

Dear xxx,

I am writing you to express my concern over changes I recently learned were planned to the way school nurses are provided in our public schools. At a Ward 4 Education Alliance meeting on September 14, Dr. Heidi Schumacher of DCPS confirmed a rumor that schools no longer will have a minimum of one nurse per school but instead have a part-time nurse as part of a larger initiative to increase coordination of care with physicians and community health organizations. It was stated that these changes were intended to be implemented by January 2017.

I support the general notions that were presented, including increased equity and better utilization of public resources. But, I object to the way the actions are being carried forward. I request that you preserve a full-time nurse at each public school. If there are worthwhile initiatives to increase performance and efficiency, then please add to the budget to pay for those. Don't pay for it by cutting nursing staff at our schools.

In the meeting, it was stated that school staff can manage issues while the school nurse is not present. I strongly object to this for two reasons. First, I don't see any additional funding going to cover staff positions as we add collateral duties, and I don't believe you get something for nothing. If anything, our teaching staff should have fewer collateral duties so that they can concentrate on their main job: teaching. Second, the little training that staff gets does not take the place of a skilled nurse. While our teachers may be able to address minor bumps and scrapes, can they handle infectious disease outbreaks? Will they know the signs of more serious illness? Waiting until the nurse is back in the office is not an acceptable response. And, I do not trust the idea of having centralized resources to supplement by phone. Nothing takes the place of a full-time nurse who is invested in the school community.

I also would like you to address the lack of transparency in this process. Moving from a full-time nurse to a part-time nurse represents a notable change in our schools, and you've hidden this from us until it is nearly a done deal. You can do much better than that, and you have done so in the past. Take, for example, the school boundary realignment process. While it was painful, you heard us and adjusted the actions in response to what you heard from us. There has been no such thing for this change, and you're taking us in a direction that many parents do not want to go. I request that you put a hold on this process and try again with parent input. There generally is little trust in DC government, and this lack of transparency erodes what little is left.

While you state a goal of promoting equity, you have failed to recognize the inequity that results from reducing nursing staff. While some parents are fortunate enough to be able to pick up their children from school and bring them to a doctor when there is no nurse available, the same would be significantly more difficult for the child of a single parent with a less flexible job.

As it is, your actions seem to be related to the current shortage of nurses, which already is affecting our schools. It is disturbing to me that the current contract provisions that require at least one nurse per school are not being maintained. What are DOH and DCPS doing about this? Is the council even aware?

Thank you,

xxx

Ward 4 parent of x DCPS students