



January 31, 2020

Dear DC PCSB Members and Scott:

As you know, at Achievement Prep we take our mission to prepare students to excel as high-achieving scholars and leaders in high school, college and beyond very seriously. We are committed to developing and fostering strong character in them so that they, too, can be change agents in a world often set up against them. We are committed to our SE DC community. In 2008, the Washington Highlands community of SEDC opened its arms and embraced a small proposed school named Achievement Prep. Twelve years later this proposed school has become a staple in the community and is, and has always been, proud to be part of the SE DC Ward 8 community.

Keeping our promises to the families, we opened our doors as one of the strongest charter schools ever to launch in DC history. We maintained that success for many years until we made a series of missteps underestimating the impact of taking on a low performing school and growing too fast during the same time DC educational standards and expectations were changing. We sought to support our community by not allowing a neighboring school to close. Caring about our city, we worked with our then Chancellor to think differently about public education in the District and partnered with a local DCPS school. We wanted to serve more SE DC families the way we had been so successfully doing up until that point. All of this in one school year had the negative unintended consequence of changing our impact in the sector. As a result, what was once a proof point for what is possible with our city's most vulnerable children, Achievement Prep has struggled to maintain the quality of education our scholars need and deserve.

Despite our dogged commitment to our community and Ward, we have faced some severe challenges in trying to provide a quality educational experience for middle school scholars. The quality of education being offered to our middle school scholars is not acceptable and will not allow them to be the scholars and leaders they are. Regretfully, scholars are being undereducated on our middle school campus and neither scholars nor staff are safe, physically or emotionally. None of this is acceptable nor does it align with why Achievement Prep was founded or why we exist.

While others may know they are doing children a disservice and continue to proceed as normal, the team at Achievement Prep takes the accountability it is under as a charter school very seriously. As a result, after much deliberation, we, as a Board of Trustees and school management, are holding ourselves accountable and have decided to close the existing Wahler Place Middle school campus at the end of the 2019-2020 school year. The decision was voted on at a public/open board meeting on Wednesday, January 29, 2020.

Because our scholars matter most and we are determined to ensure our scholars are properly educated at the level they deserve, **we would not simply displace them.** We have worked hard to propose a plan that will ensure our scholars have a seat at a higher performing school. Simultaneously the proposed plan will allow Achievement Prep to refocus its efforts to improve long term sustainability and be the network that not only honors its commitment to the community, but thrives and serves as a proof point of what is possible in SE DC from prek3 through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. The next page sets out our proposed plan and we would like your support.

It has been suggested that we are somehow making this decision because we are seeking to circumvent the accountability DC PCSB places on us per our charter agreement. This could not be further from the truth. We, as an organization, hold our promises we've made to our families, the detrimental impact of sustaining subpar education on generations, and the livelihood of our scholars, as the only basis upon which we make this decision. We dare not continue to subject children, many of them who already live a life filled with trauma, to anything less

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than an excellent education. A charter review is not our motivation – serving children properly is and will always be– and Achievement Prep is not properly serving its middle school scholars today.

We have been told that this could set negative precedent for the sector. It has been suggested to simply continue operating the middle school and work for continuous improvement until our 15 year review in Fall 2022. This is preposterous and suggests that the lives of our scholars are not of value and that they have two years to waste in a school where the capacity to meet their needs is lacking. At Achievement Prep, we know lives, frankly, generations, are on the line. We will not take for granted this burden. Our scholars can NOT afford for us to work to get it right when we know our scholars could be serviced more effectively NOW in a higher performing school with stronger teachers, more offerings of support, greater capacity, and seats that continue through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. And lastly, we'd challenge this Board to recognize that you've already set precedent when you forced an LEA to close its middle school and allowed it to reopen that same middle school a year and a half later. The precedent is set.

#### How we plan to do this:

- Upon your approval, we will enter into a partnership with Friendship Public Charter School (FPCS). FPCS will be the new middle school for currently enrolled middle school scholars. For the next school year (2020-21), FPCS will operate a middle school campus at our Wahler Place Middle School location, and all **3rd to 7th grade scholars** will have a guaranteed seat at that FPCS campus. So if families decide to stay at Wahler Place, the only difference is the scholars will be students of FPCS instead of Achievement Prep. This means interested families **will not** have to complete a My School DC lottery application. Starting in August 2021, the scholars will attend school at the newly constructed Friendship SE Middle School on Milwaukee Avenue SE.
- Further, PCSB Enrollment Specialists will work with current middle school scholars and their families who desire an alternative to the FPCS campus at Wahler Place. We will also hold a school fair for families interested in learning about other middle school options. Our operations team will work directly with families who need support determining next steps should families not want to remain at the FPCS campus at Wahler Place.
- Achievement Prep will petition the PCSB to reconfigure the current elementary campus to serve grades preK3 -8 so that eventually we can slowly restart our middle school campus out of an even stronger foundation. We have made great gains at the elementary campus and we expect that to continue. We will build this campus to be the premiere education space it once was, our community expects it to be, and we know it can be. We will build capacity, plan for sustainability of our efforts and be the proof point for our city. We will share our plans with you in the coming days.
- For scholars currently enrolled in grades preK 3 through 2<sup>nd</sup> the elementary campus will remain open and thriving. Scholars will continue to attend Achievement Prep Wahler Place Elementary Campus with a strengthened elementary school.

We have put a lot of thought into this plan, with a focus on what is best for our scholars and for the community. We owe it to them to reorganize our network, improve long term sustainability, bring in a stronger team, and begin again with a stronger charter middle school we know this community deserves. We're more than up to the challenge, and have proven for years, that we can operate schools that meet and exceed the highest standards.

This proposed reconfiguration of the Achievement Prep network and acquisition of the middle school campus by FPCS was formally voted on by the Board of Trustees on Wednesday, January 29, 2020, at an open board meeting.

*Achievement Prep Network Office*



We recognize that time is of the essence. We need your approval for many of these components and would like to move forward with obtaining that approval so families have as much choice time as possible in advance of the March 2<sup>nd</sup> MSDC lottery deadline. We are hopeful you will support this reconfiguration and acquisition.

Achievement Prep was founded as a 4-8 middle school campus in 2008. We love middle schoolers – they are our wheelhouse. And not just any middle schooler – our SE DC middle schoolers. We intentionally and strategically located our work in SE DC, Ward 8, in a part of the City and a Ward that was and continues to lack high quality seats for children. We commit to this work, to these families, to our scholars. Our work in this city is not done. Schools like Achievement Prep are needed – we always think about families, scholars and community first. We do three generational work knowing that if we change the lives of our scholars, we will in turn impact the lives of their parents and their future children. Our work is not for a charter or a review or for political show – it is to impact a people who have been historically underserved so that they can change the world. We do that starting in SE DC. We will never stop fighting. The work is too important. The price is too high. Achievement Prep is not finished. We simply did too much too soon and our scholars paid the price. We will never allow that to happen again.

Please let us know if you have questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

*Jason E. Andrean*

Jason Andrean  
Achievement Prep  
Board Chair

Shantelle Wright  
Achievement Prep  
Founder and CEO