

“Putting Children and Families First to Ensure High Academic Achievement for All”



District Parent Coordinating Council of the Buffalo Public Schools

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The District Parent Coordinating Council of Buffalo is the officially recognized Parent body for the Buffalo Public School District. Our mission is to ensure a parent partnership in the implementation of the mission of Buffalo Schools and to monitor implementation of the Districts Parent involvement policy.

The DPCC submits the following solution-based testimony for the consideration of Governor Cuomo’s New NY Education Reform Commission. We propose the following solutions:

1. Alignment of Governance Structure by returning to Neighborhood Schools to increase Parent/Community Engagement.
2. School funding formula based on daily attendance of students
3. Fund schools within districts based on student needs which will lead to equity within schools in high needs districts.
4. Targeted and purposeful Parent and community engagement will improve the school system and ultimately improve student achievement.
5. Property Tax Levy Reform/Tax allocation transparency

1. Alignment of Governance Structure by returning to Neighborhood Schools to increase Parent/Community Engagement.

The DPCC proposes that the State returns to a model of neighborhood schools where students would go to the school in their district. This would bring back into alignment parents voting for elected district representatives for the schools their children actually attend.

Problem that currently exists:

- Currently since most children are sent on a bus across town to their school, they go to schools outside of the District where they live. Often, taxpayers vote and elect a school board member who does not represent the school their child attends, and ultimately can not be held directly accountable to that child or parent.

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- Bussing students outside of their district has destroyed neighborhood investment/usage in school building in their community.
- School buildings are no longer a place for community engagement: Most people who use the building don't live in the neighborhood, and that has disengaged block club and local business participation. By disengaging these groups, there are fewer community groups working to ensure that school is performing and also safe.
- More than half the parents in Buffalo don't have cars and are not able to drive across town to attend a school function, such as a parent teacher conference, for their child. This has led to decreased parent participation in school activities, because schools are far
- Many students spend one to two hours on a bus every day. This is loss of valuable instruction time.
- Students have to wait for busses often in bad weather during winter months, which creates a series of problems, including safety concerns.
- Our youngest students, those in pre-k through 3rd grade, must wait on the corner to catch a bus to school which is very often across town.

The Solution:

Going back to a neighborhood school model will ease many obstacles of family and community engagement in schools, and also align the governance structure of the city school system. The DPCC has long advocated for this solution because we are parents who face obstacles improving parent and community engagement. Importantly, aligning the school district governance to one of district and school-based representation was the original intent and so the system is designed for this purpose. Through busing, parents have lost the ability to hold their school board representative accountable for their child's school. Busing was originally established to desegregate schools. While this was a noble intent, our schools are still segregated, and students are traveling across the city to attend school. By using a neighborhood school model, the governance structure of the school system will be restored to its original intent, and parents and communities will have the ability to be involved in their schools.

Scalability:

We make it work in Buffalo by maintaining a combination of some magnet schools which students can be bussed and give parents the option of sending their child out of district and reestablishing neighborhood schools within districts.

2. School funding formula based on Daily Attendance of Students

The DPCC proposes that the State ties funding of schools to attendance of students. Fund and reimburse school districts according to average daily attendance rates.

Problem that currently exists:

- Very low attendance rates, particularly in High Schools.
- School Districts fully funded to serve students, independent of whether the students actually attend school or not.
- Very high suspension rates. 18,000 suspensions last year in a district with 32,000 students.

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- School Districts cutting budgets in areas that support student attendance, with no incentive to address this issue because they are funded independent of Student Attendance.

Solution:

This is a solution because it will give School Districts incentives to ensure they are doing everything in their power to maintain high student attendance. This idea came about by a historical analysis of how school districts are funded and when attendance patterns changed. What it does is connects attendance to funding and incentives prioritizing attendance. It achieves results by ensuring districts maintain and develop efforts to increase student attendance. We know it will work because students cannot learn if they are not in school and this will support increased student attendance.

Scalability:

We make this work by changing the funding formula to fund school districts based on daily attendance rather than enrollment.

3. Fund schools within districts based on student needs which will lead to equity within schools in high needs districts.

The DPCC proposes that the State require school districts that receive additional taxpayer funding based on being designated a High Needs School District to pass those resources to the High Needs Schools in those districts. Currently, that money is passed on to all schools equally, even criterion based schools that have few high needs students.

Problem that currently exists:

- In 2010 the Lead Community Superintendent for Buffalo Schools stated –“We are creating Persisting Low Achieving (PLA) Schools by how we do placement of students. He was referring to the fact that Criteria Based Schools have an unfair advantage and it is not fair to compare them to other schools. Buffalo schools are basically funded at the same level. Criteria Based schools choose their students based on designated Criteria and in most cases do not have the challenges facing schools that don’t have Criteria for admission. This has led to a two tier education system where the Criteria Based Schools (City Honors, Hutch Tech and DaVinci have the wealth of riches (top students and equal funding). Either Students should be distributed equally independent of academic performance, talent or special education needs or have A Needs Based Funding formula. With additional funds going to schools that have higher concentrations of high needs students.
- Non Criteria Based schools will reach a ceiling in there improvement efforts and can never be equally compared to Criteria Based Schools, who have an unfair advantage and equal resources.

Solution:

1. This is a solution because it brings about equity between schools within the district and addresses a long standing disparity.

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2. This idea came about by communication with Principals of non-criteria based schools and their contention that they will reach a ceiling in Student Improvement.
3. What it does is bring equity to the education system.
4. It achieves results by driving resources to where they are needed most in the effort to increase academic achievement.
5. We know it will work because it will allow additional supports where they are needed.

Scalability:

We can make it work in Buffalo and other school districts by requiring money to follow the specific needs of students. This money can be prioritized by the State and local district.

4. Targeted and purposeful Parent and community engagement will improve the school system and ultimately improve student achievement.

The solution is to require every homeroom to have a trained classroom parent facilitator (CPF). This CPF will be trained in Asset Mapping, Asset Mobilizing and Values Clarification.

- The primary job of the CPF will be to identify all of the resources, skills and strengths (Assets) of all the Parents in the classroom. (Map).
- The CPF will then meet with the Teacher and they will design a plan to mobilize the assets of the parents of that class (Classroom achievement plan). Thereby engaging all parents and working with usable assets to increase student achievement.
- Each CPF will sit on a grade level team. One CPF will be designated the Grade level Parent Facilitator (GLPF).
- The GLPF will work with the Grade level team (teachers/coaches/para staff etc.) to develop and implement a grade level achievement plan.
- All GLPF will sit on a Principal’s Council and will work with Principal to mobilize the Prime Assets of each grade level into a Building level achievement plan. (BLAP)

CPF – Part time (20 hours per month) – Stipend (12-36) parents per building

GLPF – Part time (20 hours per week) - .5 FTE (4-8) parent per building

PF – 1 full time Parent Facilitator at every school – 1 FTE (1) parent per building

These plans will be the basis of the Parent Involvement component for the Comprehensive Education Plan required to be completed by all School based management teams in compliance with NYSED CR 100.11

B. Governance Structure

Parent Assembly

- All CPF’s will be voting members of the Districts Parent Assembly which will meet quarterly.
- This body will be the districts largest parent body. In Buffalo this is approximately 1300 Parents
- It will be responsible for parent approval of District Parent Involvement policy, Code of Conduct, Consolidated Application (Title 1) etc.

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District Parent Coordinating Council

- Each Parent Council will elect 2 people (1 representative and an alternate) to represent the school on the Council.
- The Council will meet monthly.
- The Council will elect an Executive Committee that will be the Presiding officers for the District wide Parent Body (Parent Assembly)
- DPCC executive committee will represent Parents on District Stakeholder Committee (Superintendent, Teacher Union President, Administrators Union President and Community stakeholders as identified by committee)

DPCC President will represent Parents on Say Yes Core Planning Committee

Building Level Parent Council

- Each Classroom will elect 5 people to the building level parent council (3 voting/ 2 alts).
- BLPC will choose 5 Parents to sit on School Based Management Team. (SBMT)

Building level representatives will be Parent Council officers, SBMT reps, DPCC reps, and Parent Assembly reps.

C. Grievance Procedures

- The District will develop grievance procedures to parallel those of the Districts Collective Bargaining Units.
- Grievance procedures will cover all policies and procedures involving Parent Involvement.
- Federal (1118) State (100.11) and Local (3170)

Problem that currently exists:

1. Parent engagement is not currently structured with any consistency throughout the district and has no systematic checks and balances.
2. Parent engagement is not aligned with the districts management system.
3. Parent engagement is not monitored effectively
4. Parent engagement policy have no enforcement policies or procedures
5. Parent engagement has no grievance system to address violations

Solution:

This is a solution because it creates and aligns a Parent engagement operating system with the other district systems. It provides standard procedures, metrics, check and balance, and a grievance process.

How did this idea come about?

The idea came about by asset mapping of effective parent engagement procedures going on throughout the district and piloting strategies over a 3 year period.

What does it do?

It gives the Parent body an organized structure that parallels the other stakeholder groups in the district (Teachers and Administrators).

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How does it achieve results?

It uses a governance structure that empowers parents to effectively engage the system of education, provides support for their child’s academic achievement and social development. It has a built accountability and feedback system that guarantees checks and balances.

How do we know it will work?

- The system is already working in separate parts, this plan aligns the parts into an integrated system, then aligns the system with larger District construct.
- We have run pilots on different parts over the past 3 years.
- We have used school improvement grants (SIG) at Persistently Low Achieving (PLA) schools to Pilot full time Parent Facilitators, which has given us our best results.

Scalability:

We can make it work in Buffalo and across the State.

1. By establishing it in NYSED Commissioner Regulations.
2. Aligning it with NCLB Sec. 1118 in SEA and LEA policy and procedures.
3. Monitoring, evaluation and enforcement

5. Property Tax Levy Reform/Tax allocation transparency.

Property Tax Levy Reform/Tax allocation transparency - for the purposes of increased community engagement and community enfranchisement. That will lead to increased accountability and increased voter participation.

Solutions:

- The property tax levy allocation should be altered to permit “Big 5” City residents to vote on the amount of the property tax allocation, giving them the same influence over district spending as suburban/rural residents have.
- The State should enact and develop a ‘taxpayer dashboard’ permitting taxpayers to review and analyze how tax money is allocated and spent by districts.

Districts should create a taxpayer dashboard on their websites to show districts how much money in their budget is from local, state, and federal taxes, and exactly how it is spent. The State should emphasize that districts must make the knowledge widely accessible and understandable to regular parents, so that a parent does not require a vast knowledge of accounting to understand how their money is being spent on improving education. Such a tool would improve accountability for tax spending, particularly in the ‘Big Five’ districts where local taxpayers presently have no voice over how their property tax is allocated to school spending.

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- Though the majority of the ‘Big Five’ revenues come from state aid, local property tax levies still make up a significant portion of school spending. In Buffalo, for example, nearly one-half of the property tax levy is allocated to the District. Despite this, local residents have no vote over the Buffalo City School District’s budget, unlike suburban districts.
- No transparency on what and how all taxpayer dollars are allocated.
- There is no annual engagement of taxpayers in the Big 5 cities. Taxpayers currently only vote in school elections every third and fifth year. Which has led to 2 to 5% voter participation in school board elections.

III. The solution:

1. This is a solution because it enfranchises taxpayers, gives them information and opportunities to more effectively hold elected officials and administrators accountable.
2. This idea came about by analyzing the difference in systems of accountability between Urban, Suburban and Rural school districts.
3. What it does is gives meaningful participation to voters on a regular basis.
4. It achieves results by engaging taxpayers annually in the monitoring of how taxpayer dollars are allocated.
5. We know it will work because EVERY district that uses this model has better results than ALL the districts that don’t. (using graduation rates as the measurement).

Scalability:

Altering the tax law to allow BIG 5 residents to vote is only applicable to the Big Five school districts and would require a change in the current law. Requiring every school district to post a tax dollar dashboard showing residents how the local, state, and federal share of tax dollars are spent should be implemented statewide. This does not require a change to State law; it requires an additional Commissioner’s Regulation to require district to produce and make widely accessible their total and actual budget broken down by local, state, and federal dollars.

Submitted by

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