Making School Choice Work: The High Quality Schools Campaign in D.C.
Agenda and Housekeeping

12:00/3:00 - 12:30/3:30: Briefing on the High Quality Schools Campaign

12:30/3:30 - 1:00/4:00: Q&A with David Pickens and Natasha Ettienne

#makingchoicework2018
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Meet Bridget and Tionna

“For all my kids, I want the best for them. I want them to enjoy being kids. I want them to stay focused on their goals and have what they want in life.”
Bridget has questions

What school will prepare Tionna for high school?

Which schools offer athletic programs?

How does the school approach student discipline?

What school will offer the best “fit” for Tionna?

How do I apply? What if Tionna doesn’t get matched to her first choice?
Where can Bridget go to get answers to her questions?
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Unanswered questions remain

Which schools offer athletic programs?

How does the school approach student discipline?

What school will offer the best “fit” for Tionna?
Families need more than information about schools to find success with school choice.
The HQSC fills the gaps

Search for schools w/ emphasis on quality

Prioritize schools that meet families needs, constraints

Navigate application, lottery & enrollment
The DCSRN Team
The DCSRN Team
A learning agenda for the HQSC

Three year formative evaluation partnership focused on:

- Understanding what it takes to offer personalized, one-on-one support
- Evaluating impacts on participating families: What challenges are addressed? What challenges remain unresolved?
- Surfacing recommendations for the field around how to better support families in navigating school choice processes
Learning from the HQSC: What it takes to offer personalized, one-on-one support
Parents don’t always know what they don’t know

“I didn’t even understand the process of what was going on. I thought my child had to go to the neighborhood school, so I was stuck.”

- HQSC Parent
Lesson #1: Meet parents where they are

HQSC built around a **targeted, direct outreach** recruitment strategy

- Focuses on families in the city’s most underserved and isolated neighborhoods (Wards 7 and 8, SE DC)
Lesson #1: Meet parents where they are

DCSRN leverages community partners that families already trust, including:

- Services for Homeless Families
- K-12 Public Schools
- Early Childhood Centers
- The Homeless Children’s Playtime Project
- AppleTree Early Learning Public Charter School
- DC Scholars Stanton Elementary
Direct outreach to families pays off

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\frac{2}{3} \text{ HQSC families are 1st time participants in the My School DC application and lottery}
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Parents face unexpected challenges

“[T]he biggest problem was the language barrier. “

“A lot [of parents]...didn’t know how to read or write.”

“She didn’t know how to get the counselor recommendation ”

“[Parents] didn’t know how to get started.”

“Parents didn’t know what information was needed on the application.”
Lesson #2: One-on-one, personalized help provides support where it’s needed

“The parent would have to go to the school and give me a call, and then I would translate over the phone just because they didn’t have anyone else to do that for them.”

- Parent Advocate
Connecting and sustaining contact with families is difficult

“Parents [have] their work schedule, some parents work nights, and sleep during the day... And it was tough, because we had to communicate at some point. There were parents that I would see at 10:00PM because that was the only time they had free.”

- Parent Advocate
Lesson #3: Persistence, creativity in reaching families can pay off

“[S]he is a single mother and going through chemotherapy... It was the last day to submit the application. I was calling her since December almost everyday. Literally, on February 28th [the day the application was due] she contacted me late at night... She was like, ‘You’ve been calling me, I’m so sorry I didn’t get back to you... I really need your help.’”

- Parent Advocate
The HQSC connects families with quality schools
Participating HQSC parents are satisfied

86% rated the services provided by their advocate as “excellent” or “very good”

97% would recommend their parent advocate to a friend

“I was leaning on [my parent advocate] to help me decide which school would best suit [my daughter]... We put our heads together to come up with schools to fit [her] needs.” - HQSC parent
HQSC parents are enrolling in quality schools

Of participating families who maintained contact throughout HQSC:

84% of students matched to a quality school

82% of students who matched completed enrollment

Systemwide, just 61% of students who match complete enrollment
HQSC addresses common information gaps for parents

96% agreed advocates helped them to understand school quality ratings

97% agreed advocate helped them understand their child’s quality school options

Advocates often grounded their conversations about school quality in parents’ aspirations for their children’s future.
Advocates keep parents on track

“I never thought that I would have to do this much research and spend this much time in getting my daughter into school... I was able to spend more time because I got a call from [my advocate]. It made me feel on top of it.”

- HQSC Parent
And help to build parents’ confidence

“The first time [my parent advocate called me], I felt like I wasn’t alone and if I had questions, I had someone to call and ask.”

- HQSC Parent
The HQSC cannot resolve all challenges in school choice systems
Choice is limited by the supply of quality schools

“[I]t’s kind of hopeless. Because the way the system is set up... if you don’t have certain money or you don’t live in a certain neighborhood, your child might not be educated appropriately.”

- HQSC parent whose child did not match to any of the 12 schools they listed
And where you live shapes your opportunities

“Distance is a huge issue...[T]here aren’t a lot of high quality schools [east of the river]. We had a parent who was just like, ‘I can’t get my daughter to school. It’s too far.”

-Parent Advocate
In Sum

HQSC fills the gap:

- Direct outreach reaches families most in need of assistance.
- Personalized, one-on-one assistance helps address pressing challenges.

But the work of reaching and maintaining contact with families is difficult, requires tenacity and persistence by advocates, and it alone cannot resolve other shortcomings in the school choice system.
Implications
Look beyond apps and information tools

*Relationships matter*
Build evidence around how to scale, sustain supports

To enable more families to benefit the work of the HQSC:

- Build evidence around cost-effective strategies to reach more families
- Identify new sources of philanthropic and government support
- Leverage DCSRN’s work with families to improve school choice system
Address weaknesses in school choice system

Recognize the limits of school choice systems

- Too few quality schools
- Difficulty finding out what schools will offer good fit
- Constraints around transportation

Without attention to these and other issues, families opportunities under choice will be limited.
Thank You