

Early conflict with the BOE

To: Josephine Baker, Chair

From: Tom Loughlin *TL*

I understand you're assembling board members' comments regarding General Becton's letter to the Washington Post published on May 17. Frankly, I thought his remarks betray the same unwillingness or inability to obtain and understand essential facts that has led to his current position - former schools superintendent.

General Becton's call to arms is misdirected. He invokes a grassroots effort to contain the charter schools movement, seemingly ignorant of the fact that this movement is, in itself, a grassroots effort to address the shortcomings of status quo public education - a system that the General seems to be trying to shield. Most surprising, the General bemoans a perceived lack of accountability of the charter schools - this coming from the person whose oversight of the public school system resulted in a recent "surprise" budget overrun of \$60 million due to either an unwillingness or inability to identify and eliminate unnecessary positions in the bureaucracy.

Now that I've gotten that out of my system—

- The city's two chartering authorities - the Public Charter School Board, established by Congress and appointed by the Mayor, and the elected Board of Education - do in fact operate independent of one another and of the Board of Trustees. This does not mean that they have no accountability; simply that they are not accountable to the Board of Trustees. Further, I am not aware of our Board engaging in any direct or even remotely indirect competition with the elected School Board.
- Charter schools are *public* schools that operate in an autonomous manner, relatively free of the shackles and limitations frequently imposed by centralized administrative bureaucracies. Further, charter schools in the District must compete to obtain their charter. The Public Charter School Board's most recent competition resulted in only one third of the applicants receiving a charter. This application and review process was highly structured and rigorous - it is not the free-for-all the General implies.
- The budget threat allegedly posed by funding charter schools is overstated. I believe that total charter school funding for school year 1998-99 is expected to be \$25 million - a fraction of the public schools budget; indeed, a fraction of the current year's *increase* in the budget, or of the current year administrative cost overrun over which General Becton presided.
- We need to rebut the assertion that charter schools' per pupil funding is rich relative to the school system. Charter schools face significant costs (such as facilities rental costs that traditional public schools do not incur, and retirement system payments that

I believe are not factored into the per pupil formula) that make their challenge all the more daunting.

- The Public Charter School Board does not solicit existing public schools, or for that matter, any individuals or institutions, for applications. Ballou Senior High School's Math, Science and Technology Academy did submit an application and receive charter status from our Board. This does not, as General Becton implies, pose the death knell of one of the city's centers for academic excellence; rather, it invigorates the institution and will open it up to all students of the District.
- Most egregious is the General's statement that the charter schools will not be accountable to or monitored by anyone. No accountability to ensure standards? All schools chartered by the Public Charter School Board are required to achieve accreditation- I think it's within three years from their inception; further, all such schools will be subject to *at least* the minimum standards established for the public schools, including the Stanford 9 testing regimen. We are developing an accountability and monitoring program that I believe has the potential to serve as a national, best-practice standard for charter schools.
- We need to explore General Becton's assertion that lower Stanford 9 scores in the public school system will trigger a congressional takeover. Will the test score results submitted to Congress be inclusive or exclusive of charter school results? If inclusive, charter schools may prove instrumental in *preventing* such a takeover.
- I was astounded by the General's "masters in Congress" reference - this seems to me to be a thinly veiled, divisive remark with racial overtones.
- 75% of a charter school's funding is to be received by the school not later than October 15 of each year. This funding formula was established by Congress. I think the General's point is well taken here - there should be a better mechanism for controlling the funds after the initial pupil census.
- General Becton's "entrepreneur" comments are an insult to the many dedicated professionals that are making significant efforts to raise the bar for students in the District. We should publicize the list of schools the Public Charter School Board has chartered, with a description of how they will serve important needs that are not currently being met. The two schools allying with entrepreneurial entities include Friendship House, one of the nation's most prominent community service organizations with a track record of many years' service to the residents of the District of Columbia; and Robert Louis Johnson Academy, which received its charter on the basis of strong community support in an underserved neighborhood in Anacostia. These will be challenging educational environments - not exactly a recipe for getting rich.

Please call me to discuss.

Contrary to Becton's

General Becton's call to arms is misdirected. He invokes a grassroots effort to contain the charter school movement that is, in itself, a grassroots effort to address the shortcomings of a status quo public education system.

Charter schools *are public schools* that operate in an autonomous manner, relatively free of the constraints frequently imposed by centralized administrative bureaucracy. The city's two chartering authorities – the Public Charter School Board, established by Congress and appointed by the Mayor, and the elected Board of Education - do in fact operate independent of one another and of the Board of Trustees. This does not mean that they have no accountability; simply that they are not accountable to the Board of Trustees.

accountability

Further, while charter school applicants must compete for charters, there is no instance where our board has competed with the elected school board either directly or indirectly. In fact, all materials developed by our board have been shared with appropriate parties to the educational process prior to use.

The Public Charter School Board does not solicit existing public schools or any individuals or institutions for applications. Ballou Senior High School's Math, Science and Technology Academy did submit an application and receive charter status from our board. This does not pose the death knell for one of the city's centers for academic excellence; rather, it invigorates the institution and will open it up to all students of the city.

Most egregious is the statement that charter schools lack accountability and will not be monitored. Our rigorous review process crafts a charter that clearly spells out requirements that must be fulfilled and we are developing detailed accountability plans with each approved school. Furthermore, to correct a misconception, each charter school by law is required to receive proper accreditation; a status that most public schools have not achieved.

Considerable attention has been given the Marcus Garvey Public Charter School and the extended amount of time leading to its closing. While the DC Public Charter School Board played no role in the various policy decisions, we are inclined to note that had Garvey been a traditional public school, it would not have been closed at all.

750 words

Response to Julius W. Becton, Jr.

The District of Columbia Public Charter School Board has found inaccuracy and false assumptions in "Charter Schools Parade," Close to Home, The Washington Pose, Sunday, May 17. General Becton's statement that "...no one is taking responsibility for ensuring certification, validation, compliance with accreditation requirement, etc. is inaccurate. The law requires that all schools that are approved for charters give an assurance that proposed school will seek, obtain and maintain accreditation from at least one of the following: (sec. 2202(16, A thru H).

This board's rigorous review process has set the stage for the crafting of a charter that clearly spells out requirements that must be fulfilled and is developing detailed accountability plans with each approved school.

The reference to "schools... are being pursued", casts accusations on the DC Charter Public Charter School Board. This board does not solicit potential applicants, but as provided by law, makes its application guidelines available to the public.

While there was an extended delay in the closing of Marcus Garvey Charter School, if Garvey had been a traditional public school that failed, it would not have been closed at all.

The District of Columbia Charter School Board believes that the schools we charter will support the improvement of education for children in the District of Columbia.