group of Ward 6 parents, educators, and community members regarding their hopes and goals for the selection of the next Chancellor. Co-hosted together with the Capitol Hill Public Schools Parent Organization and Joe Weedon, Ward 6 State Board of Education member, the discussion focused on the search process itself, desired qualifications for Chancellor candidates, and short- and long-term priorities for the incoming Chancellor.

This diverse group of education stakeholders were eager to be involved in the selection process and the evening's discussion featured thoughtful comments and substantive feedback that I wanted to summarize and share with you as representative of the Ward 6 community's priorities:

Chancellor Search Process Priorities

- **Transparency**: Special attention to transparency throughout the search process will be crucial to rebuilding public trust in DCPS. Stakeholders want information about the search timeline to be publicly available and for all meetings to be conducted in accordance with the District's Open Meetings Act. Meaningful opportunities for community input into the process should be created citywide at convenient times and locations. All candidates should be vetted for consideration by the full committee.
- **Composition**: Like myself, attendees were disappointed that no Ward 6 residents were selected for the Our Schools Leadership Committee. With 14 members, the exclusion of any Ward 6 resident participation was jarring, and attendees expressed concern that our unique neighborhood priorities and perspectives will not be considered. Many attendees raised questions about committee members with ties to non-DCPS schools and why they were appointed. Stakeholders noted there are no representatives from neighborhood high schools – special efforts should be made to seek those school communities' input.
- **Equity**: While some neighborhoods and wards are conducting their own meetings to gather input (Wards 3, 4, and 6, in particular), concern was expressed that many parts of the city won't be as fully represented. Residents wanted to ensure the committee will be hearing from Wards 7 and 8 stakeholders, with special efforts made to solicit their input. There was also the suggestion that a city-wide meeting of parents be organized with the Mayor to discuss the Chancellor selection process.
- **Legal Requirements**: Stakeholders asked that this search process comply with the full range of specifications set forth in §38–174. Attendees raised concerns that teacher and student voices are not being heard, and that additional seats on the committee should be created to increase their participation as required by the law. In addition, attendees said the search committee should receive the resumes of candidates under consideration prior to their selection, and that the Washington Teachers Union be afforded great weight in the making of the nomination.

Chancellor Candidate Qualifications

Many comments about candidate qualifications referenced input offered during the 2016 Chancellor search process. Attendees stated there is no need to “reinvent the wheel” – many thoughtful suggestions were made then that still apply now, including the attached August 11, 2016 sign-on letter from the Coalition for DC Public Schools & Communities.

Building on that input, residents also specifically mentioned:

- **Character:** Given the circumstances of Chancellor Wilson's and Deputy Mayor Niles' departures, the next Chancellor will need an unquestioned commitment to ethical behavior in office and a willingness to have difficult, honest conversations in order to rebuild trust with the community.
- **Equity and Community:** Candidates should have experience addressing issues of equity in diverse communities, a strong sense of urgency about the work needed to improve graduation rates and close DC's achievement gaps, and a true commitment to build partnerships with community organizations and residents.
- **Experience:** The next Chancellor should have on-the-ground experience in traditional public schools and as a school administrator. She or he should understand policy implementation, how to collaborate effectively with other agencies, be able to define success for DCPS, and be willing to be held accountable in his or her contract.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Residents want a Chancellor who can articulate a long-term plan for DCPS's future and who will advocate for the continued growth and success of DCPS schools and students. The Chancellor should prioritize real progress over public relations, be willing to conduct actual research to learn what is working and what isn't, and be transparent about both successes and failures. Again, a willingness to have difficult, honest conversations with the community will be essential to rebuilding public trust in DCPS.
- **Focus on Students, Listen to Teachers:** The next Chancellor should continue the focus on social emotional learning and the whole child approach to education, ensuring all students have access to a well-rounded curriculum at all levels and making decisions based on what's best for students. The Chancellor should also be willing to listen to and partner with teachers, including a commitment to providing strong supports for principals and investments in teacher leadership.

Short and Long-Term Priorities

Once the new Chancellor is in place, attendees raised the following items as top priorities needing immediate attention:

- Rebuild trust with parents and the community;
- Create a vision to grow DCPS, from birth through graduation with great schools and predictable pathways in every neighborhood;
- Close the achievement gap, with a particular emphasis on supporting at-risk and homeless students;
- Work to ensure all students receive a high-quality, well-rounded education and are being challenged;
- Improve special education, including the delivery of services, child-find efforts, and communication with families;

- Change the DCPS school-level budgeting model to better support struggling schools and empower local school advisory teams (LSATs);
- Better incentivize high performing teachers to stay in struggling schools;
- Create and fund a District-wide technology plan so that schools are properly resourced;
- Improve collaboration with sister agencies to better leverage resources from outside DCPS to more fully support at-risk students, especially those experiencing homelessness and trauma;
- Build a culture of transparency and accountability within DCPS; and
- Reduce teacher and principal turnover.

Attendees also noted all of this feedback applies equally to the selection of a new Deputy Mayor for Education. Stakeholders recognize that both positions are critical to improving our public schools and creating a successful educational system in the District.

I plan to hold another meeting on Monday, September 24, at 6:30pm with our Ward 6 State Board of Education representative to solicit additional feedback from the Ward 6 community. I will share the location once confirmed, and would welcome your attendance and that of the Our Schools Leadership Committee. I hope you'll all be able to join me – I think you will hear from residents that the Ward 6 community is eager to participate in this process and stands ready to partner with you and DCPS on the critical work of building great public schools in every neighborhood.

Sincerely,



Councilmember Charles Allen, Ward 6
Chair, Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety

cc: Councilmember David Grosso, Chair – Council Committee on Education
Anita Berger
Rosa Carrillo
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