DEAR DCSRN SUPPORTERS,

I have spent my entire career dedicated to the field of education. After teaching middle school math for nine years as a public school teacher in Chicago, I became a school administrator. Although I thought that I would continue to pursue school leadership, I was soon asked to join the central office as a city-wide administrator, ultimately becoming chief of staff of the Chicago Board of Education. In the summer of 2010, I started leading DCSRN and enrolled both my children in traditional DC public schools. My perspective around education has been shaped by each of these experiences, as a teacher, administrator, advocate and, most importantly, parent.

Two years ago, when my daughter graduated from middle school, I was confident that she would be successful. She had good grades and strong test scores, however those traits were not the only things that gave me peace of mind. I knew, without a doubt, that my daughter was truly prepared for the rigors of high school because of the quality of the middle school she was leaving. For three years, she had strong instruction, excellent standardized test preparation, and benefitted from a constant dialogue between school and family. Now, in her sophomore year, I have the same expectation when she leaves for college, knowing that her years spent studying have put her on the path to excel after graduation.

Because of the incredible work of the 2016-17 High Quality Schools Campaign (HQSC), families from some of the most underserved communities in DC will be able to feel the same way. This past year, the HQSC engaged families representing over 1100 students, and 78% completed applications to quality public schools, exceeding campaign goals for the sixth year in a row. DCSRN hopes to continue this growth and ensure that all students have equitable access to high quality public education in DC.

These achievements are only possible due to the generous support of our individual donors, foundation partners, and dedicated board and staff. I am deeply grateful for your support and partnership, and I look forward to this year's campaign as we work hard to give more DC children the opportunity to attend quality public schools.

DAVID PICKENS
Executive Director

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**Public School Choice in Washington, DC**

90,061 public school students were enrolled in DC public traditional and charter schools in the 2016–17 school year. DCSRN’s program, the High Quality Schools Campaign (HQSC), primarily supports families in the underserved communities of Wards 7 & 8.

Of the eight Wards that comprise DC, Wards 7 & 8 collectively contain the:
- Largest number of public school students in the city
- Fewest traditional elementary and middle schools rated “Reward or Rising,” the two highest quality ratings
- Lowest average annual incomes

**IN 2016–17:**

- 54% of students attended a traditional DC Public School
- 46% of students attended a DC public charter school

Only 14% of the traditional public schools in Wards 7 and 8 have achieved a rating of “Reward” or “Rising”, the two highest ratings based on available school quality rating systems.

**2016–17 HQSC Results**

- DCSRN recruited families representing 1,154 students to participate in the HQSC.
  - GOAL: 1,000
- 78% of HQSC participating families submitted school choice applications with HQSC support
  - GOAL: 75%
- 82% of students who received matches to quality schools successfully completed enrollment at their matched school
  - GOAL: 75%

**DCSRN BOARD OF DIRECTORS**

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Executive Director
A FOCUS ON QUALITY AND FIT

DCSRN encourages families with students who are transitioning to a new school to apply to schools that are of the highest quality or higher quality than their current school option, and that are the right fit for their child. DCSRN utilizes the school quality rating systems available for traditional district and/or charter public schools.

Overview of the High Quality Schools Campaign

The HQSC was developed as a direct response to fill this gap of needed support in DC.

The HQSC provides free information, resources and support to DC families throughout the public school application and enrollment process. DCSRN is the only organization in DC implementing this targeted work. Thanks to the generous support of our funders, DCSRN doubled the size of the HQSC for the 2016-17 school year.

Our Vision

We believe that public schools in DC can and should become the best in the nation and every student in DC should have a high quality principal, teacher and school.

Our Mission

DCSRN is educating, organizing and advocating to build support for public education strategies that prepare kids to become college and career ready.

About the High Quality Schools Campaign

Washington, DC allows families to apply to whichever public traditional or charter school they would like their children to attend. As a result, DC families have a high degree of choice when selecting schools for their children.

With so many options, families frequently want and need support determining which schools are of quality and are a good fit for their child. Many DC families who would most benefit from the school choice process, because they live in underserved communities and lack quality neighborhood school options, often do not participate in the process, or make uninformed choices when they do participate. This places the children of those families at a disadvantage in accessing quality schools.

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Four Main HQSC Components

- Family Recruitment
- Information
- Resources
- Support

Services

- Parent-focused materials
- Workshops
- Out-of-boundary and public charter application support
- In-person and virtual school tours
- School enrollment support
- Persistence support (maintaining enrollment)

Strategies

- Build relationships with families, communities and partners
- Expose families to the characteristics of school quality through workshops, one-on-one counseling, school fairs and virtual school tours
- Inform families about the characteristics of quality schools, principals and teachers
- Encourage families to pursue quality by assisting them in submitting applications for their children to compete for quality seats in traditional district and/or charter public schools

* There are two quality rating systems for public schools in DC. They are produced by the DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education and the DC Public Charter School Board.

DCSRN Parent Advocate works on school choice application with parent at a Virtual School Tour movie night.
DC School Reform Now

DCSRN believes the best way to determine if a school is of quality and good fit for a child is to tour the school in-person when teaching and learning is taking place. However, parents frequently find it difficult to tour schools during school hours. DCSRN’s virtual school tours were developed as a direct response to this information gap. They are produced objectively and in a non-promotional manner, and are the first of their kind to provide parents greater access to make important comparisons about school quality. DCSRN’s catalog currently showcases 34 virtual school tours and DCSRN expands and updates its catalog annually.

**VIRTUAL SCHOOL TOUR VIEWS**

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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Views</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016-17</td>
<td>32,904</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Total lifetime views: 77,318

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**MEET VANESSA, DCSRN PARENT ADVOCATE**

Vanessa is passionate about bringing access to quality education to all families in DC. After graduating from the University of Pittsburgh, Vanessa joined Teach For America and taught with DCPS for four years. She then began her career at the DC Department of Parks and Recreation, where she now manages the Kids, Camps, and Co-op Division, which provides quality recreation programming for children.

As an education advocate, Vanessa feels strongly that until all children, regardless of socio-economic status, race, or location, are receiving a quality education, systems must be in place to help families tap into the resources and information necessary to obtain the education they deserve. This desire for equity led her to her role at DCSRN, where she understands firsthand just how stressful the application process can be for families. The first time she entered her own children into the lottery, she felt overwhelmed and challenged by the logistics of transportation, while making sure that her children attended a school with a rigorous curriculum. Today, both children attend a high quality school, where Vanessa is happy with the school culture, the quality of teachers, and the school leadership. Her children feel safe and welcome at their school, and are celebrated for their achievements, which she wants all the students of her families to experience as well.

Vanessa is returning to DCSRN as an advocate for the 2017–18 HQSC because she sees the powerful and immediate impact DCSRN’s work has on the lives of the families she serves. She feels deeply that by making an investment in each individual family, and working with them to determine which school will be the best fit for them, DCSRN helps to alleviate the stress and pressure families feel around school choice.

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**HQSC POST SURVEY RESULTS**

- 89% of families rated the services provided by DCSRN as excellent or very good
- 97% of families agreed or strongly agreed that their parent advocate helped them understand how to identify quality schools

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“**In my experience, families feel relief when working with their parent advocate, talking through the options, and coming up with a plan for enrollment. DCSRN provides a service that is unique yet so necessary.**”

**“The virtual school tours are a game changer for our families. We have many families who lack access to transportation, and many don’t have the time to devote visiting 5-10 schools in a short window. Being able to get a very strong sense of school fitness through a virtual tour enables our families to make a more informed choice from the comfort of a computer.”**

Christie Atlee, Manager of Community and Family Engagement, DC Scholars Community Schools
Family Recruitment

Community-based partnerships are essential to family recruitment. DCSRN maintains longstanding relationships with many partners including My School DC, DC Public Schools and the DC Public Charter School Board. DCSRN’s partnership-building efforts collectively serve families representing well over 1,000 students annually.

“DCSRN is strong where I am weak. They have a strong parent based network with the experience to help many of our first time families with the daunting task of finding a school that is the best fit for their child’s and family’s needs... Many of our families stay with us because we have the capacity and the resources through DCSRN to help them with this very important transition from Pre-K to Kindergarten.”
Juanita White, Director of Family and Community Engagement, AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School

**Child Development Centers**
1. Agape, Cabbage Patch, Lemae Child Development Center
2. AppleTree Early Learning
3. Assembly of the Saints Child Development Center
4. Community Child Development Center
5. Educare of Washington, DC
6. Emergent Preparatory Academy
7. House of Ruth Child Development Center
8. Sunshine Early Learning Center
9. Matthews Memorial Baptist Child Development Center
10. Young’s Memorial Church Daycare

**DC Housing Authority Sites**
11. Fort Dupont
12. Kenilworth/Parkside

**Community-Based Organizations**
13. Academy of Hope
15. DC Alliance of Youth Advocates
16. Far Southeast Collaborative
17. Jubilee Housing
18. Teach for America DC

**Homeless Shelters**
19. Homeless Children’s Playtime Project/DC General Homeless Shelter
20. So Others Might Eat (SOME)

**Schools**
21. Achievement Prep Public Charter School — Middle
22. BASIS DC Public Charter School
23. Capital City Public Charter School Middle School
24. Center City Brightwood Public Charter School
25. Center City Petworth Public Charter School
26. Cesar Chavez School for Public Policy — Parkside Middle
27. Cesar Chavez School for Public Policy — Chavez Prep
28. DC Prep Benning Elementary Public Charter School
29. DC Prep Edgewood Middle Public Charter School
30. Dorothy I. Height Elementary School
31. E.L. Haynes Middle Public Charter School
32. Excel Academy Public Charter School
33. Hardy Middle School
34. Harmony Public Charter Schools
35. Ingenuity Prep Public Charter School
36. Jefferson Middle School Academy
37. J.O. Wilson Elementary School
38. Kelly Miller Middle School
39. Ketcham Elementary School
40. KIPP DC AIM Academy Public Charter School
41. KIPP DC WILL Academy Public Charter School
42. Kramer Middle School*
43. Leckie Elementary School
44. Naile Elementary School
45. Powell Elementary
46. Paul Public Charter Middle School
47. Rocketship Nashville Northeast
48. Rocketship Rise Academy
49. The SEED Public Charter School of Washington, DC
50. Stanton Elementary School*
51. Stuart-Hobson Middle School
52. Sousa Middle School
53. Thurgood Marshall Academy
54. Two Rivers Elementary Public Charter School
55. Two Rivers Middle Public Charter School
56. Washington Latin Middle Public Charter School

* Non-virtual school tour partner

DCSRN executive director David Pickens speaks with parents at a Virtual School Tour movie night.
Tiara Powers and her son Blake, a rising kindergartner, live in Ward 8.

Tiara currently works as an assistant at a hair salon, where she works long hours with little flexibility. Bright and curious, Tiara knew that she wanted Blake to attend an elementary school that would give him the best education possible, where he would be challenged academically while being surrounded by diversity. Tiara was thrilled when she was contacted by her parent advocate, who was able to explain the lottery application process and identify the best schools for Blake, all on her schedule.

Completing Blake’s lottery application was truly a team effort. Tiara’s advocate called her numerous times, and Tiara appreciated the information she got from her advocate, as well as the frequent reminders to stay on top of deadlines. When the lottery results were released, she also requested that a call be placed to Blake’s grandmother, who has an active role in her grandson’s life. Tiara stated that she truly needed DCSRN’s support and resources; she is currently working later at the hair salon, and days become so busy that she loses track of time. Her parent advocate became a true asset because she did not want her work schedule to cause Blake to miss any opportunities.

When the lottery results arrived, the family was excited that Blake had options. In addition to receiving an offer from Mary McLeod Bethune Day Academy PCS, he also got an offer from Early Childhood Academy PCS. After speaking with the principals from both schools about class size, as well as a variety of other issues, the family considered Mary McLeod Bethune to be the best fit for Blake, and completed enrollment.

The family is excited that Mary McLeod Bethune has a Spanish language immersion program, and are already getting a head start by practicing Spanish together at home and in the car. Tiara has been letting her son watch shows only in Spanish with English subtitles, and when his grandmother takes care of him during the week, Blake listens to Spanish CDs and practices Spanish games on a tablet. “We want him to know something going into a new environment,” says Tiara. “Right now, he can count up to six in Spanish!”

DCSRN Parent Story

“DCSRN made my son’s education a priority.”
The HQSC’s Growing Impact

The campaign results reflect DCSRN’s growing understanding of the nuances of the DC public school choice sector and, in particular, how these nuances impact underserved families.

**LIFETIME PROGRAM RESULTS, 2011-17**

- Families engaged: 4,070
- Students who applied to quality schools: 1,663
- Students who enrolled in quality schools: 849
- Grades served: PreK4-12
- HQSC partners: 56
- Virtual School Tours: 34

“"We’ve heard lots of anecdotes from families over the past six years that illustrate the impact the HQSC has had on their children’s education. Now we have empirical data from the first published CRPE brief demonstrating the needs families have during the choice process and how the HQSC is meeting those needs. The brief shares lessons learned and best practices nationally, so other school districts will benefit from our experience.”

David Pickens, DCSRN Executive Director

What’s Next for DCSRN

DCSRN expanded the HQSC in 2016-17 to serve twice as many families as in prior years. The organization future plans will capitalize on that success and continue to grow and reinforce the HQSC program.

**PUBLICATION OF FIRST RESEARCH BRIEF ON THE HQSC**

The first year of DCSRN’s research partnership with the Center on Reinventing Public Education (CRPE) has concluded, and the first brief, detailing the structure and impact of the HQSC, was published in November 2017.

**CONTINUING RESEARCH PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CRPE**

Thanks to a generous grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation, DCSRN is continuing the three-year research partnership with the CRPE at the University of Washington, Bothell. As the partnership progresses, CRPE and DCSRN will continue to publish briefs about the impact of the HQSC and challenges of school choice for DC families.

**RAISE ADDITIONAL FUNDS TO EXPAND THE HQSC**

Although the HQSC has doubled in size over the past year to reach over 1,000 students, DCSRN has conducted demographic research that indicates there are many more families in Wards 7 and 8 that do not participate in the school choice process. DCSRN’s capacity to provide free HQSC support is limited only by available funding, and the organization is aggressively seeking further support to continue to scale up the scope of the HQSC.

Family with educational materials handed out at DCSRN event.
DCSRN Relies On Your Support

DCSRN operates entirely on private donations from generous individuals and foundations, so that we can provide HQSC services free to families. School choice support is a rapidly evolving sector of the education landscape, and DCSRN is the only organization in Washington, DC offering this crucial support to DC families.

Your gift can help make a quality public education accessible for children from the most underserved communities in the city. A gift of just $200 will support a single HQSC family. A virtual school tour can be filmed for $5,000. A major gift of $20,000 will support a single DCSRN parent advocate.

To make a donation, please call 202.315.2414, visit dcschoolreform.org/contribute, or send a check to:

DC School Reform Now
1730 Massachusetts Ave NW
Washington, DC 20036

OTHER WAYS TO HELP:

DCSRN can use your support in other ways. Sign up for our monthly e-Newsletter, follow us on social media, and spread the word about the HQSC!

HQSC family attends a free Virtual School Tour movie night to learn about their quality school options and receive on-the-spot application support.

Thank You to Our Generous Supporters

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Dakarai Aarons
Daniel Abrams
Kaisha Baker
Catharine Bellinger
Kellie Burns
Shayna Cook
Michelle Hagans
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Taryn Hochleitner
Joe & Margaret Onek
Mary Riner
Paul Staats
Bill Tucker
Shana Wang
Natalie L. Wexler
OUR MISSION
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