McAuliffe Response to Frequently Asked Questions

Regarding DPS Proposals to Expand or Cut McAuliffe Enrollment

The following FAQs have been drafted in response to questions that have been posed in the DPS Family and Community Engagement (FACE) meetings at local elementary schools to date. Please watch for possible updates to this document as these meetings continue.

What are the two options DPS is proposing regarding McAuliffe enrollment and use of the Smiley campus?

The two options DPS is proposing are to 1) grow McAuliffe to 1200 students or 2) to shrink McAuliffe to 750 and create a new middle school of up to 450 students to bring the total campus size to 1200. Both options state that McAuliffe will take 360 6th grade students for the 2016-2017 school year, with the first option keeping each grade size at 360 and the second option shrinking the school the next year.

What is Principal Kurt Dennis’ input about the two options being proposed by DPS?

First, we believe it is essential that McAuliffe is given the opportunity to share details of the impact of these DPS proposals so that the shared boundary community can understand this context in giving thoughtful and fully-informed input to what DPS is referring to as a ‘values-based’ discussion.

Second, both proposed options from DPS entail McAuliffe enrolling 360 6th grade students for 2016-2017, but Option 2 requires that McAuliffe shrink substantially the next year. A dramatic cut in size like this means we would have to hire new 6th grade teachers and then fire them at the end of the school year, no matter how great a job they’re doing. A cut to our programming would also be necessary, including cuts to our eight arts electives, six engineering classes, and three world languages. We would also need to cut back on our robust athletics program.

The impact would be felt not just for one year but through at least three years trying to move this ‘bubble’ of students through the school grade by grade. The impact would be felt not just by the staff but also by the students.

What community members need to know is that McAuliffe will only enroll a 6th grade class next year that corresponds to the total size DPS allows McAuliffe to be after a decision on this is made. For example, we will take 360 6th graders in 2016-2017 if we can grow to a total size 1080, and we will only take 180 6th graders in 2016-2017 if we are forced to cut our size to 540.
Does McAuliffe have a vision for how they would use the whole Smiley building?

Since moving to the Smiley building, we have been sharing the campus with Venture Prep High School. DPS has announced that Venture Prep will move to another location in 2016-2017 in order to provide more middle school capacity in the shared boundary.

If McAuliffe is permitted to grow and use the entire Smiley building, we envision a very thoughtfully designed arrangement with each grade—and 'house' within each grade—having a designated floor and wing within the building.

Within each grade of 360 students, there would be two 'houses' of 180 kids each. This is a model used more commonly in schools on the East Coast. It may seem counterintuitive, but this ‘house’ model and use of the whole building would not only provide more space but also enhance the small-school experience within the larger school environment. There would be a dedicated counselor and assistant principal for each grade level that would move with kids as they transition to the next grade, ensuring each child feels connected and valued.

Students would have all of their core classes, plus Engineering and their World Language, in their designated floor and wing with their fellow ‘house’ students. They would only travel outside of this ‘house’ for PE, their Arts elective, and more specialized electives such as Advanced Mandarin. Likewise, their lockers would be located in the same floor and wing as most of their classes.

We’re working to create a visual presentation of how this would look in the Smiley building and what the school day would be like for a student. Please watch for this to come soon.

Is McAuliffe open to the idea of sharing the Smiley building with another middle school?

An alternate proposal that DPS has embedded within Proposal #2 is that McAuliffe apply through the Call for Quality Schools process in December/January to replicate a second McAuliffe within the Smiley building. In this scenario, each McAuliffe would have a student body of 540 students. This scenario would allow McAuliffe to help meet the enrollment demand and increase in student population within the shared boundary, but it would also entail additional expenses and duplication of resources and would create more logistical challenges than simply running one united school community. Students hoping to go to middle school with their friends may not end up being enrolled in the same McAuliffe since these placements are determined through the DPS lottery. We would rank this as our second choice among the proposals being put forth by DPS for the reason it would not inflict significant harm to our staff, students, and programming but is not an optimal organization of the campus.

If McAuliffe is cut in size and shares the Smiley building with an entirely separate middle school, we will cut our enrollment to 540 kids, taking only 180 6th graders in 2016-2017. Operating McAuliffe at 750 students (as called for in Proposal #2) and sharing with another school of 450 students would put unnecessary strain on the building’s facilities and on our staff and students.

McAuliffe Response to FAQs - December 2015
**Why is DPS proceeding with a Call for Quality Schools in December/January before a decision is made on whether McAuliffe can grow to use the whole Smiley building?**

We’re not sure how DPS is proceeding but agree it would make sense to first determine if McAuliffe will expand as we describe in the vision above. If DPS makes the decision to cut McAuliffe and create a new school within the Smiley building, then McAuliffe can decide if it will participate in that Call for Quality Schools process along with other potential schools.

**How does the timing of this decision impact McAuliffe?**

The decision on whether to grow or cut McAuliffe will determine our budget and staffing needs for next year. If McAuliffe is allowed to grow and use the entire Smiley building, we will begin the process in early 2016 to hire additional 6th grade teaching staff. We would also begin planning for how best to use the space in the building not only for classrooms and this ‘house’ model but also for counseling, administration, teacher work space, and student support.

If the decision is made to cut the size of McAuliffe and we know we will enroll only 180 6th graders next year, we will begin the process of planning for those reductions in programming and staffing.

This decision—which will determine the 6th grade capacity at McAuliffe for 2016-2017—needs to be made by early February prior to the DPS lottery process.

**What types of extracurricular opportunities are available for students in a school of McAuliffe’s size?**

One advantage of a larger middle school is the breadth of extracurricular opportunities available to students. McAuliffe offers many extracurricular options for students, with the goal of making sure all students can participate in something that interests them. In addition to offering the most robust middle school athletics program in DPS, we also offer many academic clubs, after-school enrichments, GT programs, leadership and service opportunities, intramurals, and social and cultural activities. Find more details about all of our offerings on our website.

**For 3rd and 4th grade families that DPS is focusing on in this community engagement process, what options are there for students who wish to attend a smaller school?**

Currently there are five middle schools in the shared boundary, four of which are smaller schools. Additionally, DPS has presented that there will be another middle school option needed north of I-70 by 2018, which is also presumed to be a smaller school. A small charter middle school is also planning to launch next year in North Park Hill, and there is discussion of the possibility of expanding Isabella Bird elementary to a K-8 model. In this range of choices in the shared boundary, McAuliffe would offer a larger middle school option. We understand that each family looks at a range of factors such as size, location, programming, and many other aspects and will rank their school choices according to what is most important for them.