

To the Members of the ARP Committee,

Within the last 15 years a generous body of research has found that school building facilities have a substantial impact on student and teacher outcomes. School facilities affect teacher recruitment, engagement, learning, academic outcomes, social-emotional development, population shifts, housing prices as well as parent and community involvement.

During the multiple phases of the BPS Reconstruction Project it became clear that there is school facility inequity throughout the district. There are the have schools and the have not schools. Some schools got high end facilities and some schools did not. Staff recognize the disparity, students see the disparity, as do parents and the community.

The influx of stimulus funds provides the BPS an opportunity to provide 21st Century facilities improving the quality of those schools that appear to have been overlooked. These funds can potentially cover the cost of capital improvement projects, new equipment and upgrade several school buildings so that all children attend a school in quality buildings that meet 21st century standards and bring pride to the students, staff, parents and community. Each school has a facility analysis....use them as a starting point to evaluate and bring building equity to our students.

The Third Teacher

It is not realistic to think that every school will have the same facilities, however the concept of the learning environment as The Third Teacher acknowledges the school facilities as having a great impact on learning and behavior. The Third Teacher learning environment is thoughtfully designed and arranged to create an atmosphere of exploration, respect for student work, communication, collaboration and relationships. The environment is a valuable teacher- big or small, public or private, classroom or hallway, inside or outside, floor space, wall space even ceiling space. Every space in a school has an identity and a purpose. Every space needs to be alive, flexible and open to change reflecting the needs of the students. The environment speaks to students, teachers, and parents. The environment speaks of the students, teachers, parents and community with their work displayed throughout the school, the care given to every detail of the environment, the selection of furniture, the organization of the room, evidence of learning, photographs of children, student art, maintenance of the interior and exterior, gardens, plants, materials.....the tone of the school should be palpable upon entering. Children and adults need to move and are affected by their environment. Imagine teachers are able to increase learning and the psychological well-being for themselves and their students through the design and architecture of classrooms and the school. The Third Teacher is about the relationship between the student and the environment enriching student spaces to enhance the classroom and all school facilities.

It is also our recommendation that the district adopt the practice of administering the Riverside Insights Cognitive Ability Test to all BPS students in grades K-12, not just those seeking admission to City Honors and Olmsted. The district needs to create a paradigm shift to inform student ability rather than reporting academic achievement thus providing opportunity to achieve fair outcomes for all students.

Giving this test to all students will facilitate the creation of robust learning environments at all schools by making student thinking visible, develop critical thinking, aid in self- reflection and develop -ability, behavior and acceptable learning practices may be perpetuated.

Giving this test to all students will drive teacher and staff development to focus on pedagogical skills and facilitate the development of rich culturally responsive teaching and learning thus bringing dignity to all educational stakeholders in the community.

Riverside Insights cognitive Ability Test measures quantitative reasoning, verbal reasoning and non-verbal reasoning. The data is gathered and a profile is generated for each student to inform parents, teachers and stakeholders of student abilities.

By administering the Riverside Insights Cognitive Ability Test to all students and utilizing the individual student reports we are not recommending that each child be given access to a level playing field we are recommending that each child is given a fair chance of succeeding on the playing field!

Our final recommendations support social emotional growth and development.

Summer school needs to be a time of play and exploration for all students. Of course, summer school for some high school students may require re-taking courses in order to matriculate but others will benefit from enrichment. Summer must be a time of enrichment and experiential learning providing an opportunity to accelerate learning and making sense of the world through inquiry, art, music, drama, nature, sports, culinary arts and exploration of our city's neighborhoods and cultural icons.

This summer in particular, what students need may not be what they missed. The Council of Great City Schools recognizes the temptation to test immediately, identify deficits and remediate as soon as possible. It must be noted that this is an ineffective practice that can further alienate children from school and exacerbate inequitable access to grade level instruction. It is recommended both this summer and well into the next school year to “keep the focus on grade-level content and rigor, addressing learning gaps as needed”. It is recommended that teachers test-by-teaching utilizing formative assessments, questioning and discussions. In other words, making student thinking visible.

Finally, another system-wide recommendation is the notion of well-being. Visible well-being is the culmination of the works of Martin Seligman (Positive Psychology), Carol Dweck (Growth Mindset), Angela Duckworth (Grit) and Lea Waters (The Strength Switch). Historically we have judged children on what they can't do – we need to change and focus on their strengths.

The goal of education must go beyond academics and truly include well-being and non-cognitive skills. We must develop each child's ability as well as all staff and parents to be reflective, self-caring, kind, adding value and responsive to name a few. It is recommended the District begin a three-year training and rollout as developed by the Visible Well-Being Foundation Schools.

In conclusion high stakes decisions must be made in the best interest of all children, staff and parents. We must view the next three years and beyond by thinking differently, focusing on what students need not what they missed, focus on building community and creating what is sustainable.

Respectfully submitted by the Buffalo Association of Substitute Administrators,

Sara M. Call, President

