

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM

FOCUS GROUP NO. 3 FOR D.C. CHARTER SCHOOL
OPERATIONS

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1 PARTICIPANTS:

2 TOM HEALEY, Chair
3 HG Strategies

4 ANN VARGHESE,
5 The Center for Education Reform

6 JEANNE ALLEN,
7 The Center for Education Reform

8 JONATHAN BARON,
9 Red Sea, LLC

10 NORMAN JOHNSON,
11 Integrated Design and Electronics
12 Academy Public Charter School

13 ANA MARIA NUEVO,
14 Carlos Rosario International Public
15 Charter School

16 MARCIA McDONNELL,
17 Children's Studio School of the Arts
18 and Humanities

19 GEORGE GORDON,
20 Associates for Renewal in Education
21 (ARE)

22 NADIA CASSEUS,
SouthEast Academy of Scholastic
Excellence

* * * * *

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P R O C E E D I N G S

(2:00 p.m.)

1
2
3 MS. VARGHESE: Again, I thank you
4 both for being here, getting here on time.
5 As Tom said, we are expecting about three or
6 four other people to join a little later.
7 All right, my name's Ann Varghese. I'm the
8 External Affairs Director here at the Center
9 for Educational Reform. This focus group
10 was convened because we wanted -- it's part
11 of a broad, national effort, and we wanted
12 to identify what charter schools need most,
13 and so we better influence the development
14 of any organization that is created to fit
15 or to serve your needs, both locally and
16 nationally. We're conducting similar
17 meetings in several states, and where --
18 we're doing it differently in other states.
19 We thought this would be -- a focus group in
20 DC would be better than a telephone survey
21 which we're doing in Indiana and in
22 California. Jonathan Baron is part of Red

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1 Sea Communications, and he is going to be
2 facilitating those surveys.

3 Since he's agreed to help us
4 understand what the needs are among charter
5 school operators, and we want to find some
6 universal themes and some common themes, and
7 identify those so we can move forward in our
8 national efforts. That said, Jeannie, I'm
9 not sure I've abstained myself in what we're
10 doing here, and if you want to --

11 MS. ALLEN: No, just go ahead. I
12 run the Center, and I -- as a -- external
13 affairs person. This is kind of her
14 project, and I'm here to throw in input when
15 I can and to offer any help.

16 MS. VARGHESE: Tom Healey is going
17 to be our facilitator for today, and Tom,
18 I'll just hand it off to you.

19 CHAIR HAELEY: CER came to me with
20 the question of how they can better help,
21 given their financial resources, to serve
22 the charter school community. Now, they

1 work nationally and they work locally.
2 They've engaged both myself and Jonathan
3 Baron, who is the head of Red Sea Research,
4 and also Basswood Research -- Red Sea is one
5 company, and Basswood is another, but
6 Jonathan runs both, and they've primarily
7 become a specialist in building small
8 businesses. They have been primarily
9 working in the area of influence -- small
10 influence businesses.

11 We are conducting this -- people
12 often think, when there's non-profits, that,
13 gee, the rules of for-profit companies don't
14 really apply. But of course they do. The
15 market research study that we're undertaking
16 with -- for CER is along the classic lines
17 of trying to define exactly what the
18 potential consumers of this services need;
19 how they value those needs, because there
20 can often be a dislocation between people's
21 preference for what they want and what they
22 might actually want; and a, sort of higher

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1 level, what we really wanted to do is get as
2 many charter schools operators together as
3 possible to discuss with among themselves
4 what they needed.

5 Now this is the third session that
6 we've had today, and it's been very
7 interesting so far where the discussion has
8 gone. What I'd like to do to start the
9 discussion is, basically what we're going to
10 call a "speed exercise". I've got four --
11 just so you can -- I've got four areas --
12 they're supposed to make me write this down
13 with us.

14 There's only the two of you here.
15 They're supposed to -- there's four areas
16 that we really want to go through, and
17 they're: what do you need? What do you most
18 expect? What are you disappointed by? What
19 are you most lacking, what support are you
20 most lacking? Then there's five general
21 areas of support: technical assistance,
22 advocacy, communications, new school

1 development, and general issues that come
2 into play.

3 What I'd like to do right now is
4 just take a minute, and if you could for
5 each of the four areas: What do you most
6 need, what do you most expect, what are you
7 disappointed by, what support is most
8 lacking -- right one sentence, one point for
9 each of those. Then I'm going to ask you to
10 state them on the record, and then we're
11 going to discuss that.

12 Then at the end of the session
13 today we're going to come back and see
14 whether there's been any change in your
15 mind. Now, with only the two of you here,
16 it might not be such a -- enough of a
17 discussion that you end up changing your
18 mind, but we'll move along with that as it
19 goes.

20 But the earlier sessions, this
21 actually produced some changes in thought.
22 Now, the one question that came up

1 immediately upon doing this before was,
2 "Well, who are you talking about?" If you
3 say, "What do I most expect?" "What do I
4 most expect from who?" Well, it could be
5 from the government, it could be from
6 private supporters, it could be from
7 parents, it could be from students.

8 But just in your own mind in
9 running your school, what do you most
10 expect? What do you want the most? We're
11 trying to find that out. The other thing
12 that's come through consistently is the
13 question of focus. What I'd really like you
14 to do is think big.

15 If all the money in the world and
16 all the power in the world could be thrown
17 itself in your problem, then when you think
18 about what your need is, then choose that.
19 Don't let it be constrained by, "Ah, well
20 that's impractical. Therefore I don't want
21 it." Okay? So if we could just take a
22 minute, and try and really confine your

1 answers to one sentence, so then we can go
2 more deeply into them as we go further.

3 (Recess)

4 CHAIR HAELEY: Ana Maria, would
5 you lead off?

6 MS. NUEVO: Sure.

7 CHAIR HAELEY: What do you --
8 what -- let's run down the list. Actually,
9 I'm going to take my list back from you,
10 simply because I'm about to --

11 MS. NUEVO: Oh, sure. Okay.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: But, what do you
13 most need?

14 MS. NUEVO: Right now, I feel that
15 we most need news of secure, stable, future
16 funding to allow for the growth and
17 expansion of the programs that we currently
18 have. Right now it just seems like we are
19 getting a lot of news of future budget
20 projections for charter schools, and I don't
21 see how we can improve upon what we've
22 already established and, become even better

1 with that kind of depressing news.

2 CHAIR HAELEY: The projections are
3 coming out of the Department of Education?

4 MS. NUEVO: Right. I've only
5 become aware of them myself through a
6 meeting that I was at from the Charter
7 School Resource Center. But that, I think,
8 is what we most needed to have the security.
9 You know, are we going to go all the way
10 with the charter school movement and follow
11 through on it, or are we go on and not let
12 it spend ten years? I hope, of course,
13 that's not going to happen. But I think
14 that's one of, I think, one of the most
15 critical needs right now for me, as I see
16 it.

17 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay.

18 MS. NUEVO: I didn't feel that
19 technical assistance was really something at
20 my school most needed in this time, but we
21 were a school before having become a
22 charter, so the technical assistance side,

1 from our experience, was pretty much
2 satisfied. So --

3 CHAIR HAELEY: Good. George, what
4 do you most need?

5 DR. GORDON: Well, I said we
6 needed technical support in responding to
7 special education monitoring requests, and
8 sites, and visits. I only said that in the
9 sense that we seem to be in the monitoring
10 process, getting very negative kinds of
11 comments because we are not able to respond
12 to their -- to request for process kinds of
13 issues in terms of special ed. -- the
14 student evaluations, the IEP kinds of
15 things. Back to, again, a funding issue
16 there, who's going to pay for it, and that
17 kind of thing? It's an issue. The other
18 comments here, as we move along, sort of get
19 into budget ---- how we, when it where it
20 comes up. But I would agree with your first
21 comment there.

22 CHAIR HAELEY: Good. The, Ana

1 Maria, what do you most expect?

2 MS. NUEVO: Well, I have to say
3 from the things that I have expected, I have
4 been getting them, these expectations met.
5 One of them, I think, that I have been
6 getting is support from the Charter School
7 Board in terms of keeping us not only
8 accountable for what we've set our goals to
9 be, but also allowing us to have the
10 flexibility to set our own goals. I've
11 appreciated that tremendously.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: You mentioned the
13 Charter Resource Center?

14 MS. NUEVO: Correct.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: What other support
16 groups do you generally use?

17 MS. NUEVO: Charter School
18 Resource Center, I would say, is the
19 principle one. Our school, just because of
20 the student demographics has to hold a lot
21 of partnerships with the National Council of
22 Latin ----, which is the Hispanic

1 organization, of course. Those are the two
2 that are -- come into my mind right now.

3 CHAIR HAELEY: Good. George,
4 expectations? I'll go back and forth ----
5 no problem.

6 DR. GORDON: Funds should be
7 provided in a timely manner, enabling better
8 program planning and evaluation activities.
9 Similarly the same thing.

10 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay.

11 DR. GORDON: When I say "timely
12 fashion", what I'm speaking of is that,
13 usually the funds should be in the bank --
14 and they are on the 15th of each month. But
15 what happens is there may be, as we've noted
16 during my years experience here, those funds
17 ought to go on down constantly. We're
18 always in a negative kind of -- they are
19 less than what we got in September, and less
20 than what we expected.

21 MS. ALLEN: How would you expect
22 those ----, how would you expect that --

1 we've got to get fixed -- individually,
2 collectively?

3 DR. GORDON: See, we get Montalvo
4 here. The Montalvos are kind of difficult
5 to deal with. You only hear from Montalvo
6 when you've had a problem, or you're late
7 with a report, and it can be very, very
8 direct. What I'm saying is, rather than him
9 calling and getting this information in a
10 negative fashion, we could meet with him, we
11 could say, "Look, this is the big picture
12 here -- this is how the funds are doled out,
13 and these are the problems that I'm having."
14 Because what I'm hearing from him is that it
15 is not his problem per se. As I understand
16 the budget process in the District, he's
17 responding to some things cut on his side.
18 So we're all in this together. But what we
19 get is, you're out there and you're pretty
20 much on your own. To fix it, this is just a
21 communication problem. As far as I'm
22 concerned, it can be written, it can be

1 verbal, but people are going to have to sit
2 around the table and say, "Well, look, this
3 is what the problem is, and these are some
4 of the means that I think that we can come
5 to some resolution."

6

7 CHAIR HAELEY: Then, Ana Maria,
8 moving back over to you, can we talk about
9 disappointments?

10 MS. NUEVO: Disappointments, I'm
11 afraid, just kind of -- particular to our
12 experience as a charter school for adults --
13 adult immigrants -- and I think that just
14 the idea that, whenever it comes --
15 sometimes we'll say we've had to match up,
16 whether that be in "No Child Left Behind"
17 Act funding, or anything that's particular
18 to making sure that DC public schools and
19 charter schools are doing the same thing.
20 We are constantly being pigeonholed as a --
21 there are other charter schools as charter
22 schools for children, and we constantly have

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1 to make exceptions and do reminders. Just
2 to give you an example, the Office of
3 Federal Grants and Programs, they wanted to
4 send -- they wanted to know how many
5 teachers were giving out -- were teaching
6 certain subjects, because they wanted to
7 send out their DC school's contact standards
8 and curriculum guides. You know, at work,
9 it's for adults. I'll take it, but, if not,
10 you know, I don't know how applicable it's
11 going to be. So just that constant
12 pigeonholing is frustrating for and I've
13 been disappointed by it. But I guess it's
14 to be expected. That's my main
15 disappointment.

16 CHAIR HAELEY: Mm-hmm.

17 MS. NUEVO: Right now.

18 CHAIR HAELEY: That's more of a
19 PR/Communications problem, isn't it?

20 MS. NUEVO: Yes. I mean, given
21 the -- I mean, it is. Then, also, just the
22 turn over at these offices, too, doesn't

1 help because, you know, you make an
2 agreement with -- you've written the letter,
3 you've said, you know, we have -- we
4 make --for example, we make these plans for
5 special ed. Students, or have these
6 programs, and we have an agreement, and
7 then, you know, someone new comes in, and
8 it's explain the story all over again, why
9 you don't do something the way it's been
10 delineated. So that's my disappointment.

11 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay. George, can
12 you talk about disappointments?

13 DR. GORDON: A lot of paperwork
14 and reports, as usual. Redundancy. It
15 seems like we get --

16 MS. NUEVO: What have you --

17 DR. GORDON: Well, see, we might
18 be in a unique position because we've just
19 finished two monitoring sessions. We're
20 just getting requests for reports from five
21 years ago -- information, database kind of
22 things that we may or may not have had privy

1 to, being that we've just started in
2 September. School, incidentally, is on
3 probation, and we have been doing our best
4 to erase that kind of status in terms of
5 shaping the curriculum, a lot of different
6 kinds of concerns. But again, we've had, I
7 guess, about 80 or 90 percent staff turn
8 over. That, in and of itself, causes a lot
9 of problems in terms of record maintenance
10 and that kind of situation.

11 MS. NUEVO: What have you -- by
12 the way --

13 MS. ALLEN: Are there
14 opportunities for you all to sit down? I'm
15 Jeannie Allen, by the way. We had to meet
16 Hi.

17 MS. CASSEUS: Nadia Casseus.

18 MS. ALLEN: Hi. Good to see you.
19 Had -- are there opportunities for you all
20 to be together and kind of explore if there
21 are ways to help each other?

22 MS. NUEVO: Well, I would say

1 that -- I mean, the Charter School Board
2 does have its principals' meeting, leaders
3 meeting. Charter School Resource Center
4 also has projects coming up of -- that allow
5 for -- that are going to allow for
6 moderation. But I am -- I'm going to have
7 to go with what -- taking a ---- off of what
8 George was saying, that, you know, you're a
9 school that's in trouble. It's hard, I
10 would think, to get help. I mean, just to
11 give you an example, a charter school
12 resource center is having this project
13 called the Nexus Project. It's a way for --
14 to promote schools of excellence. But they
15 only want you, you know -- you have to fill
16 out the application. They only want you if,
17 you know, you're ---- to be one of those
18 schools of excellence. Whereas, I would
19 want to have an opportunity to provide
20 assistance to a school that would, you know,
21 really get something out of it. So, I
22 don't -- maybe I might be misconstruing of

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1 the application process works and all that
2 resource center --

3 MS. ALLEN: No. You're right.
4 No, no. You're right. That is the program.

5 MS. NUEVO: Yes.

6 CHAIR HAELEY: So, Nadia, just to
7 catch everybody up with where we are and
8 what we're doing, I'll give you a little
9 exercise that we're working on. We're going
10 to circle back at the end of the discussion
11 and review these points, just to see if
12 there's anything about the discussion that
13 might have changed your mind. But just --
14 also as a matter of, you know, where we've
15 been and what we're doing -- CER, which
16 serves both a national constituency as well
17 as charter schools in Washington, is really
18 looking to try and determine what of its
19 resources can be used to help make problems
20 go away for charter schools, both here in DC
21 and nationally. The project work involved
22 in today's, is really trying to put on

1 record the, you know, from the most
2 miniscule need to the largest, grandest, if
3 there was no resources -- you know, no
4 resource limitations, what problem would I
5 most want to have solved. So, what we're
6 really asking you to do with your colleagues
7 is sort of tell us, you know, again, the
8 needs, the problems, the disappointments,
9 and Jonathan Baron is from Red Sea, which is
10 a research firm, and we're putting -- and I
11 run a strategy firm for the goal and legal
12 issues, and we're trying to help CER really
13 define how they best can use their resources
14 to go forward in solving the problems of
15 charter schools. So --

16 MS. ALLEN: I mean, because some
17 of those very issues are right now being
18 discussed here in Washington, about groups
19 to help you. We'd like to at least be able
20 to learn what we can and influence that
21 process so it's the best process.

22 CHAIR HAELEY: So it's

1 supplementary to a complementary, to not a
2 substitute for, the discussions that are
3 currently going on in DC for a potentially
4 charter school association.

5 MS. ALLEN: Yes.

6 CHAIR HAELEY: Just as it isn't --
7 it's a supplement or complement to the same
8 discussions going on in Indiana, California,
9 Arizona, and Michigan, and many of the other
10 states around the country. CER has the
11 ability to -- say there's some best
12 practices that should be coming together, or
13 different discussions have come up on what
14 type of services could be best provided that
15 every school could avail themselves of. So,
16 just to bring you further along in the
17 group, if you wouldn't mind just telling us
18 what your greatest need is.

19 MS. CASSEUS: Our greatest needs
20 are kind of twofold. One is facilities.
21 Facility is the issue -- we are currently in
22 a renovated Safeway building. It was

1 originally designed to house about 250
2 students. Our current enrollment is 670, so
3 we have about 14 portable classrooms on the
4 campus, on three different site parts of the
5 main -- we're kind of on a cul-de-sac. So
6 we've bought lots, empty lots on that
7 cul-de-sac and placed our classrooms around
8 that way. So we have 14 classrooms in
9 portables, and the other 14 classrooms are
10 in the main building. So ---- are able to
11 serve really 50 percent of our population in
12 our -- at our site. So that's a huge issue
13 in trying to even get access to how to begin
14 to research open facilities, and, you know,
15 where can we go, other than having to break
16 ground and build something new. We know
17 there are buildings available that are not
18 in use. It's just, you hit a brick wall
19 every time you try to find out how to get
20 these things, and how to kind of access
21 them, and get around to it. Second to that
22 is, I think we need -- there is a need for

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1 board development and training for charter
2 schools. I think a lot of these charter
3 schools are kind of sprung up through some
4 kind of grass roots movement a lot of the
5 times, and the people who we have sitting on
6 the boards are not necessarily trained as
7 board members prior to them considering this
8 event, or wanting to do this for their
9 communities. So the kind of basic board
10 training and responsibilities aspect gets
11 missed in them actually doing their
12 function. So when it's actually time to do
13 certain things, and we split operations from
14 board functions, it gets confused. So those
15 are probably the two things that kind of
16 stick out in my head as I think about that
17 question.

18 CHAIR HAELEY: How about
19 expectations?

20 MS. CASSEUS: What I expect
21 from -- my question was, "From whom?"

22 CHAIR HAELEY: That's an open

1 question. From government, it could be from
2 parents, it could be from private service
3 providers.

4 MS. CASSEUS: I sort of answered
5 it from, sort of a department of charter
6 school board. I was thinking, one of the
7 things we delve in today I don't feel is
8 being fostered as partnerships among charter
9 schools. We've kind of done our own
10 breaking ground with some charter schools in
11 our neighborhood, because we do feed our
12 children to some school at some point.
13 We're not the beginning and the end -- we
14 end at eighth grade. So we need to feed our
15 children to another school. So we sort of
16 have partnered with some schools on our own
17 in order to begin to that. That -- sort of
18 to dove tail on your comment, there really
19 is an opportunity to sit down and kind of
20 partner among charter schools just as a
21 think tank or just as a group of people
22 sharing needs and concerns and issues. For

1 a lot of it, I know a lot of the middle
2 schools last -- this beginning of this
3 school year, you had a lot of problems with
4 enrollment. We had tons of children who
5 didn't know where they were going until
6 September. You know, so we were, like,
7 well, we've got kids. We just can't make
8 contact with anybody to -- you know, "We've
9 got these 45 children. Do you want them?"
10 It's just impossible. It's impossible in --
11 so just to be able to kind of foster that
12 partnership, a time when charter school
13 leaders can sit down and, you know, not have
14 an agenda on the table, but an open meeting
15 to say, "This is kind of what I need. I
16 know that you're doing this well. We need
17 help here." As Dr. Gordon mentioned --

18 DR. GORDON: George.

19 MS. CASSEUS: George, turnover is
20 enormous. Is enormous. I am the fifth
21 principal in the fourth year of my school.
22 We, too, are in a probationary status right

1 now. A lot of it is due to turnover. So
2 there is no historical data. There is no,
3 you know, trying to get reports due -- that
4 was due six years ago -- no longer exist.
5 You know, it's kind of that deficient status
6 that you can't makeup from if you don't have
7 the bodies, you know, to give you the
8 answers. So some kind of partnership or
9 support for those type of things are not
10 always a slap on the wrist for what you're
11 not doing, but kind of just how you need to
12 do them. Here's a model of how you need to
13 do it. It would be really, really helpful
14 to get.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: Good. Marcia
16 McDonnell has joined us, so I'm speaking for
17 the record, Marcia. We're recording.
18 Marcia --

19 MS. McDONNELL: Mar-cee'-ah.

20 CHAIR HAELEY: Marcia.

21 MS. ALLEN: Marcia.

22 CHAIR HAELEY: So, what we're

1 talking about is what schools could most
2 need, expect, what's been the most
3 disappointing, and what's been the most
4 lacking. This exercise is basically just a
5 brief, one line, here's the thing that I
6 would most need if I could have anything.
7 So I wondered if you could answer that
8 question, not having had the chance to think
9 of an answer?

10 MS. McDONNELL: Oh, that deals
11 with my note to you: "Please tell me what
12 are the questions you have so I won't
13 mention everything at once." So --

14 CHAIR HAELEY: That's great. So
15 we'll just run through them, if you don't
16 mind doing it this way, so --

17 MS. McDONNELL: No, no. I didn't
18 think you just want one thing, the most
19 important --

20 CHAIR HAELEY: Just one thing. If
21 you could have one thing for your school,
22 what would it be?

1 MS. McDONNELL: Okay. A sack of
2 money.

3 CHAIR HAELEY: Aside from money.

4 MS. McDONNELL: Aside from money, it
5 would be our biggest need for 25 years, and it
6 hasn't changed -- it's changed slightly in the
7 last five to six years, is the people who
8 understand what we're doing who are the artist
9 teachers that we seek. The faculty are the
10 hardest to find in the world. I guess that's
11 why we haven't been eminently

12 Popular. Precisely, because it
13 is hard. So that's the hardest
14 thing for our school is to find
15 the appropriate --

16 SPEAKER: Accredited?

17 MS. McDONNELL: Yes, that's the
18 generic, but it's because of our peculiarity of
19 our schools.

20 MS. NUEVO: I would have to agree
21 with you on that. Our school is principally
22 English as a second language. So that for

1 us it's also a struggle to find teachers
2 with the appropriate qualifications in adult
3 education, and English language teaching to
4 language minority students. I mean, and
5 the -- yes.

6 MS. CASSEUS: Can I just say
7 that -- I know I said it facetiously
8 again -- and besides money, but actually
9 that is the first -- in our case, because we
10 try to stay small, so we don't have the
11 economy of scale. So money is the first
12 thing.

13 MS. ALLEN: So let me jump in. I
14 told Tom before we asked him to be objective
15 and an impartial moderator for all of you,
16 that I may jump in if I thought there was a
17 germ of something I wanted to pull out, or
18 if I thought there was something missing.
19 But because of some things you all just
20 said, and given your limited time, I wanted
21 to posit something to you. That is: if you
22 had a centralized place that actually would

1 help you in a very global way to do
2 recruiting, or service your recruiting needs
3 as you chose -- could be everything from
4 full service to maybe combining a number of
5 advertising, whatever. The sky's the limit.
6 Would that be the kind of thing a) you'd like
7 to see, and b) that you even ever heard of
8 being introduced? Or do you think it's
9 under discussion right now? In other words,
10 to what extent are some of the things you've
11 mentioned, things that you could load off on
12 a group?

13 DR. GORDON: Is that recruiting
14 for staff, or students, or what do you --

15 MS. ALLEN: Any of it. But
16 recruiting for staff is what made me think
17 of it.

18 MS. NUEVO: I would be very -- I
19 mean, for what you're sounding, what you're
20 talking about, reminds me of how our
21 executive director was saying, "Well, that
22 won't go in the school system." You know,

1 it was terrible because we had to get -- you
2 know, we couldn't do anything. We had to
3 do, you know, for supplies, for recruitment,
4 you know, whatever they sent you, you were
5 stuck with. So, in terms of your idea, I
6 would think that charter schools could
7 benefit from that type of group. But I
8 would be very concerned about the nature of
9 obligation and relationship between that
10 group and the charter schools. Is it more
11 of a resource or is it something that's kind
12 of the mouth that feeds you, I mean, type
13 of --

14 MS. ALLEN: However you design it?

15 MS. NUEVO: Right. However ----
16 was designed, I think most charter schools
17 would like to see it more as a resource in
18 the sense that we each have our own
19 individual needs in different areas. But I
20 would hesitate to make it more resembling of
21 a public school system.

22 MS. CASSEUS: BU staff that you

1 can't get rid of. So there is an
2 organization that contacts us on a regular
3 basis that does do something like that. But
4 what they do is kind of ask you what you're
5 looking for. You know, what -- to what
6 vacancies do you have in your school, if
7 any, and then salary. It is a really very,
8 very basic information sheet that you fax
9 back and then they call you and say "Well,
10 I've got three resumes. Would you like to
11 see them?" That kind of thing. I think
12 something like that is very -- I'd like it
13 to be a little more technologically sound --
14 something you could look on the website, or
15 something that can be done via e-mail. I
16 hate faxes. So, it's the worst invention in
17 life. But, something like, that can be, you
18 know, on the e-mail, or on the server on
19 the web that you can access and kind of look
20 at resumes, maybe preview, you know, preview
21 them on your own. So like -- but,
22 definitely not, "I need six teachers, and

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1 here is six teachers we delivered to you."
2 You, you know, kind of obligated to keep
3 them.

4 CHAIR HAELEY: Would you trust a
5 group like that to do the background checks
6 for you?

7 MS. CASSEUS: If I saw them,
8 after --

9 CHAIR HAELEY: If you chose
10 them --

11 MS. CASSEUS: Mm-hmm.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: Knew that they had
13 been pre-qualified, then you'd be
14 comfortable in all the back end being done.
15 But you want to choose?

16 MS. CASSEUS: Mm-hmm. But I'd
17 want to be able to make the final decision.

18 DR. GORDON: Then they would be
19 responsive if one slips through and the
20 Washington Post is on your back, if you see
21 what I'm saying. In other words, if --
22 well, I don't have to go into that. But I

1 know you can -- the responsibility you might
2 be able to, at least initiate to the point
3 that you're saying, "Well, look, if you --
4 this organization is here, and you sent me
5 someone who slips through the screening
6 process, and all of a sudden you had the
7 problem, you just don't run and hide when
8 the Post comes says, "Well, look, how did
9 you get this ---- came in that we sent you?"

10 CHAIR HAELEY: You need a partner,
11 someone to --

12 DR. GORDON: Yes, you need
13 somebody to say, "Well, look, it's not only
14 your fault as a principal for accepting this
15 particular case here. We've got some other
16 people involved here." It's neither here
17 nor there, but then the trouble is, you
18 know, doo- dah.

19 CHAIR HAELEY: But you could hire
20 the ----

21 DR. GORDON: Pardon?

22 CHAIR HAELEY: I mean, you

1 couldn't take from your budget a set of
2 money and hire a professional human
3 resources agency to do that?

4 DR. GORDON: They -- yes.
5 Outside of the fact -- ----

6 MS. CASSEUS: Someone who would
7 like to volunteer?

8 CHAIR HAELEY: So really, what
9 you're asking for is the level of
10 professionalism that you can be purchased to
11 be provided through -- if it was possible,
12 to be provided through a support
13 organization?

14 DR. GORDON: Right.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: So ---- degradation
16 of quality.

17 DR. GORDON: Right. ---- is the
18 opposite side of that coin, there is, as a
19 charter school you have some leverage in
20 doing some unique kinds of recruiting -- and
21 what you didn't have while you were in the
22 school system. So if you want to put in

1 a -- run a two-day advertisement in the Post
2 seeking certain kinds you can do that.

3 CHAIR HAELEY: Mm-hmm.

4 DR. GORDON: You might be bending
5 a rule here or there, but it can be done.
6 You could also say you need ---- downtown.
7 Put some signs up. You know, you can do
8 some creative kinds of -- and you don't want
9 to lose that at a -- well, I guess I'm
10 saying, you don't -- we have to be careful
11 what you set up, so that you don't lose some
12 autonomy that you have. End of process.

13 CHAIR HAELEY: How about other
14 areas than human resources? We've had food
15 service come up -- questions of not even
16 being able to find if -- one of the things
17 that seems to be almost a principal's
18 network of -- they know who these, you know,
19 for food services -- calling other
20 principals to say, "Who do you use? Are
21 they okay?" Would being able to have
22 resources that you could look at the would

1 identify, "These are, you know, a series of
2 food service providers with ratings from the
3 other schools." Would that be helpful?
4 Systems of services like that: lawyers,
5 accountants?

6 MS. CASSEUS: Immensely helpful.
7 I think all of that would be helpful. Some
8 way of gauging people with experience with
9 charter school servicing -- all levels of
10 service delivery. Our food services are
11 ----. I can't even begin to talk about
12 them. They're so disgusting. I can't
13 even -- if I began to talk, we'd run over in
14 time. But it's a -- I think all, just
15 general service providers from food service
16 down to, you know, electricians, and who are
17 you're using for your phone service, who are
18 you using for your internet service? Things
19 like that, because we spend a lot of time
20 jumping around different vendors trying to
21 get things done. Everyone doesn't know how
22 to deal with the needs of a school. It's

1 not a Fortune 500 company. It's not a bunch
2 of adults, you know, who will be using these
3 services, so they have to be a lot more
4 durable and child-friendly and all of that,
5 which takes a different level of, you know,
6 use. Then, because of the use there's ----
7 being installed provided their services. So
8 it would be great to be able to call, and
9 look somewhere and say these are the vendors
10 that all these schools are using, and we can
11 call someone and say, "How do you like the
12 service?" You don't find out too often
13 until you have a problem that this was not a
14 good vendor. Then somewhere in the meeting
15 someone will say, "Oh, gosh, I had them in
16 my apartment two years ago." So you say,
17 "Well, it would have been nice to know, and
18 then we wouldn't have had to go down the
19 same road and make the same mistakes for
20 it."

21 MS. ALLEN: So no one showed up
22 when you got started or when you arrived as

1 principal. Or at least you didn't have any
2 kind of little handbook that said, "There
3 are these various things available, and this
4 is how you can avail themselves, and if you
5 dial this number, so-and-so will show up to
6 help"?

7 MS. CASSEUS: Absolutely not.

8 MS. ALLEN: Did that exist when --

9 MS. McDONNELL: No, but I do have to
10 give credit. Definitely between FOCUS and the
11 research center, all the things you've
12 mentioned have been more than available in
13 terms of evaluation even of vendors -- by the
14 group, not by them, not by the providing
15 support group but by the individual schools,
16 commentaries -- and there's been a good e-mail
17 system of commentary about the -- as far as
18 recruitment is concerned, the resource center
19 has put that on for some of us --

20 MS. NUEVO: I have a job there.

21 MS. McDONNELL: Yes, and you're
22 probably talking much wider -- I like the idea

1 of being able to look at ----.

2 MS. ALLEN: How is that --

3 MS. McDONNELL: For some of us it
4 hasn't worked for us at all for faculty. It
5 still doesn't answer us because it's not a
6 typical person who would apply -- but, yes, for
7 resource people, and when there's the special
8 education supports, you know, system that
9 allows you to find vendors -- vendor fare,
10 through that. So there -- I didn't know if you
11 meant more the national scale. Possibly that
12 would make a difference, where this was a
13 little more local what they're doing. But they
14 have been doing almost every one of those
15 areas, one or another institution has. I
16 haven't seen any of them come up with, like,
17 "Here is \$5,000, and you can have it in ones,
18 or, you know, twenties, you know.

19 CHAIR HAELEY: Right. then, you
20 know, one of the questions that was brought
21 up earlier today was simple benefits that
22 can be given to teachers -- coupons for

1 florists that the centralized organization
2 could round up and have available for
3 distribution. I mean, what need do you
4 think is the most that you could really
5 off-load, Marcia? What's the number one
6 thing you can get rid of?

7 MS. McDONNELL: Oh, for off-load?

8 CHAIR HAELEY: Sorry. Off-load.

9 MS. McDONNELL: That's ----

10 COL. JOHNSON: I'm Colonel
11 Johnson.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: I'm Tom Healey, and
13 is that sun bugging you?

14 COL. JOHNSON: No, it's fine. It
15 feels great. The school is cold right now.

16 CHAIR HAELEY: So, we've been
17 going through an exercise of answering
18 essentially four questions: 1)what do you
19 need the most; 2)what do you expect the
20 most; 3)what ---- most disappointed;
21 and 4)where you've found just the whole
22 charter experience lacking.

1 MS. McDONNELL: Oh, ---- today?

2 CHAIR HAELEY: But as opposed
3 to -- we haven't gotten to "lacking" yet.
4 We've ---- a little exercise which we're not
5 going to go back through. But that's sort
6 of our context. So as a practical matter,
7 you know, as we talk about needs and things
8 that can be off-loaded, some of the
9 questions that came up quite a bit earlier
10 was the discussions with governmental
11 entities.

12 MS. McDONNELL: I was going to
13 address that.

14 CHAIR HAELEY: Definitions of
15 formulas for -- per child, per head
16 payments, the request for special
17 legislation, the lobbying area, and general
18 advocacy work. Is this an area that -- if
19 any ---- would like to discuss this now, so
20 Colonel Johnson, since you just joined us,
21 perhaps you can tell me about the need of
22 your organization -- your school, for, you

1 know, outreach efforts, people to walk out
2 in the community and speak out on issues
3 that not just affect your school, but the
4 general DC charter area.

5 COL. JOHNSON: Right. The issue
6 you just addressed, I think that affects all
7 schools, because what has happened -- and I
8 am just going to talk about my school, but I
9 think it affects all schools -- is the
10 bureaucracy has found us. You know that the
11 first year, you know, you running very hard
12 trying to get everything together. Now,
13 because the bureaucracy has found you, you
14 are pulled so many different directions in
15 order to provide the paperwork here, a
16 report here and a report there, and so when
17 we talk about going out and doing the
18 outreach, it's been very, very difficult.
19 We have a person who is a volunteer that
20 does a lot of our outreach. It's very
21 difficult for even that one person to do
22 that, to go talk to the local ANC's in the

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1 community, the local politicians, to talk to
2 some of the businesses in the area. We want
3 people to talk to the different churches and
4 just people in the community. We found that
5 very, very difficult now. Just like me, I
6 mean, I the meeting person. That's what I
7 do. I do meetings and graphs. It's hard
8 for me to even know the kids anymore. In
9 fact, that's difficult for me to take,
10 because I like that interaction with the
11 kids. So when you're talking about one of
12 the difficulties, absolutely, as I said, the
13 bureaucracy has just kind of, just sucked us
14 in.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: Well then, in going
16 out to churches, is it a matter of, you
17 know, the general community not really
18 knowing what the school does, or not even
19 knowing it exists, or do find it's more than
20 a persuasive case of -- they know who you
21 are, but you've got to identify where you're
22 solving one of their needs?

1 COL. JOHNSON: Well, we had to get
2 a little smarter, because I said it was
3 difficult for us to get out. Because in our
4 community, within about a mile radius,
5 there's about 27 churches. So in that case
6 we've got three that border our property.
7 So one of the ways we got smart, we invited
8 them to be part of our local school
9 restructuring team. So, they're partnered
10 with us, so now that's how we get a little
11 outreach that way, through them.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: Nadia, could you --
13 sorry. I saw you with a bottle at your
14 mouth, and that's just something I do with
15 my kids all the time. Advocacy, is this an
16 area that you think there's a need for?
17 Public relations, communications?

18 MS. CASSEUS: I think some kind of
19 public relations needs to be done. I'm not
20 certain what level we would need
21 consistently, but at different times we need
22 different things. So someone who can

1 provide the gamut of services and we could
2 kind of a la carte pick what we need at a
3 certain time. I think during recruitment
4 time it's imperative if we had someplace
5 where we would run ads, if there were
6 someplace where we would know all of the
7 schools -- all of the elementary schools or
8 whomever, who are looking to, you know, feed
9 their children somewhere else -- if we could
10 find out where all of the area job fares are
11 so we can be there to recruit rather than
12 calling 18 different schools every time to
13 find out when they're having a --

14 CHAIR HAELEY: Do you all
15 advertise at the same time?

16 MS. CASSEUS: Not usually.

17 SPEAKER: ----

18 MS. CASSEUS: No.

19 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay.

20 SPEAKER: ----

21 MS. CASSEUS: Yes.

22 MS. McDONNELL: Yes, we all hear

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1 stories

2 CHAIR HAELEY: I'm sorry?

3 MS. McDONNELL: Stories -- you know,
4 getting stories of people the PR, the
5 stories --

6 COL. JOHNSON: See, we used to use
7 the radios, but we found that not
8 necessarily non-productive, but we found
9 that the best way for us to do it was by
10 word of mouth, actually going to -- talking
11 to different schools, different agencies.

12 MS. CASSEUS: ----

13 MS. NUEVO: ----

14 COL. JOHNSON: Yes, absolutely.

15 MS. McDONNELL: Are we talking about
16 recruitment here, or just general information?

17 COL. JOHNSON: A little of both.

18 MS. McDONNELL: I mean, we also try
19 to get out press releases to the different news
20 organizations. We've also -- our school is
21 also a part of the Council of Latino Agencies,
22 which is a local agency that -- so we mail

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1 stuff to the community that way. Just, you
2 know, people that we've -- organizations that
3 we've kept up with in the past huge mailing
4 lists, and that's a lot of the ways that we
5 announce what's going on at the school, whether
6 that be the school's groundbreaking ceremony
7 for the new building, or commencement
8 ceremonies, or any festivals that we're having.
9 We usually have these festivals that celebrate
10 the students' heritages throughout the year.
11 We definitely make that a PR event to invite,
12 and we've had -- at the last one we had someone
13 from WETA, and the Washington Post was at the
14 last graduation ceremony, so we're trying to
15 definitely make sure that our school is getting
16 showcased, because it definitely helps later
17 on.

18 MS. CASSEUS: It's difficult
19 finding "school- friendly" reporters. I
20 think a lot of the reporters come looking
21 for the bad story at the school -- what's
22 wrong with the school? What's happening

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1 incorrectly, or who's mismanaging -- or
2 things like that.

3 MS. NUEVO: It's a sexier story.

4 MS. CASSEUS: Right. Right.

5 Rather than finding the good news people,
6 when we want to hear about the commencement
7 ceremonies, we want to hear about, you know,
8 the volunteering, and all the civil duties
9 that the children are doing, the community
10 service that they're doing, they really
11 don't want to cover stuff like that. We did
12 a huge event on the King holiday where we
13 had 125 students come in and partnered with
14 DC Cares and the Red Cross, to paint the
15 building. It was all volunteers, and it was
16 a huge effort, and we got stuff donated from
17 Home Depot, and stuff donated from
18 McDonald's lunches, and everything from
19 them, and then we put a big press release
20 out and we got one reporter from Fox, I
21 think, who came out. I think it ran, like,
22 Saturday night at 10:30 when everybody's at

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1 dream. So, you know, how do we get that out
2 there, you know, versus if we had, you know,
3 the water main break or some kids couldn't
4 get into the school on Tuesday -- that would
5 have been all over the front page.

6 CHAIR HAELEY: Did you put a press
7 release out that you were on TV?

8 MS. CASSEUS: That we were on TV?

9 CHAIR HAELEY: After they did it?

10 MS. CASSEUS: No, we didn't do
11 that.

12 CHAIR HAELEY: You should have.

13 MS. CASSEUS: Well, see, I didn't
14 know that. It would be nice to have someone
15 tell me that then.

16 (Laughter)

17 CHAIR HAELEY: But if there was a
18 central place that could do that type of
19 stuff --

20 MS. CASSEUS: Absolutely.

21 CHAIR HAELEY: But that that would
22 be helpful. That type of general image for

1 both the school as well as charter schools
2 generally. How about direct lobbying
3 efforts -- have any of you engaged in
4 lobbying efforts to try and actually get
5 special appropriations for your schools
6 earmarked phonies --

7 MS. McDONNELL: Oh, that kind of --

8 MS. ALLEN: What kind of lobbying?
9 Marcie, You were shaking your head "yes"?

10 MS. McDONNELL: I was just saying
11 that we do so lobby since we have ---- to
12 the lobbyists directly.

13 MS. ALLEN: Right.

14 MS. McDONNELL: But we've left it,
15 again, to some of the -- some of the, what
16 you're talking about, some of the wider
17 institutions to do the more provocative
18 lobbying with Congress. But on a local level,
19 so with -- I'm sure with each board, we
20 constantly in one way or another are having to
21 communicate that they -- someone else might
22 interpret it as lobbying about legislation.

1 That's the area I think that is one of the most
2 needed. Like, we're all talking about things
3 that disappear. Sound like fearful, but it
4 doesn't have to be, about, of what could be
5 imposed by the unifying in certain ways. But
6 there are some things that are unifying is
7 essential, and that's the legislative aspects.
8 But on a local level, I'm sure with each board
9 unifying such as, I guess I have to say a
10 unified feeling about the imposition of the
11 federal education legislation has effected --
12 is bothering almost everybody then from the
13 survey we get with Stokes. Our school, a part
14 of the responses we got -- the two areas,
15 everybody is unified on the two areas that we
16 really need to be on. That would be to be able
17 to affect federal legislation. I think that's
18 where we need the most help, because of the
19 nature of DC, and because it is -- well, not
20 just -- no -- not just DC in this case. This
21 is affecting every state, federal legislation,
22 and the way it's being interpreted in terms of

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1 high staked testing, which I know, you know,
2 there's some difference on, maybe here at this
3 table. But for the most part in public charter
4 schools they are unified, except for maybe
5 three exceptions that I know of, about that
6 issue. About the interpretation of highly
7 qualified teacher, which is almost the essence
8 of what ---- or descriptive of whether our
9 public charter schools to be able to decide
10 what that means to us, as long as the outcomes
11 are strong, and that we should have -- and just
12 finally, that we should have varied ways of
13 assessing those outcomes. So, I'm just laying
14 out what I think are currently some of the
15 major lobbying efforts that are needed as ----.

16 MS. ALLEN: We learned earlier,
17 that, unlike a handful of states where the
18 authorizers have, in fact, sat down and made
19 an attempt to explain and to work with
20 charter schools directly on how to align
21 themselves with these things without
22 compromising their mission -- that none of

1 that has been done here. It sounds like
2 there's a lot confusion on the teacher piece
3 itself. That's actually a surprise, because
4 that's something that we would have expected
5 that be done right out of the box by any
6 number of groups working here on behalf of
7 charter schools.

8 CHAIR HAELEY: An unintended
9 consequence of ---- research, right? This
10 just is not something that -- I think, what
11 Jeanne was saying earlier was that -- she
12 just expected or CER expected that the DC
13 Charter Schools had this qualified teacher
14 issue in hand, like the other states do.
15 But, in fact, it's almost unanimous among
16 the groups today, that no one's come and
17 presented the qualified teacher issue or the
18 other elements of "no child left behind", to
19 you as a group or individually. Has anyone
20 received any individual counseling on this
21 area?

22 MS. McDONNELL: Yes, by -- by

1 calling up our state and communicating --
2 taking the initiative to do that -- hearing
3 their interpretation. Also, the person at
4 FOCUS who -- what's her name?

5 COL. JOHNSON: Shirley?

6 MS. McDONNELL: No.

7 COL. JOHNSON: Or Natasha?

8 MS. McDONNELL: Yeah. She and
9 someone else have been, sort of, running the
10 state -- the federal level meetings to --
11 they've been interpreting it. There's been
12 interpretation, but that's not what I'm talking
13 about -- I'm talking about being able to make
14 our response from our state being a part of it,
15 and so by talking to DCPS, we at least got
16 involved now. In the little area -- the little
17 room there is to -- for the state to respond --
18 so it's more than just hearing what is, it's
19 lobbying we need, I think, to affect change.

20 MS. ALLEN: But since you're not a
21 part of DCPS, shouldn't you have your own
22 voice going directly to the feds?

1 MS. McDONNELL: Oh, yes. I would
2 think -- as we exist as a state and dealing
3 with DCPS as its role in the state, they've
4 been -- the new people in place are somewhat
5 open.

6 MS. ALLEN: But, you're different.
7 In fact, we worked really hard to make sure
8 there was a clause in the federal law
9 saying, that while a lot of these things
10 must apply, they have to be handled
11 differently, because charters are different.
12 That itself gets lost in the absence of you
13 all having a way to communicate.

14 MS. McDONNELL: Can -- even though
15 maybe it's not your intent, in this, can you
16 respond and say that FOCUS -- if you had an
17 affect on federal law, because a lot of this
18 stuff is -- that we -- the two areas we are
19 real concerned about seem to be very narrow,
20 but we -- hoping the interpretation can be
21 made, and some say it can, that our federal
22 law for public charter schools, to public

1 charter school law here trumps the --

2 MS. ALLEN: Yes, although not in
3 terms of testing. I know you don't like to
4 hear that, Marcia. But, that said, and
5 again, this is one of those areas where the
6 really strong state infra- structures have
7 figured out how to help their charter
8 schools work with the within the eyes of
9 this law without comprising. That's part of
10 the void that we're hearing all day, but
11 what may be working towards filling that
12 void, we're not sure where that's coming
13 down.

14 MS. McDONNELL: Can you just
15 answer one other thing, and what about the
16 other one that we thought were the two
17 strongest things were -- even stronger one
18 was qualified teachers, is that according to
19 the public charter school -- that's what
20 we've heard -- we can interpret it as long
21 as they're highly qualified for the
22 individual school. Is that as you interpret

1 it?

2 MS. ALLEN: It is very flexible.

3 MS. McDONNELL: Okay. Thank you.

4 MS. ALLEN: He's looking at me,
5 like, where did she come from.

6 COL. JOHNSON: No. No. No. You
7 were mentioning someone talking about some
8 of the direct line, and I was thinking that
9 in reference to a couple of things. One,
10 that the highly qualified teacher which, I
11 know that everybody in here knows for the
12 charter schools in DC, it says that we don't
13 have to be certified. So, we've been
14 grappling as a group among the traditional
15 public schools and the charter schools to
16 see what "highly qualified" means in DC.
17 Well, also, because there is two chartering
18 boards here, and I have to speak for the
19 Board of Education, because that's what
20 we're chartered under -- and I know you're
21 under the Public Charter School Board -- so,
22 it's two boards and there's a different

1 focus on different things. Because, with
2 the Board of Education -- the Board of
3 Education speaks for DCPS, but we're also
4 chartered by the Board of Education. So
5 they have to have enough knowledge in order
6 to capture what our concerns are, and some
7 of the concerns of DCPS, and carry them
8 forward. That is supposed to be our quote
9 federal voice. But this somehow gets lost
10 as it goes forward.

11 MS. McDONNELL: So that's why we
12 have that need -- that you've been asking --
13 that's the biggest need.

14 MS. ALLEN: Independent from your
15 authorizers' voice, that can help you
16 through your authorizers -- sounds like
17 you're saying.

18 COL. JOHNSON: Yes. Yes.

19 DR. GORDON: In addition to this,
20 I think I heard mentioned
21 newsletters/newspapers that are generated by
22 the charter school, or whatever organization

1 might come out as a result of this. On air
2 time, you mentioned -- someone mentioned
3 here -- dealing with reporters. Principals
4 can't deal with reporters. They're -- the
5 whole process is different. There's no news
6 but bad news, and when you deal with
7 reporters you have to assume that that's the
8 position they are going to take, but we all
9 understand that. What I am saying though
10 is, if we're going to create an entity here,
11 that it's highly possible we're talking
12 about communications here. If a group got
13 together and developed a professional
14 publication of what's going on in each
15 charter school, providing some air time,
16 get -- the whole process of getting fifteen
17 minutes on a local station, the amount of
18 time it would take before a principal would
19 do that it's just enormous. Even having the
20 context, it would make it prohibitive at
21 best.

22 CHAIR HAELEY: So, someone to

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1 pitch your story -- someone to come up with
2 the editorial matrix for the written
3 publication ---- --

4 DR. GORDON: Professionally done.

5 MS. McDONNELL: Kind of like, the
6 Washington Post -- the Washington Post had a
7 piece on each of the charter schools -- that
8 was a while back.

9 DR. GORDON: We need a constant
10 piece coming out.

11 MS. McDONNELL: You mean
12 something --

13 CHAIR HAELEY: That was Nadia
14 speaking, who just said, he sent me the
15 e-mail. When we all speak at once then the
16 transcription falls apart. ---- So, but the
17 question was: has the article been
18 published? Consensus earlier was, that no,
19 the article has not been published yet. So
20 then, we only have about 15 to 20 minutes
21 left, so I would like to run through the
22 question of what's most lacking again,

1 although we seem to hit on that fairly
2 clearly with lobbying and advocacy,
3 communications, different PR efforts,
4 coordinated media presence. Special ed.
5 hasn't come up in this discussion at all.
6 The rules of special ed., the questions of
7 special ed., is there any other areas, in
8 particular, that you'd like to bring up
9 that's been lacking, which you would value
10 What's most lacking from your school?

11 MS. CASSEUS: I put here, some
12 kind of a constant flow of documentation,
13 information, and controls. I think everyday
14 we wake up, the rules have changed. So,
15 it's always impossible to know if you're
16 playing basketball or we're playing football
17 today. I think that's the -- probably the
18 most difficult aspect of, kind of, keeping
19 the stream steady.

20 CHAIR HAELEY: So, there's no --
21 for a lack of better terms -- attorneys
22 overseeing the regulators, and in turn the

1 regulators are changing the rules on you.

2 MS. CASSEUS: Right. For example,
3 this is -- most of us deal with
4 out-of-boundary children, because our
5 children don't need to be in certain
6 boundaries within neighborhoods. They just
7 have to be District residents. When I move
8 my children from my school to neighborhood
9 schools, then the boundary issue becomes an
10 issue for them, although it was -- it hasn't
11 been -- maybe for the time they've been with
12 us. Some huge thing happened with the way
13 the out-of-boundary process is to happen
14 this year. The only reason why we found out
15 about it is a parent, who had a child in
16 another school, in a DC public school, said,
17 "Did you guys hear about this?" We hadn't
18 heard about it. For our eighth graders and
19 some of our sixth graders, potentially,
20 that's huge. If they weren't housed with us
21 and continued to go through the process as
22 we typically do, and by the time March came

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1 around, and April, they would have missed
2 their opportunity for the out-of-bound
3 replacements. So, that was not the rule
4 last year, and we were, kind of, going with
5 everything last year, and if that was to be
6 changed, then it would have been great to
7 know in December, this is what you need to
8 do in January or by February, rather than
9 assuming that it goes the same way and not
10 getting notified of the detail. It's a
11 problem. That happens in many different
12 arenas, not just, you know, that -- you
13 know, what you need to report one month, you
14 report -- you turn in eighteen different
15 reports -- the next month, well, you really
16 need to have those two; you shouldn't have
17 turned in those eighteen. Anyway, but
18 you're really late on this other thing that
19 we didn't tell you that you should've turned
20 instead of eighteen things that you did turn
21 in. So, it's, you know, it's just, can we
22 have in September, all of this, what you

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1 need for the entire year -- with knowing,
2 and knowing on the back of your head, yes,
3 there will be exceptions based on emergency
4 situations -- but, if we know September
5 through June, these are the things that you
6 are going to need from us, and when, and in
7 what form, then we can always comply. But,
8 it seems to change quite frequently.

9 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay. George.

10 DR. GORDON: Let me preface my
11 statement -- I got to follow-up on something
12 that Marcia said here earlier. It may be
13 that much of what we've discussed already
14 exists, the technical support kind of thing
15 at the charter school office and in a number
16 of other existing organizations -- we don't
17 want to leave you with the impression --

18 MS. ALLEN: Can you name what
19 those are so we make sure that we've got
20 some --

21 DR. GORDON: Well, when I deal
22 with the Charter School Board, it's charter

1 school office or resource center. Most of
2 the requests that I've made I've been able
3 to get. They come through. The issue is,
4 do you have enough time to really sit down
5 and make -- get away from your desk and the
6 school to go pick it up or do whatever have
7 you -- but the -- when you ask for
8 assistance, generally it's there. Now, I
9 cannot say that I've had an instance yet in
10 which we've asked for technical assistance
11 and which it was not either responded to by
12 saying, "Well, look, we're going to have a
13 session within the next two months regarding
14 this issue, or if you'd like you might want
15 to come by and pick up this memo, or maybe
16 you want to go through this document here to
17 find out what the answer is". Okay, that's
18 one. Now, let me go back and respond to
19 what you were saying here. What support is
20 most lacking? I said, the technical support
21 in terms of managing these accounts and your
22 monies. This seems to be a big issue,

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1 because we're all using different kinds of
2 bookkeeping systems. When you get -- when
3 the monitor comes out, I have never seen a
4 case yet in which we are in congruence with
5 what they expect. Case in point, are you
6 using Quick Books; are you using Quicken;
7 what kind of system are you using? But,
8 these are very simple kinds of things to me.
9 We all should be using the same doggone
10 system, if you got money. So, you know what
11 to expect when they come out, especially
12 when you're standing with an auditor, you're
13 in education, and what are you supposed to
14 do except get creamed in the process.
15 That's my only comment.

16 CHAIR HAELEY: Well, the question
17 of control and treasury functions came up
18 earlier with accounting, and whether some of
19 that can be standardized. They'd let you
20 use Quicken. Anyone?

21 DR. GORDON: Not Quicken.

22 CHAIR HAELEY: Quick Books has

1 double sided accounting. Quicken is
2 one-sided.

3 MS. McDONNELL: Requirements must
4 be in both, but under that Board of Ed.
5 they, kind of, want us to do whatever the
6 CFO is wanting. Now, not that what we do
7 internally -- internally -- but the outcomes
8 have to be pretty standardized. If certain
9 systems -- I imagine to some people's
10 disdain, when they were going in other
11 direction -- about a year ago, so there was
12 some unification. Can I bring up the need
13 that, you know, we have -- keep passing by,
14 as though it were impossible? Suddenly I
15 thought, let's be creative, because you
16 brought us together. There is something
17 that I mentioned that really could happen if
18 we had a unified group of fundraisers.
19 Instead of just doing what we've been doing
20 up to now, which is helping some support
21 agency -- support organization help us,
22 which takes a lot of -- it takes a lot of

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1 money and gives us some actual support like
2 a particular person might be able to do a
3 particular function, and it does support us,
4 so that's helpful. But, what could be much
5 more economical, I just thought of, with
6 fundraisers, is literally, if we raise for
7 DC, for example, if somewhat unified could
8 raise \$10 million dollars and we'd each
9 have \$300,000 a year, that's just an
10 example -- that would be putting all our
11 efforts together, and really raising money.
12 I mean, that is what the individual
13 creativity of public charter schools could
14 well use. That's just going right to the
15 guts of one of the things that we need. We,
16 sort of, by-pass it, because we think -- I
17 think, we think, we're -- this isn't the
18 place to talk about it.

19 CHAIR HAELEY: Earlier on, we
20 talked about the idea of -- think as large
21 as you possibly can.

22 MS. McDONNELL: Oh. Okay.

1 CHAIR HAELEY: We have no limit.
2 If you -- if there was no constraint for
3 funding, no constraint for the amount of
4 effort that could be put toward something,
5 what do you want most? Which was going to
6 be our closing question again too, but we'll
7 go there in a second, because I want to go
8 back to: Colonel Johnson, what's most
9 lacking?

10 COL. JOHNSON: Well, I'm glad
11 we're talking about the resources. Marcia
12 talked about it; George has talked about it,
13 and Nadia has alluded to it. One of things
14 would be great if we did have a ---- central
15 clearing house for say, grant writing or
16 something like that, that could help support
17 all charter schools. Because, let's face
18 it, all of us know that we never have enough
19 money to do all the things we want to do.
20 We have barely enough to do the things that
21 we need to do. One of the issues that we're
22 addressing right now -- in fact, there's a

1 budget meeting tomorrow on -- it deals with
2 the per pupil allocation. I would just like
3 to see a fair and equitable way of
4 addressing that per pupil allocation.
5 Because, both from the facilities, and also
6 for the regular student formulas, the
7 charter schools have been really cut back --
8 cut, based on what was in your budget, but a
9 real drop-off from what we received last
10 year. I think there's some inequitable
11 areas in the way that funding formula is
12 addressed. Just like in our school it is
13 about \$80,000. Now that might not be a lot
14 for a lot of organizations, but I don't
15 have \$80,000 in my wallet. So, it's
16 sufficient funding that we have to address
17 by budget reduction and reducing some actual
18 expenses. So, that's what I'd like to see,
19 something that's fair on the per pupil
20 putting out formula.

21 MS. McDONNELL: That's back to
22 advocacy, right?

1 COL. JOHNSON: Oh, yes. That,
2 too.

3 MS. McDONNELL: Advocacy. Then, can
4 I just start, the clearing was for the other
5 would be -- I just want to say, that for the
6 actual money -- we need more than a clearing
7 house. We need, actual grant writers, because
8 there is a clearing house of, like, grants that
9 are -- that you can find out about.

10 MS. ALLEN: One of the ideas that
11 I raised earlier with the group that was
12 talking about this fundraising, was rather
13 than have people say, "Oh, there's a great
14 grant we want to write. Will you
15 participate?" They come to you. They ask
16 you for all this information, and you may
17 touch the surface. What about thinking in
18 terms of having resources that you could tap
19 into, where maybe somebody has already
20 identified 300 foundations that like to
21 provide services to groups like yours, and,
22 "Hey, Marcia, I just found five that really

1 do meet an arts' charter school" -- and
2 where you might be able to make some
3 headway, and here's the contact information,
4 and I've already dropped them a note about
5 you. So, you need -- so in other words, cut
6 out some of the process, so that at least
7 you've got a clear path -- is one model that
8 you could consider.

9 MS. McDONNELL: Except for that
10 last thing, I dropped you a note depending
11 on who it was. The awareness of where we
12 can get support, I found is more available
13 than getting someone who is a poetic grant
14 writer. That's a real need -- is grant
15 writing for us. But it doesn't hurt, but
16 we've got a lot of knowledge.

17 CHAIR HAELEY: Ana Maria.

18 MS. NUEVO: Support most
19 lacking -- I already have technical
20 assistance. I feel that our school has been
21 able to accomplish that mostly by outside
22 partnerships and carrying through our own

1 institutional memory, but after hearing what
2 Nadia was saying about documentation,
3 information and controls, I really did
4 relate to that in the sense of what we've
5 had to report to our Charter School Board,
6 and what we've had to report to the Office
7 of Federal Grants & Programs in terms of "no
8 child left behind". I'm a little bit more
9 prone to cut some slack to the Charter
10 School Board, because in a sense, they were
11 created at the same time we were, more or
12 less, and have kind of grown with us, and
13 they've changed some things. What, for
14 example, what we've had to report in our
15 annual report, our accountability plan and
16 such. But it -- how do you collect data
17 from year to year, when every year you're
18 asked to report something different. So,
19 every year, you say to yourself, "I'm
20 collecting this, and let's remember, so next
21 year, it won't be a problem," and the next
22 year, it is something else that they're

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1 asking for. So the sense of historical data
2 does become quite an issue. So, I'm hoping
3 that with the stability of the movement,
4 that we'll reach some type of consistency.

5 CHAIR HAELEY: Now, we're getting
6 near closing time -- or in fact, if you all
7 don't mind staying a few extra minutes,
8 since we're at closing time -- I'd like to
9 just run -- is that okay? A couple of extra
10 minutes. I want to go back around the table
11 and discuss this question of greatest need
12 again, and although it may be pedantic and
13 sometimes to define greatest need, for the
14 research purposes of what Jonathan is doing
15 and what I'm doing -- to hear it straight
16 from your mouth again, you know, answering
17 the question -- my single greatest need is
18 "X" and why, would be very helpful. So Ana
19 Maria, I'm taking it right back at you, and
20 if can please define your greatest need, and
21 why it is your greatest need?

22 MS. NUEVO: I'm just going to have

1 to go with what I said in the beginning, and
2 just, the stability of future funding in
3 terms of the sense that, hopefully we will
4 chartered for another fifteen years. We
5 need to know that we can count on the
6 stability and growth in order to do what we
7 need to do. I'll leave it at that.

8 CHAIR HAELEY: Okay. Marcia, are
9 you getting coffee or are you leaving?

10 MS. McDONNELL: I was going to and
11 then, I -- you see, I have to get that -- a
12 hundred dollar fine would be a little
13 difficult right now. The car: Four
14 o'clock.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: What do you most
16 need?

17 MS. McDONNELL: So, I've mentioned
18 most of them: advocacy, and faculty, and money.
19 So, I think you've heard a lot from me in this
20 short time.

21 CHAIR HAELEY: Colonel Johnson?

22 COL. JOHNSON: Marcia put it well

1 for the advocacy; money to include what I've
2 already indicated; and then obviously, grant
3 writing.

4 CHAIR HAELEY: Nadia?

5 MS. CASSEUS: Okay. What we need
6 mostly, is that SouthEast Academy is a
7 facility that can grow with us, and
8 information, so we know ahead of time what
9 we need to do.

10 CHAIR HAELEY: Thank you. George?
11 I've got no one else to go to but Jeannie.

12 MS. ALLEN: I need --

13 MS. NUEVO: I need a vacation.

14 DR. GORDON: Well, everybody is
15 talking about money, so we'll -- my belief
16 on the money issue is you give me the money;
17 I can do my own advocacy. I'd just say
18 technical assistance probably, number three.
19 That should permeated much of what I was
20 saying, being able to pick up the phone and
21 say, "I need this. I need the assistance in
22 doing this or that". That's -- would be my

1 number three.

2 CHAIR HAELEY: Now, one of the
3 discussions on the assistance earlier was
4 almost saying -- one of the other principal
5 was saying -- when she picks up the phone,
6 what she ends up is being told, "Ah, here's
7 more work you can do to solve your problem".
8 Do you find when you currently ask for
9 assistance that you -- and, you know, almost
10 defined it to some extent earlier, when you
11 said, people say, "Pick up this paper;
12 here's this book to read".

13 DR. GORDON: Yeah. I almost went
14 into that.

15 CHAIR HAELEY: Is that the kind of
16 problem when you seek technical assistance?

17 DR. GORDON: Get off your duff.
18 Come out -- come out to the school, sit down
19 and talk with people. We've got students.
20 You can't leave the building. That's number
21 one. If you leave, you better back on time.
22 But, if you have an organization, that

1 person should be able to get in his or her
2 car, go out to the facility, bring whatever
3 you have -- or use media or appropriate
4 media and respond -- that's all I'm saying.

5 MS. CASSEUS: Kind of, to dovetail
6 on that, it's answers. We need answers to
7 questions that we ask, not another road to
8 go down to find another question. That's,
9 kind of, what we end up doing. So, when we
10 ask a question, we'd like to have an answer.

11 SPEAKER: Somebody will respond to
12 this.

13 MS. ALLEN: Can I just throw out
14 since Marcia's car hasn't been towed yet,
15 what do you think the public perception of
16 charter schools in DC is, both by the local
17 public as well as the, kind of, the greater
18 federal city? Do you have a sense of what
19 you think?

20 MS. McDONNELL: We have to
21 constantly put out there, from a number of
22 us with whom I've spoken, is our whole

1 growingness -- growingness is an important
2 issue with the local level. That's not
3 saying everything else, but it's implying
4 all the other issues.

5 MS. ALLEN: But, do they think
6 you're important, a political force, a
7 strong group they should fear when you walk,
8 they don't care, I mean, what's the kind of
9 general --

10 MS. McDONNELL: Money is getting
11 taken away from DCPS. Fear.

12 MS. CASSEUS: They see us as a
13 kind of competition, but very temporary
14 competition. This is kind of a new fangled
15 thing, and eventually it will go away. You
16 know, they kind of backing us right now, but
17 eventually they'll go away. I think that's
18 kind of where we are, and most -- I think,
19 it's two tiered. Either you have people who
20 are, you know, really, really in your
21 corner, and will bend over backwards to do
22 it, and that's probably about 8 percent.

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1 Then, the other 92 percent are just --
2 that's why my school is half empty, because
3 you took part of my kids and my money. So,
4 we don't have these children, but these
5 children weren't in your building before I
6 was here. So, it's, kind of, that kind
7 of --

8 DR. GORDON: I'll take it to a
9 personal level. My wife is in the public
10 school system, and there are certain aspects
11 of what we do, myself, in terms of the
12 charter school, we don't discuss at the
13 dinner table.

14 (Laughter)

15 MS. ALLEN: I want to come to your
16 house.

17 MS. CASSEUS: I share George's
18 view. My husband works for the DC public
19 schools as well, and we don't talk about
20 work at all -- at home.

21 (Laughter)

22 CHAIR HAELEY: Very good, well,

1 thank you everyone for coming in today and
2 for making the time. The transcript of this
3 session will be available in about ten
4 business days or sometime after ten business
5 days.

6 (Whereupon, at 3:36 p.m., the
7 PROCEEDINGS were was adjourned.)

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