

Findings of the Review of Charter Applications and Enrollment Forms
Office of the Independent Monitor

June 13, 2011

In response to concerns expressed by members of the Parents' Council that charter schools required parents to provide information regarding special education eligibility and services on lottery application forms, a review of applications and enrollment forms was conducted by the Office of the Independent Monitor (OIM). The review was intended to identify potentially inappropriate information requested by charter schools during the application process that may be used to screen students, including those with disabilities, from being selected for admission.

The review is based on the forms collected by the Innovation and Charter Schools Division and provided to the OIM. The findings may not reflect all forms utilized during the lottery and enrollment processes, as it was noted that in some instances it was unclear if the enrollment forms were also used during the application process, or if a complete set of forms were provided. Furthermore, the findings also include variables not specific to special education which may require inappropriate information or actions from parents by charter schools. The District has been advised to conduct a comprehensive review of these forms and determine appropriateness and compliance with applicable education codes and anti-discrimination laws.

Findings

Of the 183 charter schools in the District, 178 (97.26%) provided applications for enrollment, while two-thirds (66.85%) provided enrollment forms. Of these, 14.6% of the schools utilized the enrollment forms as the lottery application. This means that some schools required more detailed information consistent with enrollment forms such as information related to a student's special education program during the lottery process.

Approximately half (49.43%) of the applications required parents to indicate if their child had an IEP or received special education services. Of these, about two-thirds (64.77%) requested that a copy of the IEP be provided with the application. Similarly, 34.83% of the applications asked if a student had a 504 plan, with 79.03% of these requesting a copy with the application. Some applications asked if a student received special services such as: types of special education services and programs such as SDP, RSP, and/or Speech and Language (35.95%), whether students received English Language Development (ELD) (24.71%), or participated in a gifted program (GATE) (28.65%).

Essays or short answer questions were required from students (3.37%) and parents (9.55%) as part of the application process. In one instance, the application required the parent to complete three essays while the student had to complete one. This same school also required the student's current teacher to fill-out an evaluation form and make recommendations on the student's academic potential, character and overall abilities. Student achievement information such as transcripts (2.8%), CST score reports (2.24%) and report cards (11.79%) were requested as part of the application. Several schools also

inquired if the student had ever been retained, while one school stated that “candidates may only apply if the student had successfully completed their current grade.”

Approximately one quarter (24.15%) of the applications asked if a student had ever been suspended or expelled. One application stated that the school “may not admit a student who has been suspended, expelled or has some other ‘unsatisfied’ discipline consequence from another school.”

Some applications included information consistent with that sought by enrollment forms that may not be appropriate for the application process. This includes information regarding: child custody (1.12%), court order (23.59%) Social Security number (5.05%), date of enrollment in a US school (19.1%), parent education levels (26.4%), home language survey (30.89%), migrant work status (10.11%), and reduced lunch/economic status (3.93%).

The review of enrollment forms found other areas of concern. Approximately one quarter (24.71%) of the schools had contracts that students and parents had to sign and agree to specific requirements of the school. In several instances, parents had to agree that if their child received special education services they would receive such services in a full inclusion (general education) program. Similarly, parents had to agree that if their child was an English Learner, they would receive instruction in a full immersion model. Some schools included a withdrawal clause (16.85%) or a statement which indicated that if the student or parent did not fulfill specific obligations, the student may be asked to leave the school. Furthermore, some withdrawal clauses were tied to attendance (3.37%) and tardy (2.8%) policies.

Approximately one-third of schools had information outlining the expectations for parents to volunteer (30.33%). The requirements ranged from 15- 50 hours a year. In some instances, the time required was increased depending on how many children a family may have enrolled at that school. One school provided parents an alternative to their volunteer time commitment by noting that they would accept donations of \$5.00 per hour.

Fees and donation/fundraising expectations (9.55%) were also identified. One school stated that the school “depends on an average family contribution of \$1,300.00 a year per child recognizing that some families have the ability to give substantially more...” Another school included a “fees and contribution form” which required parents to submit fees for a student planner (\$10.00), lanyard and student ID (\$10.00), resource contribution (\$35.00) and an emergency kit (\$25.00). The form also provided the option for families to purchase the PSAT (\$33.00). Furthermore, the form included a range of contributions which asked parents to “please choose one” for each of the following funds: Building Fund (\$100, \$200, \$350, \$500, \$1000), Technology Fund (\$35.00, \$55.00, \$75.00), Library Fund (\$35.00, \$55.00, \$75.00), Robotics Fund (\$35.00, \$55.00, \$75.00) and AER Radio Fund (\$35.00, \$55.00, \$75.00). Last, some schools had fees for after school care programs with additional fees for instance when parents were late to pick-up their child (\$1.00 per minute).