



March 15, 2021

Dear Members of the D.C Public Charter School Board:

Greetings, I am Dr. Carlene Reid, Ward 8 Representative to the D.C. State Board of Education. I am testifying as an individual and do not represent the sentiments of the board as a whole. I am providing feedback and suggestions about the applicants who indicated an interest in establishing their schools in Ward 8. Over the summer, a team of mostly east of the river residents and I engaged in various forms of outreach to approximately 10,000 Ward 8 residents. A substantial majority of those residents frequently expressed a preference for sustaining and improving the schools we have. The outreach found that residents were not very fond of entertaining new schools in our ward. The information gathered included residents citing; school closures, over-saturation, restructuring, performance, and lack of physical space as areas of concern.

While we appreciate applicants' interest in expanding the educational offerings in Ward 8, as the elected representative to the D.C. State Board of Education, I feel that I must raise the general hesitancy of Ward 8 residents around establishing more schools, taking into account the issues that surfaced. Additionally, I have listed specific areas of concern or consideration based on a review of applications.

DC Wild Flower

In its application, DC Wild Flower indicates that it is a Montessori school focused on racial equity. The organization plans to have eight micro-sites across several wards. Its application specifically suggests a preference to establish in Wards 7 & 8. Lee Montessori is currently in Ward 8 with a similar mission of providing the Montessori experience with a focus on anti-racism and anti-bias (per the website). Lee Montessori serves the same grade ranges proposed by DC Wild Flower. Lastly, it should be noted that Lee Montessori had difficulty finding a location, and the likelihood is high for DC Wild Flower to have the same problem with establishing a permanent placement in Ward 8.

Other areas of concern in the application include:

- Page 11 cites charters are in high demand in D.C. but lists demographic information for several states that are very different from the city. (i.e., South Carolina and Connecticut) and the demographics of the community the charter seeks to serve.
- The applicant asserts it is rooted in anti-bias approaches but then points to a need to increase high-quality seats. Our goal is for all seats to be considered quality. This



assertion indicates some level of bias that is counter to the applicant's mission and warrants concern if the applicant can construct an anti-bias approach given its current assessment of the current school offerings in Wards of interest.

- The applicant points to data around disproportionality in discipline but did not demonstrate a plan or strategy to address discipline.
- The applicant cites waitlists for schools offering the Montessori curriculum throughout the District. The application's data reflects high numbers in pre-K, likely because these aren't guaranteed seats versus the older grades where the waitlists wane.
- Page 24 cites an interest in families attending charters as the rationale for opening. The application mentions the highest enrollment at charters is in Wards 5,7, 8. High enrollment numbers are probably due to a disproportionate number of charter options compared to other wards (i.e. Ward 3 which has no or very few charters). The applicant's assertion that there is more interest does not substantiate why its application is unique and should be approved by the PCSB.
- No specific information related to outcomes of community engagement in Ward 8 was indicated in the application. No plans for community engagement in Ward 8 were reflected in the application.
- No representation from Ward 8 in the founding design team.
- The applicant's only resource for training in special education was for staff to participate in the Friendship Public Charter School special education coordinator training, if available. No additional plans for special education training were provided.

Heru Academy

Heru Academy indicates it is a school established to specifically meet children's social emotional needs who have been unsuccessful or underserved in schools. The application appears to have a strong preference for ward 7, although wards 7 and 8 are listed as potential sites for the school. As indicated above in my response to the previous school's application, it is difficult to find permanent physical space in Ward 8.

Other areas of concern:

- In the needs assessment portion of the application, demographic information for comparison was solely for Ward 7 schools. No analytics for Ward 8 schools (p. 11-13)



- Indicates a need for the school due to the lack of early intervention services. The city has Strong Start for 0-3, which receives a “meets expectations” review from the federal government (the highest rating for early intervention programs). The city also has Early Stages to identify children with special needs. Additionally, it is a best practice for young children with special needs to be placed in more inclusive settings at early ages versus self-contained programming similar to what the applicant describes for their school.
- The school’s proposed curriculum includes approaches to learning that do not seem unique. Universal Design for Learning and STEAM are offerings at a variety of schools in Ward 8 for this grade range.
- The plans for addressing unique populations, specifically children with special needs should be further developed. Heru Academy references inclusive practices; however the classroom offerings appear to be specifically designed for children with behavioral needs. The program specifically mentions the following classifications: Disability Emotional Disturbance, Multiple Disabilities or Other Health Impairment; however plans for inclusion with typically developing same-aged peers are unclear.

At this time, these applicants do not appear to be providing plans that will enhance the education experience, or fill a new need for residents of Ward 8. Using the residents’ concerns as a measure, I have addressed my position on these potential applicants.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Dr. Carlene Reid
Ward 8 Representative to the D.C. State Board of Education