November 19, 2012

The Honorable Vincent Gray
Executive Office of the Mayor
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue NW, Suite 316
Washington, DC 20004

Chancellor Kaya Henderson
District of Columbia Public Schools
1200 First Street, NE
Washington, DC 20002

RE: Garrison Elementary School

Dear Mayor Gray and Chancellor Henderson:

The Commissioners of ANC 2F, each in his individual capacity, are writing to oppose the closure of Garrison Elementary School as part of the DCPS Proposed Consolidations and Reorganization Proposal (the "Proposal"). Garrison is within the boundaries of ANC 2F, and the current school boundaries for Garrison straddle ANC 2F and ANC 1B. Many children who live in ANC 2F attend Garrison.

The Proposal to close Garrison undermines DCPS's stated goals of the consolidation and reorganization, which include (i) meeting "the diverse needs" of students, and (ii) creating "flexible" schools, by "allowing for population growth and shifts and always ensuring that students have high-quality schools in their neighborhood as well as out-of-boundary options."[1] In addition, closing Garrison will undo the community's efforts over the last several years to improve the school, and it ignores the important role Garrison plays in our neighborhood.

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[1] http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Parents+and+Community/DCPS+Proposed+Consolidations+and+Reorganization (last visited Nov. 16, 2012)

Serving Logan Circle, Thomas Circle, Old City, Blagden Alley, Franklin Square, and parts of Shaw and Downtown

First, Garrison serves a diverse student body, and 60 percent of the students are from Wards 1 and 2, so Garrison is already a neighborhood school. Significantly, 23 percent of students have special needs, and there is at least one "autism classroom." It is difficult to see how removing a school that is two-thirds full with 60 percent of the students coming from the local community meets "the diverse needs" of students. Closing Garrison will only serve to needlessly uproot its students from a comfortable and productive learning environment.

Second, closing Garrison will not create "flexible" schools that allow for population growth. The Logan Circle neighborhood has seen significant population increases over the last several years, and DCPS projects the neighborhood will see an increase of at least 125 children by 2015.[2] With this increase in children, Garrison could soon be at capacity with greater attention and response from DCPS to what the changing neighborhood demographic needs in its neighborhood school. But even without the projected increase, Garrison currently has approximately 237 students enrolled.[3] **Seaton does not have room for this many students.** This is a tacit acknowledgment that consolidation WILL result in current and prospective neighborhood parents responding to the closure of their neighborhood school by rejecting forced relocation to Seaton and joining the exodus out of DCPS.

Finally, the Proposal ignores the significant efforts of the Logan Circle community to improve Garrison, and the important and unique role Garrison plays as a neighborhood school. In the past three years, parents have re-established a PTA, developed strong partnerships with local community organizations, reached out to prospective parents, and worked with DCPS to improve the school. After three years of hard work led by parents and community members, and with new school leadership appointed less than three months ago, many essential elements are now in place to steepen Garrison's trajectory to becoming one of the top schools in the District. Many of our parents in ANC 2F are excited about Garrison. We are deeply disappointed that, despite the stated DCPS policy regarding the importance of family and community engagement to the success of our neighborhood schools, DCPS so quickly dismisses our engagement in Logan Circle, undervalues the effort that goes into creating change, and ignores the magic that can happen when a community uses its ingenuity to make a really great neighborhood school.

Closing Garrison will undo all of this hard work. DCPS cannot expect to carve out the heart of one community, transplant it to another, and expect it to beat and pump with the same vigor. Closing Garrison will kill this community's spirit. Many frustrated and disillusioned parents will likely join the exodus for Virginia, Maryland, or anywhere that has a stable and predictable school system, draining the city treasury of badly needed tax dollars and neighborhood diversity. There can be no healthy, successful neighborhood that does not include a healthy, successful neighborhood school.

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[2] *See* DCPS Proposed Consolidations and Reorganization 33 (Nov. 15, 2012), *available at* http://dcps.dc.gov/DCPS/Parents+and+Community/DCPS+Proposed+Consolidations+and+Reorganization/Full+Proposal.
[3] http://profiles.dcps.dc.gov/garrison (last visited Nov. 16, 2012).

As a community, we have worked hard to make Logan Circle a place where neighborhood families want to stay and raise their children, and we remain committed to that goal. We respectfully ask that you reconsider your proposal to close Garrison Elementary. We urge you instead to support fully the parent- and community-led efforts to ensure the success of our DCPS neighborhood school.

Respectfully submitted,
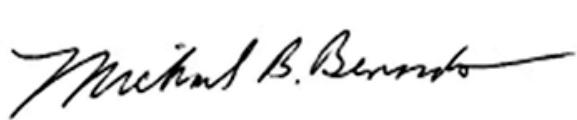
Mike Benardo, Chairman, ANC 2F

Matt Raymond, Vice Chairman, ANC 2F
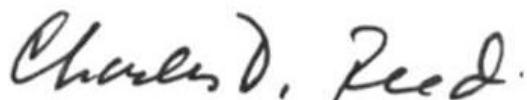
Charles Reed, Commissioner, ANC 2F
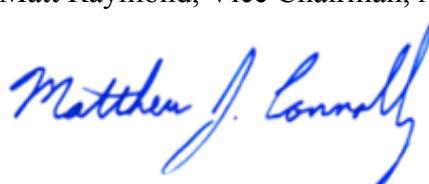
Matt Connolly, Commissioner, ANC 2F

cc: *(Via Email Only*)
        City Council, Committee of the Whole
        Chairman Phil Mendelson
        CM Jim Graham
        CM Jack Evans
        CM David Catania
        CM Michael Brown
        CM Vincent Orange
        CM-Elect David Grosso
        Mary Lord
        Laura Slover
        Ted Trabue
        Jack Jacobsen