

D - FYI, the missing talking points. - W.

Talking Points

Paul

Did DCPS know about the conversion?

DCPS was well informed. Mr. Chairman, I would like to enter into the record a collection of 9 press clippings that refer to the Paul conversion between 1997 and 1999, all prior to our approval of the application last September. DCPS had three consecutive opportunities to testify in public hearings - -and could simply have picked up a phone or written a letter about their concerns. They only went into action after we approved the application in September.

DCPS has not followed its own policies. I would like to enter into the record two actions of the emergency trustees, both subsequently ratified by the control board:

- The first is the DCPS policy on property dispositions to charter schools, approved in October 1997 and still in effect, which says that charter schools can remain in their buildings providing this is congruent with long-range DCPS academic and facilities plans, and providing that the school gives neighborhood children a preference in admissions -- which Paul will do.
- The second is a resolution from August, 1998, circulated by Mrs. Ackerman, which says that schools proposing to convert will be assessed for use as special education or alternative education. We are not aware that any such assessment was done, and neither type of program was mentioned when DCPS proposed to put its own program in the building.

Should Congress Clarify Its Intent on Whether Conversions Keep Building?

We do think this should be clarified. Unless a neighborhood school can continue serving its neighborhood, it's not really a "conversion," -- and there's no point in collecting hundreds of signatures from parents.

It's interesting that the sponsor of the DC Council's earlier charter measure has said that this was the clear intent of the local legislation. We're hoping the Council will provide this clarification on its own -- but we do believe it is an important point.

Concerning the Inspector General investigation:

The issues being investigated by the Inspector General were raised by the teachers union. They first approached us, and our Board did not find credible evidence to support their charges. As the Authority overseeing this conversion, we asked those making the allegations to bring us any credible evidence they had. None was forthcoming. Now they have brought the IG into the picture.

We have two main concerns at this point:

- First, the terms of this investigation must be clear. If a teacher signs a petition then changes her mind, that is not evidence of coercion.
- Second, the investigation should be thorough but prompt. Planning for the charter school has been distracted and held up too long by the series of challenges mentioned in my testimony.

BUDGET: FY2000

What about the "significant residency verification problems?"

It's true that some schools were not where they should be when the October count was done. But by November, there was strong improvement:

- Charter schools wound up with about 6 percent of students lacking any residency verification, compared to 9 percent of DCPS students with no proof.
- Those lacking two proofs -- which was the standard used to decide on funding -- were 7 percent in charter schools and 8 percent in DCPS.

So there were some problems on both sides -- and we certainly appreciated having a second opportunity to demonstrate residency.

Our concern is twofold:

- First, there were numerous problems in the audit itself. More than 150 students at Edison-Friendship were not counted as receiving special education services. At other schools, "membership" was arbitrarily reduced, despite proof that was in the files.

- Second, decisions were only made after the fact as to how to apply these results would be used. There is no provision in the law for holding up fall funding on the basis of an enrollment audit.

That said, we applaud Mrs. Newman's statement that the full 75 percent will be awarded according to law, and holding schools harmless for the results of this fall's enrollment audit.

How much were schools shortchanged this fall?

We estimate that just among the schools chartered by our Board, they received \$1.9 million less than they requested based on fall enrollment. We will provide the committee with a detailed table of this shortfall.

Where are we now?

With the exception of one school that has received additional funding (Maya Angelou, which has received the \$114,000 due for its residential students), none of our other schools has received additional funding.

As we understand it, the Control Board is still trying to decide whether and how to make up the shortfall.

BUDGET :FY2001

Should Congress Approve Using Reserve Funds?

Only as a last resort. The District has to get into the habit of appropriating enough funds for charter schools in the regular operating budget. If we use the reserve fund, that means next year's baseline budget will still only reflect the inadequate \$50.6 million being put forward this year. We can't go through this same exercise year after year when the law clearly provides for funding charter schools according to the per-pupil formula.

FACILITIES

Our main issue is predictability. DCPS has recently been helpful with two of our schools, SEED and Edison-Friendship, in their efforts to acquire buildings. But this should be the rule rather than the exception.

Were we consulted in the development of the new disposition process?

We provided general comments supporting the idea of moving that process out of DCPS -- but we were not consulted regarding the advisability of the specific points Mrs. Newman mentioned. So as I said, we look forward to seeing the draft plan.

Concerning Franklin:

Emphasize again our concern for following established rules, and not going through a process and then finding that the rules have changed.

Also -- if AppleTree comes up, emphasize that this is WMST's deal, not theirs. We have been emphatic with the WMAT Board, and with Appletree, that this Board will not accept any kind of partnership agreement that does not wind up with the school owning the building -- even if AppleTree arranges financing up-front.