



March 15, 2021,

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

As the Ward 7 Representative to the DC State Board of Education, I join my Ward 8 colleague, State Board of Education Representative Reid, in providing feedback and sentiments reflective of my Ward 7 community and the larger East of the River community. I echo the sentiments she outlined and offer my response below.

As we work to respond to and recover from a global pandemic, which has had a disproportionately negative impact on Ward 7 schools and families we should be focusing all of our time, attention, and resources on supporting the existing schools in our community both traditional public and public charter in serving our children's needs. In a year where we are dealing with challenges we have not seen in our lifetime and hope to never see again, it is hard to fathom why we are soliciting charter applications.

Overwhelmingly, the residents of Ward 7 have expressed the need for high quality programming in our community that fits within a larger comprehensive plan. We need our education system to not simply provide options, but rather to ensure a high-quality pathway for all of our students from preschool through high school.

Of the five applications before the board, I detail my response to the two applications citing Ward 7 as a potential location: DC Wildflower and Heru Academy. I considered community priorities, in addition to any potential they have to be both additive and/or complimentary to our Ward 7 public education landscape.

#### DC Wildflower

The DC Wildflower Public Charter School (DCWPCS) proposes a Montessori program based in racial equity, specifically noting the River Terrace neighborhood of Ward 7 as a preferred location. P. 17

- The application incorrectly states: "Currently, there are 24 Montessori programs in DC, with only one Montessori school east of the Anacostia River in Ward 8 (Lee Montessori-East End)." In fact, JC Nalle Community School in the Marshall Heights community of Ward 7 has had a Montessori program for decades, and mirrors the proposed grades DCWPCS seeks to serve.P.20 Furthermore, upon review of Nalle's MySchool DC Lottery data, there is not a substantial waitlist for the school overview or the Montessori program.
- There has been no engagement of community organizations listed in this proposal nor potentially affected communities. The Ward 7 Education Council is specifically listed as planned engagement. The organization has received no correspondence from DCWPCS

requesting a formal opportunity to present to our membership. There has been no outreach to the River Terrace Community Organization, which represents the preferred neighborhood and has consistently been on record in supporting a traditional community school that serves the entirety of their neighborhood. By its own design, DCWPCS does not meet that need.

- River Terrace is geographically isolated, which has been the primary reason they have gone on record through several engagements with the city pushing for a community school including but not limited to: community meetings around the proposed closure of River Terrace, the school boundary and assignment process, and the siting of the River Terrace Education Campus which serves students with special needs citywide. It is bordered by national parkland, and the two major parallel thoroughfares of East Capitol Street and Benning Road, and Highway 295.
- In addition to the lack of feasible locations in broader Ward 7, River Terrace, is especially limited for space. The school is the only government owned space in the largely residential community, the remaining facilities house two churches, neither of which can host a school. There is also a fully inhabited strip mall.
- The proposed program does not support our existing feeder patterns, which are STEAM focused. The application notes, they “expect most students will graduate from Wildflower sites and pursue middle school programs. Students who want to pursue secondary Montessori learning opportunities may do so at The Sojourner Truth Montessori Public Charter School or Capitol Hill Montessori (secondary public schools in DC).” P 19

#### Heru Academy:

Heru Academy Public Charter School (HAPCS) has stated it is committed to providing an authentic academic and social-emotional program that enables students who have been unsuccessful and/or underserved in other school settings.

- The data provide by Heru Academy conflates services and placements. Therefore, it cannot support demand for this program.
- Students receiving special education services are not a homogenous grouping and require varying services, the settings, and the frequency of service to make sure they are fully supported. There is no indication from this application that the Heru Academy Team has the capacity to provide distinct or comprehensive services along the existing continuum of services provided by DCPS, which is their comparison.
- The application does not sufficiently detail any behavior and education support program, early learning support programs, or independence and learning support programs that would serve students. Further, it provides no detail around communication and education support programs, medical support programs or sensory support programs.

#### Considerations for the Larger Education Landscape



Arguments for demand and need cannot be considered in a vacuum. As the charter authorizer, I push for your considerations not to be pro-choice solely, but to be pro-planning.

In 2018 Master Facility Plan from the DME, the growth plans gathered from LEAs in the most recent Master Facilities Plan were greater than the number of projected school age children in DC by over 11,000 students. Those projections don't include:

- Any new schools the DCPCSB has authorized since 2019
- The existing charter LEAs that chose not to participate as they are not required by law
- A measurable and meaningful formula for growth plan calculation applied consistently across LEAs.

Despite, having multiple avenues to authorize and open schools, there still remains a disconnect between the schools and programs that exist and their ability to serve children and families. In our community the reality is across both traditional schools and charter schools; Ward 7 does not have enough middle school seats for the school age population currently in those grades, let alone our projected student population. There is only one vacant school facility remaining in Ward 7, Winston Elementary, which is 137,7000 sq feet. Additionally, no vacant district owned parcels remain. Neither Heru Academy nor DC Wildflower project enrollment growth to utilize the capacity of this building, nor would either program meet our students actual population need of a middle school.

As a Ward 7 community, we have consistently outlined the following priorities for school planning:

- Addressing the opening, closing, and siting of schools: Providing a citywide, cross-sector process that is meaningful, transparent, and responsible that governs the opening, closing and siting of schools. Every challenge we face as a city flows from this source.
- The continued investment in and improvement of our existing schools.
- Building toward a logical and predictable education path from preschool through high school. That requires investment in our feeder pathways.

At this time, I cannot recommend the approval of these applications as they do not meet our community priorities for school planning, nor are they additive or complimentary to the education landscape of Ward 7.

Respectfully Submitted,



Eboni-Rose Thompson,  
Ward 7 Representative to the D.C. State Board of Education