

January 11, 2017

To the Cincinnati Public School Board of Education:

My daughter was born in the summer of 2012, 7 weeks early with a head full of red hair and the personality to match. My husband and I couldn't believe how quickly her first day of preschool came when she started a neighborhood preschool in Clifton in the Fall of 2015. That was the year it was announced, without much advance notice, that there would no longer be a campout at CPS magnet schools. Instead, a lottery system would be implemented to ensure more fair access to successful schools.

I remember parents in my daughter's classroom, people I had just met within the last few months, talking about the change and what it might mean for their future. Some had moved to Clifton for the sole purpose of attending Fairview German, and talked about moving if they did not get in. I remember feeling lucky that I didn't have to be the first to endure the changed process, and had a year to see how everything played out. What I did not realize was that it wasn't the children entering Kindergarten that year that were most affected, it was my little 3-year old who had just entered preschool. That the only way she could get into Fairview German's kindergarten in 2017 was to enter a lottery (just two months after starting her first year of preschool) in hopes we could pay to go to a different, unbuilt, unknown and unable to be toured preschool that we had no interest in attending.

Not only was that not a decision parents with a new preschooler and 1-year old want to make two months into a big transition, I wasn't even aware that I needed to make it. This change in plans, the expansion of Fairview German's preschool and guaranteed entry into Fairview was not communicated to the public (or at least not effectively because I did not hear about it before the first round of the lottery). By the time I realized this was happening, that you could not camp out, but could pay to go to Fairview German via the preschool, I hurriedly entered the second lottery for the preschool in January. We did not get in.

When it became clearer that our planned option of Fairview, a school that many of my daughter's classmates and nearly all of our neighbor's kids attend, was not a likely choice for us, we began the tireless search for an alternative option. We visited no less than 8 additional schools, searching for a way to stay in the neighborhood. We were even open to the possibility of moving, a decision we did not take lightly as longtime Clifton residents.

Luckily we found Annunciation, a Clifton gem that is not only a successful, but actually accessible neighborhood school (for over 100 years!). The EdChoice scholarship makes it a clear choice for us.

While I respect the fact I likely don't have all of the relevant information, nor face the same challenges you do in your job, I cannot express strongly enough how disappointed I am in what's transpired in the last year in Clifton. I had finally moved home, started my own family, looked forward to a neighborhood school that most of my friend's children attended, and instead was met with secretive changes and a roller coaster of information that directly impacts my neighborhood and my children's educational future. It has resulted in so many unexpected hours of research into schools all over the city,

consideration of a move out of the CPS district after a lifetime in Clifton, and a complete lack of trust in CPS's ability to successfully plan for or execute change. My entire job is dedicated to change management for the Department of Veterans Affairs. As a member of the community experiencing this change, I can say with confidence you missed opportunity after opportunity to successfully implement this change. I do not disagree that change was needed, but changing from a campout to paying for a preschool spot that I couldn't even tour at the time, which turned out to be too competitive to even get in, is not a fair solution to this neighborhood. Similarly, offering zero lottery spots to incoming kindergarteners for the Fall of 2017 is not a fair solution.

Fortunately, I have found a solution that will allow me to stay in the neighborhood, and for that I'm grateful. However, I still resent that I don't have an opportunity to attend a successful public school in my neighborhood. I resent the stress you have caused my family in the last year and the fractured cohort of 2017-2018 Clifton kindergarteners, who will now be spread across many schools. I resent the impact on our neighborhood, and the denied opportunities to build relationships through shared school activities. But most of all, I resent your inability to effectively plan for and execute change. I simply cannot trust that my taxpayer dollars are in good hands after witnessing how events have unfolded in the last year.

I know it can be difficult to stay in touch with the people directly impacted by your decisions, and so I write this letter in hopes of lending insight into my experience of this change. My hope is that it will remind you of the enormous amount of influence you have, and motivate you to reflect on this specific change and avoid making the same mistakes in the future.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Heather Schwetschenau McCarren".

Heather Schwetschenau McCarren