EMPOWERING DC STUDENTS

IN THE HIGH SCHOOL SELECTION PROCESS

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PROJECT BACKGROUND

My School DC hosts the online common lottery application for DC families and students. The lottery allows for families to complete the application process for students to attend out-of-boundary DC Public Schools (DCPS), Public Charter Schools, preschool programs, and selective DCPS high schools. This process supports school choice for families in order to match students with the school(s) they most want to attend. According to data from My School DC, approximately 33% of high school student applicants select "I am the student" for the question of "Who is completing this application?" when using the My School DC website to find a high school they want to attend.

Given this information, Higher Achievement (HA) and SchoolTalk, Inc. (ST) sought to explore the support needs of DC students who are independently applying to high schools, and make recommendations for future resource development to better meet their needs and the needs of all DC students engaged in the school choice process.

The *Empowering DC Students in the High School Selection Process* project was limited in scope and time. The project focused exclusively on gathering and analyzing (1) existing DC school choice data related to student engagement, (2) student feedback on their support needs, and (3) school- and community-based student support provider input on how the District can improve support for students as they navigate the high school choice process, especially students completing the process independently.

The project began August 2018 and ended January 2019.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUNDS

Founded in DC in 1975, Higher Achievement (HA) is a year-round out of school time program serving middle school scholars. Scholars commit to the program as fifth graders, and spend about 600 hours a year with HA from 5th to 8th grade. About 550 Scholars participate annually afterschool and in the summer at eight local Achievement Centers, receiving opportunities like mentoring, homework completion, scholar-led seminars, interactive, career-focused field trips, and an overnight college trip. The program culminates in top high school placement in the 8th grade year. Annually, about 90% of HA scholars go on to top ranked high schools in the DC area. About 95% of HA scholars graduate high school on time.

Founded in 2008, SchoolTalk, Inc. (ST) is a DC-based nonprofit whose mission is to create spaces that promote self-determination and a voice for youth with disabilities and their peers. ST

supports the DC education community in collaboratively addressing complex challenges and creating practical solutions for assisting youth of all abilities achieve success. ST's programs actively work to improve postsecondary outcomes for youth through both proactive initiatives such as youth leadership and mentoring, skill-building, and workforce development; and direct intervention to resolve issues in productive ways, such as mediation and restorative justice. ST has three key program areas: Youth Leadership, Restorative Justice, and Secondary Transition.

PROJECT OBJECTIVE

The focus population for this project was middle school students who were applying independently to high school and high school students who had previously independently chosen their high school option(s). HA and ST (1) gathered available information on students who were independently completing the My School DC application to better understand their needs; (2) explored the school choice process from the perspective of the student to better understand student needs and preferences; and (3) used the information gathered to make recommendations about how DC can better prepare students in 6th – 10th grades to successfully engage in and complete the school choice process.

Note: DC's Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) launched the first annual DC School Report Card and School Transparency and Reporting (STAR) Framework on December 7, 2018. The new data driven tools are housed on DCSchoolReportCard.org, and designed to provide community members with information on the academic performance, student growth, teachers, extracurricular opportunities, and parent organizations within all DC schools. Community members, including families and students, can now use this information to track and compare schools' performance. Although these tools will undoubtedly be a key part of the DC high school choice process for students moving forward, the timeline for this project prevented HA and ST from including substantive questions about the new tools in the focus group protocols or School Choice Stakeholder Survey. Data collection for these components of the research plan concluded on November 9, 2018.

PROJECT CONTEXT

In DC, high school students have several options for attending a public high school. All public high schools are either part of DC Public Schools (DCPS) or public charter options. All students have the right to attend their DCPS in-bound neighborhood high school. If they currently attend a DCPS school that is not their in-bound school, they have a right to attend the feeder high school for that DCPS school. There are currently ten neighborhood high schools students have the right to

attend. DCPS also offers admission to eight standalone, specialized high schools or selective high school programs within neighborhood schools. Admission to these programs is competitive and based on an application which may include test scores, grades, an admissions essay, an interview or audition, and/or an admissions exams. Finally, DCPS has one city-wide high school, which does admissions by lottery.

In addition to the DCPS options, there are currently 18 public charter high school options. In DC, public charter schools, by law, must be open to all students via lottery. Charter schools are overseen by the DC Public Charter School Board and are run independently from the DCPS system.

In 2013, My School DC was established to create a common online application system for DC public and public charter schools. It is currently located within the Office of the State Superintendent of DC (OSSE) and today, all DCPS schools and the vast majority of public charter schools participate in the common application. Through completition of this application, all students will be matched with up to one high school. Students do not need to complete the application if they are only interested in their neighborhood or feeder high school.

DELIVERABLES

HA and ST jointly completed the following deliverables to achieve the project objectives:
1. **Research Plan**
   a. Conducted focus groups with representative groups of middle and high school students.
   b. Completed School Choice Student Support Survey of school- and community-based student support providers.
   c. Collected quantitative and qualitative data from My School DC.
2. **Final Report**
   a. Provided written report to My School DC and other relevant stakeholders including (1) compilation and analysis of all data from research plan; (2) sample student support resources (Glossary of School Choice Terms, School Choice Questionnaire for Students, & Mini video clips of high school students discussing their high school experience); and (3) recommendations for next steps.
3. **Advisory Group**
   a. Facilitation of and consultation with an advisory group of expert stakeholders who reviewed and provided feedback on the following:
      i.   Research Plan
      ii. Data Collection
      iii. Draft Final Report

RESEARCH PLAN

Focus Groups

HA and ST facilitated a series of student focus groups to explore how DC students experience the school choice process, and ascertain (1) how familiar students are with the school choice application and (2) what supports they need to successfully engage in and complete the high school choice process. See Appendix A for focus group protocols used during these sessions.

During the fall of 2018, HA and ST scheduled, conducted student recruitment, and facilitated focus groups. HA and ST conducted a total of nine focus groups with five to 10 students each, and one online survey with 14 student participants. Students received incentives for participation. For detailed demographic information on focus group participants, please see Appendix B. Broadly, the focus group participants were intended to be a representative sample of students making the high school decision choice or students who have recently made the high school decision, and included current middle school students, current/recent high school students, and special education students. The groups of middle and high school students may or may not have also included students with disabilities, but the focus groups of students with disabilities were specifically targeted so that the entire group was made up of current or recent high school students with disabilities who receive/d the majority of educational services in inclusive classrooms.

Stakeholder Survey

HA and ST surveyed school- and community-based student support providers who work directly with students during the high school choice process.

The School Choice Stakeholder Survey was administered November 2018, via Google Forms. My School DC and the DCPS school counselor team helped HA and ST recruit survey participants. The survey goal response rate was seven to 10 participants. A total of 21 support providers responded. It is important to note that this was not intended to be a representative sample of DC school counselors, but rather a snapshot of some of the work that is being done by DC school- and community-based service providers to support student engagement in the high school choice process.

Quantitative Data Review

In an effort to better understand the data that exists about DC students who are applying independently to high schools, HA and ST worked with the publically available data from OSSE. Due to the project's restricted timeline and the time it takes to fulfill data requests, we were unable to get a detailed data report from OSSE prior to the completion of this report.

According to publically available OSSE data, 6057 9th grade students enrolled in DC public and public charter schools for the 2017-18 school year, and out of those 6057 students, 3327 completed applications through My School DC[1]. This means that close to half of DC 8th graders applied for high schools using the My School DC lottery, 1456 (44%) of whom lived in Wards 7 and 8.

According to a report released by the Office of the District of Columbia Auditor, the most popular high schools selected by 9th graders through My School DC lottery were[2]:

- School Without Walls Senior High School (456 applicants listed as first choice)
- KIPP DC: College Prep (271)
- Duke Ellington School for the Arts (266)
- Benjamin Banneker Academic High School (226)
- McKinley Technology High School (201)

My School DC collected surveys from lottery applicants anonymously after the lottery was completed. Some of takeaways from this survey included:
- "School reputation" was the most important factor in application decisions for students applying themselves;
- School websites were the most common points of entry, followed by open houses & school visits; and
- 8th grade counselors were a critical support for rising 9th graders (school guidance, admissions prep, etc.)

These results largely align with the project's focus group data.

New York City Resources

New York City released a 2018 High School Admissions Toolkit and NYC High School Application Guide last school year. The materials were created by the NYC High School Admissions Study, a group of researchers based at NYU, Princeton, Columbia, and Seton Hall charged with developing new tools to help students find high schools, and studying the effectiveness of these materials.[3] The materials included student and parent guides, school research support tools, application support materials, and lesson plans designed to help students understand and successfully navigate the NYC school choice process.

As an extensive, multiyear research project, the NYC High School Admissions Study is an excellent resource for DC both in terms of materials produced to support students and parents, and lessons

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[1] Retrieved from https://osse.dc.gov/page/2017-18-school-year-enrollment-audit-report-and-data
[2] Retrieved from http://dcauditor.org/report/a-study-of-enrollment-projections-for-d-c-s-public-schools-assuring-accuracy-and-transparency/
[3] NYC High School Admissions Study, *FAQ for School Counselors*.

learned. A member of the study's research team offered to share materials with and provided guidance to HA and ST throughout this project.

Lessons learned by the NYC study include:
- Students provided with information about the high school options matched to high schools with higher graduation rates.
- School location and daily commute times are an important factor in satisfaction of high school, but most middle school students do not think about this.
- Building awareness of high school choice should start in 6th grade.

Note: Dr. Jennifer Jennings, who was on the team which conducted the NYC study, provided feedback on focus groups and counselor survey.

Advisory Group

HA and ST recruited local experts for a group to serve as advisors regarding all aspects of the school choice process. The group consisted of representatives from the following organizations: Education Forward DC, DC Public Schools, DC Charter Public Schools, Raise DC, DC Re-Engagement Center, DC School Reform Now, and the DC Special Education Cooperative.

The advisory group met three times between August 2018 and January 2019 to review and provide feedback on the following key aspects of the project: (1) the draft research plan, (2) project data, and (3) the draft final report including student support resources and recommendations for next steps.

Draft Research Plan Feedback

Advisory group recruitment began the week of August 20, 2018, and concluded when all members had been recruited for the first advisory group meeting on September 19, 2018. During the initial meeting, members of the advisory group reviewed and provided feedback on the draft research plan. All members were given the opportunity to propose key questions to HA and ST regarding the data collection for the project. HA and ST used member feedback to finalize the research plan.

Specifically, the group had feedback about better understanding what students are looking for, and how parents may use student input to determine the high school process. The group shared that most parents heavily weigh student opinion for the high school choice process, even if they are ultimately the ones completing the application. The group provided significant input into the focus group question design, and helped us better frame our questions for focus group sessions to make sure we were asking the right questions. The group also gave invaluable feedback to better understanding the needs of special education students and their role in the high school choice process, as well as some of the barriers for students and families going through the

process. In addition, the advisory group helped recruit participants for the School Stakeholder Survey. Finally, the advisory group was essential in helping identify key findings from the focus group.

Data Feedback

The data collection period of the project ended on November 9, 2018. The advisory group received all of the data that had been collected on December 14, 2018, and were provided with two opportunities to provide feedback on the data either: (1) completing a brief Google Form questionnaire, or (2) participating in a conference call on January 3, 2019. Advisory group data feedback was included in data analysis and informed final recommendations.

Draft Final Report

On January 24, 2019 the advisory group reconvened for its final meeting to review the draft final report including the student-centered resources jointly created by HA and ST. The advisory group provided feedback and next steps regarding finalization of the report and student-centered resources. The group asked clarifying questions which helped guide our final edits to the report. Dawnyela Meredith from Two Rivers Public Charter School agreed to pilot the School Questionnaire with her students and provide feedback for future iterations.

KEY FINDINGS

Based on the data gathered through the focus groups and surveys, HA and ST identified three key themes to how secondary school students make school choices. Participant responses indicated that (1) school reputation can influence high school choice; (2) there is a gap between youths' school choice and their knowledge of the application and enrollment processes; and (3) young people need system improvements to better support them in the high school application process.

School Reputation Can Influence High School Choice

Approximately one-third of high school applicants indicated that they are completing the application on their own, therefore it is key to have a better understanding of the main factors influencing their choices. There are several factors that impact the perceptions of high schools among applicants that ultimately influence the choices they make. Middle schoolers, high schoolers, and high schoolers with disabilities all identified school reputation as a key aspect in their decision-making. These students mentioned that their knowledge about a school's reputation is based on its (1) admission requirements (such as having a specific GPA to be considered), and (2) reputation in terms of prestige and climate from the perception of peers, family members, community members, etc.

Across grade levels, abilities, interests, and other demographics, focus group participants and survey respondents highly valued academics and afterschool activities and factored them into

their decision-making. Secondary school students mentioned that the admission requirements, school statistics, and school's known prestige helped inform the school's academic reputation. Equally important to high school applicants was the school's organizational structure. Below we will dive into how these factors impacted students' perception of school reputation and ultimately how they influence a student's high school choices.

It is important to note that students might not be influenced solely by school demographics or the social aspects of the school. Several participants identified school demographics or friends as the least likely factors they consider when choosing a high school. For instance, middle school participants mentioned applying to schools that are best for their future rather than applying to the same schools as their friends. When speaking of school reputation, the participants indicated that reputation was based on the school's academic rigor and the school's organizational structure.

Academic Rigor Impacts School Reputation
In addition to perceptions within their community, students ascertained a school's academic rigor based on course offerings and afterschool opportunities. Middle schoolers, high schoolers, and high schoolers with disabilities mentioned being attracted to schools that set them up for their future through rigorous coursework and ample choices of afterschool activities. A middle school participant said that among the top three things that were important to them when choosing a high school were "classes that are more rigorous [and] more personalized extra-curriculars." Another middle school student expressed the need to go to a high school with "higher expectations, more choice in classes [and that] offers college scholarships." Across middle school focus groups, participants mentioned the need to go to schools with programs like JROTC, STEM, college preparation, afterschool clubs, and "classes to help achieve [their] goals." Similarly, high school respondents identified quality classes and after school activities as key factors in their school selection.

In reflecting on their high school application process, high schoolers echoed the middle school students' focus on academic rigor. One high school student stated that when choosing their high school, they sought a high school that "provided a rigorous curriculum that is different from other schools." Another high school respondent said that when looking at schools, one needs to "focus on the classes the school has [and] if the school has any clubs you're interested in." Throughout the responses, high school students like middle school students connected the value of having the opportunity to take demanding classes to prepare them for post-secondary education. The high school respondents also identified the need for afterschool offerings at their high school similar to the need middle schoolers expressed. However, the high school respondents tied these offerings to their post-secondary life. They expressed the need to have "different type of clubs and extra activities that lead into the real world" in addition to diverse and rigorous class options.

High school students with disabilities voiced similar school choice factors as their peers without disabilities. They also sought schools that would provide them with opportunities to prepare for post-secondary life. In their reflections on the high school application process, students in these focus groups based their preference for high school options on the following factors: (1) how well the high school would prepare them for the future, (2) the prospect of "newness"—new environment, new peers, new teachers, new opportunities, etc. and (3) independence—freedom to choose classes, go off campus, and generally enjoy more autonomy in their school day.

When choosing a high school, students with disabilities identified academics and afterschool programs as key factors in their decision. They looked for schools that would push them toward graduation and prepare them for their future. One participant stated, "When I was in middle school I wanted to be a lawyer, and [my current school] aligned with that" when discussing what excited them about their high school. Similarly, other participants cited academics, course difficulty, and school workload as key factors in their decisions. Like their peers, high school students with disabilities identified afterschool opportunities as an important factor in choosing their high school. They viewed afterschool offerings as opportunities to gain new experiences and build independence.

Organizational Structure
Students in the focus group weighed a school's academic rigor and organizational structure equally when considering a school's reputation. Organizational structure is a broad term used here to discuss the school systems and climate. When considering academic rigor, students considered multiple factors (delineated above) in determining how academic rigor impacts a school's reputation. In contrast, when considering how organizational structure impacts a school's reputation, students only considered one factor-word of mouth.

School systems. Middle school students mentioned that knowing the structural supports schools offer is one the top three factors used to choose a high school. Middle schoolers mentioned that they want to know if schools would provide them with Individualized Education Plan (IEP) support, have college connections, and opportunities for new experiences. In addition to these organizational supports, participants mentioned other environmental factors that helped determine their choices. These other environmental factors included school uniforms, length of classes, opportunities for freedom within the school, and school lunch offerings. Similarly high school students identified the school's organizational structure as key in their school choice decisions.

High school students specified that school support and opportunities for freedom were the structures that influenced their school choice decisions. Some high school students noted that high schools that have academic rigor can put you on a path to success, but it's important to have the supports to get you there. One participant remarked that a school with strong structures

"goes further than tutoring—one-on-one learning and [aligned to] how you are as a person and your strengths," while another said that it's important to have schools with strong structures where "tutoring is mandatory for more support," particularly in high schools with rigorous, specialized programs. In regards to structures that lead to opportunities for freedom, they mentioned the options they have when choosing courses. A student said, "They allow you to pick what you want to do, get more freedom […] if you are doing good, you get to pick your classes," while another remarked that this type of freedom gives them "an opportunity to do what [they] love."

High school students with disabilities expressed that school support and opportunities for freedom were key structures that they consider when looking at high schools. Additionally, they expressed the excitement around new experiences high school could offer. When reflecting about what they like the most about their current school, most participants mentioned support from teachers. Similar to their high school peers without disabilities, they considered the school's academic rigor in their choice. Although the support to reach academic rigor was not mentioned as a factor influencing their school choice, it was heavily mentioned as the best attribute of their current school. Students noted school systems such as office hours, final exemption policies, and the teacher's willingness to support. They described increased freedom as having a flexible schedule, access to join clubs and other afterschool activities, and class choices. The opportunities for new experiences included meeting new people, having new subjects, and new opportunities. One student remarked that in high school, "They show you what you can do—in middle school I didn't realize the potential of what I could do." Having systems in place to support students, offer them new experiences, and provide them with the freedom they crave is only part of what students consider organizational structure.

School climate. Middle and high school students identified school climate as a key part of a school's organizational structure. Middle schoolers mentioned that knowing the cleanliness of a school was important to them. They connected the notion of cleanliness to a positive, caring environment. For these students, a "cozy environment, drama free" was as important as small classes and teacher support. High school students echoed the need for positive school climate and expanded on it by adding school safety. One participant mentioned that knowing that a school was "organized [and has a] safe environment" was one of the key factors when choosing a high school. Another participant described school safety as having a safe environment "around and outside [the school], teachers having background checks, and students being safe." High school students with disabilities mentioned that a school's climate was also a key factor in their school choice. These students factored in "how people treat one another" and "how friendly" the school community was as they considered high schools.

In summary, school reputation influenced the high school choice for middle schoolers, high schoolers, and high schoolers with disabilities. Although students found information to inform

their conclusions regarding a school's reputation, they used formal and informal data to make the decision. Regardless of the data source, students based their school choice on what they perceived to be the school's academic rigor and organizational structure. Students used the knowledge on schools' reputations to start the high school application process.

Gap between Students' School Choice and Knowledge of the Process

It became evident that there existed a gap between the student's school choice and their knowledge of the process. In particular, this was evident when discussing with the current middle school students. When these students were asked what they like best about their school, what excites them about high school, and what factors will influence their decision, many had thorough answers and responded excitedly. They were less certain about where to obtain information about schools, how to apply to their top choices, and who to ask for support.

Limited School Information

Young people in our focus groups and surveys expressed wanting more information about high schools. Middle schoolers consistently expressed that extracurricular activities were one of the most important things in choosing a high school. However, there was not a standard way of providing information on extracurricular opportunities across all DC public and public charter high schools. Students preferred using school websites to find out information on schools rather than the centralized information provided by My School DC (multiple students expressed that their first step in researching schools was to search the school's name on a web search; this generally brought up the school website first). Individual school websites did not have consistent information. Students also mentioned wanting more information about school rules or policies/requirements, safety information, and teachers (such as qualifications, retention, race and ethnicity).

Many students expressed finding out about schools from other young people- friends, older siblings or other relatives, etc. Students identified talking to current students as one of the best ways to help them successfully apply to high school.

Lack of Clarity about the Application Process

The middle school students in the focus groups were mostly 8th graders and some 7th graders—key grades for applying to high school. While 7th grade grades impact options, applications, and potential acceptances, fall of 8th grade was when students prepared for the application process, while applications are finalized in the winter of 8th grade. When asked about the high school application process, these students were uncertain about the requirements, the process, and documentation needed to apply. Some scholars in some focus groups had clear answers such as, "Private school applications are due December 15, shadow days aren't until November." All but one of the focus groups of middle schoolers mentioned shadow days. Although these mentions were mostly focused on shadow days at private schools, the youth saw value in it. For instance,

one student said that shadow day at a school gave that student information that the student didn't expect about the school. They said "You should still shadow [if unsure about choice]" because that is the only way they can see the school's climate, "It's the students who make the school good, not mostly the teachers and programs." As aforementioned, school climate was one of the key elements students factor when considering the school's organizational structure.

Aside from shadow days, middle schoolers were unclear about where to start the high school application process. Some of them mentioned applications and essays, interviews and shadow days, and grade point average and letters of recommendation. Although they named the components of the high school application process, they were unsure as to where to start. One student said that to start an application, "Write a letter and send it to them and they reply if you got in or not." Another student said that she wanted to go to a public school so she does not have to apply. In one focus group, only one of the students knew that there is a lottery for charter schools. In the remaining middle school focus groups, the students knew that they would have the opportunity to apply to schools, but only one knew that that they could only be matched at one school. Finally, none of the students in the focus groups named My School DC as the site to apply for high school.

Adult Support
Most students said they have discussed high school with their school counselors. The youths' expressed lack of knowledge of individual schools and the high school application process indicated that although most of them are speaking with their counselors about high school, there was a gap in the information counselors were providing and what students were retaining as far as it pertained to application support. One of them said, "I talked to my school counselor about what I'm looking forward to, what changes to expect, what is it about the school […] I don't know deadlines of any applications." At one of the focus groups, none of the middle school students had spoken with their counselors or any other staff at their school about high school.

Most of the students in the middle school and high school students without disabilities expressed that they were the primary decision maker when it came to high school application decisions. One student expressed that "parents are there to back me up, but it's my decision." Another middle school student said, for high school students, "if you go to a school your parents want you to go to and you do not like it, you may not do well." Some students expressed that it was a joint decision between them and their parents. Students with disabilities, on the other hand, stated that their parents did play a larger role in the final high school decision.

Middle and high school students also expressed wanting more support in the high school process- both support with the actual application and choice as well as "emotional support" with the anxiety that students were feeling in the process. They expressed anxiety about "being prepared for interviews" and "getting rejected" as well as "not knowing the schools you want to apply to."

Need for Social-Emotional Skills

In particular, students in the middle school focus groups consistently expressed concerns about the need for stronger social-emotional skills in the transition to high school. While they were excited about the perceived increase in freedom, students also discussed concerns about navigating a new environment with perceived higher stakes and challenging teachers. One student said, "people are stricter" and another, "teachers have more rules, higher expectations." Additionally, students mentioned concerns about time management and prioritization- "more work than usual" and "new coursework." Students in the special education focus group, in particular, expressed having concerns about the level of support they would receive in high school.

In addition, students mentioned concerns about interacting with other students at the high school. "If you are a freshman, it's gonna be hard to interact with other higher grades." Students expressed concerns about "dealing with fake people", "boy drama", "cliques" and "bullying". One student expressed, "people may pick on you because you're the new kid." There was a clear element of concern about dealing with challenges outside of just academics.

At the same time, students already in high school (in all groups- including those students with disabilities) mentioned teacher support and "tough love" as some of the best things about their current high school. The high school students named the importance of "building relationships" to high school success- including with teachers and counselors.

Need for Systems Improvement to Support Youth

Although support, newness, and freedom are important, one current high school student expressed "coming from middle to high school, I was excited about the new experiences but now I'm not interested in the things they have to do." The biggest takeaway from our survey of school stakeholders about high school placement was how big of a gap exists between schools that provide a significant amount of support for students, and schools that provide almost no support for students in the high school placement process. Some schools reported that they start the HS process as early as 6th grade, and other don't start until 8th grade. Survey respondents reported a wide variation between the amount of support provided. In addition, students in the focus groups had widely different experiences- some had already met with their counselor in the fall of their 8th grade year, and others had yet to meet with a staff member at their school.

While My School DC provides multiple resources for students and parents in the high school placement process, including a hotline in multiple languages, email requests, and specific Ward-based community outreach staff members, the focus groups and stakeholder survey indicate a gap in access for middle school students, particularly the ones completing the application on their own. While some schools and community-based organizations began talking about the high

school placement process in the 6th grade, others indicated that they began speaking about the process much later- including, in some cases, not until the end of the 8th grade year. Since the application deadline was the beginning of February, and selective high schools may use 7th grade report card grades in the selection process, waiting until this late would not be conducive to successful high school placement.

SAMPLE STUDENT SUPPORT RESOURCES

My School DC Student Friendly Glossary of Terms

My School DC provided a very helpful Key Terms page to help users navigate its website. These terms, however, were largely geared towards parents. Many of the middle school focus group participants expressed confusion by terms, even after reviewing the My School DC website. HA asked the students in the middle school focus groups to identify confusing terms and with the support of high school and college interns, rewrote some of the key terms to be more student friendly (Appendix H).

Special Education Glossary of Terms

This project recommended that My School DC, the DC School Report Card, and individual school websites include information on schools' special education services beyond the percentage of students served and special education test scores. Ideally students and parents would be provided with information on the continuum of special education services provided at every DC School, from least to most restrictive environments. In order to support this recommendation, SchoolTalk drafted a Glossary of Special Education Terms to help students with disabilities and their parents better understand the nuances of high school choice and enrollment, in terms of special education placement (Appendix I).

Student Questionnaire

HA has used a version of a parent and student questionnaire for high school placement, and we adapted this tool to better support students who are applying independently. HA piloted the tool with a group of 7th and 8th grade students, and had them use the tool while going through the My School DC website. We took notes of their comments, challenges, and suggestions about the tool and incorporated them into an updated version of this tool (Appendix J). Additionally, SchoolTalk added a number of questions specific to students with disabilities. Ideally, this tool could be used by school counselors and others working directly with students to help empower students to work through the high school research, selection, and application process.

Mini Video Clips

Video has shown to be an excellent tool for reaching students. Youth leaders from SchoolTalk's DC Youth Leadership Network (DCYLN) worked to produce five mini videos to demonstrate how

student produced videos could be used to enhance the school choice process for students. Youth leaders asked DC high school graduates the following questions:

- What high school did you attend?
- What did you like about your high school?
- What advice do you have for middle school students participating in the high school choice process?

The DCYLN mini video clips can be found at:
- [DC School Choice Video Sample #1](#)
- [DC School Choice Video Sample #2](#)
- [DC School Choice Video Sample #3](#)
- [DC School Choice Video Sample #4](#)
- [DC School Choice Video Sample #5](#)

Youth produced videos were a cost effective way for older students to help mentor middle school students as they research and choose a high school. [DC School Reform Now's Virtual School Tours](#) also provide excellent examples of how video can be used to provide a glimpse into daily life at a school.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DC School Choice Toolkit

Considerable variability existed in the level of support DC students received to help them successfully navigate the school choice and enrollment processes. Some schools provided significant student support that includes individualized coaching and supports throughout school selection and enrollment. Other schools provided limited to no supports.

Student supports could be improved through the creation of a DC School Choice Toolkit designed for school- and community-based providers to use as they help students develop the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully navigate each phase of the school choice and enrollment processes.

A scan of existing student supports and support materials from DC schools and community-based organizations, as well as other systems such as NYC could help to advance toolkit development. The toolkit should include:
- Student support materials for both the (1) school choice and (2) enrollment phases of the process.
- Lesson plan(s) designed to help students to align their interests, preferences, support needs, and postsecondary goals with the academic and extracurricular programming, and

student supports available at DC high schools. Materials may include the updated HA Student Questionnaire (Appendix C) included in this report.

- Lesson plan(s) on how to conduct and analyze school research including but not limited to helping students access, understand and online data and website user guides and key terms (My School DC, DC Report Card).
- Specific tools to help support English Language Learners and students with disabilities.

Student Support Timeline

Schools should start providing student school choice supports no later than 7th grade, and extend supports through the completion of the high school enrollment process. Based on the findings of this project, HA has decided to take several steps to increase the success of our high school application supports, including a targeted 7th grade session which will include student representatives from a variety of high schools.

Website Information

My School DC, the new DC Report Card, and individual school websites should make every effort to list detailed information about all academic and extracurricular programming, and student services. The following information and recommendations should be considered:

- Students were not just looking to see if a school offers AP and CTE courses, but require specific details about AP courses and CTE program offerings to determine if a school's offerings align with their interests, preferences and postsecondary goals.
- Similarly, students were looking for more information about what interscholastic sports are offered, as well as details about student clubs.
- Students would also benefit from more information about student support services including but not limited to supports for specific student populations (ELL, special education, etc.), medical clinics, and mental health services.
- Information provided should be consistently available across schools, in order for students to compare and contrast options.
- Websites should include student-focused tools and language.

School Videos

As noted above, video has shown to be an excellent tool for reaching students. Youth produced videos are a cost effective way for older students to help mentor middle school students as they research and choose a high school. DC School Reform Now's Virtual School Tours also provided excellent examples of how video can be used to provide a glimpse into daily life at a school.

School Climate

A majority of students were interested in learning as much as possible about the school climate of DC high schools prior to school selection and enrollment. Students found that current online

school data did not adequately address their school climate questions. DC schools could use the following tools to communicate key aspects of their school climates to prospective students:

- Host school visit days prior to the annual school selection deadline
- Host representative panels of current students and/or alumni for prospective students (may be included as part of school visit day)
- Send current students and/or alumni to middles schools to meet with prospective students
- Produce and post online school climate videos for students that are not able to do school visits (*Example*: [DC School Reform Now's Virtual School Tours](#)).

Enrollment Support

One area which, due to timing, did not get fully explored in this process was the support that students and families need with enrollment, post-application match. SchoolTalk, Higher Achievement, and several of our advisory group members identified enrollment support as a challenge for many students, particularly those who complete the application independently.

In DC, students must enroll at their matched high school by May 1, including providing all documentation for enrollment such as proof of residency and other enrollment paperwork. If students do not meet this deadline, they will not be able to enroll in the school. Parent/legal guardian must complete the enrollment process in person by May 1.

Factors that make enrollment challenging for some families and students may include:

- Challenges with paperwork (can be particularly challenging for students with complicated residency situations, such as parents living in different jurisdictions)
- Families and students disagreeing about school choices
- Families and students missing or being unaware of deadlines for enrollment
- Families and students unaware of the importance of the deadline for enrollment (if students had previously attended neighborhood schools, families do not need to complete enrollment paperwork until the fall)

We recommend this as an area for future study and attention.

Special Education

Students receiving special education services require more information and supports throughout the school choice and enrollment processes.

Access to Special Education Program Information

As noted above, this project strongly recommends that My School DC, the DC School Report Card, and individual school websites include information on schools' special education services beyond the percentage of students served and special education test scores. Ideally students and parents would be provided with information on the continuum of special education services provided at

every DC School, from least to most restrictive environments. For example, each DCPS school websites should provide information about the continuum of special education services the school provides (inclusive to fulltime special education classrooms), as outlined in the [DCPS Special Education Programs & Resources Guides for Families: School Year 2018-2019](#).

In order to support this recommendation, SchoolTalk drafted a Glossary of Special Education Terms to help students with disabilities and their parents better understand the nuances of high school choice and enrollment, in terms of special education placement (Appendix I).

Student Supports
Additionally, students with disabilities with an IEP or 504 plan need to (1) know their disability and what services they are currently receiving, and (2) understand and be able to articulate their support needs both inside and outside of the classroom prior to completing the school choice process.

In order to adequately prepare students with disabilities for school choice and enrollment, they need to (1) have access to all of the school choice supports provided to their nondisabled peers, and (2) receive additional one-to-one support, as needed. The updated HA Student Questionnaire includes key questions for students with disabilities to ask during the school choice process (Appendix J).

Due Process
Finally, students with disabilities also need to know where they can go, if their current school placement is not working. As part of the school choice and enrollment process, students and families should (1) be informed that ideally all school placement issues can be resolved through the IEP process, and (2) provided with the following resources in the event that the IEP process does not resolve their school placement concerns:

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) requires that state and local education agencies provide dispute resolution options for members of the IEP team that are in conflict. In DC, families that disagree with a placement decision have a number of options:

> **OSSE:** OSSE is responsible for providing the dispute resolution requirements outlined in IDEA, and includes   two different complaint processes: (1) the due process complaint process, and (2) the state complaint process. The table below highlights key elements of each complaint process.

Due Process Complaint Process	State Complaint Process
Typically requires an attorney or advocate	Typically does not require an attorney or advocate

Parties filling complaint must be given access to mediation before a schedule hearing	Can be used to address concerns facing multiple students or entire system
Hearing office is responsible for hearing position of both parties and issuing legally binding decision	OSSE is responsible for investigating complaint and making recommendations for resolution
OSSE administers through the Office of Dispute Resolution, which is separate from the Division of Elementary, Secondary and Specialized Education (DESSE)	OSSE administers through the State Complaint Office, which is located in the Division of Elementary, Secondary and Specialized Education (DESSE)
Timeline for decision is 75 days	Timeline for decision is 60 days
For more information go to http://osse.dc.gov/service/request-due-process-hearing	For more information go to http://osse.dc.gov/service/specialized-education-state-complaints

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDSMAN FOR PUBLIC EDUCATION: Located within DC's State Board of Education, the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education is responsible for helping students and families resolved problems that they have with DC Public Schools (DCPS) and Public Charter Schools (PCS). Independent of the schools, the Office provides conflict resolution services for students and families across all areas that impact student learning including special education. For more information about the Office of the Ombudsman for Public Education go to http://sboe.dc.gov/page/office-of-the-ombudsman-for-public-education.

OFFICE OF THE STUDENT ADVOCATE: Located within DC's State Board of Education, the Office of the   Student Advocate is responsible for providing students and families with information about and guidance   on navigating DC's public school system including DCPS and public charter schools. For more information about the Office of the Student Advocate go to http://sboe.dc.gov/page/office-student-advocate.

ADVOCATES FOR JUSTICE IN EDUCATION (AJE): AJE is DC's federally funded Parent Training and   Information Center (PTI).   AJE provides training, supports, and legal representation to families   with children with disabilities. For more information about AJE go to http://www.aje-dc.org/.

Next Steps

This project collected data from a small sample of DC students. In order to build on/expand the findings outlined it this report, it would be beneficial to:

- Identify a vehicle for collecting a larger sample of data from DC students before, during and after they complete the high school choice process [*Example*: An exit survey distributed to users following the initial school selection phase of the process]; and
- As recommended by the advisory committee, examine how the findings from this project compare with DC school choice research being conducted by other local organizations in order to draft a complete picture of how all DC students and families are experiencing the school choice process [*Example*: Compare project data with DC School Reform Now's parent survey data to examine how students and families are experiencing the school choice process].

HA and ST also plan to distribute the final report for the project to both of their networks.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP PROTOCOLS

Questions for Middle School Focus Group (45 minutes)

Outcomes for Middle School Student Focus Group Discussion:
1. Find out if students are applying to high schools independently.
   a. Examine why students are applying independently.
2. Determine what students know about the school choice application process.
3. Determine what supports students who are independently applying need in order to navigate the school choice process.
   a. Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.
4. Learn about students' educational goals as they transition to high school and how this plays into their school choice.
5. Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

Middle School Student Focus Group Questions:
1. What's the best thing about your school?
   a. What excites you about high school?
2. What top three things are important to you when choosing a high school?
3. Describe the type of high school do you want to attend? And why?
   a. DC Public School? Charter? Selective high school (like Banneker or Duke Ellington)?
   b. Big, small, neighborhood?
4. Describe what you know about the high school lottery application process (e.g. lottery, My School DC website, etc.).
5. Have you discussed the high school lottery application process with your school counselor?
   a. Do you know your GPA?
   b. What documents do you need to apply to high schools?
6. Who will help you apply to high schools?
   a. Are you applying on your own?
   b. If yes, why are you applying independently?
7. What do you think will be difficult for you as you apply to high schools?
   a. What will help you the most when applying for high schools?
   b. What resources would you like to assist in this process?
8. What will help you the most when applying for high schools?
9. Will you attend a high school fair?
   a. How will this help you in choosing a high school?
10. Do you plan to visit a school?
    a. If yes, how will you schedule a high school visit?
11. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not very difficult and 5 being very difficult, how difficult do you expect high school to be?
    a. Do you anticipate difficulty in learning new course material?
    b. Managing your time?
    c. Interacting with instructors?
    d. Interacting with students?
12. Have you gone to the My School DC website?
    a. If yes, what was easy about navigating the site? What was difficult when accessing the website?
13. What supports help you access websites?

Questions for High School Focus Group (60 minutes)

Outcomes for High School Student Focus Group Discussion:
1. Determine if current high school students applied independently to their high schools.
    a. Explore why students may have applied independently.
2. Discover what students now know about the high school choice application process.
3. Find out what supports students would find helpful in the school choice process.
    a. Solicit recommendations about improving the school choice process.
4. Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

High School Student Focus Group Questions:

1. What's the best thing about your high school?
    a. Did you know about this when choosing your high school?
2. Now that you are in high school, what top three things do you think are important when choosing a high school?
3. What factors did you most care about when applying to high school? What factors did you least care about when applying to high school?
4. Why did you choose the high school you are attending?
5. Did anyone help you apply to high schools?
    a. If yes, who? If no, why did you apply independently?
6. What challenges did you face as you went through the high school lottery application process?
    a. What assisted you in the high school lottery application process?
7. Who did you talk to about the high school lottery application process?
8. What would have helped you the most when applying for high schools?
9. What would you change about your high school lottery application process experience?
10. Did you attend a high school fair?
    a. Did this help in choosing your high school?
11. Have you accessed the My School DC website?
    a. If yes, what was easy about navigating the site? What was challenging when accessing the website?
12. What supports help you when accessing websites?
13. What recommendations would you give to middle school students about navigating the high school process?

Questions for Students with Disabilities Group (45 minutes)

Outcomes for Special Education Focus Group Discussion:
1. Determine if students are applying to high schools independently.
    a. Examine why students are applying independently.
2. Establish what students know about the school choice application process.

3. Ascertain what supports students with disabilities need in order to navigate the school choice process.
    a. Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.
4. Learn about students' educational goals as they transition to high school and how this plays into their school choice.
5. Verify if students have disability awareness and what supports they need from their school program when applying to high schools.
6. Find out what resources students use as supports when navigating websites.

Special Education Focus Group Questions:
1. What's the best thing about your current school?
    a. What excites you about high school?
2. What top three things were important to you when choosing a high school?
3. Describe the type of high school you attend? And why?
    a. DC Public School? Charter? Selective high school (like Banneker or Duke Ellington)?
    b. Big, small, neighborhood?
4. Describe what you know about the high school lottery application process (e.g. lottery, My School DC website, etc.).
5. Did you discuss the high school lottery application process with your school counselor before going to high school?
    a. Did you know your GPA?
    b. What documents did you need to apply to high schools?
6. Who helped you apply to high schools?
    a. Did you apply independently?
    b. If yes, why did you apply independently?
7. What was difficult for you as you applied to high schools?
    a. What helped you the most when applying for high schools?
    b. What resources would have been helpful to assist in this process?
8. Did you attend a high school fair?
    a. How did this help you in choosing a high school?
9. Did you visit a school?
    a. If yes, how did you schedule the visit?
10. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being not very difficult and 5 being very difficult, how difficult did you expect high school to be?
    a. Did you anticipate difficulty in learning new course material?
    b. Managing your time?
    c. Interacting with instructors?
    d. Interacting with students?
11. Do you know your disability? Did you know your disability when you were choosing a high school?
    a. If yes, how does knowing your disability affect which high schools you considered and chose?
12. What services do you receive as part of your IEP or 504 plan?
13. What type of classes are taking now?

       a. Are you in small class to support your learning?

       b. How many teachers do you have in your classroom?

       c. Do you get one-on-one support from a teacher?

14. What supports help your success in the classroom?

15. Have you gone to the My School DC website?

       a. If yes, what was easy about navigating the site? What was difficult when accessing the website?

16. What supports help you access websites?

APPENDIX B: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

Overall demographics:

The focus groups and survey participants were comprised as follows:

- **Middle School**: Four focus groups consisted of 7th and 8th grade students (n = 26) currently enrolled in HA programming. Roughly two-thirds (65%; n = 17) of student participants from the middle school groups represented Wards 7 and 8. The remaining one-third (30%; n = 8) of student participants represented Wards 1, 4, 5, and 6. One participant did not know what Ward they lived in.

- **High School**: One focus group (n = 6) and one group of survey participants (n = 14) consisted of 9th and 10th grade HA alumni who had recently completed the high school choice process.

- **Special Education**: Three focus groups (n = 21) consisted of high schools students and recent high school graduates with disabilities who receive/d the majority of educational services in inclusive classrooms, as opposed to resource rooms and/or substantial separate classrooms. All Special Education Focus Group participants were enrolled in one of three ST programs: TMA Self-Advocacy Workshop Series; VSA Music Production Program; and the DC Youth Leadership Network (DCYLN).

- **Online Research**: One focus group (n = 6) consisted of 7th – 8th grade students who used a student questionnaire created by HA to help them conduct online research on DC high schools.

APPENDIX C: School Choice Glossary for DC Middle School Students

This glossary is adapted from the My School DC Key Terms. It was developed with middle school students to better understand some of the terms and words used on the My School DC website and in the DC high school application process.

Matching Algorithm: This is the computer program that runs the lottery. The matching algorithm ensures that the lottery is conducted fairly, without any human bias. This video explains more about how the matching algorithm works.

Dual Language/Immersion Program: In schools with dual language or language immersion, students learn a second language and spend significant time in school classes taught in that language (for example, students may take science in Spanish and social studies in English).

Career and Technical Education (CTE Programs): Students in CTE programs complete typical high school courses and in addition, take career-focused courses that prepare them for working after high school. Students also participate in work-based learning experiences.

Dual College Enrollment: The school offers its students the opportunity to maintain their high school status while enrolling part-time or full-time at participating colleges or universities. In addition to being able to take challenging college courses that are not offered at their home high school and to earn college credit that can be transferred to many postsecondary institutions such as college and universities. This may enable students to graduate college early.

Sibling preference: some schools give preference in the lottery to siblings (brothers or sisters) currently attending the school. The specifics around the sibling preference vary by school, so double check with the schools themselves if you have questions about sibling preference.

Proof of DC residency: Students need to prove that they live in DC in order to attend a DCPS or DC public charter school. Parents/guardians must present documents proving residency before enrolling their child in a school. This page will show all the documents that can be used to prove residency and includes things such as a pay stub, driver's license AND utility bill, etc. If you or your parent/guardian has any question about documentation you should communicate directly with the school.

National Honor Society (NHS): The National Honor Society is an organization for high school students. Students are selected for participation in the NHS based on the areas of scholarship, service, leadership, and character.

Interscholastic sports: These are sports teams where teams from one school compete against teams representing other schools.

International Baccalaureate (IB): Some schools are members of the IB program. For high schools, this means they offer the IB Diploma or are on their way to being able to offer the IB Diploma. The IB coursework is a rigorous program that intends to allow students to think independently, become culturally aware, and be global thinkers. Students who participate in the IB diploma may be able to earn college credit in high school.

Enrollment: Students accept a space offered through the My School DC account by completing the My School DC Seat Acceptance Form. This allows your current school to transfer your records to your new school. Accepting a space at the new school means that you will be giving up the space at your current school and giving up feeder rights to schools at your current school. You will also be removed from the waitlists of schools you ranked below the school where you are enrolling. To complete the enrollment process, your parent/guardian will need to submit residency and other enrollment paperwork at your new school by the enrollment deadline.

APPENDIX D: SPECIAL EDUCATION GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
Accommodations	a support that helps a student complete a task	- extended time - modified assignments - assistive technology - calculator - read aloud
Adapted Curriculum	the classes or instruction that special education students receive to learn functional skills	- independent living skills courses - work readiness courses - functional academic courses
Assistive Technology	the devices that help individuals with disabilities to independently access various environments, including home, work, school, and the community	- communication devices - text-to-speech/ speech-to-text software - iPad/tablet applications
Career and Technical Education (CTE)	courses or programs that specialize in skilled trades. High school CTE courses and programs are typically recognized by a field and can result in certification in that field. * For more information on CTE, visit https://osse.dc.gov/service/career-and-technical-education-cte	- Architecture & Construction - Arts, A/V Technology & Communications - Business Management & Administration - Education & Training, Finance - Health Science - Hospitality & Tourism - Human Services - Information Technology, Law - Public Safety - Corrections & Security - Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM) - Transportation, Distribution & Logistics
Certificate of IEP Completion (IEP Certificate)	type of exit document students with disabilities receive when they have mastered their IEP goals but have not met the requirements to obtain a standard high school diploma. * For more information on Certificates of IEP Completion, visit https://dcps.dc.gov/page/my-child-track-graduate	

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
Content Classes	core academic classes that all students take such as math, language arts, science, and history, as they work to meet the requirements for a standard high school diploma	• English/ language arts • Math • History • Science
Continuum of Services	the variety of supports and services that a school or school district provide to meet the needs of students with disabilities	• accommodations • related services
Curriculum	the courses a student takes or the instruction he/she receives	• adapted curriculum • general education curriculum
District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS)	public school system in DC *For more information about DCPS, visit http://dcps.dc.org/	• (list DCPS high schools here)
Elective Classes	additional classes that students can chose to take	• career and technical education (CTE) courses • art courses • music courses
Exit Document	the document that proves a student has completed high school	• Certificate of IEP Completion (IEP Certificate) • Standard High School Diploma
Free Appropriate Public Education. (FAPE)	section of the federal law (IDEA) that requires schools and school districts to provide a meaningful education to all students, regardless of their disability	
General Education Curriculum	the classes and instruction that help all students meet state standards and measured by state testing	• English/ Language Arts • Algebra 1 & 2 • Geometry • US History • Government • Biology • Chemistry
General Education Learning Environment	a classroom where a general educator teaches all students (with and without disabilities) the general education curriculum	

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
General Education Students	students without disabilities	
General Educator	a teacher who is trained to teach a specific content in the general education curriculum	• English/ Language Arts teacher • Algebra 1 & 2 teacher • Geometry teacher • US History teacher • Government teacher • Biology teacher • Chemistry teacher
Homebound Instruction	a type of learning environment where instruction is student's residence by a qualified school staff member	
Individualized Educational Program (IEP)	the legal document that outlines the supports and services a school will provide a student with a disability to ensure she/he receives a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE)	
Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)	a federal law that requires schools to serve the educational needs of eligible students with disabilities by providing a free and appropriate public education (FAPE) in the least restrictive environment (LRE)	
Intervention	targeted specialized instruction	
Learning Environment	the type of space a student receives instruction defined by the location, type of educator, and student population	• general education learning environment • team taught learning environment • pullout services (resource room) • special education (self-contained) learning environment • special education center • special education day school • residential school • home bound instruction
Least Restrictive Environment (LRE)	a section of the federal law (IDEA) that mandates schools to provide students with disabilities access to the general education curriculum and the general education peers to the largest extent possible	

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
Local Education Agency (LEA)	another word for school district or an organization that is legally allowed to provide educational services to students and can be made up of one or more schools that are run by the same organization.	• District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) • Public Charter Schools (PCS) • Nonpublic Schools
Location of Services	the specific physical location or site where a student with a disability receives special education services and supports	• a specific classroom in a specific school • Ms. Teacher's class
Nonpublic School	the privately owned or operated schools that maintain or conduct classes for the purposes of offering instruction to students with disabilities * For more information on nonpublic schools in DC, visit http://dcase.org/	• (List DC nonpublic schools here)
One-to-One (1-to-t or 1:1) Services	instruction or a service provided to one student by one school staff member.	• aide assigned to a student to help with daily tasks • an individualized session with a speech therapist • targeted intervention session between 1 teacher and 1 student
Paraprofessional (Instructional Assistant, Aide, Assistant Teacher, etc.)	a teaching assistant that can provide support to students under the guidance of a teacher	
Placement	refers to the type of learning environment where special education services are delivered to a student with a disability	•
Public Charter School (PCS)	public schools that are run by non-profit organizations under agreements with the DC Public Charter School Board (DC PCSB)	• list DC charter schools here
Pull-Out Services (Resource Room)	a small group or 1-to-1 learning environment where a student or a group of students with disabilities receives an intervention or related service	•

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
Related Service	a support service that supplements education	 • speech and language therapy • occupational therapy • physical therapy • behavior support services • school psychology or clinical services • interpreting services • English as a second language services • audiology • assistive technology services • transportation services • orientation and mobility • parent counseling and training • career and college counseling • rehabilitation counseling • recreation services • transition services • school health or nurse services
Residential School	institution that provides both residential and educational services	• list DC residential schools here
Standard High School Diploma	the exit document students earn by completing the standard graduation requirements outlined for $9^{th} - 12^{th}$ graders by the school district	
Special Educator	a teacher who is qualified to teach students with disabilities and the adapted curriculum	

Term	Definition	Examples/ Types
Special Education Center	a cluster of services or learning environments intended to meet a specific need or disability category within a general education school	• Behavior & Education Support (BES) • Communication & Education Support (CES) • Early Learning Support (ELS) • Independence & Learning Support (ILS) • Medical & Education Support (MES) • Vision Programs (Sensory Support) • Deaf and Hard of Hearing Support (DHOH) • Specific Learning Support (SLS) *Examples from DCPS
Special Education Day School	a separate school for students with disabilities	• River Terrace Education Campus (DCPS) • Nonpublic Schools
Special Education (Self-Contained) Learning Environment	a learning environment that is run by a special educator and only available to students with disabilities	
State Standards	the expectations that all students learn by the end of each year to learn the general education curriculum	
Special Education Student	a student with a documented disability who has an IEP	
Statewide Testing	tests that measure how many state standards a student has learned in one year	• PARCC
Team Taught Learning Environment	a learning environment run by both a special educator and general educator and has a mix of students with and without disabilities	
Transition Plan	the section of the IEP that addresses the goals and services that will help a student transition from high school to postsecondary life in the areas of education, employment, and independent living. The transition plan is based on a student's individual strengths, interests, needs, and preferences	

APPENDIX E: STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRE

Your Name:	_____
Current School:	_____
School Counselor's Name:	

High School Choice
Student Questionnaire

This questionnaire will help you reflect on your decision for high school. Answer the questions below as honestly as possible in order to help guide you towards what is important when looking for a high school option.

1) Look at your 7th grade report card. What are your final grades in the following classes:

       English/Language Arts: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Math: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Social Studies: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Science: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

2) What was your final GPA for 7th grade? _____

3) Think about your current grades in your 8th grade classes. What are your first quarter grades in the following classes:

       English/Language Arts: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Math: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Social Studies: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

       Science: ❑ A ❑ B ❑C ❑ D ❑ F

4) What three words would you use to best describe yourself, or would your family/teachers/friends use to describe you?

    _____   _____   _____

5) Do you have an IEP or 504 plan? If yes, answer the following questions:

- What is your disability?

- Are you currently in mostly large or small classes?

- Would you like to be in large or small classes for high school?

- What supports do you get in middle school that help you do well?

- Which of these supports would you LIKE to continue to get in high school?

- Which of these supports would you NOT LIKE to continue to get in high school?

6) What activities do you currently participate in, either at school or outside of school? (for example- sports, band, cheerleading, community service, etc)

- Sports: _____
- Band
- Arts
- Theater
- Community Service
- Mentoring
- Other: _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

7) What activities would you like to participate in during high school? Think about activities you've heard about or seen other people do, both inside and outside of school. This can include activities that you currently participate in, and would like to continue doing.

_____   _____

_____   _____

_____   _____

8) What are your favorite classes or subjects in school:

_____   _____

9) Do you know what you want to do when you grow up? If so, please write down what you would like to do:

_____   _____

10) Circle the 3-5 items on the list below that are the most important for you to consider when you are selecting a high school:

Strong academics	Strong teachers	Close to my home
My friends are going there	Good sports teams	Options for coursework (AP/IB)
Nice building/facilities	High graduation rate	Test scores
No uniform	Able to go off campus for lunch	Hands-on activities/experiences

11) Who is helping you with your high school decision? Who will it be important to discuss your high school choices with? Check all that apply:

❑ My parents/family

❑ My older brother(s) or sister(s)

❑ My friends

❑ My teachers

❑ My school counselor

❑ My principal

❑ Other adults (coach, mentor, neighbor, etc)

12) Which methods of transportation are you and your family comfortable taking to school (check all that apply):

❑ Walking

❑ Taking the bus

❑ Taking Metro

❑ Biking

❑ Getting a ride from someone

❑ Rideshare (like Uber/Lyft)

❑ Other:

13) How long does it currently take you to get to school in the morning, on average: _____ minutes

14) What is the longest you are comfortable traveling in order to get to high school: _____ minutes

15) At this point, what are the 3-5 high schools to which you want to apply or are interested learning more about:

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

Now that you've written down all this information about yourself, review it. What further information do you need in order to make a smart school choice? How will you get that information?

Doing this self-assessment is a great way to start getting an idea of what is important to you in your high school choice decision, and what type of high school would be a good fit for you. Your next step is to research high school options and make a final decision about to which high schools you should apply. You can find out more information about different high schools online at www.myschooldc.org, www.dcschoolreportcard.org, or by talking to your 8th grade counselor. You can also get more information about a lot of schools at EdFest, December 14, 2019. Be sure to complete your application at www.myschooldc.org by the deadline, Monday, February 3, 2020.