



Can DCPS Reorganize While Restructuring?

The Devil's in the Details... and the Wide View

BY VIRGINIA AVNIEL SPATZ

The Renew-Revitalize-Reorganize (RRR) Initiative for the DC public schools will place some 9,000 students into newly consolidated schools for fall 2008. Another 14,000-plus students attend schools that are restructuring under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. Thousands more will experience grade reconfigurations or other changes at their schools.

DCPS thus plans to reshuffle – with but a few months planning – more than 26,000 students, a population equivalent to that of the entire city of College Park, Md. Many more students will be affected less directly, as resources – including out-of-boundary transfer slots (see sidebar) – shift throughout the 52,000-student system.

In addition, DCPS Chancellor Rhee is not ruling out additional closings, saying only – when asked on Feb. 1 -- that she plans to “worry about these [the 23 currently proposed] first.”

Revised consolidation plans call for 19 previously proposed closings, plus four that were not included in the November 2007 plan. After all 23 closings – comprising about 2 million square feet – DCPS would retain approximately 12 million square feet, including much unused space.

Consolidations entail “facility blitzes” at 29 schools. Four closures require temporary moves during modernization of permanent facilities. Two require new bathrooms, playgrounds and other retrofits to make junior high facilities suitable for younger students.

Staffing changes for proposed closings involve roughly 700 employees, although Rhee believes “normal annual attrition” should obviate “significant staffing decreases.” Meanwhile, under NCLB legislation, more than 1,000 teachers will experience one of five federally-

mandated options: charter conversion, private enterprise management, complete staff replacement, state takeover or another “fundamental change in governance.”

Rhee says the RRR plan will reduce the cost of excess space and maximize educational resources, with newly consolidated schools the first to enjoy “comprehensive staffing.” The plan will also “bring exciting new educational programs and opportunities to students across the District,” she says.

Critics say that 23 closings will not support comprehensive staffing or fund promised programs but, in fact, leave DCPS an annual shortfall of many millions for utilities/maintenance. Implementation and community engagement also concern many, as does the interplay between the federally mandated restructurings and the RRR proposal.

Renew-Revitalize-Reorganize

This year’s maintenance/utility bill, Rhee repeatedly notes, is \$50 million, while the UPSFF (uniform per student funding formula) provides only \$25 million. These figures were the only financial sums in her Jan. 14 testimony to the DC Council and are among the very few figures offered through months of RRR presentations.

Fewer active buildings will reduce maintenance/utility bills, and consolidated enrollments will fund comprehensive staffing in four areas: academic, wellness, administrative and enrichment. Included in this model are full-time art, music and PE/health teachers, as well as nurses, social workers, in-school suspen-

School (Ward)	School Type	Current Enroll	Planned Change to School/Program	Associated School
Amidon (6)**	PK-6	227	RRR-Receiving (from closures/consolidations)	Bowen
Anacostia (8)	SH 9-12	835	No Child Left Behind-Restructuring	
Backus (5)	MS 7-8	141	RRR-Close. Move to LaSalle	LaSalle
Ballou (8)	SH 9-12	1267	NCLB-Restructuring	
Bancroft (1)	PS-6	451	RRR: Arts Focus (New Program)	
Bell Mult. (1)	SH 9-12	856	RRR: 6-12 w/Lincoln (already share bldg)	With Lincoln
Benning (7)**	PS-6	162	(RRR-Close. Move to Smothers.	Smothers
Bowen (6)	PK-6	221	RRR-Close. Move to Amidon	Amidon
Brightwood (4)**	PS-6	370	RRR-PK-8	
Brookland (5)***	PK-6	247	RRR-Receiving. (First move to Bunker Hill)	Bunker Hill
Ron Brown (7)**	MS 7-8	263	RRR-Receiving. Also NCLB-Restructuring	Merritt
Browne (5)**	MS 7-8	211	RRR-Receiving. New PS-8. NCLB-Restructuring	Young
Bruce-Monroe (1)**	PS-6	307	RRR-Receiving (2011) Also Re: Meyer	
Bunker Hill (5)***	PS-6	270	RRR-Close. First receive Brookland	Brookland
J. Burroughs (5)**	HS-6	242	RRR-Receiving. New PK-8	Slowe
Cardozo (1)	SH 9-12	888	NCLB-Restructuring. Receiving MM Wash.	MM Washington
Clark (4)	PS-5	200	RRR-Close. Move to Raymond, Powell-McFarland	several
Cleveland (1)**	PS-5	241	RRR-Receiving	Gage-Eckington
JF Cook (5)	PS-6	184	RRR-Close. Move to Walker-Jones, Emery, Mont.	several
HD Cooke (1)**	PS-6	294	RRR-Receiving	Meyer
Coolidge (4)	SH 9-12	710	NCLB-Restructuring	
Dunbar (5)	SH 9-12	852	NCLB-Restr. [Also, 121 students in Pre-Engr.]	
Eastern (6)	SH 9-12	915	NCLB-Restructuring	
Eliot (6)**	MS 7-8	155	NCLB-Restructuring Also, Receiving: Hine	Hine
Emery (5)**	PS-6	190	RRR-Receiving	Cook
Francis (2)**	MS 7-8	165	RRR-Receiving. New PK-8 with Stevens	Stevens
Gage Eckington (1)	PK-6	183	RRR-Close. Move to Cleveland, Emery	Cleveland, Emery
Garnet Patterson (1)**	MS 7-8	206	RRR-Close. Also, NCLB-Restr. RRR: G/T	Shaw
Gibbs (6)	PS-6	281	RRR-Close. Move to Miner [NCLB-Res], Young	Miner, Young
Green (8)***	PS-6	238	RRR-Close. First moves. First Turner Moves	Turner
Hardy (2*)	MS 7-8	308	RRR: Arts focus (w/Fillmore)	
PR Harris (8)	PS-8	312	RRR-Close. Move to Patterson, Hendley, Leckie,...	several
Hart (8)**	MS 7-8	508	NCLB-Restructuring. Also, RRR-Receiving	
Hendley (8)**	PK-6	207	RRR-Receiving. Keeping Grade 6	PR Harris
Hine (6)	MS 7-8	268	RRR-Close. Move to Eliot [NCLB-Res]	Eliot
Hyde (2)	PK-5	181	RRR: Learning Lab	
Jefferson (6)	MS 7-8	408	RRR: High Tech campus	
Johnson (8)	MS 7-8	412	NCLB-Restructuring	
King (8)	PK-5	368	RRR: Regio Emilia program	
Kramer (8)	MS 7-8	340	NCLB-Restructuring	
Langdon (5)	PS-6	408	RRR: STEM PK-8	
LaSalle (4)**	PS-6	272	RRR-Receiving. New PK-8	Backus

* Temporarily located outside listed ward

** Promised “Enhanced Staffing Model” and “Facility Blitz”

*** Require temporary move before final consolidation “Enhanced Staffing Model” and “Facility Blitz”

sion facilitators, math and literacy coaches, librarians and administrative staff.

“Through this plan, every ward will have excellent opportunities, such as new Montessori and early childhood programs, more high tech campuses and lab schools, fine arts schools, more gifted and talented programs, and an increased capacity to serve our historically and grossly underserved students who have special education needs,” Rhee testified. “When and where something works, we should ensure that as many students as possible have access to that program.”

“In order to provide the strong programs and enhanced staffing models that our kids deserve, we must reorganize and reallocate our resources,” Rhee explained. “This plan relies on significant reorganization of the school system.”

Reorganization Risks

The “significant reorganization” of the RRR plan has many concerned about individual school communities and

DCPS as a whole.

“Should we tinker with schools that are getting results?” Lisa Raymond, vice president of the State Board of Education, asked in her council testimony. She cautioned that “a learning community is a delicate balance of many factors” and that disturbing these communities could lead to the loss of “involved and dedicated families.”

“In 25 years,” reported George Parker of the Washington Teacher’s Union, “I have not yet seen a closing where logistics went smoothly.” Individual closings are difficult within a robust system; 23 simultaneous closings may be too much for a system as fragile as DCPS.

“There is no reason to believe that DCPS can handle 23 school closings,” Smith testified, “not without significant detriment to students.” In addition, he said, DCPS has not demonstrated how it will mitigate further enrollment loss – due to this reorganization and/or further down the road.

Research conducted for school leaders estimated that be

Discretionary Transfers Unlikely?

Discretionary out-of-boundary (OOB) transfers may be difficult to arrange this year. The 5,000-plus students in schools slated for closing were promised precedence in this year’s lottery; actual criteria list them second, behind siblings of students attending a requested school. Further priority is assigned based on 3) feeder school attendance, 4) residence within walking distance, and 5) preference.

Students in the 79 elementary schools subject to NCLB school choice provisions also have priority in transferring. Relatively few students have exercised the NCLB choice option so far. Only 250 out of 29,000 eligible DCPS students did so for 2007-08. It is unclear, however, how many students from closing schools will make use of their promised priority.

Secondary students have no NCLB choice option, because only Banneker, Ellington, McKinley and School Without Walls – all selective-enrollment schools – have avoided NCLB failing status, and Wilson Senior High School (also restructuring) accepts OOB students only through selective-enrollment academies.

School (Ward)	School Type	Current Enroll	Planned Change to School/Program	Associated School
Leckie (8)**	PS-6	325	RRR-Receiving. Keeping Grade 6	PR Harris
Lincoln (1)	MS 7-8	406	NCLB-Restructuring. 6-12 w/Bell (share bldg)	With Bell
McFarland (4)**	MS 7-8	207	NCLB-Restr. RRR-Join new PK-8 cluster, serve 6-8	With Powell
McKinley (5)	SH 9-12	843	RRR: Emery becomes feeder school	Emery
Merritt (7)	MS 7-8	170	RRR-Close. New STEM	Ron Brown
Meyer (1)	PS-5	169	RRR-Close. Move to Tubman, Bruce Monroe, HD Cooke	several
Kelly Miller (7)	MS 7-8	313	RRR: Gifted and Talented Program	
Miner (6)**	PS-6	478	NCLB-Restructuring. Also RRR-Receiving	Gibbs
Montgomery (2)**	PK-6	183	RRR-Rec. RRR: Regio Emilia	JF Cook
Moten (8)**	PS-6	215	NCLB-Restructuring. Also, RRR-Receiving. First Move to Wilkinson	Wilkinson
Park View (1)***	PK-5	162	RRR: Close (2011)	Bruce-Monroe
Patterson (7)**	PK-6	334	RRR-Receiving. Keeping grade 6	PR Harris
Payne (6)	PS-6	220	RRR: Montessori and Emilia Regio	
Phelps (5)	SH 9-12		Open 2008. RRR-Receiving	MM Washington
Powell (4)**	PS-6	278	RRR-new PS-8 cluster (serve PS-3). Also Rec.	With MacFarland
Raymond (4)**	PS-6	249	RRR: PS-8. Also, RRR-Receiving	Clark
Roosevelt (4)	SH 9-12	845	NCLB-Restructuring. Also, RRR-Receiving.	MM Washington
Rudolph (4)	PS-6	228	RRR-Close. Move to Truesdell, Whittier	Truesdell, Whittier
School wo/Walls (2*)	SH 9-12	406	RRR: Francis becomes feeder (?)	
Shaw (2)***	MS 7-8	154	RRR-Rec. Also, NCLB-Restructuring	Garnett-Patterson
Slowe (5)	PK-6	83	RRR-Close. Move to Burroughs. New PK-8	Burroughs
Smothers (7)**	PS-6	186	RRR-Receiving	Benning
Sousa (7)	MS 7-8	214	NCLB-Restructuring	
Springarn (5)	SH 9-12	626	NCLB-Restructuring	
Stanton (8)	PS-6	379	NCLB-Restructuring	
Stevens (2)	PK-6	231	RRR-Close. Join new PK-8 at Francis	Francis
Taft (spec. ed.) (5)	Spec.	81	RRR-Shift: inclusion.	
Truesdell (4)**	PK-6	286	NCLB-Restructuring. RRR: PK-8. Receiving	Rudolph
Tubman (1)**	PS-6	405	RRR-Receiving	Meyer
Turner (8)***	PK-6	386	RRR-Receiving. First move to Green	Green
Walker-Jones (6)**	HS-8	278	RRR-Receiving	JF Cook
MM Washington (5)	SH 9-12	289	RRR-Close. Move to Phelps, Other CTE Schools	several
MM Wash. SE (5)	Spec.	98	RRR-Close: inclusion	
Webb (5)	PS-6	327	NCLB-Restr. RRR-New PK-8 cluster, Montessori	Wheatley (modern.)
West (4)	PS-6	190	RRR: Ext. to PS-8, Learning Lab	Clark
Wheatley (5)	K-6	48	NCLB-Restr. RRR-New PK-8 cluster, Montessori	Webb (temp. move)
Whittier (4)	PS-6	365	RRR-Receiving	Rudolph
Wilkinson (8)***	PS-3	365	RRR-Close. Moten [NCLB-Res] First Rec Moten	Moten
Woodrow Wilson (3)	SH 9-12	1557	NCLB-Restructuring	
Woodson (7)	SH 9-12	904	NCLB-Restructuring. RRR: STEM program	
Young (5)	PK-6	243	RRR-Close. New PS-8 at Browne. Also, RRR-Receiving: Gibbs	Browne, Gibbs



** Schools promised “comprehensive Staffing” for 2008.

Total Restructuring	14,208
Total Closing	4,090
Total Receiving	5,381
Total Grade Reconfiguration/ other	5,422
TOTAL	29,001

Is All of This About \$14 Million?

At press time, the Office of Public Education Facilities Management (OPEFM) had yet to provide estimates for costs savings related to school closings – or for direct expenditures required in renovations for August 2008. Fixed costs for closing schools in the Renew-Revitalize-Reorganize plan are, however, embedded within school-specific materials labeled “Reorganization Questions,” now available on www.k12.dc.us. To find the total fixed costs requires perusing materials for each of the seven wards and seeking the following paragraph 23 separate times.

“When we operate a school building, regardless of how many students there are in that school, we pay certain fixed costs, such as utilities and the cost of a principal. By keeping open two buildings that are under-enrolled (school-specific statistic) we are spending that money in both of those buildings, when the students could all be accommodated in one. That means less money to go towards teachers and programming. In the case of [School], our annual fixed costs are [cost].”

Totaling these costs – which include items “such as utilities and the cost of a principal” – for 23 schools yields \$17,458,000.

Although this figure was available – to anyone who waded through to calculate – Chancellor Rhee did not provide this in verbal testimony to the DC Council or share it with the public as an attachment to her written testimony. (Additional materials were shared with councilmembers.) She did, however, tell the Washington Post (Jan. 24, District, p. 5) that she still expects the closings to save \$23 million or more.

Mary Levy, Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, estimated savings due to 23 closings as follows:

Maintenance	\$4,196,068	(based on system-wide costs per ft)
Utilities	\$5,808,498	(based on OPM fiscal year 2008 estimates)
Small School Subsidy	\$2,266,499	(based on fiscal year 2008 subsidies)
Food service, security	\$2,000,000	(based on “rough estimates”)
Total	\$14,271,065	

Levy lists the average cost of a principal as \$114,375. DCPS gives no figure. To compare DCPS estimates – which include “utilities and the cost of principal” – with Levy’s detailed estimates, subtract the cost of 23 principals – \$2,630,625 – from the DCPS total, yielding \$14,827,375.

Thus, DCPS and Levy apparently agree that the closings would save roughly \$14 million in non-personnel fixed costs. Rhee confirmed the \$17 million figure at a Feb. 1 press conference, saying the funds would be used for “teachers, supplies, and textbooks.” Levy estimates that \$4 million will be needed for 2008-09 maintenance in occupied school buildings, while the 2007-08 utilities/maintenance deficit is greater than the remaining \$10 million in projected savings.

School advocates also note that any closings could avoid one-time modernization costs as well as annual fixed costs. But months after the chancellor asked community members to sign on to the RRR plan, OPEFM had yet to provide estimates of modernization savings – less renovation costs for receiving schools and upkeep for closed buildings.

Also missing is evidence that OPEFM had considered the alternative of collocation with charter schools, city agencies and other entities – as councilmembers and advocates have long suggested – or that they had thoroughly examined existing collocation arrangements in schools slated for closing.

tween 12 percent and 26 percent of students reassigned in DCPS school closings would enroll instead in charter schools. This does not include students – or teachers – lost through dissatisfaction or uncertainty regarding 2008 plans. A related concern is that closing schools could be leased to charters, further depleting DCPS enrollment and budget.

“[The system] could collapse under its own weight,” warned Iris Toyer of Parents United for DCPS.

The Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) “understands the impact of the [DCPS] reorganization and restructuring” on both public and public charter schools, said OSSE’s director of communications. And the State Board of Education is considering the relationship between public and public charter schools in its recommendations on restructuring. Still, Mary Filardo, of the 21st Century School Fund, said, there must be a system for considering budget, enrollment, and facilities of DCPS and DCPCS as a whole.

Where’s the Vision?

“I don’t think you can reinvent the public school system and close the schools in one fell swoop,” says Ron McBee, an ANC commissioner (6D03) active in school communities slated for consolidation in his area. “Reinvent the school system, and let that process drive the school closings.”

“The academic piece has to drive what we are doing,” Toyer testified. An entire school system cannot be reformed, she said, through “a sprinkling of a few programs.”

Only one new program is listed as a com-

ponent in the Revised School Consolidation Plan. Timetables and budgets for promised programs have not been provided.

Where’s the Benefit?

“Renew, Revitalize, Reorganize’ will enable us to provide better programs to our kids,” Rhee testified. “In order to provide the strong programs and enhanced staffing models that our kids deserve, we must reorganize and re-allocate our resources ... including closing schools and rightsizing the school system.”

“I’m not saying we need to close these schools to get the programs,” Rhee said when questioned, adding that the closings would not suffice for comprehensive staffing at remaining schools. Instead, the RRR commitment is to prioritize for comprehensive staffing those schools receiving students in 2008 consolidations.

Even this promise seems optimistic to Mary Levy, of the Washington Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights and Urban Affairs, however.

In what she called “the gloomiest testimony [she had] ever given,” Levy compared budgets at five of the largest DCPS elementary schools and projected budgets for two proposed consolidations. “Unfortunately,” she determined, “even the largest DCPS schools lack a full program, and the consolidated schools – even if they keep their combined resources [if every student from closing and receiving schools enrolls in the consolidated school] – will still lack a full program.”

In addition, Levy said, “Although larger schools can have that greater range of staff, their student/adult ratios are higher than those

Revised School Consolidations: Wards 7 & 8

Both closures originally proposed for Ward 7 – Smothers Elementary and Ron Brown Middle School – have been revised as of Feb. 1. Benning Elementary is now proposed to consolidate into Smothers, and Merritt is proposed to consolidate into Ron Brown. New proposals require additional hearings. A “community hearing” – for these schools and several in Wards 1 and 2 – is scheduled for 6:00 p.m., Feb. 27 at McKinley Technical High School in Ward 5.

For Ward 8, the original closure list included Wilkinson Elementary School, with students moving to nearby Moten. Community members expressed concerns about the Moten facility and its suitability for a larger population, however. They noted, also, that RRR materials refer to Wilkinson’s “open space plan,” failing to mention walls, built through community donation, last summer. Jackie Ward (ANC 8A06), whose single member district encompasses both schools, advocated a return to the 2006 proposal – consolidating the schools only after renovation of Moten.

The revised plan incorporates Ward’s suggestion: Moten Elementary students will move into Wilkinson next year, according to Mafara Hob-

son, spokesperson for DCPS Chancellor Rhee. Moten Center (special education) students will be assigned elsewhere. In 2010, Wilkinson will close, and the combined student population will move to the newly renovated Moten building.

Ward is “very happy that [the Chancellor and staff] were wise enough as regards the buildings.” She stresses, however, that Moten Center – which operates separately, with its own principal -- is “the best kept special education secret in the city.” It should be “kept and expanded,” she says, and any closing decision should have been based on a school-specific hearing.

Still slated for closing are PR Harris and Green elementaries. Harris students will be re-assigned to three schools, each retaining sixth grade for 2008-09. Turner students will temporarily move to Green, during renovations for the consolidated Green-Turner move in 2010.

Councilmember Marion Barry remains concerned about transition plans – including gang intervention where necessary – for students in Ward 8’s affected schools. He plans “a series of meetings to be sure that all the schools are on track” throughout the reorganization process.

of small schools.” Counselors at four of the five largest schools each serve over 400 students, for example.

Moreover, DCPS will still run an annual deficit for utilities and maintenance – even if 23 schools are closed – unless the UPSFF is modified, Levy testified. Closings leave 4.3 million in excess space unfunded through UPSFF, resulting in annual shortfalls of \$33 million or more. Meanwhile, Levy estimated, \$14 million could be saved through the closures in maintenance, utilities, small school subsidies, food service and security. (See sidebar.)

“Is all of this about 14 million dollars?!” Councilmember Jim Graham (Ward 1) exclaimed in response to Levy’s testimony. “That’s a drop in the bucket when it comes to the school system.”

Brown proposed several times during the hearing that the council immediately appropriate funds for existing school buildings and comprehensive staff at each one. Rhee could not say what that would cost.

“We do not see that children at closing or receiving schools will be better off,” Toyer concluded.

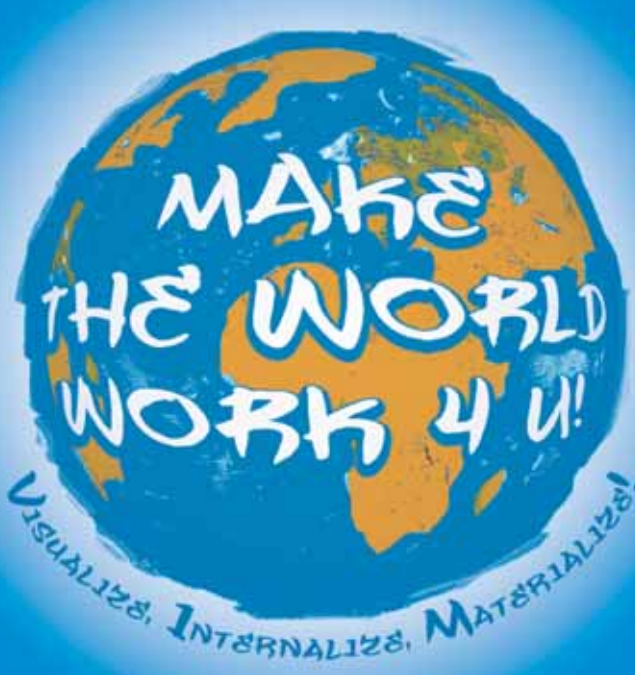
Where's the Planning?


“We are running those numbers right now,” Rhee said several times in response to budget inquiries at the Jan. 14 Council hearing. The Office of Public Education and Education Facilities Management (OPEFM), which is “running those numbers,” did not testify.

In late January, OPEFM spokesperson Tony Robinson said the office had not yet estimated costs for renovation projects, prepared timetables or determined the feasibility of completing necessary renovations by August. The Revised School Consolidation Plan, presented on Feb. 1, was accompanied by no such specifics, although Mayor Adrian Fenty promised more information would be forthcoming.

The current administration has only managed a single school-year opening, Jeff Smith told the DC Council, one that was relatively uncomplicated and accomplished with mediocre – “C-minus” – results. It is unwise, he believes, to inject so many changes into “an unproven process.”

When asked how DCPS would handle the major upheaval of 19, possibly 23, closings and associated renovations in just a few months, Fenty responded, “I appreciate [the] point.” ♦





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