

In The Matter Of:

*CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
CHARTER SCHOOL OPERATIONS*

*FOCUS GROUP 2
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GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
CENTER FOR EDUCATION REFORM
FOCUS GROUP NO. 2 FOR D.C. CHARTER SCHOOL
OPERATIONS
Washington, D.C.

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[1] PROCEEDINGS

[2] (12:38 p.m.)

[3] MS. VARGHESE: We'll just welcome [4] people as they come in. Just wanted to take [5] this time to thank you for getting here on [6] time, or taking time out of your schedules [7] to come to this support meeting. Before I [8] hand it over to Jeannie and Tom, I just [9] wanted to explain to you that this focus [10] group was convened because it's part of a [11] broad national effort to better understand [12] the needs of charter schools, and to help us [13] better influence the development of any [14] organization that is created to serve your [15] needs, both locally and nationally. Jean [16] will fill you in a little bit more.

[17] MS. ALLEN: I'm Jeannie Allen, and [18] I run CER, and Ann is our External Affairs [19] Director, and we had — we have basically a [20] multi-state effort going on right now. DC [21] is the only state we're doing this in [22] person.

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[1] The other groups we're doing it by [2] way of telephone survey. Jonathan Baron is [3] with Red Sea, which is doing our survey. [4] Tom Healey is with HG Strategies, which is [5] Ameritrip local consulting firm. The [6] purpose is two-fold: It's really very [7] national and local in scope.

[8] It's to really help define in a [9] very clear and objective way what is the [10] needs and interests in issues really that [11] are facing schools are without the [12] additional filter of other people talking on [13] their behalf. To hear you get it to get it [14] on record, help us both be able to digest [15] it, influence what's happening with you [16] locally as well as nationally.

[17] We had a group of six people [18] earlier. We're going to have, I think, [19]

eight in the next session. There should be [20] about five or six now, and then we're going [21] to follow-ups where we hit every single [22] charter school.

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[1] It is important to do it quickly [2] and to get it off going quickly, so I [3] appreciate your help because there's a lot [4] of things happening that could really help [5] influence what happens here. Tom Healey is [6] your moderator.

[7] CHAIR HAELEY: All right. I [8] thought before I'm going to [9] introduce myself. I'm going to give each of [10] you one of these — I'm going to ask you to [11] break a little bit down. Sorry, here's a [12] pencil. What we've been asked to do — [13] well, let me — I'm sorry, I'm a specialist [14] in building small businesses. That's what I [15] really spend most of my life doing.

[16] That's what I know about. For us [17] has been working primarily with [18] companies that are in the influence center [19] and public relations, public affairs, [20] financial communications, and helping [21] companies that help other companies in those [22] areas.

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[1] Our work, the work with Jonathan [2] with Red Sea, and the work that I'm doing [3] with HG Strategy for CER, is to take their [4] organization, which is a small but rapidly [5] growing business, and help it to better [6] define how it can serve its clientele.

[7] So this is really just the — the [8] discussion groups today, plus surveys that [9] we're doing in Indiana and California, and [10] what we're doing in other states, are all [11] part of a process to say that non-profit [12] organizations are not independent from the [13] principles of how you should serve your [14] clients.

[15] That the responsibilities that you [16] need to — the duties and responsibilities [17] of the small business takes when it's [18] serving its clients, translate almost [19] perfectly into the non-profit area. So this [20] is a market research project. We want to [21] come out of this with ability and a national [22] level for CER, and at the local level.

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[1] So, to help them to interact with, [2] for example, new organizations like this [3] charter school association that's being [4] talked about here in DC, is similar to [5] what's being talked about in other states. [6] How can CER support those efforts here, how [7] can it support elsewhere, both as you look [8] at other infants who are growing, and [9] generally, let's remember the charter [10] schools are an infant industry. It's not [11] established.

[12] We know what the cycle is. We [13] understand how we're going to build

this, [14] and the road blocks that you meet in an [15] infant industry are — well, they can be [16] systematic, meaning that the same per-head [17] student expenditure problems that come in DC [18] can be formulaic, and formulaically based in [19] Indiana.

[20] There's other things which are so [21] cast that are just going to occur. That's [22] based upon your building your businesses,

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[1] and we're trying to define for them how best [2] they can go about taking their finance set [3] of resources and use them to help people [4] here in DC, and translate that also to the [5] national level where they're currently [6] serving other populations.

[7] So, again, it's the small — [8] pieces of paper, because what I'd like to do [9] is start with a very simple exercise, and [10] then we're going to go into a discussion. [11] There are four areas that I would like to [12] talk about today:

[13] 1) is, what do you most need? [14] 2) is, what you most expect. [15] 3) is, what you're most [16] disappointed by; and [17] 4) is what support is most [18] lacking?

[19] Okay? Now what I'm going to ask [20] you to do is write down — we're going to [21] take about a minute, and we're — I'd like [22] you to write down what you most need, what

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[1] you most expect, what you're most [2] disappointed by, and what support is most [3] lacking. In any of these, or all of these [4] five areas:

[5] 1) technical assistance. [6] 2) advocacy [7] 3) communications, which — by [8] "communications" I'm generally thinking PR; [9] to the outside world, discussion with [10] parents, but however you feel like defining [11] communications; [12] 4) and new school development [13] issues; and then [14] 5) other, or general issues. [15] So if each of you could just take [16] a minute, and if you don't have anything [17] in — disappointed, that's just fine. But [18] if you'll just give me a —

[19] CHAIR HAELEY: I'm Tom Healey.

[20] MS. ABDULLAH: Ms. Abdullah —

[21] CHAIR HAELEY: Nice to see you.

[22] MS. ABDULLAH: Hello. How are you

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[2] CHAIR HAELEY: Okay. If you can [3] just start doing that, and then what I'm [4] going to have you do, frankly, is we're [5] going to go back around the table. I'm [6] going to have you just tell me what jotted [7] down. We're going to have a discussion, and [8] then when we get to the end, I'm going to [9] ask you the next

organization comes to the

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[1] table with their proposal, it's just more
[2] work for us. By the time we sort it out,
[3] the school year is over. So it's too
much. [4] We don't need nobody to ask us
what else can [5] we do. We need
somebody to come in and say, [6] "This is
what I've done for you. Take it, [7] or don't
take it." Okay. I mean, that's [8] what I
need, if you want —

[9] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Clearly, that's why
[10] we're here.

[11] **MS. ABDULLAH:** Okay. All right. [12]
Okay.

[13] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Because CER has
the [14] ability to take its fi-net resources
and [15] make a difference.

[16] **MS. ABDULLAH:** We really just [17]
can't afford anymore assignments, like,
now, [18] if you're planning to compete.
The project [19] really makes it dif-
ficulties — they want a [20] five year
school to compete with a thirty [21] year
system and never make a mistake. [22]
That's not possible.

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[1] **CHAIR HAELEY:** You've been in that
[2] business five years?

[3] **MS. ABDULLAH:** Yes. I'm supposed [4]
to do no less than what DC public
schools [5] has already done.

[6] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Uh-huh.

[7] **MS. ABDULLAH:** With all of the [8]
resources that they had, and with all of
the [9] limited resources that we have.
That's [10] impossible. Then they actually
hold me to [11] that.

[12] **MS. ALLEN:** What assignments are
[13] you talking about — [14] organizations
coming in [15] ?

[16] **MS. ABDULLAH:** You have your [17]
FOCUS, you have your resource center,
you [18] have this person and that person
that says [19] they want to help chartered
schools. They [20] do. But it adds more
work on us in addition [21] to the help
that they bring. Because we are [22]
already overloaded with day-to-day

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[1] operations, and organizing and putt-
ing this [2] school together from the
ground up, we can't [3] take anything
else. Big distraction. It [4] has you going
this many directions. So you [5] probably
miss something in the process, and [6]
then when that falls you run over there
and [7] catch that, and then this falls, you
run [8] over there and catch this, and it's
just — [9] part of your day — every day —
something [10] happens that you have to
stop and address [11] that distracts you
from something else that [12] you may —
wanted to do. So you almost [13] can't

finish a particular thing because you [14]
don't have either enough people, en-
ough [15] money, or enough time. One of
those three [16] elements interfere with
the success of [17] whatever it is that you
maybe trying to do. [18] You want to get it
right, but you can't. [19] So, some of us are
working around the clock. [20] You're
taking it home, you're bringing it [21]
back, you're taking it back, you're bring-
ing [22] it home. Try to get enough time to
get some

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[1] of these thing tied up.

[2] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Well, with the [3]
things you're taking home and bringing
back, [4] taking home and bringing back,
which — is [5] there anything in par-
ticular that these [6] support groups
could have taken off your [7] plate, that
instead they're creating more [8] work for
you to do in the shuffle?

[9] **MS. ABDULLAH:** Me, myself, I [10] stop-
ped going. I just stopped going. I [11]
don't come to anything else, because,
when [12] I — I used to go, the first two
years I was [13] gung-ho, I went to
everything. It was so [14] much I stopped
going. See, because I [15] couldn't do it. I
couldn't do it. So, I [16] don't even know
where they are anymore. [17] That's how
much it was for me. I deal with [18] my
day-to-day operations, the staff at my [19]
school; I'm running a service from two
and a [20] half through twelfth grade
that's really [21] four different depart-
ments. I mean, LEA [22] which means I
could do everything as if

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[1] I am a superintendent, principal,
mother, [2] father, friend, and then go to
all of these [3] other meetings that you all
have after I've [4] worked all day. That's
too much. So that's [5] the kind of extra —
and I need it, but I [6] can't. I need it — like
now I'm fighting [7] special ed. If you
never majored in special [8] ed., and you
didn't teach special ed., how [9] would
you know? I mean, what do you want me
[10] to know, I don't know. Then when I
don't [11] know, you're telling me I have
to do all of [12] these things, and it's like I
have to be a [13] lawyer to figure it out. I
didn't major in [14] law, either. So how do I
supposed to know? [15] I need somebody
who can come in and say, [16] "Okay, we'll
deal with special ed. You're [17] not your
own LEA; you don't know. Until you [18]
can learn it, we can help you get this [19]
situated." Meanwhile, while I don't
know, [20] I'm fighting a fire, after a fire,
after a [21] fire, with parents who are
expecting me to [22] give whatever it was
that they weren't

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[1] getting in DC public schools. I'm

trying to [2] figure out, "Okay, Ms., what
do you want? [3] You want this, you want
that, you want this, [4] you want that." " "
Okay, DC public schools is [5] our LEA.
We're behind DC public schools in [6] the
line. What do you want me to do?"

[7] "Well, you better get it. If you don't get
[8] it, I'm going to this, and I'm going to [9]
that, and I'm going to this, and I'm going
[10] to that." All day you've got to be in
there [11] calming somebody down.
That's facing [12] all day. It's , but it's time
[13] consuming. So, I mean, somebody
that can [14] help us do that without
overloading me any [15] further, because I
still have the general [16] population that
does not have one of those [17] issues
needing me just as much. So, I don't [18]
know.

[19] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Okay. Well, we'll [20]
come back in with —

[21] **MS. ABDULLAH:** Then, I need — I [22]
mean, what was the next question? What
are

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[1] we disappointed about? I'm dis-
appointed — [2] I was at private school,
but converted to a [3] public chartered
school. So when parents [4] put their
children in private school they [5] have a
different disposition about their [6] educa-
tion than a public school. I'm [7] dis-
appointed in behavior of the parents of
[8] public school student. I mean, what do
you [9] mean; you want to cuss somebody
out. I [10] mean, somebody told all day,
everyday, [11] five days a week, because
somebody told your [12] child to stop
before they hurt themselves? I [13] just can't
imagine that it's a whole [14] barnyard full
of them just like that. So [15] they have
been disappointed in DC public [16]
schools for so long in ranting and raving,
[17] and ranting and raving, and ranting
and [18] raving for what they want over
there was out [19] in — was released, so
by the time we get [20] him, we're sitting
there saying, "What [21] happened?" We
don't even know what they're [22] talking
about, so it took us three years to

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[1] understand what was wrong with
him.

[2] **MS. ALLEN:** They do even give you [3]
a chance. They come in expecting you —

[4] **MS. ABDULLAH:** They don't give you
[5] a chance they don't, they say, even
know. [6] They don't expect you to fix it.
Most [7] to be fixed. But they didn't even
expect it [8] to get fixed. So by the time
they say, "Oh, [9] you fixed it." They say,
"Yeah, we did." [10] You know, by then
we're so beat up till [11] we're almost not
ready for the next . [12] Those persons,
that what I'm most [13] disappointed in,
how the district public [14] school system

have, that's how much money you will [10] get. But I thought that they plan ahead how [11] many students are going to be in the system. [12] Anyway, so, what else? I need, of course, [13] money. You know, we have a treasury [14] director and we have a principal. We're not [15] in operation yet. We felt that it was very, [16] very important to have two people — we have [17] to find the space, a building. We are [18] trying to purchase a building, renovate a [19] building; we are incorporating a program [20] that it's Montessori bi-lingual. It's very, [21] very — it's specific and demanding, because [22] you have to, you know, teacher recruitment

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[1] is a big issue. You know, I might have to [2] go overseas to find teachers who are native [3] and have the specific training for what I [4] need. I think it can be done, and I'm being [5] very successful, you know, in finding [6] teachers, but I also want them to get the [7] money that they need. You know, we have a [8] lot of expenses, of course the Montessori [9] materials are extremely expensive. Thank [10] God they last for a long time. What [11] else? We really need — one — a place [12] where we can go, and I said we need [13] evaluation from day one. Because if you're [14] going to support charter schools and [15] we're going to duplicate programs for [16] exercise, well how do you know they're [17] successful? You need evaluation, you know, [18] professional evaluation from day one so that [19] you can really, you know, show your results [20] in a very professional or scientific way. [21] So I've been trying to do myself by linkage [22] with universities. But, you know, it will

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[1] be nice that advocate group that will go [2] talk to universities and see how to work [3] with, you know, different schools, and [4] is that also extremely expensive if you want [5] to go university. They have a huge [6] overhead, and, yeah — what else? We have [7] a — I mean, pretty much I think that I also [8] am very pleased because I see that having [9] the Latin-American Youth Center as our [10] organization, or parent organization, it's [11] an extremely fortunate for, on our part. [12] Also, some of the laws, if you go to our [13] national charter school conference, then you [14] say, like, "Oh my God, you know, I'm lucky." [15] It's, a — you know, like, I mean, an [16] example is, you know, DC pays for three-year [17] olds, and our program Montessori, three-year [18] olds are a very important part of the [19] program. You have to have three to five, [20] you know, three to six, six to nine, nine to [21] twelve. Some other places they don't pay [22] for three-year olds. So, you know, you have

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[1] to charge tuition for three-year olds. What [2] else? At the new school development, like I [3] said, building — oh, one of the things I [4] want to mention is that DCPS has a number to [5] do it.

[6] They don't know what to do with us [7] either. You know, I talk and I say — I [8] called them and I said — it depends on who [9] I talk, like she said. You know, I need to [10] hire — you know, I called the Embassy of [11] Spain, and I said, you know, "How do you [12] bring teachers from overseas, because I know [13] a public school who has a dual language [14] program has done it." They said, "Well, we [15] have a contract with DCPS." I called DCPS [16] and DCPS said, "We don't know — we've never [17] done — you know, we — we don't know what [18] to do with you guys. We've never done [19] anything with charter schools." Things like [20] that. What else?

[21] CHAIR HAELEY: Expectations, [22] disappointments?

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[1] MS. ENCINAS: Expectations. I [2] mean, I think that what I see when I go to a [3] group charter schools is that we're all in [4] such a different levels. There are — you [5] cannot, you know, there's no "one size fits [6] all", at all. You know, we cannot sit [7] around a table and expect that the [8] information they are giving us is worth for [9] enough time.

[10] It's really limited for going to [11] meetings and listening to things that I'm [12] not even, you know, something that we can [13] use. So it would be nice to have somebody [14] who can sort that out and say, you know, [15] we're going to help schools or assist [16] schools in a way that they can cluster [17] them — in a way that they can really help [18] and strengthen each other, and, you know — [19] I think that also, among charter schools, [20] you know, it's such a big load of work that [21] it's sometimes hard to also get assistance [22] from schools that are being in operation as

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[1] a new school. I think that's it.

[2] CHAIR HAELEY: Nat?

[3] MR. BROOKS: Well, I'll start with [4] the last one since get it in, just try [5] to reinforce that a bit. That speaks to the [6] need for, I think charter schools. I [7] think the charter schools have reached — in [8] DC, have reached a point where they're look [9] at organized system stuff. It's got to be, [10] and I think that speaks to the point that [11] you're making here about the languages [12] understandings, and around a lot of [13] that. I think that is a sore need. But on [14] a very pragmatic level for us, we're in dire [15] need of user-

friendly, environmentally [16] friendly, affordable buildings, building and [17] equipment. I mean, we're really being [18] shafted on that because we're paying rent [19] that is ridiculous. Because we are a school [20] that focuses on building trades — this town [21] needs a lot of building trades people — we [22] have to go out of town in this town. I'm a

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[1] retired DC government employee. I'm aware [2] of some of the problems that present. We [3] have to recruit — this city has to recruit [4] from outside for all kinds of stuff, [5] including some of these beautiful edifices [6] that have been remodeled and built over the [7] past twenty years. That is insane to have [8] to recruit from 100-500 miles away while you [9] have people who are unemployed and costing [10] the city more money. So as a part of our — [11] a major part of our philosophical thrust is [12] to prepare people to enter the industry and [13] to move right up. We have — just take, as [14] an example, on our first graduation class, a [15] young man who was one of our outstanding [16] trades students — he was in, focused on the [17] and electrical wiring. He worked on a [18] big contract downtown during an internship [19] in his senior year that he liked, and, of [20] course, and he got a job them and thought [21] that he was set for life, but he came back [22] the next year, showing us the beginning of

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[1] the next year, his union card, Electrical [2] Workers of America — of course, we can [3] longer afford him, even though he's one of [4] our alumna. The next year he came back [5] saying he just got a new position that he [6] would reach the \$40,000 a year mark, but he [7] said, "I've learned something, so I'm going [8] back to college, because I want to be one of [9] those contractors." That's the way that [10] pathway continuum should work, because [11] that's what we have in mind. But, in order [12] to train people in the building trades, you [13] need certain kinds of space, equipment as [14] well. So buildings and equipment are really [15] at the top of our list, very selfishly, even [16] though there may be more esoteric needs for [17] class support.

[18] CHAIR HAELEY: Can I just [19] clarify —

[20] MR. BROOKS: Sure.

[21] CHAIR HAELEY: Those are functions [22] of buildings and equipment, because they are

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[1] a portion of the curriculum?

[2] MR. BROOKS: Yes.

[3] CHAIR HAELEY: Not buildings and [4]

away from politics, and you can't

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[1] get away from it, and you've got to survive [2] so that you can move on to a point where you [3] thrive. You'd better become politically [4] astute. So if there is an organizational [5] unit that can — it's like a clearing [6] house — I'm not sure, Tom, I'm not sure how [7] to articulate this, but it's got to be 'a' [8] place as opposed to seven places. Because [9] you can't go to all those places all the [10] time.

[11] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Dream big, right? [12] I mean, if we had all the money in the [13] world, and we had the ability to be kings of [14] the world, and say, "Here's what we can give [15] you. What do you want?" Now that's — you [16] know, this is a — you know, we don't have [17] all the money in the world. We don't have [18] the ability to tell you what you want. But [19] we've got a chance to be able to take a [20] finite set of resources and direct them to [21] solve a set of problems which will both [22] benefit the DC schools plus charter schools

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[1] nationally. That's the goal of the [2] research. So think there again — it's okay [3] to say "I don't know how to say it", because [4] that's, frankly, Jonathan's job to figure [5] out what it means and to put it into context [6] based upon all the rest of the information [7] we have. So don't let that stop you. Just [8] throw out exactly, you know, if we could [9] give you anything in the world, what would [10] it be?

[11] **MR. BROOKS:** A centralized, like a [12] nerve center, with the lobbying capacity, [13] public relations, marketing, communications, [14] making sure that we're all aware of what we [15] need to be aware of. The monitoring of it, [16] even, you may not like big brother, but it [17] is necessary to have the certain functions [18] out of that, in order to be more efficient [19] and effective. That's the way you [20] demonstrate success and your necessity. [21] Soft money, for instance — I keep saying [22] I'm not a grants labor — I just have some

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[1] experience in sitting with them, and while [2] they pick my head so they can throw it [3] together. Because you've got to start up [4] sometimes — if you can just get it started [5] up, it will sustain itself, or you can plan [6] other ways, effective ways, to sustain it. [7] But you can't even start it up. You have [8] nothing to sustain. So soft money has its [9] place. I went to a university — I attended [10] a university where they were very big on [11] soft money, and everybody knew it wouldn't

[12] last forever. But you keep piling it [13] through until you get these institutions set [14] up. Then you can go with it, and a lot of [15] us know what that means. Then you become so [16] essential as to how they can't do without [17] you, and the hard money will follow. So [18] it's something more centralized so that you [19] don't have to go to seven meetings a week in [20] order to find out that three of them are [21] going to be saying, talking about the same [22] stuff. Two of them won't have any answers

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[1] to it, so you become frustrated because [2] you've got these things back home to do to [3] manage their more individual items. But [4] they're all part of the processes necessary. [5] Everybody's doing it. When you go to these [6] meetings, you find out that everybody's [7] sharing the same problems, but you haven't [8] had an opportunity to talk to one another [9] about them. If you had more face to face [10] opportunities for face to face, you would [11] find out that is all commonplace stuff. So [12] it's — it requires highly paid personnel to [13] do that. It requires smart people who don't [14] work free. Sometimes we get into expecting [15] that stuff will be done free as a welfare [16] mentality. I talking about our city and I'm [17] talking about our country. In many ways we [18] get to thinking that somebody should come in [19] and volunteer this and that. If it's highly [20] skilled stuff requiring great credentials, [21] that goes with — that's what I mean about [22] good teachers, too. I expect for them to be

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[1] paid. If we can't afford to pay a good [2] teacher, and if we say we should pay [3] have that teacher to come in and, I mean, [4] that teacher has a mortgage, or should be [5] aspiring to have one, and send the kids to [6] college and all of that, and so they don't [7] have four or five years to take out of their [8] lives to do almost volunteer work, to work [9] at a sub-standard, sub-par salaries. So, [10] in order to be competitive, we've got to [11] have some kind of incentives. It's not just [12] salary, because anybody who knows anything [13] about salary knows that people don't really [14] work for money, they just need a certain [15] amount of money. They work for the way it [16] makes them feel, because it's the [17] self-esteem and worthiness.

[18] **CHAIR HAELEY:** One of the things [19] that came up in the earlier discussion was [20] just the simple problem of not being able to [21] find comparative salary data. If you want [22] to hire somebody, what's a principal cost?

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[1] What is a fifth grade Spanish teacher cost?

[2] **MS. MKEON:** It's out there. I [3] mean, you can get that information.

[4] **MS. ENCINAS:** I hit the DCPS [5] website, and I, you know, when people asked [6] me, I said I won't pay you based on DCPS, [7] because, you know, I think that that's the [8] people that I'm competing with in terms of [9] the job market and salaries. If people want [10] to move to Washington —

[11] **MS. MKEON:** Then the counties, you [12] can get theirs as well.

[13] **MS. ENCINAS:** Yeah.

[14] **MS. MKEON:** I agree with you.

[15] **MR. BROOKS:** That stuff is not [16] that difficult to get, but suppose you want [17] to get somebody who has the potential for [18] providing more. There's got to be some [19] additional incentive there.

[20] **MS. ENCINAS:** I agree with you.

[21] **MR. BROOKS:** A savings plan, some [22] tuition monies for further study, and other

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[1] things. We've got to be a little more [2] creative. Because you may even be able to [3] pay a few dollars less if you've got [4] something else available to this person that [5] has value.

[6] **MS. ENCINAS:** I think that also [7] the DCPS people are, you know, the benefits [8] of retirement. It's a big issue, like, you [9] know, working in the system for seven years, [10] and I leave now, then, I lose, you know, my [11] retirement. But for a couple of years they [12] don't, right?

[13] **MS. MKEON:** You can keep rolling [14] over, and apply for a leave of absence. [15] Then the school district — and then the [16] charter school pays DCPS for your retirement [17] so that when you leave you can —

[18] **MS. ABDULLAH:** Okay.

[19] **MS. MKEON:** In the same —

[20] **MS. ENCINAS:** But if you're new to [21] your charter school, then you have your own [22] plan for retirement.

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[1] **MS. MKEON:** Thank you.

[2] **CHAIR HAELEY:**

[3] **MS. ABDULLAH:** I think what would [4] help, from what I've experienced after five [5] years, is an organization that's the center [6] for charter schools. When we need legal [7] advice we can call any of these two or three [8] lawyers in that staff that helps us with [9] whatever the legal parts. There's somebody [10] there that would do the retirement plan for [11] us,

[4] MR. BROOKS: It's — I think I [5] agree, but it's a process — it's a [6] developmental — it's development of the [7] system. It's going on. This is part of it. [8] But this kind of thing had to happen because [9] the way it started was an evolutionary [10] process. When evolve, you don't control. [11] That's when nature does —

[12] MS. ABDULLAH: I mean, I agree, [13] but when she comes as her first year, how [14] does she get the same induction that I [15] received the first year that I was here?

[16] MR. BROOKS: I think we're [17] speaking to it, though. I think you are [18] speaking to it. If you have the centralized [19] place for clearing house, it not only [20] provides the administrative service pieces, [21] but orientation and training, and there is a [22] facilities and management office that is

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[1] aware of all of the buildings and the costs [2] and the utilities and so forth for them, [3] because there isn't a piece of turf in this [4] town that isn't on a computer bank. It — [5] somebody knows about it. So if you tap into [6] all of those — if you're able to tap into [7] virtually all of those, you can begin to [8] manage how you develop your facilities. If [9] you know that you can only afford \$8 dollars [10] a square foot, and you're — you shouldn't [11] be looking at a \$20 a square foot facility. [12] So, if I wanted something when I used to [13] look for spaces that belonged to the [14] government by and large, I would go to the [15] experts in their office and say, "This is [16] what I'm going to do. This is what I need." [17] You know, and then, somebody would be [18] assigned to work with me and I would start [19] looking, and I would have choices to go look [20] at. I am not a facilities manager; I [21] happened to work with one who knows about [22] that kind of stuff. But I don't talk the

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[1] language, but I've never had — it wasn't [2] necessary for me to talk the language as [3] long as I could speak our common language to [4] facilities manager. I understood the common [5] language. Then he or she would identify [6] options for me. I think that's what you're [7] speaking to, somewhat, because that gas bill [8] and that water bill can be projected and [9] estimated for projections.

[10] MS. ABDULLAH: I agree with you, [11] sir, but I obtain my billing from the [12] District. It's a DC public school; we ask [13] all them — we have enough sense to say, [14] "Can you tell us what the gas bill was, the [15] electric bill was, the telephone bill, et [16] cetera, et cetera, et

cetera, over the [17] years?" Nobody would give us the [18] information. Nobody. Ms. Reed wouldn't [19] give it to us; the people in the electric [20] company wouldn't give it to us. First of [21] all, they didn't even want to turn this [22] stuff on because whoever was in the building

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[1] prior to us getting it, left with a lot of [2] bills. They really didn't want to turn it [3] on. Then they wanted us to put down a large [4] deposit, which wasn't our fault that what [5] happened to them before. You know, that, [6] anyway, all of that to say, if this [7] organization existed, then I can find out [8] without running all around. We've got to [9] cut down on the "run-around" time. The [10] "run-around" time is eating into our other [11] issues and concerns that we may have to [12] address in the course of the day. I don't [13] want to keep looking for lawyers; I don't [14] want to keep looking for special ed.; I [15] don't want to keep looking for food. I've [16] been trying to get my food program up since [17] I started. I still don't have the right [18] food program. Then, the way I understand [19] it, I might be wrong, but just trying to cut [20] through the chase, we pay \$4 a meal. The [21] school system gives us back \$1.25 for [22] every \$4 we spend. I mean, what are you

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[1] giving that money for? Just keep the money. [2] I don't like that. I don't like you giving [3] me \$4 and making me think you gave me [4] something, and then, I mean, I spent \$4 and [5] you give me a dollar and something back. [6] Then, okay, now on the free lunch program is [7] on us individually. You have to do yours, I [8] have to do mine, she has to do hers. But [9] it's not free. It's on us. When we get [10] into the charter movement, we really don't [11] clearly understand that that means you've [12] got to pay for all of the children's food, [13] even if they throw it in the trash every [14] day. Okay, then you've got an electric bill [15] sitting there and children throwing food in [16] the trash. Do you give the children the [17] food, or you pay the electric bill? You're [18] almost like the mother now. "Okay, you [19] know, I'm not going to buy no more food [20] because you all are wasting the food. I'm [21] going to go ahead and pay the electric." [22] You can't do that, but you're almost being

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[1] put in a position to think like that.

[2] CHAIR HAELEY:

[3] MR. BROOKS: May I finish my — I [4] just, real briefly, my most disappointing [5] relationship with DC school personnel? [6] You're getting the run-around.

The [7] secondly, budgetary constraints. They are [8] artificial — you put a number on it, this [9] is what it should be. But we service [10] individuals, so the numbers are not [11] realistic per pupil expenditure. There are [12] students with special needs. Then — so [13] it's a question of whether or not you have [14] the capability for identifying those special [15] needs, and are to increase the allotment, [16] and sometimes that doesn't meet the company [17] school system. Finally, parent knowledge [18] and understanding of where the charter [19] schools are. Then, under most lacking — [20] parent support — any tie-in to that lack of [21] knowledge and understanding. Would they [22] dumped on — I thought it was just Booker T.

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[1] the first year until I talked to other [2] people who were being dumped on with soft [3] referrals of students who are considered [4] problem students. Because if there is no [5] paper trail, you can't prove that. But if I [6] have a school up the street that says to [7] this parent that this child they don't want [8] anymore, "Why don't you try Booker T.?" [9] They've got a fine program." The parent [10] shows up dragging this child in and says, [11] "You know, I understand that you all have a [12] great school here." You know, well, what's [13] wrong with him. He's just a level four and [14] a half, special ed., something like that. [15] That's an old game of informal referral [16] where there's no way to prove it.

[17] CHAIR HAELEY: We're booked to go [18] to 1:45, right? We're basically there, [19] which — but I'd do go, if you have a few [20] more minutes, just to circle back around to [21] discuss the one, the crucial point to us [22] again which you want to hit. I mean, I

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[1] don't have time to go back to him and say, [2] "Ah, you've changed your mind on many things. [3] I don't think you've far enough there to [4] change minds." But just so we've got it [5] clearly in the record, and that it's, you [6] know, public forum, what is the one thing, [7] if you could have one problem solved by an [8] outside service organization, regardless of [9] whether it costs money or not, what would [10] that one thing be?

[11] MS. ALLEN: Just let me add, I'd [12] like to also ask the question Cathy and [13] Imani you've heard everybody else talk [14] since you started the and you wanted [15] to — I saw you kind of —

[16] MS. MKEON: Yes, thank you. [17] Well —

[18] CHAIR HAELEY: So then, anyone [19] else wants to change their mind —

[20] MS. MKEON: Yeah, sure, go right [21] ahead. I'll tell you very briefly.

transcript if you [18] want, you know, without — anything, any [19] level that you want. We'll start out small, [20] just so we can give you feedback. I'll be [21] working to post it up before this goes. [22] There is a real difference between what

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[1] schools that have been around for a long [2] time want, what think they need, and what [3] your schools need. That's something that [4] not everybody is cognizant of. I think [5] that's a real neat thing that you guys help [6] us understand, as well as some of the [7] technical issues surrounding —

[8] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Christina?

[9] **MS. ENCINAS:** I'm still in the [10] process of understanding all this be [11] able to hear what experience people have [12] said. This is very helpful in a way. I [13] think I need more right now. It's [14] sometimes — help me to start with the [15] right — you know, in terms of [16] facilities. We have a very big issue with [17] trying to purchase a building, and remodel [18] the building.

[19] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Right. Nat?

[20] **MR. BROOKS:** I'm torn while we're [21] in building here. Selfishly, we need [22] building. But unselfishly, I think that a

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[1] centralized organizational structure that [2] feeds into building all of these aspects as [3] important pieces, is needed probably more [4] importantly. But if I went back to my [5] place, we would all vote for a building [6] versus —

[7] **CHAIR HAELEY:** Great. Well, thank [8] you all for taking the time today, and [9] please contact CER if you have any [10] questions. It's really a pleasure to have [11] had you come.

[12] (Whereupon, at 1:58 p.m., the [13] PROCEEDINGS were adjourned.)

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