



Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools

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**Statement of IRIS J. TOYER
before
CHAIRMAN VINCENT C. GRAY
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
PUBLIC OVERSIGHT HEARING ON
HUMAN RESOURCES AND HUMAN CAPITAL INITIATIVES WITHIN
THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS
FRIDAY, JANUARY 16, 2009**

Good Morning Chairman Gray and members of the Committee of the Whole. I am Iris J. Toyer, a D.C. Public School parent and the Chairperson of Parents United for the D.C. Public Schools. I am pleased to be here today with my colleagues to participate in this important discussion. My role today is to present a set of recommendations based on some very simple core values that we believe the Council might adopt as guiding principals as it moves forward in its oversight role.

There must be a clear definition of the problem that the administration's human capital initiative is seeking to solve. We are concerned that the approaches being communicated are inadequate to solve the problems and are retreads of initiatives that have been tried before and failed here in this city.

Therefore here is what we would like to see:

Investment in the workforce that will result in better educational outcomes for our students. This means that the strategies articulated and implemented by the school administration must be able to demonstrate a recognition of the value of community, collaboration and stability at the local school and central office. As Ms. Berkey indicated our neighboring school districts and others across the country are on the pathway to success because they work together as a community to improve educational quality. As Ms Reilly indicated we do not believe that this approach is incompatible with the administration's goal to create a system where student achievement is the main driver.

Statements have been made that the current workforce has too many teachers that are not up to the job in our classrooms. The core strategy is to recruit new personnel (i.e. teachers and similarly principals). We believe that a far more realistic and cost effective approach would be to develop fair and accurate systems that measure effectiveness and performance. How does one know

when he or she has attained effectiveness without some benchmark that has been effectively communicated to him or her?

The 5 year plan's approach will assure that churn continues and instability will reign supreme. At this rate we will never meet the stated goal of making DCPS one of the premiere school districts in the country.

Recommendation: The Council must set the tone that it values clearly defined problems, prioritized solution and strategies that reflect the full panoply of community assets in responding to the problem. That would include parents, teachers and principals, nonprofits and the university and business communities, and other interested citizens. We want sustainable investments that can only be achieved when all or most aspects of the community agree to the importance.

Equity and transparency must be a cornerstone of the administration's work. The fair and equitable distribution of resources throughout our school system is key. We believe that in order to fairly hold our workforce to a set of standards the administration must assure that teachers and principals are given to the extent possible an equitable share of resources for the children they serve.

Recent stories in the Washington Post have highlighted several of our schools (Hart and Shaw to name two). What the stories failed to talk about was the resources available to one school that are not available to the other. Yet they serve almost identical populations. Is it a matter of school leadership, teacher commitment? I don't know. However, the difference of \$12,000 for one school and \$7000 per child for the other must have something to do with it. There can be no wildly divergent sums of money spent on students from the same populations at the whim of individuals.

Recommendation: The Council assure that the children of this city are treated fairly and equitably when it comes to allocating city dollars for the purpose of education in accordance with our municipal regulations. We realize that there will be some differences for special programs but clearly not in the instance of identical general education programs for identical populations.

Building the Workforce: What is the goal? We are greatly concerned that the reliance on new teachers as the sole answer to DCPS's problems institutionalizes instability. The pond in which the administration plans to fish is too shallow (i.e., TFA and NTP) and accepts the premise that a two year commitment is sufficient. It seems to eschew the development of teachers as professionals who develop effective strategies, improve their skills over time with the necessary supports, and are able to develop into master teachers.

The plan includes a costly strategy. As a community we need to look at what research tells us to why teachers leave and let that guide our future actions. Do we really want a system where the most veteran teacher has 5 years of

experience and our central office and building level leadership has not much more? If we want to develop our teacher and principal corps then the plan ought to reflect it. Strong induction programs and supportive professional development for ALL teachers is critical.

Recommendation: Council must assure that the budget reflects the intent of this community. We cannot continue to start over with a new crop of individuals every year. We would like to see a professional development addresses what happens in the classroom beyond the first year of teaching. The Council must 3) ensure that the budget invests in initiatives which provide a solid return, produce stability, contribute to excellence in teaching, provide support to the workforce, etc.