

## Remarks at School Reform Commission

April 16, 2015

### Alternatives (Choices)

My name is Barbara McDowell Dowdall. I am a public school-trained bassoonist, child of a onetime Free Library of Philadelphia branch head, a currently serving substitute teacher (perhaps not for long!) and a member of the Alliance for Philadelphia Public Schools (APPS).

1. Fifty years ago, a most fortunate generation in Philadelphia public schools was learning to sing, play, and listen to music: patriotic, religious, classical and Broadway. Every child was expected to purchase – metal or plastic – a melody flute. We all learned to read music, at least the treble clef. Every school, including elementary, had an orchestra and chorus. Every junior high and high school had both a fulltime vocal and fulltime instrumental teacher. Free lessons on free instruments, violin, clarinet and trumpet, were offered in 4<sup>th</sup> grade. Every school had candidates for All City Band, Orchestra and Chorus. Music is still a significant presence in our public schools: two CAPA's, the Girard Academic Music Program, all-city choral and instrumental groups, and in schools where principals are strategic and creative enough to cobble together budgetary and charitable resources, music instruction possibly for selected students. The musical guarantee for every child, however, has vanished. Might one alternative be to return to these halcyon days rather than rely on charity and chance.
2. The relentless march to school library oblivion, combined with random, piecemeal proposals/grants in Plan 3.0 could be replaced with the alternative plan to model a restored school library system on award-winning Council Rock. For 200 hundred schools instead of 10.

[http://articles.philly.com/2014-02-13/news/47273712\\_1\\_pennsylvania-libraries-council-rock-school-district-common-core](http://articles.philly.com/2014-02-13/news/47273712_1_pennsylvania-libraries-council-rock-school-district-common-core)

<http://www.crsd.org/Page/36969>

- a. “high-quality early childhood literacy activities in elementary schools” could include small classes (current kindergarten classes at C.W. Henry School in Mt. Airy have 30 students and no aides), reading specialists (eliminated), funding for adequate texts and supplies (cut to near zero), and a resourced and professionally-staffed school library.
- b. Rather than “kindergarten through second-grade students at these schools [making] bimonthly visits to neighborhood libraries,” have all students in every school several times a week walking down the hall to their school library.
- c. Instead of utilizing “computer terminals in their school libraries [so] students will be able to ... *chat with a librarian,*” provide a live, in person, certified teacher librarian for chatting, instruction, guidance and collaboration. And allow branch librarians to continue providing the year round, collaborative support services they have always done.

[http://articles.philly.com/2014-04-29/news/49467521\\_1\\_school-libraries-school-budget-cuts-philadelphia-public-schools](http://articles.philly.com/2014-04-29/news/49467521_1_school-libraries-school-budget-cuts-philadelphia-public-schools)

<http://www.ala.org/news/state-americas-libraries-report-2014/school-libraries>

3. Last, if insufficient substitute teachers is a concern, hire more by eliminating the freeze; restore the practice of auxiliary teachers in each building; bring back home school preference [which provides the benefit of familiarity for both teacher and students]; and permit experienced teachers with sufficient related coursework to teach outside their area of certification. Value qualified veteran teachers. Unless the goal is simply the elimination of qualified, unionized, adequately paid teachers. In that case, the alternative of privatization would be more in line with your intentions.

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Note: Members of the SRC were provided the image of Jacob Lawrence’s “The Library,” and an invitation to the Roxborough Symphony

Orchestra's upcoming Friday concert where they could meet addition Philadelphia public school graduate musicians, some in their 70's, who also benefitted from those golden days of SDP music programs.