

**Testimony of Danica Petroshius
Parent at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan
Committee on Education Hearing on the
PACE Facilities Amendment Act
July 11, 2016**

Thank you Chairman Grosso for holding this important hearing. I'm Danica Petroshius, parent of two at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan.

Thank you for continuing to move forward on efforts to improve all aspects of the modernization process from lead to budget to data. The PACE Facilities Amendment Act is an important step in improving a broken modernization process. CHML has not been modernized and it needs to be very soon. But we need more than getting on the CIP. We need accurate data, school-specific work plans, and smart use of tax dollars. Thank you for starting to address these issues.

We also need successful school and parent engagement for all of this to work. My experience shows we don't have the engagement piece right yet. There is too much talk of engagement, but little follow through. Or there is hasty engagement that leads to hasty promises that are quickly broken, demoralizing teachers and parents. We have to strike a better balance.

There are some dangerous myths embedded in the city culture that can break a system. I want to call them out now so we can move past them.

Myth 1: If you involve parents, they become obstacles; they are never happy. Reality: Parents can be reasoned with under open, strong leadership. If parents are given information and are brought to the table about solutions and compromises, they can trust the process and will help see it through to the end.

Myth 2: Parents don't understand buildings and what it takes to fix them. This is not the place to engage them. Reality: We know and understand our schools. No DCPS or DGS staff person knows or cares about any building in this city like a parent, teacher or principal in that school. This knowledge is an asset to leverage – not work around.

Myth 3: Parents are consumers, not partners. If they don't like our product they can leave. Reality: Parents don't want to be consumers of DCPS or our schools – we want to be partners. Schools are built on human exchanges not on purchasing of products. Let's build a system of partnership.

To that end, I propose that this legislation take a stronger step towards leveraging parent energy, knowledge and power as partners with the system. While I appreciate the requirement that DCPS give "a description of the process and timeline used to develop the DCPS CIP including community engagement," I think we can do more.

First, we'd like to see "parent, school and community" whenever engagement is mentioned. And where specific organizations are listed, include the school's parent and teacher organization. School staff and parents too often are left out; it should be specified.

Second, we can be stronger by including requirements of “parent, school and community engagement” on the inputs and plans too. We have seen too many times where the data is wrong or doesn’t exist - or the schools get rebuilt in ways that are wrong for that school. If there had been engagement on the front end in DGS assessments, enrollment projections, special program space requirements, plans, swing space, etc. – so many mistakes or misunderstandings could have been fixed early on.

Third, we should provide an opportunity for parents, school personnel, or community members to appeal specific data or plans within a limited time and clear process. This is an opportunity to ensure better success with a double check. We have seen too many mistakes on the data for our school alone – I can only imagine other schools have similar problems. With the fate of modernization now hanging on data, we have to make sure that we do all we can to make sure it is accurate. Why not harness the power of the people in the schools to make sure the data is accurate?

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.