



Andy Shallal for Mayor

White Paper on Education

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WHAT WORKS? ORGANIZING SCHOOLS FOR IMPROVEMENT

The reforms of the past seven years have focused on the wrong things. They've divided us. More support and less blame will unite our parents, teachers, administrators, and students — and improve our schools.

INTRODUCTION

Education reform in Washington, D.C., stands at a crossroads. Reform strategies put into place in 2007 have borne surprisingly little fruit. The achievement gaps between wealthier and lower income segments of the city continue to widen.

Our neediest students are just not progressing. The inequity in student success across the eight wards is running at an all-time-high. At the current rate of improvement, our city's African American students would need 132 more years to reach today's reading proficiency levels of white students in the District of Columbia.

Education reform is just not working in Washington.

We've spent seven years attacking our teachers and replacing our principals, closing schools and disrupting neighborhoods. We have tragically little improvement to show for it.

Andy Shallal has spent his life building institutions that bring people together. He would replace D.C.'s failed high-stakes testing, intimidation and punishment education strategy with what works: respect, support and collaboration. He's ready to engage the public and the educator workforce to actually improve our schools.

Seven years of experimentation with ill-conceived reform has alienated far too many parents and educators. It's time to:

1. **Stop the fixation with the standardized test metric.** Develop instead a broader set of goals focused on the whole child, with a rich and varied curriculum. Invest in what we know works – early childhood education and supports, smaller class sizes with individualized attention, tutoring and summer enrichment for those behind grade level, deep curriculum development, and rigorous training and strong support for teachers at every grade level and in every subject discipline.



2. **Stop the war on teachers and start helping teachers improve the craft of teaching.**

Continue the DCPS focus on teacher evaluation, but work with the WTU to shift the emphasis away from ranking and rating every teacher with drive-by judgments, numeric scores, and bonuses for a few and toward real support for improving the professional practice of our teachers, accomplished and struggling alike.

3. **Stop closing neighborhood schools and labeling high poverty schools as failures.**

Instead, help every school community understand the components that research shows lead to meaningful school improvement. Those components include:

- A skilled and experienced school leader committed to collaboration.
- Peer professional-led instructional improvement.
- A rich curriculum that goes beyond a narrow-minded focus on only reading and math.
- A positive, engaging, and welcoming school climate.
- Parent and community engagement with comprehensive supports to tackle external barriers so all children come to school ready to learn.

This *White Paper on Education* details the steps that Andy Shallal believes are needed to begin a long-term trajectory of improvement.

Our current mayor and other players on our education scene have claimed that improved student scores on the 2013 National Assessment of Educational Progress prove that the reforms of recent years are working. But this claim doesn't at all reflect the facts on the ground: Even with record-sized budgets and more direct control by the mayor and chancellor than ever before, even with unrelenting pressure to succeed on standardized tests and a get-tough approach to firing teachers and closing schools, poor black, low-income students in DC continue to score lower than their counterparts in other cities.

The 2013 NAEP scores reflect, in part, the changing demographics of D.C. schools, toward a population of wealthier and whiter students. Beyond that, these scores reveal an economic achievement gap seriously widening.

Our last two mayors, their chancellors, and the DC Council could have — and should have — taken responsibility for developing strategies for school improvement, instructional improvement, and community engagement. Instead, they have taken a “cut and run” approach.

While some charter schools are excellent, our city is outsourcing education to private entities, increasingly to charter chains. The system of neighborhood school-feeder patterns is crumbling everywhere but Ward 3. Neighborhood schools have closed in alarming numbers, and parents,



students, and teachers see churn as the order of the day, with little improvement to show for the disruption and instability.

Test scores have been the all-consuming priority. This single-minded focus distorts our entire educational enterprise. It harmfully pressures our educators to treat improving standardized test score proficiency rates as the only currency that preserves and advances their careers.

Promising initiatives, in this environment, have become afterthoughts. An exciting “community schools” initiative with wrap-around services? Limited by the Council to a small pilot, not a real investment. A serious move to deepen DC’s commitment to pre-kindergarten, focus on quality and wrap in early childhood for three year olds and younger? Not the budget priority it needs to be. An attempt to integrate nearby Montgomery County’s approach to mentoring and teacher evaluation that provides intensive support for new and struggling teachers? Never even considered.

We need to start prioritizing, says Andy Shallal, the supports that teachers and students need to really turn things around. We’ve emphasized consequences when what we need to emphasize is support. Blame, punishment, and intimidation — our current approaches — only make sense to those who believe that teachers, parents, and students just aren’t working hard enough.

Mayoral control hasn’t brought us “efficiency.” Mayoral control has brought us fewer public policy-making hearings and less transparency in the decision-making process. The public is cut out.

Our educational civic culture is souring. Education in our city is becoming a commodity. Individual parents shop around for schools as competing consumers. That’s not the American way. We invented *public* education, the notion that democratic societies provide equal, free, and universal public education as a basic right. Andy Shallal aims to re-instill a sense of civic participation — around improving our neighborhood schools — into every neighborhood.

Real urban education reform does not come easy, not when outside-school factors — childhood poverty, for instance — determine at least two thirds of what impacts student achievement. Andy understands all this. Our last two chancellors and mayors have not. In their rush to reform, they have pursued an approach that has excluded and alienated many educators and parents, exactly the stakeholders who we need to make school improvement happen.

Andy Shallal aims to let them back in.



PART ONE: CHANGING WHAT DOESN'T WORK

The False Assumptions

The Fenty, Gray, and education chair Catania approach goes something like this: Teachers and school administrators know what to do to dramatically improve student learning, they just don't want to work that hard. Poor standardized test results need to trigger dramatic rewards and punishments. Threats and punishment will induce teachers and principals to make the changes needed. If they don't, micro-managing their every behavior and firing "bad" educators and closing schools will.

Wrong diagnosis. Wrong prescription. In real life, parents desperately want their children to be engaged in school and do well. Teachers want to succeed and make a difference in student lives. But DC Public schools and individual students and teachers face enormous challenges. Arbitrary test-score expectations, sanctions, threats, and intimidation get in the way of meeting these challenges — and demoralize those we should be supporting. Our current school leadership is driving away many of our best teachers, failing to educate many students, and driving families out of the system.

Andy Shallal will ensure that reform efforts focus — collaboratively — on the **Five Factors of Success**, implemented in combination with each other, that research has identified as essential to educational improvement in high-need schools.

1. **Leadership.** Skilled and experienced leadership, focused on instruction, committed to an inclusive, facilitative, collaborative leadership style, and capable of creating buy-in among teachers, parents, and students and a sense that "together we can make this a better school."
2. **Instructional Improvement.** Professional development and peer collaboration, individualized mentoring by accomplished teachers for beginning teachers, and an encouraging approach to the professional habit of teachers helping each other ensure all students the support they need.
3. **Curriculum and Instructional Guidance.** A rich and well-rounded curriculum relevant to student culture and experience that includes art, music, history, science, and physical fitness, all aligned within grades and between grades, with training and support so teachers have confidence in what they are teaching and are moving students toward higher order thinking, problem solving, and communications skills.
4. **School Learning Climate.** Student-centered beliefs, values, and behaviors, norms that ensure order and safety and high expectations and personal support for all students. Collaborative peer interactions among the teaching staff and between teachers and administrators, as well as a welcoming, friendly, and engaging atmosphere toward parents and families.
5. **Parent, School, Community Ties.** Direct wrap-around social services to schools and students aimed at meeting health needs and overcoming other non-academic obstacles to learning.



Support that helps parents encourage good study habits and otherwise assist student learning. Parent and community volunteerism in schools and parent involvement in school decision making.

[Note: These criteria reflect the Consortium for Chicago School Research's detailed study *Organizing Schools for Improvement* and Karen Chenoweth's book on schools that break the mold, *It's Being Done*, among other sources.]

These tried-and-true cornerstones for educational progress have not been high on the radar screen of DC school reform the past seven years. In fact, the test-and-punish approach and the IMPACT evaluation system have pitted teachers against each other and encouraged principals to fire and "excess" staff, creating enormous instability and unnecessary churn. It's time to focus on what we know works.

The Harm to Students

The strategies devised by the chancellors appointed by Mayors Fenty and Gray have worsened declining DCPS enrollment in secondary schools and community instability around neighborhood schools. The narrow focus on pressuring principals and teachers to raise standardized test scores has made DCPS schools *less* attractive. Narrowing subject matter to the material tested and forcing teachers to spend large amounts of time teaching to the test have cheated — and discouraged — students, parents, and teachers.

Defenders of the "reform" status quo point to a small improvement in DC's average scores on the National Assessment for Educational Progress from 2011 to 2013 as proof that they're moving on the right track. DC's NAEP improvement last year did improve more than any other state. But after more than six years of Fenty and Gray, only 10 to 12 percent of African American students attain "Proficient" in reading on NAEP, and only 12 to 15 percent have hit "Proficient" in math. The 2013 NAEP figures for Latino students: 28 percent "Proficient" in reading and 25 percent "Proficient" in math.

Even worse, at least 58 percent of black students still score "Below Basic" in reading, with 52 percent "Below basic" in math, i.e., without even partial academic competence at their grade level. For Hispanics, we have seen no improvement in the percent "Below Basic" in reading: 44 percent in 2007 and still 44 percent in 2013.

Add in changing demographics into this mix, and the picture becomes even more distressing. The income gap has seriously widened under the current educational "reform" regime. From 2007 to 2013, the gap between the percent of low income DCPS students "Proficient" in math and our non-low income students more than tripled in math and doubled in reading.

Over the last decade, the white share of the District's population has grown from 30 to 38 percent, and their number enrolled in DCPS has risen significantly. Median household income in the city has risen 23.3 percent. These two demographic shifts in and of themselves contribute to a rise in overall average



scores. For this reason a focus on what has happened to the scores of low-income students, and students of color, becomes all the more important. The average score gains for non-low-income students have greatly exceeded those for low-income students in both reading and math. The gains for whites exceeded those for blacks in reading.

Further confusing the data and probably inflating the scores for low income kids: A new DCPS formula now counts non-poor kids in schools with more than 40 percent poverty rates as “poor” when disaggregating NAEP scores, a move that inflates the 2013 scores of students reported as low-income.

Those who celebrate the most recent NAEP scores seem to completely disregard all these behind-the-curtain statistical realities. The basic truth they ignore: A small percentage of DCPS black and low-income students have reached a “Proficient” level. A huge percentage remain “Below Basic.” DCPS still rates in the lowest category of large cities nationwide.

During the Fenty/Gray period, from 2007 through 2013, the percent of low-income students and of black students who have become “Proficient” has only increased at the rate of about $\frac{1}{2}$ of 1 percent per year in reading and about 1 percent per year in math. If the current DCPS strategy continues at this rate, we’ll have to wait at least 132 years — until 2146 — to bring low-income and black student reading “proficiency” to 78 percent, where the white student population rate stands now, and until at least 2080 to bring math “proficiency” to 81 percent, the current white student rate.

The current “reform” approach has just not led to real and sustained progress. For our children’s sake, we must change course.

The Failure to Pursue Good Ideas

Some good ideas for improving education in District schools have already appeared. But under the current city administration and school leadership, these good ideas have been consistently shortchanged. DCPS has kept these ideas in the shadows and implemented them as small pilots, typically carried out by private philanthropic organizations. These ideas deserved better. They deserved to be debated by the community and developed collaboratively with teachers, principals, and their representative organizations and other stakeholders.

This shortchanging has appeared on a wide variety of good ideas, from teacher home visits and parent engagement to after-school activities. Andy Shallal will ensure that the chancellor engages stakeholders at the front end of ideas like these and then take these initiatives system-wide. To be more specific:



Early Childhood Education. The DC school system has for decades been a national leader in providing full-time early childhood education – pre-K for 4 year olds – across all elementary schools. Attention to the years before kindergarten, research shows, pays real dividends in student achievement. A system of comprehensive supports could ensure that all children arrive at school ready to learn, so teachers can teach effectively. But DC’s early childhood pre-school programs need better attention to quality and curriculum, and need to be expanded to serve more 3 year olds. Universal quality early childhood programs can be the hook to promote a continuous feeder pattern in every neighborhood, beginning with pre-school and continuing through viable neighborhood elementary, middle, and high schools.

Facility Modernization. DC government has finally funded the long overdue rehabilitation of school buildings. Newly modernized school buildings can become an opportunity to build academic programs that will attract neighborhood families to schools like Dunbar, Roosevelt, and Cardozo, but only if the academic programs in those schools can attract and meet the needs of a broad array of students. And low-income neighborhoods have not seen their share of modernized buildings.

Data Transparency and Analysis. The Office of the State Superintendent of Education has begun maintaining a longitudinal student database, a real boon to effective planning and policy making that can take us well beyond the current annual snapshot approach that has so miscalculated student improvement in the past. Teachers need timely access to data. Only then can data become useful as a diagnostic tool and not just an after-the-fact judgment. DCPS publishes almost no basic data on its website or otherwise, and its budget is impossibly opaque.

Special Education and Social Services. DCPS has expanded social worker and psychologist services to non-special education students and implemented “early stages” diagnostic screening for early identification of special education needs. DCPS has cut special ed private placement costs. More effort to target special education resources is the key to getting that huge cost down.

After School Programs. DCPS has expanded after-school enrichment programs, and this effort needs to be continued, including sports. Until recently these programs mainly sought to raise DC CAS proficiency rates. They need now to be greatly expanded and better used to engage students in enriched programs.

School Profiles. The school profiles that appear on the DCPS website represent a welcome development. These profiles could be considerably more helpful if they trumpeted a richer set of school priorities — the arts, higher-order thinking, creative student work, and innovative staff offerings. The profiles also present an opportunity to promote the flavor and uniqueness of each school community.



Charters and Privatization

Charter schools are here to stay and need to be counted as part of the solution to attracting families across the city. But “choice” must not be the chief goal. Parents don’t fundamentally want choices. They much prefer quality schools within walking distance from where they live. Helter-skelter, high-volume charter school expansion leaves neighborhood schools less viable.

No charter school should be located within close proximity of a neighborhood school, in any sort of way that has charters and neighborhood schools competing directly for students. We need a moratorium on closing neighborhood schools until a city-wide plan has been developed, with the full participation of community and city-wide advocacy organizations, that covers feeder patterns and school locations.

Charter schools also need to be accountable to the public and must be overseen by elected public bodies. The meetings of charter school governing boards need to be subject to the open public meetings law. The public has a right to know how all our tax dollars are getting spent. Much of the data collected about DCPS schools also needs to be collected for charter schools. We need to know much more than we do about charter school spending, teacher transfer rates and experience levels, and staff and executive salaries. We need to build in this greater public oversight before we find ourselves with still another charter scandal like the profiteering at the Options Public Charter school.

No one on the DC Council and neither of the past two mayors has declared and demonstrated their support for preserving a system of neighborhood schools. No one has confronted the threat to public education we currently face. The drip-drip of increasing numbers of charter schools, located wherever charter managers can find buildings, is disrupting our system of neighborhood schools.

During last year’s school closings, no school leaders even proposed co-locating charters in neighborhood schools as a way of keeping under-enrolled DCPS schools open and a valuable stock of building real estate in the public domain.

We need a mayor who will help us define what we want public education to look like in 10 or 20 years — and then connect that vision to each and every decision to open and close a school. We need a plan for the ultimate configuration of the charter and DCPS sectors into a single educational architecture. We don’t need 60 totally separate and independent school districts.

Under our current system of mayoral control, the mayor has the responsibility for this configuration planning. He has not met it.



PART TWO: WHAT ANDY SHALLAL WILL DO AS MAYOR

1. Andy promises a chancellor who believes in respect, support, and collaboration.

The most important task of the mayor will be determining the characteristics of and selecting the next chancellor. Andy's chancellor will be an educator who believes in building a system based on respect, support, and collaboration, not test and punish. The chancellor and principals we hire need to be recruited from the ranks of experienced educators. They need to be professionals who have had success running and improving schools. Andy will task the next chancellor and each school principal with creating in each school a strong learning community.

Andy will:

- ✓ end the practice of keeping principals on one-year contracts, a move that guarantees that those with experience and other options will either never apply or never stay as leaders in DCPS schools. In an Andy Shallal administration, our schools will systematically support all our principals with training and more autonomy.

2. Andy promises DCPS will support, hire, and train a professional corps of educators.

Andy will:

- ✓ Ensure the chancellor recruits new teachers from teacher colleges that participate in Teacher Residency programs providing at least one year of clinical training to those we bring in. Our current revolving door of young people fresh out of college who have no intention of staying and becoming career teachers does not benefit students or inspire commitment to our schools.
- ✓ Ensure the chancellor analyzes the reasons for teacher turnover by interviewing teachers who depart and develops a plan to provide the support that will help good teachers have long and successful DCPS careers.



3. Andy promises a new and more effective approach to low student achievement.

Andy will:

- ✓ Require that we actually measure school success and not just standardized test results. We can develop a richer set of indicators that will lead to school improvement. These indicators might include: student suspension/discipline/attendance rates, parent and secondary student satisfaction surveys, amount of teacher time spent on peer collaboration and mentoring, amount of principal time spent on teacher observations and evaluation, teacher turnover rates and certification levels by school, math and project portfolios, teacher analyses of student test scores, and observations by inspectors trained to focus on the hallmarks of school and teacher quality.
- ✓ Ensure we give every school an analysis on the wrap-around services needed to address non-academic obstacles to learning. We must then build on these analyses by investing in models that systematically address the need for wrap-around services. The “community school” or “promise neighborhood” models like the Harlem Children’s Zone have proved successful in cities like New York. Andy will work with the chancellor and other social service agencies to develop our own “community school” model.
- ✓ Stop labeling schools as failures. Andy will instead see that we implement, in every high-need school, the five factors of success that actually have been shown to work.
- ✓ Insist that we develop a rich curriculum with sequenced lesson plans, combined with teaching strategy training and other support for instruction (eg curriculum specialists and resource teachers.).
- ✓ Listen to the concerns of educators and insist that teacher and principal evaluation systems become professional growth systems, engines of support for better teaching and learning.
- ✓ Andy will encourage the chancellor to focus master educators’ time on teachers who need help. The main focus of evaluations must be on helping teachers and principals improve and recognizing positive work, not simply on ranking and rating them, imposing rewards and punishments, and raising test scores.
- ✓ Andy will help each school initiate teacher mentoring and support as part of the ongoing learning culture.



4. Andy promises to give the public a strong voice.

Andy Shallal will take steps to put the public back in public education. He will encourage collaboration between teachers and administrators at the school level, as well as communication and engagement with parents at both the school and system levels. Andy will hold the Public Charter School Board and public charter schools individually accountable to the open public meetings law and other basic standards of public transparency and accountability.

Andy will:

- ✓ Champion civic engagement as an important goal of public schools. He'll require each and every school, DCPS and charter, to have a Local School Advisory Team made up of elected teacher, parent, and secondary student representatives. He'll require detailed satisfaction surveys that become part of the report card of each school and the DCPS central administration.
- ✓ Prioritize data transparency and holding hearings and meetings with advocacy groups and other knowledgeable parents and community members.
- ✓ Make it easier for students to get to school and for families to be engaged. Andy will promote free SmartTrip cards for eliminating the transportation barrier to school engagement, recruit "relatable" parents from the same neighborhood and background to encourage attendance at back-to-school nights and parent conferences, and expand the pilot program of home visits by teachers.
- ✓ Provide for parent and community engagement citywide in school district policy and decision making.

A FINAL NOTE ON MEASURING PROGRESS

Accurately measuring what a school contributes to the students they enroll or what a teacher contributes to student success has always been a complicated endeavor. Researchers agree that two-thirds of student achievement reflects factors outside of school.

Notes Harvard measurement expert Dan Koretz:

It is inappropriate to use a score from a single test, without additional information, to assign students to special education, to hold students back, to screen students for first time enrollment, to evaluate the effectiveness of an entire educational system, or to identify the "best" teachers or schools . . . Critics who ignore the impact of social factors on test scores miss the point. The reason to



acknowledge their influence is not to let anyone off the hook but to get the right answer. Certainly, low scores are a sign that something is amiss. . . But the low scores themselves don't tell *why* achievement is low and are usually insufficient to tell us where instruction is good or bad, just as a fever by itself is insufficient to reveal what illness a child has. Disappointing scores can mask good instruction, and high scores can hide problems that need to be addressed.

Most educators, most parents, and candidate for Mayor Andy Shallal want a broader set of school improvement measures. We want to capture the extent that schools are engaging students and teaching the whole child — in everything from higher-order thinking skills to communications skills and the arts.

Schools must be accountable for being welcoming places with positive learning climates. We need to encourage and reward the risk taking and teamwork necessary to organize schools for improvement.

The richness of the measures of progress we choose will determine what gets done. Andy will follow the lead of districts like Montgomery County that have invested in a deeper understanding of the teaching process and of the social/emotional components of school culture.

Only this approach, respectful of the complexities of teaching and learning, will win the respect of educators and parents and ultimately lead to student learning and success.