

March 7, 2017

The Honorable Muriel Bowser
Mayor
John A. Wilson Building
1350 Pennsylvania Ave, NW
Washington, DC 20004

Dear Mayor Bowser:

We write today as members of the Community Schools Advisory Board. As you know, the District Government has provided grant funding for community schools since fiscal year 2013. In that time, eight grantees¹ have received grants in Wards 1, 4, 5, 6 and 8. The real story though lies in the impact these modest grants have had on the thousands of children involved.

In 2016, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) commissioned an external evaluation on the Community Schools Incentive Initiative (CSII). This evaluation report highlighted a number of promising activities by grantees including: home visits, mental and physical health screenings, regular school-wide activities, neighborhood engagements, and homegrown youth enrichment and development initiatives. To supplement the work of the site coordinators, volunteers and local businesses, grantees partnered with organizations like Kid Power, Mary's Center, People Animals Love (PAL) and Gearin' Up Bicycles to meet the needs of the students and families at each school.

The evaluation also noted limitations with the current grant. The evaluators noted a lack of parental involvement, a lack of coordination within the schools, and inadequate data sharing as some of these issues. We are confident they are fixable to ensure the long-term continuance of the CSII. The Advisory Board, after considering feedback from grantees, recommends the following to address these limitations.

First, it is clear that the CSII was designed to provide seed funding to encourage schools and community organizations to create community school

¹ Six grantees received funding in fiscal year 2013 and two additional grantees received funding in fiscal year 2016.

programs. However, currently there is not enough funding available to ensure the sustainability of these programs beyond the CSII. **We strongly recommend the inclusion of a long-term investment in community schools that could be awarded as the next stage of the CSII.** Community schools provide a unifying and broad set of resources that address countless barriers, allowing children to focus on their education, health and families.

Second, we are appreciative that more than ten District agencies under the direction of the Mayor are part of the Advisory Board. Unfortunately, many of these agencies are not active participants. Cross-government partnership and involvement is vital to reducing barriers in the education sphere. **We recommend that you issue administrative guidance to all District agencies that the community schools program is a priority in your Administration.** This action will ensure that District Government employees actively participate and collaborate to provide much needed support to community schools. It also will help address some of the challenges cited in the report around parent engagement, coordination between agency providers and data sharing.

The CSII grant process should be revised and clarified to ensure that program outcomes and the improvement of our children, are put first and foremost. We believe this can best occur by making the grant multi-year, which will allow OSSE to consider the following changes:

- A new timeline for the grant in which the application would be issued no later than November of each year, with award being made no later than March each year. This timeline would allow six months of planning for the grantees prior to their program implementation at the school year,, but would require additional funding for that planning period.
- Clear information on the funding they can expect each year, including a minimum level. While this recommendation would, of course, be dependent on funding availability, it is also vital for grantee budgeting and planning.
- Clarifying language that describes the CSII grant as a seed program, not a long-term funding mechanism. We recommend that the CSII grantees be made aware that the grant is for a fixed term and can only be extended in unusual circumstances for a single year.

Finally, we strongly urge that a thorough and comprehensive evaluation of the CSII be completed on a regular basis. The evaluation that was completed in 2016 was limited in scope, time and depth. The Advisory Board believes that regular evaluation is needed to ensure the continued success of the program.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide our recommendations on the Community Schools Incentive Initiative. Community schools are life changing for the students, parents and residents involved. Your support has been instrumental in keeping us moving forward. We are available to provide additional information and appreciate your consideration.

Sincerely

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