Letisha Vinson
PCSB ASPIRE Hearing
Monday, April 8th, 2024

As a parent who is deeply invested in my children's education within the DC Public Charter system, particularly at KIPP DC, I have been closely following the proposed Annual School Performance Index Report and Evaluation (ASPIRE). Since my children were in pre-K 3, I have been a part of this educational journey and have witnessed the evolution of assessment systems like the Performance Management Framework (PMF) and now ASPIRE. It is crucial to examine both the positive attributes and areas of improvement from a parent's perspective.

Positive Factors:

1. Comprehensive Evaluation: The ASPIRE system provides a comprehensive evaluation that assesses schools based on critical areas such as student growth, college and career readiness preparation, and overall learning environment. This offers a more holistic view of a school's performance beyond just academic achievement.

2. Transparent Reporting: The ASPIRE System aims to provide transparent and accessible data to parents and the community. By publishing scored information annually, parents and other stakeholders can make informed decisions about children's education based on objective metrics.

3. School-Specific Performance Measures: The inclusion of school-specific performance measures acknowledges the uniqueness of each school's mission, program, or model. This allows schools to highlight their strengths and areas of focus that may not be captured by standard measures.

4. Focus on Student Engagement and Attendance: ASPIRE's emphasis on non-academic factors such as attendance rates and student engagement aligns with parents' priorities. Increased attendance rates can directly impact student growth and achievement, highlighting the importance of initiatives like specialized school programs, and safe passage programs.

Ways to Improve:

1. Potential Pressure and Stigmatization: The assignment of overall ASPIRE levels ranging from exemplary to unsatisfactory performance may inadvertently create pressure and stigmatization for schools, particularly those in underserved communities. This could lead to unintended consequences such as teaching to the test or neglecting holistic education.

2. Overemphasis on Achievement in High School Framework: There are concerns that the high school framework of ASPIRE may overemphasize achievement while undervaluing growth. This could potentially disadvantage schools that prioritize individual student progress and development over standardized test scores.

3. Need for Differentiated Metrics: While ASPIRE covers essential areas, there's a call for additional metrics that differentiate from traditional assessments and better capture aspects like social-emotional learning and civic engagement. Including these metrics could provide a more comprehensive picture of a school's effectiveness.

As a very involved parent in my children's education, I fully support the goals of ASPIRE in providing clear and comprehensive evaluations of schools. However, it is important for all stakeholders to address the concerns that have been raised, such as the potential for pressure on schools and the need for different metrics, in order to ensure that ASPIRE is able to effectively serve the needs of all students and schools within the DC Public Charter system. Even more importantly, it is crucial to involve and engage parents from the very beginning of the process, and to continue to involve them throughout and beyond implementation.

To improve ASPIRE, stakeholders should consider the following suggestions:

1. **Pilot Year for Framework Implementation:** Before full-scale implementation, conduct a pilot year to test the effectiveness of the ASPIRE framework. This allows for adjustments based on real-world feedback from schools, teachers, parents, and students.

2. **Holistic Metrics Beyond Standardized Tests**: Expand the metrics used in ASPIRE to include holistic measures of student success, such as social-emotional learning, civic engagement, and critical thinking skills. This provides a more comprehensive evaluation of a school's effectiveness beyond academic achievement.

3. **Differentiated Metrics for High School Framework:** Revise the high school framework to ensure a balance between achievement and growth metrics. Consider incorporating measures that reflect college and career readiness, such as internship opportunities, industry certifications, and post-secondary enrollment rates.

4. **Teacher Retention as a Metric**: Include teacher retention rates as a metric in ASPIRE to assess the stability and effectiveness of school leadership and teaching staff. High teacher turnover can negatively impact student learning and school culture.

5. **Hold Harmless Policy for Initial Years**: Implement a "hold harmless" policy for the initial years of ASPIRE implementation to mitigate unintended consequences, such as undue pressure on schools and educators. This allows for a transitional period where schools can adjust to the new evaluation system without facing punitive measures.

6. **Transparent Communication and Community Engagement:** Foster transparent communication and community engagement throughout the ASPIRE process. Solicit feedback from parents, teachers, administrators, and community members to ensure that the evaluation system reflects diverse perspectives and priorities.

7. **Equity-Centered Approach:** Ensure that ASPIRE addresses equity concerns by accounting for the unique challenges and resources available to schools serving diverse student populations. This includes providing additional support and resources to schools in underserved communities to address systemic barriers to student success. (including the SpED population)

8. **Continuous Improvement and Flexibility:** Maintain a culture of continuous improvement and flexibility within ASPIRE to adapt to evolving educational needs and best practices. Regularly review and update the evaluation criteria based on research, feedback, and emerging trends in education.

9. **Incorporate School-Specific Feedback**: Allow schools to provide input and collaborate with DC PCSB in selecting school-specific metrics that align with their mission, vision, and educational priorities. This ensures that ASPIRE reflects the unique strengths and challenges of each school.

10. **Publicly Available Data and Accountability:** Ensure that ASPIRE data is publicly available and accessible to parents, educators, policymakers, and stakeholders. Transparency and accountability are essential for building trust and driving meaningful improvements in education. (as suggested in plan)

Formatted testimony:

Good evening and thank you for allowing me to share my perspective today regarding Annual School Performance Index Report and Evaluation.

As a parent of 7th and 8th grade KIPPsters, a PAVE Parent Leader in Education and Advisory Board Member, an ERNA Education Reform Champion, a KIPP DC Parent Advisory Board Member, and Leaders of Color Alum, I value and am invested in my children's education within the DC Public Charter system. I have followed the proposed Annual School Performance Index Report and Evaluation (ASPIRE) and as a parent who has been on this DC education journey since my children were in pre-K 3, I have witnessed the evolution of assessment systems like the Performance Management Framework (PMF) and now ASPIRE. The parental perspective is essential to examine both the positive attributes and areas of improvement.

As a parent, I see many positive factors in the ASPIRE system. Firstly, the ASPIRE system provides a comprehensive evaluation that assesses schools based on critical areas such as student growth, college and career readiness preparation, and overall learning environment. This provides a more holistic view of a school's performance beyond just academic achievement. Secondly, the ASPIRE System aims to provide transparent and accessible data to parents and the community. By publishing scored information annually, parents and other stakeholders can make informed decisions about children's education based on objective metrics. Thirdly, the inclusion of school-specific performance measures acknowledges the uniqueness of each school's mission, program, or model. This allows schools to highlight their strengths and areas of focus that may not be captured by standard measures. Finally, ASPIRE's emphasis on non-academic factors such as attendance rates and student engagement aligns with parents'

priorities. Increased attendance rates can directly impact student growth and achievement, highlighting the importance of initiatives like specialized school programs, and safe passage programs.

However, there are some areas that need improvement. Firstly, the assignment of overall ASPIRE levels ranging from exemplary to unsatisfactory performance may create pressure and stigmatization for schools, particularly those in underserved communities. This could lead to unintended consequences such as teaching to the test or neglecting holistic education. Secondly, there are concerns that the high school framework of ASPIRE may overemphasize achievement while undervaluing growth. This could potentially disadvantage schools that prioritize individual student progress and development over standardized test scores. Thirdly, there's a call for additional metrics that differentiate from traditional assessments and better capture aspects like social-emotional learning and civic engagement. Including these metrics could provide a more comprehensive picture of a school's effectiveness.

To improve ASPIRE, stakeholders should consider the following: Firstly, conduct a pilot year to test the effectiveness of the ASPIRE framework before full-scale implementation. This allows for adjustments based on real-world feedback from schools, teachers, parents, and students. Secondly, expand the metrics used in ASPIRE to include holistic measures of student success, such as social-emotional learning, civic engagement, and critical thinking skills. This provides a more comprehensive evaluation of a school's effectiveness beyond academic achievement. Thirdly, revise the high school framework to ensure a balance between achievement and growth metrics. Consider incorporating measures that reflect college and career readiness, such as internship opportunities, industry certifications, and post-secondary enrollment rates. Fourthly, include teacher retention rates as a metric in ASPIRE to assess the stability and effectiveness of school leadership and teaching staff. High teacher turnover can negatively impact student learning and school culture. Fifthly, implement a "hold harmless" policy for the initial years of

ASPIRE implementation to mitigate unintended consequences, such as undue pressure on schools and educators. This allows for a transitional period where schools can adjust to the new evaluation system without facing punitive measures. Finally, foster transparent communication and community engagement to build trust and promote collaboration between all stakeholders.

As a parent, I support the goals of ASPIRE in providing clear and comprehensive evaluations of schools. However, it is important for all stakeholders to address the concerns that have been raised, such as the potential for pressure on schools and the need for different metrics, in order to ensure that ASPIRE is able to effectively serve the needs of all students and schools within the DC Public Charter system. Even more importantly, it is crucial to involve and engage parents from the very beginning of the process, and to continue to involve them throughout and beyond implementation.

Sincerely,

Letisha Vinson