



May 3, 2019

By Electronic Mail and Hand Delivered

Dr. Diana Greene, Superintendent
Members, Duval County School Board
1701 Prudential Drive
Jacksonville, Florida 32207

Subject: Duval County Public Schools Facilities Master Plan

Dear Dr. Greene and Duval County School Board Members:

As you know, the Jacksonville Civic Council's Education Task Force is an interested and engaged group of business leaders focused on supporting the improvement of K-12 education in our region, in partnership with DCPS and other stakeholders. In pursuit of our mutual goal of creating a world-class education system for the people of Jacksonville, the Task Force has reviewed the countywide Facilities Master Plan.

Based on our preliminary analysis, using publicly available data, the Task Force members believe the plan contains several strengths that should be implemented and will lead to better district performance. In particular, the consolidation of underutilized schools will create efficiencies and lower maintenance costs, allow for better leveraging of high-level school leadership, and reduce neighborhood blight.

Along with its strengths, however, the Task Force has identified several areas in which the plan falls short: 1) it is excessively expensive; 2) it fails to anticipate reductions in district-operated public school enrollment; and 3) it does not adequately contemplate the increase in charter school enrollment or the role that charter schools will play in creating the highly effective school system of the future. We are writing today to detail our concerns and share initial recommendations for addressing the issues above.

1. *The Per Pupil Cost of the Plan:* On a project-by-project basis, district spending plans are unnecessarily expensive and fail to take advantage of recent legislation



offering construction flexibility, which would lower costs to taxpayers. In general, these plans allocate \$30,000 to \$35,000 (or more) for every new or replacement student seat. This is exorbitant, particularly when compared to recent new facility projects for local charter schools.

In 2018, the Florida Legislature passed HB 7055, which offers school districts the flexibility to construct facilities at the same building code requirements as charter or private schools, provided there is adequate hurricane/emergency shelter capacity in the county. Recent new charter school projects in Duval County have cost approximately \$12,000 to \$15,000 per student seat.

Examples of excessively costly estimates in the plan span the district and include:

- A replacement school for Holiday Hill Elementary is estimated at \$19.7MM for its present enrollment of 565. This equates to \$34,900 per student.
- A replacement campus consolidating Ribault MS and Ribault HS is estimated at \$83.9MM to serve its present combined enrollment of 2,160. This equates to \$38,800 per student.
- A new replacement K-5 campus at Pickett Elementary is planned to combine Pickett with nearby Reynolds Lane and SA Hull elementary schools. The estimated cost of \$28.2MM to serve the three schools' combined 827 students equates to \$34,100 per student.
- A new replacement campus for Venetia Elementary, designed to combine Venetia with nearby Ortega ES, is estimated to cost \$22.6MM. The present enrollment of the two schools is 755, equating to \$29,900 per student.
- Budgets for new classroom additions and to "address identified facility issues" (i.e. general repairs) have similarly high per-student price tags -- all greater than \$20,000 per student seat.

At a minimum, 30% of the projected \$1.95B of spending, or \$600 million, could be saved through a more efficient, economical spending plan that fully leverages newly available state construction flexibility. Moreover, should DCPS choose to incorporate Schools of Hope into the plan, the district will unlock additional funds from state, non-profit and philanthropic sources at *no additional cost to Duval County taxpayers.*



We are confident the district can provide students with quality facilities while more efficiently deploying taxpayer resources, and would be happy to assist in developing that plan.

2. *District Student Enrollment Projections:* Given current and projected charter enrollment growth, the plan shows the district making provisions for more facilities than it will need, again resulting in excessive spending. Recent trends show significant charter enrollment growth and a consistent decline in enrollment in district-operated schools.

In the last four years, district-operated schools have lost an average of 1,000 students per year (117,700 to 113,600), while charters have gained 1,400 students per year (11,000 to 16,600). As a result, the share of Duval students attending charter schools has increased from 8.5% to 12.7%.

These enrollment trends are expected to continue given the growth plans of existing charters, anticipated charter openings in 2020, and the planned introduction and growth of new, multi-school non-profit CMOs to the local landscape. In light of those trends and the addition of new charter capacity, it is reasonable to estimate that within 10 years (i.e. the 2028-29 school year), charter schools will be serving 29,000 students (~22% of the district), with enrollment in district-operated schools declining by 10,000 to 103,000. In such a scenario, the district would need ~10-12 fewer buildings than currently planned, at a savings to the taxpayers of \$300-360MM if priced at \$30MM per facility. We encourage DCPS to study these trends and revisit its estimates based upon a more realistic projection.

3. *Projected Charter School Enrollment Growth:* While it is estimated that an average of ~80% of public-school students will attend district-operated schools in the next 15 years, current plans allocate 100% of tax proceeds to district facilities, at the expense of students attending public charter schools. Current district plans do not include sharing tax proceeds with public charter schools.

Like the school district, public charter schools have facility renovation backlogs and anticipate the need for new buildings to accommodate continued enrollment growth. Unlike the district, charter enrollment continues to grow each year, while enrollment in district-operated schools is consistently shrinking. If taxes were to be equitably shared pro-rata based on student enrollment, one could anticipate charters sharing



in ~20% of the total proceeds of a 15-year sales tax (20% being the average estimated “market share” of charter schools from 2020 to 2035).

Transparent mechanisms and rigorous oversight protocols can (and should) be developed to ensure tax proceeds are allocated to facilities directly owned by a charter school or a Duval County community-based non-profit organization. Oversight mechanisms should also be in place to ensure that resources for district facilities are properly spent. Spending on both district *and* charter facilities should be aggressively monitored. The district’s facility spending plans would need to be revised downward to reflect an equitable sharing of tax proceeds with qualified charter schools.

The Jacksonville Civic Council is committed to creating a great school district that provides the best possible outcome for every student. In order to do this, our Education Task Force believes the Facilities Master Plan must be amended to 1) ensure the most cost-effective use of taxpayer funding, including proceeds from any sales tax; 2) leverage *all* available funding sources; and 3) more equitably represent the choice of many students and parents in Duval County to attend charter schools. We stand ready to assist in this effort and appreciate your hard work on behalf of Jacksonville’s future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gary Chartrand".

Gary Chartrand
Chairman, Education Task Force

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jeanne M. Miller".

Jeanne M. Miller
President & CEO