

**High School Graduation Requirements Task Force Meeting #11**  
**March 14, 2018 at 6:00 PM**  
**441 4<sup>th</sup> Street NW, Room 1114**  
**Washington, DC 20001**

**Minutes**

**Attendance:**

HS Grad Task Force Members:

**Present:**

- **Markus Batchelor** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 8)
- **Tom Brown** (Executive Director, Training Grounds, Inc.)
- **Julie Camerata** (Parent, DC International, Executive Director, DC Special Education Cooperative)
- **Latisha Chisholm** (Special Education Coordinator, Anacostia High School)
- **Celine Fejeran** (Deputy Director, Raise DC)
- **Cara Fuller** (Principal, Ballou STAY High School)
- **Larry Greenhill, Sr.** (Vice President, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers)
- **Dwan Jordon** (Senior Advisor, Friendship PCS)
- **Sandra Jowers-Barber** (Director, Division of Humanities, University of the District of Columbia College)
- **Kimberly Martin** (Principal, Wilson High School)
- **Sanjay Mitchell** (Director of College & Alumni Programs, Thurgood Marshall Academy PCHS)
- **Karla Reid-Witt** (Parent, Banneker High School)
- **Cathy Reilly** (Executive Director, Senior High Alliance of Parents, Principals and Educators)
- **Justin Tooley** (Special Assistant for Legislation & Policy, Office of the State Superintendent of Education)
- **Laura Wilson Phelan** (Task Force Co-Chair, State Board of Education, Ward 1)

**Phone:**

- **Erin Bibo** (Deputy Chief, College & Career Programs)
- **Cosby Hunt** (Teacher & Senior Officer of Teaching & Learning, Center for Inspired Teaching)
- **Carol Randolph** (Chief Operating Officer, DC Students Construction Trades Foundation)
- **Jimell Sanders** (Parent, Houston Elementary School)

**Absent:**

- **Jerome Foster II** (Student, Washington Leadership Academy)
- **Shenita Ray** (Director of Online Operations, Georgetown University School of Continuing Studies)

- **Naomi Rubin DeVeaux** (Deputy Director, DC Public Charter School Board)
- **David Tansey** (Teacher, McKinley Technology High School)

#### **SBOE Staff:**

- **John-Paul Hayworth**, Executive Director
- **Kit Faiella**, Policy Fellow
- **Dyvor Gibson**, Administrative Support Specialist
- **Paul Negrón**, Public Affairs Specialist
- **Abby Ragan**, Policy Fellow
- **Matt Repka**, Policy Analyst
- **Maria Saliccioli**, Senior Policy Analyst

#### **Executive Summary**

Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor convened members of the High School Graduation Requirements Task Force (TF) for their eleventh meeting. TF members engaged in an in-depth discussion of mastery language and community service requirements, reaching consensus on close-to-final recommendations. Following this conversation, TF members split into two groups to discuss the next steps for creating individualized learning plans and differentiated diplomas for District students. The TF then came back together, shared what they had discussed, and identified next steps to address in the following meeting.

Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor thanked TF members and adjourned until the twelfth meeting on March 21, 2018.

#### **Welcome**

Ms. Wilson Phelan welcomed TF members to the meeting, announcing that they had ambitious goals for the evening. She provided an overview of the agenda, adding that while it would be unlikely that the TF would achieve complete consensus, she hoped they would be able to move forward on principles they could agree upon.

#### **Finalize Technical Changes**

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if TF members who made technical changes could present them. Mr. Jordon and Ms. Reilly had suggested the changes, and Ms. Chisholm had offered edits. Ms. Chisholm presented on behalf of the group, sharing the following proposals:

- Students can receive credit for a high school math or world language course if they can demonstrate mastery through a qualifying score on an OSSE-approved exam and can demonstrate completion of a DCPS- or PCSB-approved equivalent learning experience
- Students may receive placement credit for up to 1.0 of the required 4.0 math credits and up to 1.0 of the required 2.0 world language credits
- While these credits would count toward students' requirements, they would still be encouraged to take 4.0 additional math courses and 2.0 additional world language courses
- Up for debate – should students be able to receive credit through passing a test without participating in an equivalent learning experience?

TF members were not clear on what an equivalent learning experience was, and Ms. Saliccioli explained that Ms. Reilly and Mr. Jordon had suggested that an approved learning experience could be a study abroad experience, course at another middle school or a high school, but they wanted a required number of hours attached to the learning experience. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked what the TF was trying to accomplish by offering students to earn credit by proving mastery, saying this would be a good place to start the discussion. Dr. Jowers-Barber said that this would help the TF find a way for students who have mastered a language to have an opportunity to get credit, honor prior knowledge, and increase number of other courses they can take to broaden their horizons. Ms. Chisholm said that this was the case in college – students could place out of a class and take electives they were interested in. Ms. Wilson Phelan added that it would be an opportunity for students to take courses outside of their own schools and receive credit, too.

Ms. Fuller said that it did not make sense for students who could meet the mastery level required to place out of a course to also demonstrate an approved learning experience. She said she was assuming the designers of the proposal wanted a social experience beyond mastery. Dr. Jowers-Barber asked whether experiences in language classes would be the same across campuses, and Ms. Wilson Phelan said that they do all require 120 seat hours. Ms. Martin said the hours themselves would be very different.

Ms. Fuller said that because teachers do things differently, it is not currently guaranteed that all students have a social language or math learning experience. Dr. Jowers-Barber asked why students could not simply test out, rather than demonstrating an approved learning experience, if not every student is guaranteed to take the course in a social atmosphere.

Ms. Reilly said that she and Mr. Jordon were concerned about opening the door for students to test out of any class, and world language and math jumped out as possibilities for demonstrating mastery because they are trying to achieve different things than social studies, English, or other subjects might. With those subjects, they worried that there would be a bigger world of material that students might not be mastering if they placed out through a test. Ms. Fuller clarified that a test might not capture every concept a student should master, and Ms. Reilly agreed. Ms. Reilly asked how to capture experience living in a foreign country. She added that if the group was prepared to say that if students who pass approved math or world language tests are on level with those who have had 120 course hours, that would be fine. Ms. Fuller asked if she and Mr. Jordon thought this policy would only apply to Algebra I or if it was conceived to be broader. Ms. Reilly said the underlying purpose of the proposal was to address some students' issues with the courses they were permitted to take. She said that it was up for debate whether students could receive credit for taking exams. Ms. Martin said that there were competing messages coming out of these proposals.

Ms. Reilly said the difficulty is that advanced language courses at DC schools are not consistently offered. If students test out of algebra and geometry, DC schools do not have four additional years of math courses available. Ms. Martin said her school did, and Ms. Reilly said not all schools do. Ms. Chisholm said that was why she suggested allowing students to place out of up to one course – this would make it more likely that schools could accommodate additional years of study. She added that counselors should be responsible for helping students ensure their

transcripts are college-ready. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked whether, if a student took algebra placement test, received an 80%, had a B on their transcript for the course, and proceeded to geometry, Howard University would be able to tell the student had taken the test rather than the course. TF said no, it would look identical to a college. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if the group objected to the fact that these two experiences would look identical on a transcript, and they said no. Ms. Chisholm said that while a placement test would show up as a course on a transcript, a college could perhaps figure out that a student had placed out if they did an in-depth transcript analysis.

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked whether the TF cared if students sit in class and how they master knowledge. Ms. Camerata said this proposal puts a lot of pressure on the test being right and capturing a lot of the right information. Ms. Martin said that students might try to take tests to save themselves in classes where their attendance and grades are not up to par and they might be on track to fail. Mr. Batchelor said this was Ms. Fuller's point. Ms. Fejeran said this conversation was figured out at the college level and the TF needed to decide whether that idea of a test equating to mastery at the college level should extend down to high school. Ms. Fejeran asked about clarifying the timing of when these courses would be taken, and TF members agreed the tests should be taken at the beginning of the semester.

Mr. Tooley said he was wondering about what the inherent problem was and how many students were affected – was it a handful, or was it more? Should this be where the TF focused its attention? He said he did not feel compelled to make a change with mastery language, even knowing that there might be exceptions to the rule, because he was not sure the issue was systematic.

Mr. Brown said he appreciated Mr. Tooley's perspective but wanted to know what the threshold was for when it was important enough for the city to care. He said the TF should not be in the business of deciding how many students needed to be affected in order to make a policy change. He said that the flexibility was an attractive aspect of the mastery plan, and the method for achieving it could be further fleshed out. He liked the suggestion of taking the test before sitting in on the course. Mr. Tooley said he appreciated the spirit of Mr. Brown's remarks and that it was important to help as many students as possible, but there are an infinite number of individual cases.

Mr. Brown said that the city is claiming to serve all students and that it is important to talk about the scale of the problem. Ms. Reilly said she thought the scale of the problem was large. Dr. Bibb asked whether this proposed mastery language was new or had been featured in previous straw men, and Ms. Wilson Phelan said the thinking was not new but that the language was.

Ms. Reilly said mastery tests had been discussed at length in the credit flexibility task force. Mr. Tooley asked if there was a way to figure out the number of affected students. Ms. Camerata said she thought it would apply to a relatively small swath of students, which was fine, but she wanted to consider how to broaden the conceptual thinking so it would touch more students. How could the TF use mastery, through [universal design for learning](#) (UDL), to help students gain more flexibility. Tests do not work for all students - was there a way to make the policy more accessible for students who aren't able to excel on tests? Ms. Reid-Witt said that she does not send her students to school to check off boxes - the purpose of education is not to get a job, it

is about personal growth. She said the group was thinking about the issue too antiseptically without considering the people who are affected. She added that the relatively small number of students affected might belie how many students would be inspired by the additional flexibility if it were offered.

Ms. Chisholm said that she did not understand how this could only apply to a subset of children, when the conversation had been about those who were high-achievers as well as those students who might be in alternative settings or have had alternative high school experiences who could take advantage of those possibilities. The chance to see how two very different populations could think about this flexibility means that it is a high-impact possibility. Ms. Fejeran said this was most likely to meet the needs of students who are on an accelerated path. She asked if Ms. Fuller could share how this might help her, as a school leader, meet more students' needs.

Ms. Fuller said that it spoke to the earlier point that a number of students arrive at alternative high schools having taken Algebra I; almost all of the students she receives at Ballou STAY have taken it but have failed it. She liked the way this proposal could allow students take classes they have not already taken, and she said that if they took sections from PARCC to test for mastery, they would not be achieving their goals. She said her students would be excited to have this option and she believed they could create buy-in because it opens the door for students to spend their time wisely.

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked for a temperature check on the importance of seat time - what about a student who could pass a Spanish I and II exam without having taken a Spanish course? All but one TF member was ok with this student receiving language credits without the need for additional seat time. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if there should be limits to this policy.

Ms. Chisholm asked if high schools are equipped to serve students through age 16, even if they place out of courses. She said that she was not sure all high schools are equipped to continue serving students who place out. She asked if Ms. Martin had a robust internship program at Wilson High School, and she said no. Ms. Chisholm said Anacostia HS did not, either. Ms. Wilson Phelan said the maximum number of courses students could place out of, using this policy, was 6. Ms. Chisholm said that it would be difficult to find solutions for students who are only interested in fulfilling their graduation requirements but might place out of up to 6 courses. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if they could take six electives, and Ms. Chisholm said this would have a negative impact on their educational experience. She asked if we should push the District to do more dual-enrollment credits.

Dr. Jowers-Barber said that she was more knowledgeable about higher education than about these policies – she asked if proactive students could come to the University of the District of Columbia (UDC). Dr. Bibo said that all DCPS high schools have internship opportunities and access to dual enrollment opportunities. Mr. Mitchell said that these dual enrollment ideas might not extend to charter schools, and if a policy for dual enrollment was widespread, he wanted to create options for charters that could not afford to send students to colleges.

Mr. Hunt asked why charters could not afford to send students to colleges for dual-enrollment classes, and Mr. Mitchell said students are charged tuition, fees, books, and transit, and these are

expensive. Some government agencies offset these costs, but the funding could fall through, and the schools would have to figure out how to pay for the students. He said that without equitable funding, he was concerned.

Dr. Bibo said that because there wasn't anything guiding dual enrollment until recently, when OSSE put regulations into place. These regulations ensured that any student pursuing dual enrollment at a college course through his or her local education agency (LEA) must not bear any cost for the course. As a result, colleges paid for tuition but not textbooks and fees. She said another policy, the OSSE Dual Enrollment Fund, asks that universities apply to participate in a fund that covers the cost of fees, textbooks, and other materials. The Dual Enrollment Fund also paid for student metro cards for any hours that extend beyond the hours that are typically covered. Dr. Bibo agreed that smaller LEAs have a hard time managing enrollment agreements with colleges and universities.

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if the TF would impose a credit limit. She called for a vote, and all but four TF members voted that students should not be limited in the number of math and language courses they were able to place out of. Mr. Jordan was one of the members who voted to limit the number of classes, and Ms. Wilson Phelan asked him how many courses he would want to limit the policy to. He said he was not sure, but he voted against unlimited place-outs because he was trying to think about how the system could be abused or what loopholes could exist. He said he needed to think about it more. Mr. Brown agreed – this was his reasoning for voting against unlimited place-outs, too. Ms. Martin said she voted against it because of the potential for manipulation or abuse, too, and Ms. Chisholm agreed that this was also her reasoning. Dr. Jowers-Barber asked who would manipulate or abuse the system – would it be teachers? Ms. Martin said no, and Dr. Jowers-Barber asked how students would be able to do this. Ms. Martin said students would manipulate the system the same way they abuse the ACT or SAT, and Dr. Jowers-Barber said this did not clarify things for her.

Mr. Brown said he felt that allowing unlimited place-outs did not consider a lot of scenarios that should be considered. Mr. Jordan said that he was close to supporting unlimited place-outs but that schools would shuffle to figure out how to start dual enrollment programs to accommodate students who needed to fill more credits, and he did not want to see schools purchasing the cheapest possible dual enrollment programs for students to use. Vetting dual enrollment programs would help - if programs are rigorous and certified, he would be fine with unlimited access to place-outs. Ms. Reid-Witt said that she could accept unlimited math and language place outs because the subjects are mostly linear and it is almost cruel to make a student who has finished material continue it for no reason. She said she would think there would be students who might not opt out of classes where they had mastered the material, hoping to receive easy As, and there might be more reasons not to take advantage of the new flexibility.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said SBOE staff would type the list of changes the TF agreed on into principles for agreement in the final recommendations that would go to OSSE for consideration. She suggested taking the evening's ideas that were shared and largely agreed upon. She said she had taken notes on nuance or overt disagreement to capture those things in an eventual report, and she said there would be an additional month to process information, test it with the TF members' communities, and see what would make sense.

Dr. Bibo asked if they would have a month to gather feedback, and Ms. Wilson Phelan said the changes should be finalized by the end of April. Mr. Tooley suggested that, in its feedback to OSSE, the wording should explain how the TF envisioned the new system working. He said not to get caught up on policy wording, but instead to think about the vision for how it would play out.

Ms. Wilson Phelan moved to the proposed changes to community service, written by Mr. Mitchell, saying they would be more straightforward - the key decision to make would be whether LEAs could approve professional internships or whether all internship hours should have to be served at a nonprofit. She asked what the purpose of changing the community service requirements was and what language should be include to reflect that purpose.

Ms. Fejeran said that adding flexibility to the community service hours would be helpful for students who are trying to get on track, particularly those who are over-age - it gives schools another tool and could let students earn income. Ms. Reilly asked whether jobs qualified for internship hours. Ms. Fejeran said it was a question for the group, but she liked giving the chance to accomplish multiple things (earning money and fulfilling internship hours) at the same time. Dr. Jowers-Barber said she thought of the internship provision as beneficial to students who knew a discipline they wanted to pursue post-high school – it would be a chance to try out a career and get some exposure.

Ms. Camerata took issue with the word “professional” in the community service definition – she noted that some SPED students hope to go straight to work after high school, and research shows paid internships during high school help students maintain employment after they graduate. She said she would advocate that the definition would not be so limiting as to exclude paid work. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked Mr. Mitchell to clarify his thinking.

He said that there was no existing citywide definition of community service. He thought it would make sense to let each LEA define professional internships, and he added that he made the wording intentionally vague to give LEAs flexibility to support students in multiple situations.

Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested a vote on keeping the definition of community service broad for the 50 hours that could not be fulfilled by an internship. Ms. Reilly said that students in a focus group she participated in during the fall had talked about how much they had appreciated their community service experience. Mr. Batchelor asked whether the nonprofit provision meant that all 100 hours would have to come from a nonprofit, and Mr. Mitchell said yes – community service hours and internship hours would all be served at nonprofit institutions. Mr. Batchelor asked whether school-based opportunities would count or would be excluded under this definition, and Mr. Mitchell said that he had grappled with whether school-day opportunities should count. Ms. Fuller said that sometimes, writing definitions with too much breadth results in a loss of meaning or creates loopholes. She said it could be possible that asking LEAs to make decisions about qualifying hours was creating unnecessary extra work, and she found it important to be clear about the 50 hours the TF felt strongly about.

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked for a vote on dropping hours from 100 to 50, and five TF members

raised their hands. Dr. Jowers-Barber said she had a problem with the word nonprofit, because a for-profit organization with a nonprofit arm could be excluded. Mr. Mitchell said it would not be. Ms. Wilson Phelan said that if the hours were decreased, the regulation could be more specific. Mr. Mitchell asked if they would then define what community service entails. Ms. Wilson Phelan said that was what she had heard from this discussion. Mr. Mitchell asked whether this should be the body to change the definition.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said she needed greater focus from the group to make this decision. She asked the TF if they would opt to define community service and whether the required number of hours should be 50 or 100. Ms. Wilson Phelan first asked for a vote – how many TF members wanted to define community service? 7 of 13 TF members raised their hands. She then asked how many wanted to define community service for the 50 hours that could not be served as an internship – six TF members did – and how many wanted to define all 100 hours, setting guidelines for internships as well as community service. Only two TF members voted for this. Eight TF members voted to reduce community service hours from 100 to 50.

Mr. Mitchell said he interpreted the vote as the TF voting for a reduced community service load of 50 hours defined by LEAs, based on the vote. Ms. Fejeran asked if schools would be the highest authority that would review students' service hours. She asked if there is currently a check and balance in place to ensure the hours are high quality, and she wondered whether there should be. Mr. Mitchell said that Thurgood Marshall Academy uses DCPS' definition of community service, and if the group was happy with it, they could say that's what the formal definition is across the city. He said most charter schools use DCPS' definition, and standardizing it would help students transfer across schools.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said she heard most people say leave the language about community service as it currently stands while dropping the number of required hours from 100 to 50. Ms. Reilly asked if students' hours could be discounted if they transferred from one LEA to another with a different definition of community service. Ms. Martin said no, because community service hours are entered onto students' transcripts, and transfer students would arrive at new LEAs with their hours already approved. Ms. Reid-Witt asked how community service hours could be audited if LEAs were using different definitions of community service.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said the TF would move on and return to this discussion at a future meeting.

### **Personalized Learning Plans and Pathways**

Mr. Jordon asked the group if they wanted to make a recommendation on personalized learning plans, and Ms. Chisholm said yes. Ms. Reilly said that they could make a decision on whether or not to make a recommendation now and could figure out where the recommendation would go later. Mr. Jordon said he voted to make a recommendation, too, and he asked if anyone was opposed. There was no opposition. Dr. Jowers-Barber asked to clarify what personalized learning plans were, adding that she knew about [individualized education programs](#) (IEPs). Mr. Jordon said these plans would create a plan similar to an IEP for every student. Ms. Wilson Phelan added that the proposed plans would not be legal documents, nor would they be long. Ms. Chisholm said that an IEP does not determine the course offerings a student might be required to



take, and Mr. Jordon added that these plans would function as more of a road map. Ms. Martin said she would only say yes to making a recommendation if there was funding and resources attached. She said she had worked at a school with personalized learning plans in Ohio – there, they were called individual commencement plans. She said the plan required staff to oversee advisory periods where students received weekly feedback on their progress toward their goals. Staff members also checked on students' community service hours. She said the system, funded by the Gates Foundation, was very labor-intensive and resource heavy, and that as soon as the Gates grant ended, the program stopped.

Mr. Tooley said that the more robust the plans are, the less clear it would be that State Board (SBOE) would have the authority to require them. He said they would create was an additional reporting and spending requirement, and it could be a good pilot program, but depending on the scope of what the plans required, it would be important to stay within the highway of the law. Ms. Reilly asked if the Ohio initiative was effective, and Ms. Martin said it was very effective, and students had supports throughout their high school careers.

Dr. Jowers-Barber asked what resources would be necessary for a student who decided his or her goals changed after his or her plan was created. Mr. Tooley said there were vehicles to deliver these resources, but he wondered if SBOE had authority over everything that would be necessary to create these plans. Ms. Reilly said there was an option to make recommendations that were not official policies.

Ms. Chisholm said the suggestion originated from a discussion on how students are not prepared when they graduate from high school, but the city has knowledge about students' preparedness far before students enroll in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She said the plans could present a chance to use relevant data before high school. Her concern with creating graduation plans in 8<sup>th</sup> grade was that this is similar to the current system, where students are supposed to receive graduation plans in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. She added that SPED students receive IEP transition plans just after 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and she wanted to know how to use that existing data to provide interventions before high school. She said that the District acknowledges students are not proficient in 4<sup>th</sup>, as soon as their 3<sup>rd</sup> grade PARCC scores come in, but everyone acts surprised that high school students are not proficient, because they have passed from grade to grade.

Looking at a [policy document](#) from the Education Commission of the States, Mr. Jordon said Massachusetts' plan is interesting, starting no later than 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Ms. Reilly said it would be an LEA-level regulation, because LEAs have the necessary data. Ms. Wilson Phelan said DCPS tracks this information but may not share it with children and their parents systematically. Ms. Reilly said it needs to be produced in a format that spurs action and has a recommendation for future interventions. Ms. Chisholm said that data has shown that students who are not proficient in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade rarely become proficient at any point, and she asked why this should be the case.

Mr. Jordon asked if the group agreed that the personalized learning plans should start no later than 6<sup>th</sup> grade, and Dr. Jowers-Barber said that was too late. Ms. Reilly said the city needed to do something to intervene on behalf of students. Ms. Chisholm asked what kind of interventions or requests we should make, and Ms. Reilly said that currently, teachers are supposed to notify families about below-level students. She said these notifications should be detailed and require

that teachers notify parents halfway through the semester, which has been a problem in certain ways. She wondered if the proposed plans would be more effective than ensuring students know they are failing, adding that the problem is that there are not early enough interventions. Ms. Chisholm agreed.

Ms. Wilson Phelan said part of the problem is parents are not brought in on conversations about students who are failing courses. She added that she receives different report cards with different information for her two children who are in the same grade at the same school but are in different classrooms. She said the formats were not friendly to a low-literacy parents, and she added that it would be difficult for someone who was not in education to know if his/her children were on grade-level and what to do if they were not, which she recognized as a massive problem. Dr. Jowers-Barber said parent disengagement is another major issue – in her mind, 6<sup>th</sup> grade is unacceptably late to start creating plans to drive interventions. She said interventions should happen by 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at the latest, but ideally they should start in pre-kindergarten, with schools partnering with families to increase exposure to reading and different literacy-boosting experiences. Ms. Wilson Phelan explained that students don't receive standardized test data until 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and Dr. Jowers-Barber said she opposed waiting for standardized test data.

Ms. Reilly said one problem is parent communication and another is that schools are not making interventions once they have received data. Ms. Martin said elementary teachers collect a tremendous amount of qualitative and quantitative data and make decent predictions about where students will fall by middle and high school. These teachers rely on such data sources as [DIBELS](#), reading inventories, and reading fluency, but they do not have any ability to act in opposition to the outcomes they foresee for middle and high school because there are things they cannot control for. She said that there are issues that would make life harder for adults who are [teaching like their hair is on fire](#) without moving the needle on actual achievement. Dr. Jowers-Barber said that her grandchild goes to school in Indiana, and she learned from a report card that the child needed additional support. To get the student on track, a teacher brought the student in for extra support during her personal time. Dr. Jowers-Barber said that was an exceptional teacher and a mother who was able to look at a report card and understand what should happen, but she felt this should be the support more students received.

Ms. Wilson Phelan asked what made the intervention plans in Ohio effective, and Ms. Martin said elementary school was when the biggest changes could be made, but in Ohio and at Wilson, they try to get kids on track in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Freshman seminars and other supports produced tremendous gains, because they helped students realize the importance of starting high school strong. Wilson uses some of the components of the [AVID](#) program, and Ms. Martin explained that they have a 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy modeled off of the program. Even though they can't afford to implement the whole program, they are still seeing gains because the system works. She added that it was the same thinking that would drive the creation of a specialized learning plan.

Ms. Martin said that high school success boils down to making sure there is a caring, committed adult attached to every student who knows where the student stands academically. Mr. Jordon asked who, besides counselors, should be involved in the work. Ms. Martin said that in Wilson's 9<sup>th</sup> grade team design involves quarterly data days with all 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. She said that the model is resource-intensive, and she asks teachers to dig in deep, with home visits and phone

calls. She added that Wilson only has the resources to do this in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Ms. Chisholm said that at Anacostia High school, they have an all-hands-on-deck approach with anyone who interacts with 9<sup>th</sup> grade students. Anacostia has class sizes of 30 for students in its 10<sup>th</sup> – 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes, but they limit class sizes to 20 in 9<sup>th</sup> grade so teachers can develop relationships with their students. It works, and teachers are able to spout specific data numbers about their students. Mr. Jordon asked if Anacostia has a data person, and Ms. Chisholm said they do not.

Mr. Tooley said Ms. Martin undertook her 9<sup>th</sup> grade team design on her own, which is principal-led action, not LEA policy. Ms. Martin said she would not use the 9<sup>th</sup> grade academy cluster design from DCPS; instead, she implemented this plan because of her prior success with a similar plan. Ms. Chisholm said that it is a problem that currently, there is no minimum amount of support required of schools. Mr. Tooley said this is a leadership issue, and the TF was discussing plans that would become burdensome mandates, and he wondered what the balance between inaction and administrative burden could look like. He said personalized learning plans were prescriptive and that concerned him. Ms. Martin said there was a difference between a school-instigated habit and a bureaucratic nightmare, and she did not like the idea of mandating that schools create spreadsheets for OSSE's use that that would not be helpful at the school level.

Ms. Chisholm said her 9<sup>th</sup> grade class [SRI](#) levels were between 3<sup>rd</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade achievement levels. She asked about schools like hers, where no one was acting on these data. Mr. Tooley said he agreed it was an issue but he doubted the solution was a very bureaucratic compliance requirement. Ms. Wilson Phelan said he was looking at nuances that could be written into policy from a limited perspective. Mr. Jordan said these plans would be labor-intensive, but they would work, because they are tailored to each student. Mr. Tooley said there would be issues with the plans looking different across schools, and Ms. Wilson Phelan said he was going down a rabbit hole of what could fail about potential plans before the group could make recommendations. He said he did not think this was the case.

Ms. Reilly said the policy might not be the answer, but the group was trying to flesh out the problem. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked Ms. Chisholm what she thought. She said that if her students don't pass 9<sup>th</sup> grade the first time, they have slim odds of graduating. Anacostia pumps energy into tested courses for 9<sup>th</sup> grade purely because they are tested. She wanted to know what to do in 5<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade to ignite a similar sense of urgency about what resources are being poured into kids at those levels. Ms. Martin asked about what an approach that would be similar to Wilson's 9<sup>th</sup> grade academies, and Ms. Chisholm agreed but said she thought 4<sup>th</sup> grade academies would be better suited to early intervention. She asked what an equivalent 4<sup>th</sup> grade academy could look like.

Dr. Jowers-Barber asked why DCPS wasn't acting on their knowledge about below-level students – she said their actions wouldn't need to be prescriptive, but she was in favor of a hands-on academy approach. Ms. Chisholm said this was because the system is considered a success or failure based on its 4-year graduation rate. Research proves that high school success is all about getting through 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Ms. Wilson Phelan said 3<sup>rd</sup> – 8<sup>th</sup> grade is tested, too, and schools are held accountable for those results, so it isn't all about 4-year graduation rates. Dr. Jowers-Barber said something is going wrong if the city still has the problems it does, and clearly intervention efforts are not effective. Ms. Martin wondered about students who drop out,

saying that students in urban districts who reach 9<sup>th</sup> grade have already persisted and adding that students drop out in 4<sup>th</sup>, 6<sup>th</sup>, and 8<sup>th</sup> grade – it can happen well before high school. She said that the reason she brought this up was that those students who drop out have greater needs than the ones who stay in school.

Ms. Reilly brought up Dr. Jowers-Barber's anecdote - some districts pull kids out in first grade and intervene, but DC does not do this. Ms. Wilson Phelan said it does happen. Ms. Chisholm said Ms. Reilly was talking about classrooms with one or two kids who are below grade level, but in many schools, it is most children. Ms. Reilly asked if it was true that 70% of students could not learn to read in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. Ms. Chisholm said proficiency data was posted in elementary schools. Ms. Wilson Phelan said that [Flamboyan](#) schools addressed personalization and parent focus in a different way and the model needs to be everywhere. She asked if students know where they stand academically, and Ms. Martin responded that there are kids who would be surprised. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked if the TF should solve for that and find out a way to help parents understand their children's progress earlier. She said that the ESSA Task Force is creating a universal report card, and she wondered if there could be a parent version for every student.

Mr. Tooley said there are tools for parents, and one thing OSSE's data team has done for attendance is to create a suite of reports. He said he knew these reports went to each school's data manager but acknowledged they might not trickle down. He said OSSE could take on this parent-focused work, but DCPS could too, and he added that it was a practice schools should be engaging in. Ms. Martin said that because of concentrated poverty and segregation, these resources are not sufficient. Ms. Chisholm said that no one at the district level should be surprised about below grade-level data that comes from the Simon-Kramer-Anacostia feeder pattern, because nothing changes as students progress from one school to another, and the city cannot keep pretending that no one realizes students are graduating who are not prepared. Dr. Jowers-Barber said she is tired of seeing people who are surprised. She said the city knows the problem and needs to replicate practices that work, and the TF knows individual plans work. Ms. Reilly said high levels of student mobility add to the problem.

### **Differentiated Pathways**

Mr. Batchelor asked if the group discussing multiple diplomas and ways of demonstrating mastery had made any decisions at the previous meeting. Ms. Fejeran said this conversation moved away from the diploma and into the realm of flexibility, saying it raised questions such as whether the TF is open to being unconventional about how students fulfill requirements – would participating in the Kennedy Center Youth Orchestra count as a music credit?

Ms. Mitchell asked if there was room to look at why physical education is required in high schools, and Ms. Fejeran said it was raised as a way to prevent obesity. Mr. Mitchell said that if the TF wanted to pursue any pathways, it would be necessary to create a rationale for why it was important for students to demonstrate a given competency.

Ms. Reid-Witt said that fulfilling requirements outside of school makes it harder to ensure that a student's experience complies with the standards, so in-school is preferable. Mr. Batchelor asked

if the group had consensus that there should be a career pathway to graduation, and Ms. Fuller asked whether it would align to the 24 credits or whether there would be different requirements. She worried this would lead to different levels of diplomas, adding that when schools differentiate between college and career they are moving in that direction. Mr. Mitchell agreed that the TF did not want to lower the bar.

Mr. Batchelor wondered what a college and a career pathway rigor would look like, and Ms. Camerata said the TF should avoid anything that could create the perception that a career diploma is a lower-value option. Mr. Mitchell asked if students are able to learn both college and career competencies, and Ms. Camerata said she believed so, but that it was difficult. Mr. Mitchell asked how college and career pathways differ, and Ms. Camerata said that pathways diverge in 11<sup>th</sup> grade, but both sets of students end up with the same number of credits. Ms. Fuller said that there are more targeted ways of offering courses to students; instead of requiring Algebra II, perhaps students could take business math. Rather than letting students opt out of courses, they could replace them.

Ms. Reid-Witt asked about specializations, and Ms. Fejeran suggested a general degree rather than specializations, just as colleges offer the same degree with different majors.

Ms. Reid-Witt said it sounded like many of the TF's ideas were already in use at certain schools. She said she knew Banneker offered its own diploma and wondered what it entailed. Mr. Mitchell said his only worry was equity and whether every school could do what Banneker does. He wondered how pathways would play out at schools that do not have the ability to choose their students.

Ms. Reid-Witt asked if there was accountability for schools that offer freshman academies, and Mr. Mitchell said unfortunately, some public schools do what they want, and others are more constrained by their student bodies. Ms. Fuller wondered what decisions should be made through the State Board versus at the local level – should schools decide whether some students should take Engineering I instead of Algebra I? Should students have the flexibility to decide that for themselves?

Mr. Batchelor noted that there was some support of multiple diplomas, but there were equity concerns, and he wondered if anyone had seen a district that did this well. Ms. Camerata suggested Denver, but she expressed concern about the vagueness in Denver's example.

Mr. Mitchell said the required credits should be broad, but each individual school should decide how each one of those credits are met, through different course options and other individual decisions. He said there should be some guidance from the State Board about the types of courses that could meet these requirements.

Ms. Fuller noted that college is the issue, because some schools do not give students what they need to be able to enroll. She said there are many students who graduate without the credits that will satisfy colleges, and all students need to be able to meet colleges' standards. Mr. Batchelor suggested keeping the core [Carnegie Units](#) but allowing specializations, and Ms. Fejeran said she did not have a problem with this because DC has a strong baseline. She added that if students

want to go above and beyond, that is fine, but the issue is the public's default assumption that the default lower option is bad. She said the TF did not want to stigmatize any students.

Ms. Fuller asked if everyone was comfortable maintaining the core 24 Carnegie Units and allowing students to specialize, adding that the only change would be that each school could be more flexible with its course choices. Ms. Camerata said this shouldn't be legislated, and Ms. Fejeran added that it is about exploring different things. She added that many LEAs are creating specialized academies, and the TF could say that students who demonstrate mastery of course exams for CTE academy courses could get a special commendation on their diplomas.

Mr. Greenhill said that he and his colleagues look to the electrical aptitude test – they are happy with students who can pass it, and if a student scores in the median range, he or she will likely earn an apprenticeship. It would not matter if he or she had attended an IB school, a technical school, or another type of school entirely. Mr. Batchelor asked if something sticks out as particularly valuable in an applicant, and Mr. Greenhill said they are happy with students who pass Algebra I with at least a C and pass their English courses. He added that they prefer high school diplomas, but they will accept GEDs for students who also pass the aptitude test. Ms. Fejeran said there is still a stigma attached to the GED, and Mr. Greenhill said that outcomes matter more than diplomas. Some students catch on faster than others, and this is not predicted by high school achievement. Mr. Batchelor wondered if there was any reason to create a diploma with distinction if there are no variations that take trades into account.

### **Next Steps and Closing**

Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor asked the group to gather and close out. Mr. Batchelor asked the personalized learning plans group to share some of what they had discussed. Mr. Jordon shared that the group wanted to create plans that would start before third grade to give schools an opportunity to provide additional supports to meet students' needs. The group had agreed that teachers, counselors, parents, and any adults who work with a given child should be involved with these plans. The group had not identified a timeline, but they did want to make sure that plans offer flexibility, rather than imposing a prescriptive checklist on schools. He said they discussed that school systems already have the necessary data but may not be using it. Ms. Wilson Phelan added that she had previously learned about the challenges of prescribing anything, and she realized that a compliance checklist would not serve the TF's purpose.

Ms. Fuller spoke on behalf of the group discussing multiple pathways to graduation, and she said their main question was whether to maintain the current requirement of 24 Carnegie Units or to add an opportunity for students to earn a specialization on top of the 24 units. They agreed they did not want to tinker with the specific 24 credits, and they did not think it was necessary to create additional honors through legislation, but schools would need support to offer specialized diplomas on their own. Ms. Wilson Phelan asked whether the proposed specialization would simply be a stamp of approval or whether the group envisioned something different. Group members replied that they were not yet sure and had concerns about how to move forward – what would count for a special diploma and who would have access. Group members were split on whether this was mirroring college specialization in a positive way, but there was dissent within the group. The group did decide they did not want to pursue Denver's approach to

graduation, where students are required to demonstrate mastery through a variety of options. Ms. Wilson Phelan said her understanding was that the group wanted to leave the conferring of distinctions up to LEAs. The group did not discuss any recommendations that would be moved into a report, rather than suggested for policy change, and Ms. Wilson Phelan suggested following up with Ms. Fuller and Mr. Brown on report language. Ms. Reilly asked about pathways in support of special needs students. Ms. Fuller said they didn't go there but she'd be happy to talk about it in the high-level follow up question.

Ms. Wilson Phelan reminded them the next meeting would take place the following week, with only three meetings remaining. She asked TF members to come and participate to the greatest extent possible. She shared that the TF co-chairs and SBOE staff would work on suggested language for flexibility and community service and would capture the group's thoughts on third grade plans and the dilemma between ensuring equity and burdening schools. She thought the bulk of the following meeting would focus on these documents.

Ms. Wilson Phelan and Mr. Batchelor thanked TF members for their work and adjourned the meeting. The TF will reconvene on March 21, 2018, from 6:00 – 8:00 PM.