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I am the parent of an eighth grader who will be applying to high school in October. The process opens in a month, but no information about the new online application is up on the web pages of the Office of Family and Community Engagement, the Office of Student Placement, or the District homepage.

To access the online application, families must have a new Family Portal account. Each student's Familynet data must be linked to the portal by the parent. Families need to have an email address, a computer with Internet access, a functioning phone line to receive the verification code, and a correct/active phone number in the system associated with the student's records to get this set up. They also need to be fluent in English and have basic computer skills. As I see it, this represents six barriers to access. If a charter operator were to put forward such an application process, you would not approve.

As a parent of privilege who speaks English and has ready access to a computer and internet; as a parent who is familiar with online forms and Familynet; as a parent who is comfortable in the role of being an outspoken advocate, it took several days and a number of calls and emails to Ms. Harris for me to link my daughter's records to my new online account. Online systems come with glitches. My glitch had to do with the fact that the code verification system is not reliable providing voice codes to landline numbers. Several other parents told me they'd had the same experience. The recommended way to add a cell phone number to the account was an in-person visit to the school secretary, who as I can attest is already overburdened due to staffing cuts. I anticipate lots of eighth grade families are in the same predicament. We have 200 8th graders in my child's school. Say it takes on average 15 minutes to get families set up with a functioning Parent Portal; that would take 50 hours. Believe me, no one in my child's school has a spare 50 hours to do this.

Look at the rollout of the healthcare.gov. All online programs come with problems, and it is imperative that time be built in to address them. Rushing the process of creating Family Portals for everyone while at the same time

tying the application process to this transition is setting up your IT department for failure. There will be problems, and the casualties will be children who cannot access their high school of choice.

I am asking you today to look critically at the barriers to access you are creating for disadvantaged families. You should put in place an easy-to-access paper application with counselor support for those who for whatever reason cannot do an online application. Ask yourself, is it prudent to do the Parent Portal AND the online application program at the same time? I think the risks to students are too great.

Lastly I wanted to say that this streamlined process leaves me wondering what role will our counselors play? With so many school choices and so many admissions requirements, professional guidance is critical. The District has already outsourced high school guides and fairs to private partners. Am I wrong to see this as another way of normalizing drastic cuts that have been made to counselors? Children and families need certified school counselors. Please continue to advocate for reinstatement of adequate numbers of certified school counselors. We need them; they should not be a luxury.