

October 24, 2016

TO: Mayor Muriel Bowser

FROM: DCPS Rising Leadership Committee

RE: ***Recommendations: Factors in Selection of New DCPS Chancellor***

Few areas of public concern are more important for the future of our city, communities and families than the quality and effectiveness of the District of Columbia Public Schools. Few decisions that the Mayor makes will have greater or more lasting impact on DC citizens, especially our children, than the selection of the Chancellor for DCPS.

Serving as the Chancellor for DCPS is an unparalleled opportunity for a visionary leader who can take advantage of the plentiful educational resources of the nation's capital to advance even greater academic attainment for DC students and teachers, families and communities throughout the city.

Great educational leadership starts with a deep commitment to the achievement of social justice through ensuring excellence at all educational levels, in all school activities, in all parts of the city. Educational progress must be equitable for all students; progress for only a few denies justice for all.

Such leadership demands a clear and compelling vision for the future of DCPS; a bold plan to fulfill the vision through measurable goals supported by sufficient resources to ensure their achievement; and the ability to motivate all participants --- students, teachers, administrators, parents, business leaders, philanthropists, lawmakers --- to collaborate creatively and cooperatively in taking the actions necessary to implement the plan.

The search for the new Chancellor comes at a moment of steady educational progress for the schools. All concerned constituencies have expressed a sense of urgency to continue that progress, to acknowledge areas that need faster improvement, and to renew focus on the imperative of ensuring equitable achievement for all schools and all students.

## **Background**

Upon the resignation of DCPS Chancellor Kaya Henderson in July, Mayor Muriel Bowser appointed the DCPS Rising Leadership Committee (RLC) to advise her on the factors she should consider in selecting the new Chancellor. The membership of this committee is diverse, representing all 8 wards and including parents, teachers, school leaders, students, business, philanthropic and educational leaders from throughout the city. [list attached]

The members of the RLC met four times to discuss the issues at stake in the Chancellor selection process; to review the results of the three community forums (members of the RLC each participated in one or more of the forums); to receive and consider other input from stakeholders; and to develop the recommendations contained in this memorandum.

## **Recommendations**

The RLC identified four key themes for the Mayor to consider in making her selection. The RLC then identified a series of questions for the Mayor to consider as part of her interviews with candidates.

In order to make sure that this framework is useful to the Mayor in making her selection, the RLC chose to focus the four key themes on the qualities and talents of the candidates considered for Chancellor. Hence, the RLC states the themes in this way:

- A. The candidate must demonstrate a deep commitment to educational equity, racial and social justice.**
- B. The candidate should be strategic and thoughtful in his or her approach to learning and instruction.**
- C. The candidate's management expertise and leadership style should be effective for the scope and complexity of DCPS and engagement of all constituencies.**
- D. The candidate should understand and be able to navigate the unique educational landscape of the District.**

Following are specific questions and considerations that the RLC has identified for each of these themes.

### **A. The candidate must demonstrate a deep commitment to educational equity, racial and social justice.**

Education in the United States is the essential pathway for economic security for students and families. Education is society's most effective remedy to combat poverty, inequality, racism and all forms of intolerance and discrimination. At the same time, conditions of poverty and inequality, the latent effects of centuries of racism and discrimination, can debilitate the ability of children to learn and families to move out of poverty, driving the achievement gap wider. Continuing to improve the ability of public schools to open more effective pathways from poverty to opportunity must be among the top priorities of the new Chancellor.

The RLC heard members of the community express passionate concerns about closing the achievement gap at every community forum, and much discussion centered on the underlying issues of social justice that contribute to educational under-achievement. The RLC spent considerable time discussing the importance of a Chancellor who can express empathy and understanding of the issues of inequality across all wards of the city, and how inequality impacts student achievement. Poverty, hunger, homelessness and violence are real conditions for too many children, and these conditions do have a real impact on the ability of children to succeed in school, with a disproportionate impact on African American and Latino students, and especially those in the most impoverished areas of the city.

While the Chancellor is not responsible to fix the root causes of negative social conditions, the RLC believes it is important for the Chancellor to demonstrate an educational disposition that acknowledges these realities along with enthusiasm to partner strategically with civic leaders across all sectors to develop more effective solutions. At the same time, the Chancellor must also be able to develop educational responses to these conditions that can be effective for the long-term across many schools and neighborhoods.

- *Suggested Questions to Frame Interviews with Candidates:*
  - What evidence can you cite to demonstrate your expertise in developing successful and specific programs and methods to reduce the achievement gap among students in school systems where you have previously held positions of leadership responsibility?
  - What kinds of programmatic initiatives have you created or implemented to address systemic racism in a public education system and what outcomes did you achieve with those initiatives that could inform your leadership for DCPS?
  - How would you facilitate constructive conversations among the city's educational stakeholders about issues of race, class and ways to achieve social justice in education throughout the city?
- *Suggested Considerations when Vetting the Candidates:*
  - The candidate must have experience working with communities/students of color.
  - The candidate should demonstrate a sense of urgency for developing and implementing solutions for educational equity, racial and social justice.
  - The candidate should demonstrate a commitment to teacher/staff diversity.

**B. The candidate should be strategic and thoughtful in his or her approach to learning and instruction.**

With DCPS already on a clear pathway to improvement, a perception affirmed at the community forums, the present moment calls for an experienced educational leader who can quickly gain credibility with the constituencies that are central to ongoing educational progress, notably students, teachers and principals as well as parents and community partners. The Chancellor must be conversant with the critical issues in curricula and pedagogy for all educational levels; must be able to foster a climate for continuous innovation as a means to ensure increasingly strong student outcomes. The Chancellor should understand the importance of assessing the current curricular issues at all grade levels and ensure necessary changes are made for greater consistency across schools aligned with expected outcomes for each grade level and subject taught.

The Chancellor should also be someone whose approach to education includes a social, emotional and physical perspective that cares about the development of students in many dimensions, including arts, sciences, sports, languages and other areas that ensure a well-rounded education. The Chancellor should also reflect an approach to student discipline that helps students to grow and learn through mistakes, and that protects against disciplinary practices that are discriminatory or result in expulsions/suspensions that disproportionately affect students by race or gender.

The new Chancellor should also be adept at identifying, motivating, supporting and retaining a high quality and diverse group of teachers and principals. The Chancellor should have the leadership skill to help teachers understand the importance of evaluation, overseeing an effective teacher evaluation system that emphasizes continuous improvement while reducing the concerns that some teachers have experienced.

- *Suggested Questions to Frame Interviews with Candidates:*
  - Considering the many implications of ongoing change management for the school system, how do you achieve balance between innovation and continuity? What could that look like here in DC?
  - How do you navigate competing interests and constituencies? What process do you use to set priorities?
  - How would you evaluate the curricula at all grade levels for DCPS?
  - What kind of curricular innovations have you led in prior school systems and how did you measure their success?
  - What kinds of innovative pedagogies have you introduced in other schools and how did you measure their success?
  - What is your experience with state standards? What is your experience with assessments aligned to state standards? How would you use the results of assessment to stimulate ongoing innovation and improvement?
  - What is your approach to student discipline? How would you ensure that disciplinary practices are not discriminatory?
  - What is your approach to recruiting and supporting teachers to ensure retention of the highest quality teachers?
  - What are the fairest ways to hold teachers accountable for student learning outcomes? How would you implement your ideas in DCPS?
  - What is your experience working with unions? Describe how you would establish partnership with the DCPS unions in your first few months.

- What is your experience with high quality out-of-school time extended day and summer programming? What kinds of year-round programming have you implemented elsewhere and how did you measure success?
- What programs have you created to promote greater student engagement in education, and how did you measure success in these programs?

**C. The candidate’s management expertise and leadership style should be effective for the scope and complexity of DCPS and engagement of all constituencies.**

Managing a system of the size and scope of DCPS requires considerable professional experience in complex organizations including finance and budget, personnel, infrastructure, programs and related services. Beyond obvious technical skills and expertise essential for effective management, the Chancellor must have a personal leadership style that is, at once, strong enough to lead a system through continuing progressive reforms that will challenge conventional practices, and, at the same time, open enough to listen well and smart enough to know how to motivate all constituents to participate in the change process. Managing the demands and expectations of multiple constituencies --- not all in agreement most of the time --- is a clear necessity for the Chancellor’s role. In all community forums, the RLC heard the themes of desire for increased communication and greater subsidiarity for principals and teachers.

The RLC believes it is important for the Chancellor to be able to build a strong internal leadership team with attention given to succession planning for all key executive positions so that inevitable turnover does not disrupt the ongoing work of educational improvement. The RLC also expects the new Chancellor to have sufficient financial management experience to know the school system budget thoroughly and to be able to make good decisions about the effective and equitable distribution of resources to ensure achievement of goals, and in particular, resources devoted where necessary on activities to close the achievement gap.

- *Suggested Questions to Frame Interviews with Candidates:*
  - Why would you want this job? What are your motives?
  - What is your experience managing complex, large organizations/systems? What evidence can you present of your success in these organizations?
  - What kinds of strategic plans did you develop in your prior work and how did you measure the effectiveness of the plans?
  - What is your experience using data-driven decision-making? How do you collect, analyze and use data as an educational leader?
  - What is the largest budget you have managed previously? What is your approach to resource allocation in a system with high poverty levels in some areas and very high income levels in other areas? How do your budget choices relate to supporting activities to promote greater achievement?

- How did you fund innovation in your prior positions? How did you generate resources for initiatives? How did you measure success?
  - What is your biggest failure? How did you recover? What did you learn from it?
  - What is your experience with the community school model?
  - What would you do to engage students and parents, teachers, and other stakeholders including unions?
  - What was the rate of teacher turnover in your previous positions? What did you do to promote greater diversity in the teaching workforce and improved teacher retention?
  - How have you engaged students and parents in your previous work? How have you managed community engagement in your prior positions?
  - Why would a student want to come to DCPS? Why would a parent?
  - Why would people want to work with you? How did you recruit and retain top talent on your teams? What is your method for sustaining a high performing executive team? What kind of succession planning have you engaged in previous positions?
- *Suggested Considerations when Vetting Candidates:*
    - The candidate should demonstrate success in engaging students, parents and teachers
    - The candidate should have a strong and clear vision for how students, parents and teachers play a role in the development and direction of DCPS
    - The candidate should have significant experience managing large organizations, with large budget and staff.

**D. The candidate should understand and be able to navigate the unique educational landscape of the District.**

While DCPS embodies characteristics that are similar to those of other urban school systems, certain conditions make DC unique among cities, offering the Chancellor both complex challenges and remarkable opportunities to address educational issues with large national impact. Politically, the Chancellor must understand and be able to navigate the roles and relationships of the Mayor and Deputy Mayor for Education, to whom the Chancellor reports, and also the DC Council and its Education Committee, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE), and other public bodies with an interest in education. The Chancellor also interfaces

with numerous civic groups in Washington in the business, philanthropic, educational and nonprofit communities. The location of the U.S. Department of Education not far from DCPS headquarters also offers opportunities for synergies and participation on the national stage, and the Secretary of Education has often taken a special interest in DCPS.

DC also has important constituencies served by special education. Additionally, DC has an increasingly large immigrant population with many families speaking other languages at home. Student and school safety is also an important issue. The Chancellor should be able to address issues of cultural competence, bullying, interpersonal relationships and the consequences of community and domestic violence that students often experience before or after the school day.

DC also has a number of major colleges and universities, and has several major college access programs including the DC Tuition Assistance Grant (DC TAG) Program funded by Congress, and the DC College Access Program (DC CAP) funded through private philanthropy. DCPS has also developed innovative programs and schools for College-and-Career-Readiness. The RLC believes it important for the new Chancellor to be able to address issues in collegiate preparation of students, partnerships with universities, and effective career readiness programs for students who may not be able to or wish to pursue college immediately after graduation.

More locally, the District of Columbia is also blessed with communities throughout the city who are highly engaged with their schools, and being receptive to parent and community engagement is essential for success. At the same time, conditions of poverty undermine some communities while others enjoy considerable wealth; the economic divide along the east-west axis of the city too often has also presaged a large educational gap and racial segregation as well. While economic development is advancing in many neighborhoods, the stark fact remains that not all areas of the city enjoy the renaissance equally. The new Chancellor will need to understand that equitable decisions about school funding, for example, do not necessarily mean equality of funding; some schools and neighborhoods need considerably greater support simply to reach a level playing field. These issues play out in everything from building renovations to teacher and principal qualifications and support to the kinds of after-school programs and other opportunities for student enrichment. These issues also affect perceptions about race and social class disparities that can lead to resentment, conflict and opposition across schools and neighborhoods.

- *Suggested Questions to Frame Interviews with Candidates:*
  - How would you navigate a system with a mayoral control governance structure?
  - What experience have you had working with multi-faceted political environments including local and state educational offices?
  - How would you use federal policy, i.e., ESSA and IDEA, to leverage increased academic attainment for DCPS students?
  - What opportunities do you envision to collaborate with the Public Charter School sector in DC to improve educational outcomes across the city?

- What kinds of opportunities and relationships might you be able to build given the many educational resources of Washington? What kinds of partnerships have you built with universities in your prior school district?
- How have you worked with philanthropic support in your prior positions? What kinds of partnerships have you forged with business and civic leaders, foundations and other important community organizations?
- What is your approach to college and career readiness? What programs have you implemented that have worked?
- What is your track record for improving graduation rates and the rates of college attendance? What kinds of partnerships did you forge with colleges and universities in your prior work and were they successful in improving student outcomes?
- What programs have you implemented for students with special needs and how did you measure success with these programs?
- What is your experience working with students and families of immigrant backgrounds, especially those who speak languages other than English at home?
- What is your experience with Early Childhood Education partnerships? What about community schools, vocational education and other models? How did you measure success?
- What kinds of programs have you implemented to improve the climate for school and student safety, improve student interpersonal relationships, reduce bullying, and support students who suffer violence in the community or at home? What evidence can you present to demonstrate success in these programs?

## **Conclusion**

The opportunity for the new Chancellor of DCPS is extraordinary. The challenge is also great.

As the nation's capital, the District of Columbia offers a visionary educational leader unparalleled opportunities to build great schools and to create a model urban school system. DC is a city with truly unique assets that provide rich learning resources for students and teachers; DC is also blessed with a deep reservoir of professional talent across many sectors united in eagerness to share expertise and resources to improve DCPS. The new Chancellor will clearly have the opportunity to continue making academic progress, perhaps even more rapidly, in a school system that has gained national recognition for educational reform that works. The community is united in its desire to welcome a new Chancellor who will be a strong educational leader, a visionary who can chart important new directions for the schools while making sure to build upon the progress already made. The new Chancellor should be a strong manager with an open and compelling style to engage each constituency effectively.



The opportunity to extend DC's reputation for innovation through closing the achievement gap is clear, but the achievement gap is also the greatest challenge facing the new Chancellor. No one individual, no matter how talented, can possibly solve such a multi-dimensional problem. Reflecting a constant theme throughout this process, the new Chancellor should be a good listener, an effective communicator and a persuasive leader who can capitalize on the great reservoir of support in the community to create collaborative change across schools, neighborhoods, communities and wards. The new Chancellor must be someone who truly loves children, who has a passion for educational justice and a deep devotion to the idea that education is the most effective pathway for individuals to gain genuine lifelong fulfillment and for society to realize the common good.

The RLC thanks Mayor Bowser for the opportunity to offer this memorandum as an advisory guide for her work in selecting the new DCPS Chancellor. The members of the RLC wish to thank Deputy Mayor Jennie Niles and her staff for excellent support in this process.

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