

Testimony of Erika Hoppes
President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan

Performance Oversight Hearing: Deputy Mayor for Education and State Board of Education
February 15, 2017

Good morning. I am Erika Hoppes, parent of two children at Capitol Hill Montessori at Logan (CHML), President of the Parent Teacher Student Organization (PTSO) at CHML, and a Ward 6 resident.

As many of you know, the CHML community has advocated for a full modernization to support our students with the learning environment they deserve. CHML has never been modernized and as such deserves priority modernization in the FY 2018 Budget.

While we await full modernization, there are infrastructure needs that are immediate. Last May, Chairperson Grosso and Chairperson Cheh secured funds for CHML to receive a much-needed HVAC system. Funds for window replacement at CHML have been budgeted and unspent for years.

CHML administration and parents have been working with DGS over the last few months to plan for the installation of a new HVAC system and windows at CHML this summer. I am here today to testify about how that process has evolved, and to underscore the importance of oversight and accountability by the DME to ensure coordination across DCPS, DGS, and the school community to get the best results for everybody.

Following the assignment of funds for the HVAC and window upgrades in May 2016, CHML parents asked to meet with DGS to discuss the scope and timing of that work. They ignored our requests. Only on the eve of the PACE Act hearing before this very committee in October 2016 were we able to get a response from DGS. And it was also only after that hearing that DGS finally agreed to meet with us for the first time on these issues. The attention from this committee has been so important in achieving some focus and progress, and the CHML community is very appreciative.

Since that rough start, DGS, particularly Jeff Bonvechio and Stephen Kitterman, and Renard Alexander of DCPS, have met with us every 2 months to provide updates. Both Jeff and Stephen have come to these meetings prepared with updates and information. They have listened to our questions and concerns, and addressed them at the meeting or followed up with needed information. We are grateful for their time and involvement.

While this DGS engagement provided CHML with helpful information, the communication has also benefited DGS and DCPS planning. For example, we are working together for DGS to get some work done more efficiently over spring break rather than starting the installation over the summer. In addition, we informed DGS of OCTO work that is going on and planned for the summer. DGS was previously unaware of the OCTO work over the summer, and OCTO unaware

of DGS work, but because of engagement with the CHML community they can make adjustments and align schedules. Lastly, we communicated to DGS the need to train our teachers and staff on our new systems and DGS is planning to train our teachers the first week they are back at school in August. We think this should be standard practice.

There are real benefits that result from communication and engagement with the school community. We have said before that DGS and DCPS need to engage the teacher and parent community regularly and systematically. We walk the halls on a daily basis, learning what our building needs, how our building works, and how it doesn't.

As the planning process continues and we get closer and closer to the actual installation of the HVAC and windows, I hope that the communication and engagement continue.

We ask that you keep the pressure on the DME, DGS and DCPS to communicate and engage with school communities on work of any significance that is being done at their school. From the smaller service requests that are made, to larger projects like our HVAC and windows, to the full modernizations, we have valuable perspective and a shared interest in success.

We reaffirm the commitment of the school community to work with the DME, DGS and DCPS wherever possible to make sure the community can add value to the system, and will continue to share our lessons and experiences with the committee to help drive better results.