

**Testimony to the Council of the District of Columbia Committee of the Whole  
Human Resources and Human Capital Initiatives in DC Public Schools  
January 16, 2009**

Presented by Cathy Reilly of the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators as part of joint testimony with Mary Levy of the Washington Lawyer's Committee; Iris Toyer and Margot Berkey of Parents United for the DC Public Schools

I am Cathy Reilly of the Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators. Thank you for this opportunity to testify.

Margot has defined some broad civic goals looking at schools as builders of societies, preparing students to be strong members of their families and communities. As she said, in terms of personnel policies this entails working collaboratively. Parents, students, teachers and administrators claim ownership of the problems and successes of our public schools together.

These goals can be compatible with the current administrations goal to create a system where student achievement drives everything they do: to create the best urban public school system in the country and to close the achievement gap. It depends on how the problem is defined, on the priorities, the strategies and on an inclusive climate.

DCPS has stated in the five-year plan that one of the largest problems they face is that too many teachers are not up to the job of educating our youth effectively. In response they plan to identify and transition out a significant share of the teaching corps in the next two years through 90 day plans, buy outs, certification deficiencies and reconstitution. Key elements of their plan to then fill a potentially record number of vacancies are to:

1. Expand collaboration with the New Teacher Project and maintain strong partnership with Teach For America;
2. Initiate a strong pay for performance system that they believe will draw more teachers to DC.
3. Recruit high-performing teachers from other local districts to work at *new* DCPS schools; and provide formal opportunities for *new* cohorts of high-caliber teachers to share experiences and best practices.

Additional plans include building up human resource operations, creating career ladders and expanding professional development and induction programs for new teachers.

The personnel strategies for principals and central office staff are similar. At the core is to recruit new personnel and imbed pay for performance. Finally, as the end, the plan is to put in place meaningful staff development.

We believe it would be far more effective and more in line with the broad civic goals from the standpoint of cost, stability and quality to *initially* concentrate time, energy and funding on induction, professional development and retention *rather* than on dismissal and replacement. It is a fundamental difference.

There are strong examples in Boston, Baltimore, and Prince George's County that an approach that prioritizes investment and support is paying off. The message to those that have worked with their children is that success is comprised of many elements and that they will work to put them all in place as they hold everyone accountable. Dismissal and replacement are not the main strategy in these and many other successful plans.

Pay for performance as a key incentive to draw more teachers and administrators to DC as well as to determine whether or not they can retain their jobs assumes a fair and equitable way to measure student achievement. It also assumes that the student will have a stake in their own performance on the measurement; they currently do not.

Fair and accurate systems have not yet been developed to measure effectiveness and hence performance. We welcome the introduction of new measures as a pilot or in a targeted, well-supported initiative.

The attached data details the gross disparities in resources among our schools with similar students. The result is that teachers, principals and students are not on a level playing field. How can we compare effectiveness and performance between staff and students at schools with large classes, large adult/pupil ratios, and shortages of supplies and staff at a school with small classes, many more support staff, and ample supplies? For example according to Mary Levy's analysis of current budgets as posted we are spending at about \$12,000 dollars a student at Shaw and about \$7,000 dollars a student at Hart.

The other assumption is that we are not losing some of our strongest veteran teachers with the buy outs, encouraging them to go to the neighboring systems where fair treatment and stability are perhaps more likely. The same is true of principals and central office staff. Seven of the ten comprehensive high school principals are new to their job this year with many of them new to the job of high school principal. Support, and not just accountability measures, might have allowed some of the former principals to be effective and permit some of the current people to stay and succeed. We see many former DCPS central office staff succeeding in other districts. Mary Levy will go into more detail on these large personnel strategy concerns in her testimony.

At this time we do not feel this Administration's personnel priorities as outlined can actually support the larger vision and civic goals Margot stated. The strong initiatives and creative ideas in the plan come too late and are undermined by some of the elements detailed above.