

# Campaign for Good Information on the DCPS School Reorganization Plan

This report is a collaborative product of:

- DC VOICE
- ACORN
- DC Congress of PTA's
- Fix Our Schools
- Parent Watch
- Parents United
- Save Our Schools

The sudden announcement of over 20 proposed public school closings would cause anxiety and frustration in any community. But the recent DCPS school reorganization announcement causes particular problems because of a lack of good information and what many view as insufficient community engagement in four areas:

1. the proposed school closings;
2. the intended new academic programs;
3. the concurrent school restructurings mandated by No Child Left Behind (NCLB); and
4. the budget implications for all of these actions, particularly in light of recent news that DCPS has a \$155 million deficit two months into the current fiscal year.

Much of the community is doubtful that so much change can be managed by the new administration in such a short span of time, and believes that more information must be included in any further "reorganization" discussions.

The Campaign for Good Information is sponsored by several local education advocacy organizations to provide information needed before decisions are made, and to ensure that the community is involved in that decision-making. Only through full community participation can we produce decisions that best benefit all public school children, families and neighborhoods in Washington, D.C. We hope that this guide will assist in informing the questions and decisions of the community.

## Reorganization

### Why schools are being closed

DCPS cites rapidly declining enrollment over the past ten years, resulting in too many buildings for too few children, as the impetus for the proposed school closings.

In 2005 the former DC Board of Education voted to close five schools, and the 2006 Master Facilities Plan proposed to close another 15 schools over 10 years. The new DCPS Administration has proposed closing more schools (22) in a shorter time (three years). Under the proposed plan, 16 elementary schools, four middle schools, one high school, and one special education school will be closed.

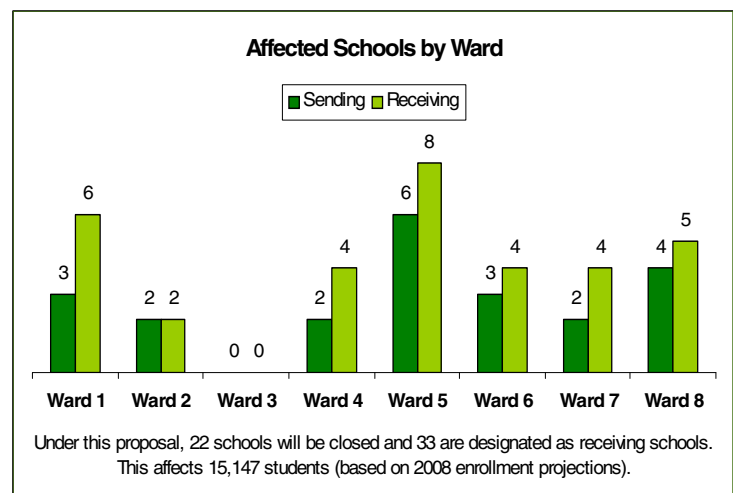
### Criteria for choosing which schools to close

DCPS suggests that the primary criteria for determining which schools should be on the proposed closing list were the size of school and the change in enrollment between 2002 and 2006. Elementary schools with fewer than 272 students and a 21% drop in enrollment were placed on the initial list, as were middle schools with fewer than 334 students and a loss of more than 29% drop in enrollment.

Secondary criteria DCPS cites for school closing fall into two categories: education planning issues and citywide planning issues. Education planning issues include: location and proximity to other schools (both charter and DCPS); safety of students traveling to and from school; enrollment projections based on birthrates, attendance patterns, and location of existing students; amenities at the school site (e.g. an auditorium) or near the schools site (e.g. a recreation center); and strength of education programming and appropriateness of space.

### Proposed process and timeline

DCPS has scheduled a series of community meetings between December 10<sup>th</sup> and January 11<sup>th</sup>. DCPS has scheduled a public hearing on January 17<sup>th</sup>. The Mayor is expected to submit a final proposal to the DC City Council in January 2008. The City Council has indicated that it will hold hearings on the proposal. A complete schedule of meetings and hearings is available at [www.dcvoice.org](http://www.dcvoice.org) and will be updated as more dates and times are announced.



## Questions the community should be asking about reorganization

- Explain how keeping so many buildings open drain resources.
- Why is DCPS proposing to make school closing decisions so quickly?
- What will happen to the buildings of the consolidated schools? For example, will charter schools move into closed buildings? Will they be sold to developers?
- What is the condition of the receiving buildings? What is the plan for renovating them?
- What will be the community's role in influencing the use of the closed buildings?
- Explain exactly how the schools were chosen for closure? Who was involved in the decision-making process?
- What other trends and factors are there to consider when selecting schools for consolidation?
- If these are just proposals, what will determine how schools come off of the list? A majority of community opposition? A school-generated alternative for efficient building use?
- Why are no schools being closed in Ward 3 even though several have less than 272 students?
- What happens to teachers and principals of closing schools?
- What does the law require from the Chancellor, the Mayor, and the City Council?
- How will the reorganization affect feeder patterns, school enrollment boundaries, and school assignments?
- What is being done to stop enrollment loss?
- Will closing schools lead to a greater drop in enrollment as parents choose to send their children to charter schools?
- Given the trend of declining enrollment, what size school system is envisioned? Will DCPS close additional schools if the enrollment declines more?

## New Programs

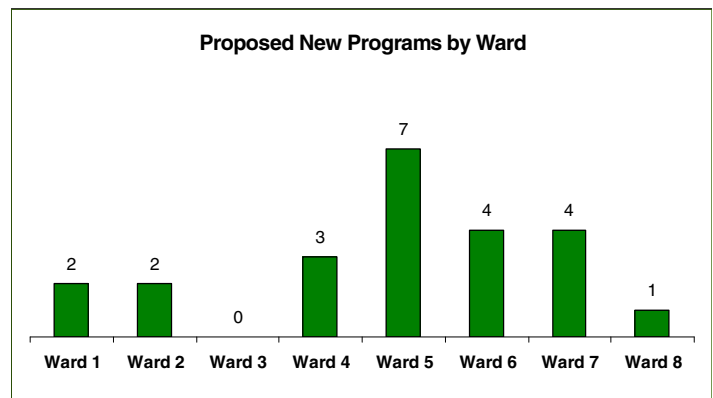
DCPS proposes that the resources saved by closing 22 schools will permit the development of a slate of new and expanded educational programs. The specialized programs DCPS wishes to establish or augment include early childhood development, gifted and talented middle schools, integrated special education, intensive fine arts, technology focused, and science and math focused programs.

DCPS also says that it wants to implement a comprehensive staffing model in every school. They state that the model will provide school based staffing support at an academic, wellness, enrichment, and administrative level.

### Proposed locations for new specialized programs

Although not all of the new programs have an identified school site for implementation, preliminary plans show programs going into 14 elementary schools, five middle schools, three high schools, and one special education school. Ten of the schools proposed as sites

for new programs are also scheduled to receive students from closing schools. Five of the schools proposed as sites for new programs are also scheduled to undergo restructuring under NCLB.



## Questions the community should be asking about new programs

- When will the comprehensive staffing model be made available to the public so that parents know what to expect?
- As a result of the closings, will every school have an art and music program for the 2008-2009 school year?
- How were the new specialized programs chosen for inclusion in DCPS?
- How do they interact with or differ from existing specialized schools and programs?
- How do they interact with or differ from the program objectives laid out in the MEP?
- Is there research-based evidence that these programs will be effective in increasing student achievement?
- Where are other urban school districts using these programs successfully?
- What results does the District expect to see as a result of each of these programs? When can we expect to see those results?
- What criteria were used to select schools for new programs?
- Were schools given an option or able to state a preference for housing a certain type of program?
- What is the timeline for the implementation of each program?
- What type of preparation is going on to ensure that the programs will be fully staffed and functional at the beginning of the proposed implementation year?
- How are each of these programs included in the DCPS budget? Will there be budget cuts in other areas to fund all of the new programs?
- Will feeder patterns be affected by the inclusion of programs at some schools and not others? If my child's school does not have a specialized program, or does not have the one I want them to have, will there be a way to transfer him/her to a school that does?
- How will the new programs be incorporated into schools that are also undergoing restructuring?



## Budget

The community has many questions pertaining to the budget implications of the school reorganization, ranging from how the anticipated savings from consolidations will be used to whether the Weighted Student Formula (WSF) funding for all schools will be affected.

### Our estimates of potential savings from school closings

Immediate savings can be generated from five sources:

- Utilities: \$5.7 million
- Maintenance: \$4.1 million
- The subsidy DCPS awards to small schools: \$2 million
- Consolidation of food service staff: \$1 million
- Consolidation of security staff and equipment: \$1 million
- TOTAL: \$14 million (MINUS continuing utilities, maintenance and security costs for vacant closed buildings).

Staffing is covered by the WSF funding that will follow students to their new school. Any WSF savings belong to that school to use for basic staff which it may not be able to afford now, such as an assistant principal, counselor, librarian, or art, music and physical education teachers.

#### Where will the savings come from?

Mayor's Estimated Savings:	\$23.7M
+ Estimated Savings (Utilities, Maintenance, Staff Consolidation, & Subsidies):	\$14M
= Unaccounted for Savings:	\$9.7M

Long term savings are not money to spend, but are cost avoidance for future spending for major repairs such as heating and air conditioning, bathrooms, and roofs (although building quality was not a criteria for this

year's reorganization). Additional spending, such as increases in energy costs and pay increases for food and security staff; and staffing including librarians, counseling and school administration (it is

not clear what is being proposed in these areas) may fall within this category.

### School consolidation costs

The Mayor is asking for \$3.6 million to cover school consolidations. Expenses will be incurred to move furniture and equipment, repair and furnish classrooms, implement staffing transfers and placements, train staff, and conduct outreach to parents.

Additional costs may result if students leave DCPS rather than transfer to a receiving school. The schools proposed for closure presently enroll 4,744 students, and are funded at \$9,036 per student in FY 2008 dollars. If 10% were to leave DCPS, the revenue reduction would be \$4.3 million; if 20% leave, it would be \$8.6 million.

### New program costs

DCPS is proposing new program costs in two areas. Comprehensive staffing plans at all schools would include new staffing for academic, wellness, enrichment and administrative and facility support. More information is needed on the level of funding required to provide school staffing that more effectively serves all students.

Also proposed are a series of new academic programs, including gifted and talented and science and math programs, high tech campuses and fine arts magnets, and early childhood and special education programs. Each one of them would incur significant costs for start-up costs as well as continuing implementation. For example, the Reggio Emilia program at DCPS' Peabody Elementary School costs an additional \$318 per pupil. Last year, Fairfax County spent an additional \$838 per pupil identified as gifted and talented.

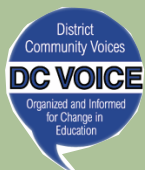
### Restructuring school costs

At this time it is hard to predict the costs that will be incurred by the schools "in need of restructuring," given that the decisions about these 27 schools have yet to be made public. However, each one of the five options available carry with them potential new expenditures, ranging from the human resources operations costs of replacing school staff to paying outside contractors or initiating new programs.

### Questions the community should be asking about the budget

- Please provide a breakdown of where the \$23.7 million anticipated consolidation savings will come from.
- How do you plan to spend the anticipated savings?
- Will local schools have their Weighted Student Formula funding reduced if they are a consolidated school?
- Will other schools in the system also have their Weighted Student Formula funding reduced next year?
- What is the timeline for implementing the comprehensive staffing plans in all schools?
- What is the timeline for initiating new programs; in what schools and when?
- How much money will be spent on parent and community outreach as part of the consolidation process, so that everyone has full information about school changes and opportunities?

FOR MORE INFORMATION ABOUT SCHOOL REORGANIZATION, NEW PROGRAMS, RESTRUCTURING, AND BUDGETING, PLEASE VISIT: [WWW.DCVOICE.ORG](http://WWW.DCVOICE.ORG)



Save Our Schools DC



FixOurSchools.net

Parent  
Watch

