April 28, 2011

Mr. Pratt-Dannals,

After much deliberation I decided to send you this email in reference to the Bank of America Learning Academy (BOALA). I also have copied all the members of the school board. I understand tough decisions need to be made in our school district, but I am concerned about your recommendation to close BOALA from both a financial and academic perspectives.

As Chair of the SAC for the school, I have spent many hours listening to parents of BOALA students and reviewing the schools budget. The budget expenses are broken out in two segments. Total staff expenses of $1,070,358 (includes pension) and Non-Staff expenses of $247,393. Non Staff expenses include a line item of $207,482 that says "School Size per agreement with BOA". This expense is almost 16% of the entire school budget and 70% of your estimated total savings of $351,056 if you close the school. This line item looks like an adjustment to balance revenue versus expenses. The bank pays for ALL overhead (building, maintenance, electrical/water, security), and parents drop off ALL the children so there is NO transportation expenses. That leaves staff (including substitutes) and supplies as the only expense item. Looking at your budget that means to run this school will cost you close to 1,110,000 per year and closing it will only save $143,574 based on your report.

The DCPS general revenue fund is estimated to be around 903 million dollars next year and the saving to close one of your best elementary schools is less than 0.015% of that amount. This change won't make any difference by any standards. Even if we use the $351,000 figure, the savings will only be 0.038%. No other school in the district operates this inexpensively.

An even more interesting way to look at it is per pupil revenue/expense based on next year's budget. BOALA has a 200 child capacity which means total cost per pupil is estimated about $5,500 (1,110,000/200). It is my understanding that you expect the state to provide $6,249 per student from to the general fund. This means we can run this school with 88% of the money the state gives you per student. How is this a loss? The reason is you are allocating fixed cost from the district to our students, but we don't have any (building, ect.) that you pay for these students. This type of budget makes sense if you are estimating the cost per student to run the entire district, but it does not make sense when you are looking at it as an individual profit/loss entity with an option to close the school.

Mr. Pratt-Dannals of course we don't want to close the school, but if you decide to close the school and we convert it to a charter school you will have to pay us $5,936 (estimated) per student (more that what you give us now). This means the district would actually spend $87,000 (($5,936-5,500)/200) more per year for BOALA if converted to a charter school versus keeping it as a public school.

Since the beginning of the state's accountability system for schools, BOALA has not only been rated as an "A" school, but has also met the Adequately Yearly Progress (AYP) provision for all students each year. Most recently, the school has been rated in the top 3% statewide for successful school models. It would seem to me that our situation, integrating the corporate world with the educational, could serve as a progressive partnership model to be further studied and replicated as appropriate in this district with other interested corporations. We are living in a time where other models are being explored and offered by our current legislature. How great it would be to take the lead in our state for having some of these models thriving within our own public educational system! In the long run, corporate sponsorships would benefit the district financially as well.

Please consider my comments and those of our BOALA parents to make the most informed decision, and keep BOALA open. This is the best deal in town and a school to be proud of.

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