

**MEETING WITH ABIGAIL SMITH, DCPS
THURSDAY, 8/27/09 NOON**

Opening Remarks by DCPS

Chancellor and staff are excited that families want to stay “public” for Middle School, and acknowledge disappointment about Deal this year. They expect there will continue to be out of bounds slots at Deal, though Deal is now just about 3 slots short of their full capacity. Principal Kim is clearly a super-star in the district.

Boundary Revisions Unlikely Soon

Not expected for 2010. Emphasis will be on improving the out-of-bounds process in terms of transparency, level of information available etc.

Hardy

Composition of Student Body and Key Families

Abby promised to revert on the number of Key/in boundary families who joined Hardy this year, and indicate the change over last year. The Chancellor continues to feel that increases in the number of Key students who choose to attend Hardy will have a catalyzing effect on other families. Abby also promised to check the percentage of in-bound and out-of-bound students at Hardy this year.

Guaranteed Admission

Key families will be guaranteed admission at Hardy regardless of whether it has an arts program. This policy will apply even to students who are out-of-bounds at Key, so that they have a consistent educational channel.

Administration

Under close observation by the Chancellor, who is working to leverage the wonderful aspects of Hardy (e.g., the Arts program).

Test Scores

Hardy’s results are not very different to Deal’s. The Chancellor is focused on “pushing up the ceiling” on results all over the city.

DCPS Goals

Defining minimum standards

This is the priority this year and ensuring consistency across middle schools in terms of minimum standards—each school must have arts, language, music, PE, algebra etc

Content—Minimum State Standards

DCPS doesn't have standard or template lesson plans to accompany curricula DCPS does have clear State Standards and the teachers know what the standards are—these can be found on the DCPS website under Academics—Learning Standards

Teaching and Learning Framework

The Chancellor is concentrating on disseminating and fostering among the teachers, through the so-called Teaching and Learning Framework, a shared mindset around 1) what effective teaching “looks like”, 2) how to engage students, 3) managing classroom and student behavior and 4) how to have and foster high expectations for kids and challenge them to the highest levels of learning. Apparently, the Framework is controversial.

CAS and Testing Generally

Chancellor will meet with all principals in September to discuss her expectations on gains to be made in CAS results. Principals commit to these goals. Each school will be evaluated on their success in moving students from their current achievement levels to the next higher levels. There are 4 levels in CAS results: Below Basic, Basic, Proficient and Advanced (with Advanced being above grade level). Thus, while the tests require students to meet minimum standards, schools are evaluated and incentivized based on whether they move students up.

Tests are being improved

DC's tests are pretty good by national standards, even though they focus on minimum levels of achievement. And schools are incentivized to higher levels of work. Increasingly, tests include Brief Constructed Response Questions (BCRs) in math and reading, for example. These require the student to explain how they got to their results. The goal is to align the BCRs with “teach to test”; i.e., teaching to test is not, in itself, objectionable if the test adequately tests students' analytical skills as well as substantive knowledge.

Teacher Qualifications

DCPS Objective

The Chancellor is making a serious commitment to identifying poor performers and requiring poor performers to attend/participate in a 90-day remedial program,

which supports the teacher, provides him or her with an opportunity to show improvement, or permits the Chancellor to move out chronic poor performers. The Chancellor has moved out 100 teachers district-wide and put another 100 on probation—highly courageous and controversial. The Chancellor admits that, while it will be even easier to move poor performers out this coming year, it is up to principals to identify poor performers.

Catalyst Schools

Definition

Not the same thing as a magnet school, which typically is application only, and does not guarantee admission to students within the school boundary. The Catalyst schools are listed on the DCPS website. There are 3 general types of Catalyst school: Arts integration, STEM (science, technology, engineering and math), and World Culture and Languages

Credentials and Process to become a Catalyst School

Schools apply, DCPS engages the community, the Chancellor approves or recommends with reservations, or conditions approval etc.... Hardy, notably, did not apply to be a Catalyst school, though DCPS expects that they will use their budget in the arts area, to the extent they have flexibility (and apparently there is a great deal of flexibility for schools to apply their budgets as they wish, to the extent they meet the requirements of having Arts, Music, PE etc.

Take-Aways and Action Items

Editorial Note. The DCPS office (not only Abby Smith, but the staff generally) are professional. The Chancellor and her staff have an ambitious and excellent long-range plan for making the DC public schools (including middle schools) an excellent and realistic option for families in the district. However, it's going to take many years.

Proposed Action Plan:

- Obtain sample class plans for each class and grade
- Visits to classes to see teachers in action
- Share with Six Schools and DCPS whatever information we compile