



## **ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSION 3E**

**TENLEYTOWN    AMERICAN UNIVERSITY PARK    FRIENDSHIP HEIGHTS**  
**CHEVY CHASE                                      WAKEFIELD                                      FORT GAINES**

c/o Lisner-Louise-Dickson-Hurt Home 5425 Western Avenue, NW Washington, DC 20015

Dear Chancellor Ferebee,

For many years, parents, educators, and administrators have expressed concern with the DCPS strategy of inflexibly and hierarchal management of local schools. When Mayor Fenty and Chancellor Rhee took the helm in 2007, the 21<sup>st</sup> Century School Fund wrote an entire report on how to transform DCPS by providing more local school control and less micromanagement from DCPS central office.<sup>1</sup> *Greater Greater Washington* in 2015 noted, “If DCPS administrators want to retain successful school leaders...they need to trust their judgment and allow them greater autonomy.”<sup>2</sup>

With this mind, we once again find ourselves immersed in budget season and, as has been the case for too many of these budgets, our local schools are facing cuts. Principals are scrambling to serve students with fewer resources yet find themselves hamstrung by the central office in terms of moving resources around in order to best address the challenges their individual schools face.

When principals face these difficult decisions, DCPS has a process whereby principals can petition to make changes to their staffing, but each change request must be approved by central office. This is after the principals, along with their staff and in consultation with their Local School Advisory Teams (LSATs), develop and submit a budget that is reflective of the individual schools needs and priorities. There should be a high bar for Central Office rejecting principal requests for realigning resources to improve student education, coupled with a responsive appeal process for redress in the case of DCPS denial, however little information is available for parents and taxpayers about the process, decision criteria, or ability for principals to get a second opinion when DCPS denies a request.

It is our understanding that across the District, principal requests for flexibility are frequently denied. For example, a recent article by the *Wilson Beacon* noted, “Martin submitted seven petitions, all of which were rejected, some before she even had a conversation with the DCPS representative.”<sup>3</sup>

One example of the practical effects of these petition rejections is that the Latin program at Wilson has now been ended, with students who took Latin short the credits they need for the DCPS language requirement, basically because the DCPS Central Office substituted its judgement for the principal’s on what is best for the students at her school. However, our concerns are broader than one denied change request at one high school. This lack of transparency and accountability is endemic in the DCPS system.

It is clear the petition process, as well as the budgeting process in general, is opaque to parents and taxpayers, and therefore we seek to better understand how our schools are faring in this process. As such, we ask that DCPS provide:

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.21csf.org/csf-home/publications/DecentralizingDCPS07.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://ggwash.org/view/38681/to-keep-its-best-principals-dcps-needs-to-give-them-more-autonomy>

<sup>3</sup> <https://thewilsonbeacon.com/13941/news/mandated-expenses-undercut-budget-increase/>

1. For each traditional DCPS school, for the past four years, a list of change requests submitted, the disposition of each request, the name of the Central Office staff member/department that made the decision, and the number of denials that were appealed.
2. An analysis by school type (high school, middle school, and elementary school) of the aggregate number of change requests submitted each year over the past four years and the number approved and denied.
3. A list of the individuals in DCPS that are authorized to approve or deny these principal budgeting and staffing requests. Please provide the number of individuals a principal at elementary, middle, or high school level could have to ask for any such requests.
4. Please provide the written criteria by which these requests are evaluated, and determinations are made. On what basis are principal requests evaluated? Does DCPS central office have written criteria that staff must use in approving or denying these requests? If so, we ask that you make them publicly available on the DCPS website for parents and taxpayers.
5. What is the process by which a principal can appeal a denial? Does DCPS have written guidelines for such appeals? If so, we ask that you make them publicly available on the DCPS website for parents and taxpayers.

This data would also be useful for the newly created Education Research Practice Partnership to incorporate into its records and make publicly available.

Accountability and transparency are critically important for faith in our public institutions; they are the foundational elements of public trust and instill the public with confidence that those institutions are operating effectively and aligned with the priorities that we as a community decide. We are deeply concerned that the DCPS staffing and budgeting decisions that affect our children are made under a cloak of secrecy.

We are committed to improving our schools and believe that principal autonomy is a critical component of that mission. A situation where principals are still accountable, as they are today, for that autonomy, but, as one DCPS Central Office figure phrased it: exercising bounded autonomy. As we've shown, this is not the case today and must be addressed immediately if schools are to function well in order to best serve their students. We look forward to your responses and look forward to working with you on this shared goal.

ANC 3E

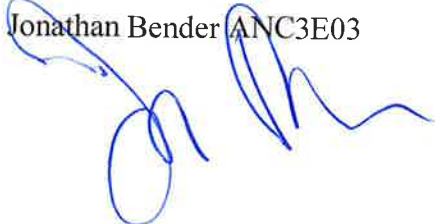
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