

Testimony before the DC Council Committee on Education
Budget Oversight for DC Public Schools
Ward 7 Education Council
Tuesday, February 13, 2018

Good Morning Councilmember Grosso and Members of the Education Committee:

My name is Eboni-Rose Thompson, and I am here in my role as the Chair of the Ward 7 Education Council.

The primary purpose of the Ward 7 Education Council is to support schools and families in the pursuit of a high-quality education for all children. Many would argue a quality education goes beyond the classroom, and I am here to argue that when we think about educating the whole-child it goes beyond just providing another academic option.

When I think about my own childhood, and I would ask you to think about yours as well, so much more than what schools I attended come to mind. Now, I'm proud to say that I went to Plummer Elementary from pre-k through 5th grade, which was my neighborhood school and that that is still my neighborhood school today. I think about spending Sundays at church and then heading down to Phillips on the Wharf to eat with my mom, grandma, and sisters- and then walk the waterfront with my granddad. I think about going to ballet in the evenings afterschool or gymnastics on Saturdays and during the summer. I think about the many times I had a fever and my grandparents spent the night at DC general with me.

I had a rich amazing childhood growing up in Ward 7. Unfortunately, so many of the experiences that made my childhood rich aren't available to children in my community today. I am here at a hearing in front of the education committee to reinforce what I hope will be an opportunity to look beyond what is traditionally discussed as education beyond choice and options and quality seats. That opportunity for vibrancy is the Fletcher Johnson site, and that site is currently under the purview of the DME.

The fact remains that Ward 7 is already saturated with 21 Total Public Charter Schools and 18 traditional District of Columbia Public Schools. The community has consistently expressed the need for a broader economic vision for the Fletcher Johnson Campus beyond the arbitrary addition of another Charter School. At present, the DME's office has announced at the community meetings preceding the much delayed RFO process, that the right of first refusal has not been satisfied, requiring a charter applicant as part of any proposal. Nevertheless, this vague "DME/DGS Mandate" apparently was not applied in a similar situation: Hine Junior High School near Eastern Market (3.5-acres, also closed in 2008) is being redeveloped into a 7-story mixed-use development, including:

- 61,000 square feet of retail space (part of which houses a brand-new Trader Joes)
- 150,000 square feet of office space
- Mixed income housing

- A public plaza for community gatherings
- Underground parking

A major difference between the two sites being the staggering inequities in needs and resources already present between the Capitol Hill/Eastern Market communities in Ward 6 and the Marshall Heights/Benning Ridge communities in Ward 7.

Our neighbors have publicly and consistently expressed that of the many investments needed to benefit the greater public good in Ward 7, building another charter school, and especially not a high school is not one of them. Our community has 9 high schools presently, several of which are under-enrolled. Simultaneously, we have only 3 sit down restaurants, 2 grocery stores, not a single hospital or urgent care center, and remains the only ward without an arts space.

With regards to education in Ward 7, our families' frustration is not with a lack of "choices." Instead, it has been with failing to have predictable, reliable access to high-quality pre-K-12 schooling as a baseline reality for all Ward 7 residents. We have been consistent in raising collective voices for investment in STEM & dual language programs in our schools. Vertical alignment within our feeder patterns is a much more urgent focus, on which we have seen little attention, for decision makers like the DME & others. Our communities are eager for city investment to improve the quality and variety of services available in Ward 7. We have taken every opportunity afforded to go on record with what we both need and want to see with the DME.

At this juncture, the community has reached a consensus in its vision for a community hub that meets our needs, and respectfully request this project be fully transitioned to the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Planning and Economic Development, which is better positioned and more appropriately equipped to move our collective vision forward.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Eboni-Rose Thompson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Eboni-Rose Thompson
Chair, Ward 7 Education Council