Hearing Summer 1998

GOOD EVENING, AND WELCOME TO THIS PUBLIC HEARING ON NEW DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS.

D.C. Public charter School

I AM JOSEPHINE BAKER, CHAIR OF THE BOARD, AND I AM JOINED BY:

OUR VICE-CHAIR TOM LOUGHLIN; AND BY OUR COLLEAGUES BERNIE WALKER AND BB OTERO. DR. HOPE HILL WILL JOIN US A BIT LATER THIS EVENING. I SHOULD POINT OUT THAT ALL OF US ARE RESIDENTS OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA.

I'D LIKE TO BEGIN BY TAKING A MOMENT TO CELEBRATE HOW FAR WE HAVE ALREADY COME.

THIS BOARD WAS CREATED A LITTLE OVER 17 MONTHS AGO. WE QUICKLY GOT DOWN TO BUSINESS! WITH THE HELP OF EXPERT CONSULTANTS, AND LEARNING FROM THE EXPERIENCE OF SIMILAR CHARTERING AGENCIES

AROUND THE COUNTRY, WE CREATED A RIGOROUS, TWO-STAGE APPLICATION PROCESS.

FROM THAT PROCESS EMERGED A DIVERSE AND EXCITING GROUP OF TEN NEW CHARTER SCHOOLS. SEVEN OF THOSE SCHOOLS WILL OPEN IN JUST A FEW WEEKS. ONE WILL OPEN NEXT JANUARY, AND TWO MORE IN SEPTEMBER, 1999.

NOW, A LOT OF PEOPLE MAY HAVE HEARD THE TERM "CHARTER SCHOOLS" BUT AREN'T QUITE SURE WHAT THEY ARE. HERE'S A THUMBNAIL SKETCH:

CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE A NEW FORM OF *PUBLIC* SCHOOL. THEY ARE PUBLICLY FINANCED, ACCOUNTABLE TO PUBLIC AUTHORITIES, BUT EXEMPT FROM MUCH OF THE "RED TAPE" OF THE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC EDUCATION SYSTEM.

THEY SELECT AND HIRE THEIR OWN PERSONNEL, DETERMINE BUDGET AND SCHOOL POLICIES, CONTRACT FOR GOODS AND SERVICES, AND LEASE OR PURCHASE FACILITIES.

LIKE TRADITIONAL PUBLIC SCHOOLS, CHARTER SCHOOLS CANNOT CHARGE TUITION, TEACH RELIGION, OR DISCRIMINATE IN ADMISSIONS.

BUT UNLIKE REGULAR PUBLIC SCHOOLS, THEY OPERATE UNDER "*CHARTERS,*" OR CONTRACTS, AWARDED BY BOARDS LIKE OURS. EACH CHARTER SPELLS OUT THE SCHOOL'S MISSION, AND PROVIDES DETAILED PLANS FOR IMPLEMENTING IT.

ANY SCHOOL CHARTERED BY *THIS* BOARD MUST ALSO CREATE A <u>COMPREHENSIVE ACCOUNTABILITY PLAN</u>, GIVING BENCHMARKS BY WHICH THE BOARD AND THE COMMUNITY CAN JUDGE HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS DOING.

BEFORE AWARDING A CHARTER, WE SUBJECT EVERY APPLICATION TO STRINGENT REVIEW.

THE CENTRAL ISSUE IS <u>STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT</u>:

- **WHAT WILL THE APPLICANTS DO TO ASSURE THAT THEIR STUDENTS LEARN AT WORLD-CLASS LEVELS?**
- **IS THE CURRICULUM STRONG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT THE SCHOOL'S MISSION?**
- **IS THERE A PLAN FOR ATTRACTING HIGH-QUALITY TEACHERS AND PROVIDING THEM WITH ONGOING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?**
- **HOW WILL PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY BE ENLISTED TO IMPROVE THE ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF STUDENTS?**

<u>BUT A CHARTER SCHOOL REQUIRES MANY OTHER KINDS OF EXPERTISE AS WELL.</u> THAT'S WHY WE

HAVE ENLISTED SOME OF WASHINGTON'S LEADING BUSINESS EXECUTIVES, PROVIDED THROUGH THE DC COMMITTEE ON PUBLIC EDUCATION, AS WELL AS A TEAM FROM THE SERVICE CORPS OF RETIRED EXECUTIVES, TO EXAMINE THE QUALITY OF BUSINESS AND FINANCIAL PLANS IN EACH APPLICATION.

AND BECAUSE WE BELIEVE THAT CHARTER SCHOOLS ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS, AND THAT THEY MUST AUTHENTICALLY SERVE THIS COMMUNITY, WE REQUIRE EVIDENCE THAT EVERY SCHOOL'S BOARD OF TRUSTEES HAS THE DIVERSITY, THE UNDERSTANDING OF OUR COMMUNITY, AND THE DEPTH OF PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE REQUIRED TO MANAGE SUCH AN IMPORTANT ENTERPRISE.

TONIGHT'S HEARING IS A KEY COMPONENT IN THE PROCESS OF CREATING NEW PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS. EACH APPLICATION HAS UNDERGONE TECHNICAL REVIEWS. EACH TEAM HAS BEEN INTERVIEWED BY A PANEL OF EXPERTS. NOW, THE

APPLICANTS HAVE A CHANCE TO PRESENT THEIR VISION TO THE BOARD ITSELF.

AND MOST IMPORTANT: TONIGHT, CITIZENS OF OUR CITY HAVE AN OPPORTUNITY TO ASK QUESTIONS, EXPRESS THEIR SUPPORT, OR VOICE THEIR CONCERNS ABOUT THE 13 PROPOSED PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS.

IN THE WEEKS TO COME, THE BOARD WILL FOLLOW UP ON THE QUESTIONS YOU ASK AT THIS HEARING. WE WILL ASK TOUGH QUESTIONS OF OUR OWN, AND WE WILL DELIBERATE ABOUT THE MERITS OF EACH PROPOSAL.

THEN IN SEPTEMBER WE WILL ANNOUNCE FIRST-STAGE DECISIONS. APPLICATIONS WILL EITHER BE APPROVED, DENIED, OR GRANTED PROVISIONAL APPROVAL – IN WHICH CASE APPLICANTS WILL BE INVITED TO REVISE THEIR PROPOSALS TO ADDRESS ISSUES RAISED BY THE BOARD.

THE SECOND, AND FINAL STAGE OF DECISIONS ON NEW CHARTERS WILL BE ANNOUNCED IN EARLY 1999.

SO, ON BEHALF OF THE DC PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL BOARD, I WELCOME APPLICANTS, PARENTS, EDUCATORS, CIVIC LEADERS, AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY WHO ARE TAKING PART IN THIS HEARING.

AND I ALSO WANT TO WELCOME REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEDIA – WHO WILL HELP US CONVEY THE THREEFOLD MESSAGE OF PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOLS: ACHIEVEMENT, AUTONOMY, AND ACCOUNTABILITY.

NOW I'D LIKE TO INTRODUCE OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NELSON SMITH, WHO WILL EXPLAIN THE FORMAT FOR OUR DISCUSSION THIS EVENING.