

## Murch Swing Space Comments DCPS/DGS Responses: January 12, 2016

DCPS and DGS received a number of comments and questions from the community on the Murch swing space evaluation. The document below outlines the questions that were received through 12/31/15 with responses from DCPS and DGS. A number of comments and questions were very similar in nature, so they were grouped into general comments. The comments and questions are broken down by scenario and general topic. If you do not see your question or comment or feel it was not accurately represented, please email [SIT.INFO@dc.gov](mailto:SIT.INFO@dc.gov).

### Scenario 1: Remain On Site at Murch

#### Safety, Security & Disruption

**Comment:** There are concerns with learning disruptions/distractions (construction noise, multiple moves)

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There are certainly some valid concerns about disruption during construction. The design team is working on a revised draft layout of the on-site option. The goal of this attempt would be to have the learning trailers as far away as possible from the construction zone.

**Comment:** More construction-related danger (air quality, debris, equipment, rodents, evacuation, emergency vehicles use Davenport)

**DCPS/DGS Response:** The contractor will be contractually required to maintain a safe, clean environment conforming to local and federal requirements if this option is selected. In addition, construction of trailers will be reviewed and permitted by all city agencies for conformance with life-safety requirements.

**Comment:** Can sound walls can take edge off of noise and dust?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Dust created by construction is addressed by watering the ground with several fire houses during the work to contain the dust before it can spread. DGS and DCPS will work with the builder and the school to evaluate construction noise throughout the project. We work with the builder to try and make sure the noisy work is completed when school is not in session. Construction work is slowed during testing weeks to prevent issues with noise.

**Comment:** Where's the official safety study?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Traffic studies incorporate an analysis of safety. Traffic studies are in progress for this and other scenarios. In addition to safety around traffic, the builder will be responsible for maintaining a safe environment. Construction fences would be put in place to separate the construction area from the dedicated school area.

**Comment:** Better security than other options

**Comment:** Less security w/non-school-related adults in close proximity

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Safety and security is a priority for DCPS and DGS. All plans are reviewed by the DCPS Security team and DGS works closely with the contractor to ensure there

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is a safe environment on the job site. The selected contractor ensures that their employees go through background checks.

**Comment:** Makes walking unsafe with construction activity.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** In all scenarios DCPS and DGS will work with the DDOT Safe Routes to School coordinator to develop the safest routes to and from the site.

### **Logistics & Proximity**

**Comment:** There are added traffic/parking concerns with construction vehicles and pickup/drop off

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There will be additional traffic on the site as a result of the construction. DGS will work closely with the builder to develop a parking plan for them and their subcontractors, but there will be vehicles that need to access the work area directly. There is an ongoing traffic evaluation at the site and we will work closely with DDOT to evaluate safe pick-up and drop-off areas.

**Comment:** Walking to Murch is important to our family/good for families without cars

**Comment:** A con is that there is a slower construction timeline (by 6 mos.)

**DCPS/DGS Response:** It is our hope that the site work can be completed before students return in August 208, but having trailers on the site does limit the time work can be completed on the site.

**Comment:** Kids in one place and maintains community/Ideal for families with Deal & Wilson siblings who pick them up. There is a convenience and familiarity with being on site.

### **Programmatic & Layout Comments**

**Comment:** Is there enough PE/ play space?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Based on the latest drawings by the architects there is approximately 24,000 SF of play space on the site. Play space means both open play areas and/or structured play equipment. We are also working with NPS to add additional play space across Reno Road. We have had productive conversations with them and anticipate having more clarity around the space before the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Comment:** Has NPS been approached?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Yes, multiple meetings have been held with NPS discussing the Murch project, swing of the students on the Murch property, and potential use of the property across Reno Road. We have had productive conversations with them and anticipate having more clarity around the space before the 21<sup>st</sup>.

**Comment:** Concerned that there is not a pull-out space for ELL students.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Our goal in all of the scenarios is to ensure that the needs of all students are met. We will work with the school leadership to determine the necessary programmatic elements and spaces.

**Comment:** Good option for X-day & aftercare families

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**DCPS/DGS Response:** This option would certainly be the closest option to the X-Day program. We know that aftercare is an important element and a resource for families. We will form a working group to ensure that the needs are understood and met in the selected swing space option. We have been working with the X-Day program to think through potential solutions to ease the burden on the families.

**Comment:** Is there enough space for all trailers?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Our initial layouts and test fits show that there is enough space to fit all of the necessary trailers on the site.

**Comment:** There is an insufficient ADA plan for this option.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** ADA requirements will be met in the final design. This is true for all of the options.

### **Miscellaneous Comments**

**Comment:** Several families are in favor of this option because it is a low-cost option

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Because some of the building can be utilized, the cost of trailers would decrease, making this the cheapest option.

**Comment:** There is a concern that families would leave Murch

**DCPS/DGS Response:** For all scenarios we will do everything in our power to make sure there is a warm and welcoming environment for students. We know the Murch staff will provide a first rate educational experience no matter what the decision is.

**Comment:** Rent a nearly empty school building like the Lab school does Hardy with bussing

**DCPS/DGS Response:** DGS conducted an extensive evaluation of potential swing space locations, including potentially vacant school buildings. The options presented to the community are the feasible options.

**Comment:** Close Ellicot st for duration of project.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** This is an interesting suggestion and something we will talk to DDOT about if this is the selected option.

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## Scenario 2: Split Between Murch and Capital Memorial Church

### Safety, Security, & Disruption

**Comment:** No children should be on-site for all reasons mentioned above in scenario.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There are certainly some valid concerns about disruption during construction. The design team is working on a revised draft layout of the on-site option. The goal of this attempt would be to have the learning trailers as far away as possible from the construction zone. There is also ongoing evaluation of a “double decker” trailer, which would allow for more play space and increase the distance from the construction zone.

**Comment:** A commenter felt that this was safer than the UDC option.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Safety and security is a priority for DCPS and DGS. All plans are reviewed by the DCPS Security team and DGS works closely with the contractor to ensure there is a safe environment on the job site. The selected contractor ensures that their employees go through background checks

### Logistics and Proximity

**Comment:** There would be multiple drop-offs/pick-ups for families. This creates logistical challenges for families and staff, especially resource and specials teachers. Can the Start/end time stagger?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** This option certainly creates a logistical challenge for families and staff members. A staggered start time is a good idea and certainly something we will look into if this is the selected option.

**Comment:** Similar to the first option, there are concerns with traffic/parking/drop-offs

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There will be additional traffic on the site as a result of the construction. DGS will work closely with the builder to develop a parking plan for them and their subcontractors, but there will be vehicles that need to access the work area directly. There is an ongoing traffic evaluation at the Murch site and we will work with DDOT to evaluate safe pick-up and drop-off areas.

**Comment:** No children should be on-site for all reasons mentioned above

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There are certainly some valid concerns about disruption during construction. The design team is working on a revised draft layout of the on-site option. The goal of this attempt would be to have the learning trailers as far away as possible from the construction zone. There is also ongoing evaluation of a “double decker” trailer, which would allow for more play space and increase the distance from the construction zone.

**Comment:** Convenient for families who live in the neighborhood and some families liked the proximity to Murch.

**DCPS/DGS Comment:** Our goal is to find a location that is in close proximity to Murch to limit the disruption on families.

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## **Programmatic and Layout Comments**

**Comment:** Who has to/stays to remain on-site? How is it decided?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** If this is the selected option, we would work with the school leadership to determine the programmatic leadership and how the school would be split.

**Comment:** Where would aftercare, X-day, other activities be housed?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We know that aftercare is an important element and a resource for families. We will form a working group to ensure that the needs are understood and met in the selected swing space option. We have been working with the X-Day program to think through potential solutions to ease the burden on the families.

**Comment:** Neighborhood doesn't want to lose Forest Hills playground + it would have to be re-renovated

**DCPS/DGS Response:** If this is the selected option, we would work with DPR and the community to outline the school use of the play equipment and the site. If necessary, project funds could be used to repair damaged equipment and repair the site. Play space is at a premium in all of the scenarios, but we try to maximize the play space as much as possible for students.

**Comment:** Several commenters felt that the Forest Hills playground is a plus

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Yes, this playground is a nice feature to the site. If this is the selection option, we will work closely with DPR to outline the school use of the equipment.

**Comment:** A commenter was concerned about the lack of play space in this option.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We believe this option provides play spaces for kids of all ages. In addition to the play space at Forest Hills, there will be more than 24,000 square feet of play space on site with potentially additional space across Reno Road on the NPS property

**Comment:** Several commenters expressed concern that splitting the school would result in a loss of school-wide assemblies and cohesion

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Yes, this is a major con with this option. Splitting the school certainly has the potential to impact the cohesion and would have an impact on the full school assemblies.

**Comment:** There is a concern about potential decreased class time for students traveling (bus between sites assumption)

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Instructional time is very important to DCPS. We would limit the amount of time students get transported and the Murch staff will ensure they get the necessary amount of education time.

**Comment:** Should Murch discontinue pre-K during construction—or have it be housed at Lafayette?;

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Interesting idea, but we are committed to providing Pre-K at the school.

**Comment:** There were a few concerns about the condition of the church building:

**DCPS/DGS Response:** DGS evaluated the site and felt the building was in good shape, but if any pre-occupancy improvements are required to meet DCPS standards, they will be addressed prior to student arrival.

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**Comment:** Want to hear more feedback from church/church neighborhood

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There has been communication with the church about the use of the building. There are limitations to us using the building, including sharing the space on the weekends. If this is the selected option, those conversations would have to be advanced. If this is the selected option we will work with the community to share the plan and understand their concerns.

**Comment:** A commenter was interested in double-stacked trailers on the field at the church site to fit all of Murch as Councilmember Cheh proposed.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** This is an interesting idea and something we are doing more analysis on. In general, double-decker trailers are very expensive and require DGS/DCPS to purchase them. This option would require a number of double-decker trailers to make the entire school population fit on the field. The layout would likely take up most or all of the field, leaving limited area for play space.

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## Scenario 3: Lafayette trailers

### Safety, Security, and Disruption

**Comment:** There are concerns with the safety around drop off and pick up. There were several suggestions about staggering the times between the schools.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Safety is very important to us. There is an ongoing traffic study at the Lafayette and other sites. Bussing could be a potential way to reduce congestion from both schools. Staggering pick-up and drop-off times is another option to reduce the congestion at the site and something that DCPS will evaluate further.

**Comment:** Several commenters noted that there is more traffic at Murch than there is at Lafayette.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There are traffic studies ongoing at both sites to help inform the decision-making.

**Comment:** How will the crowding impact the classroom environment?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** While there would be a large number of students on the site, the size of the classrooms and instructional areas would be sufficient for the students. The site is large enough to fit both populations.

### Logistics and Proximity

**Comment:** This is an undesirable location and too far from Murch to walk, which creates a challenge for car-less families due to limited public transit. Is bussing an option and is that too expensive?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Bussing would be provided for families. If this is the selected option, DCPS will form a working group to help think through pick up times, the number of busses required, and other logistical challenges related to transportation. If this is the selected option a survey will be created to further understand the transportation needs.

**Comment:** Can the neighborhood streets accommodate the increase in traffic?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There is a traffic study ongoing to measure the impact on the streets and the surrounding community.

**Comment:** Has there been an infrastructure study done for done for trailers plus the new school? Can our pipes, etc., handle so many bodies?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** The design team is currently evaluating this.

**Comment:** A few commenters noted that there are families that are closer to Lafayette.

### Programmatic and Layout Comments

**Comment:** Some members noted that there is sufficient play space access.

**Comment:** Several commenters noted that there is not enough play space and there are concerns with overuse. How would recess work?

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**DCPS/DGS Response:** The majority of the play space would be limited to the equipment on the DPR site. Coordinating recess between the two schools would be a challenge, but the scheduling of that would be worked out with both the Lafayette and Murch Principals. Yes, there are concerns with overuse of the equipment and project funds would have to be used to maintain and repair the equipment, if necessary.

**Comment:** There are concerns with access to aftercare and X-day access is concerning.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We know that aftercare is an important element and a resource for families. We will form a working group to ensure that the needs are understood and met in the selected swing space option. We will continue to work closely with the X-Day provider.

**Comment:** Trailers are already constructed. It would be cost-effective to share resources between two schools.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** While there are some savings by re-using the trailers, there are still some costs associated with this scenario. The trailers at Lafayette are leased and would need to be leased again for 2 years to house the Murch students. In addition to leasing costs, there are other elements of the site that would add to the cost, including storm water retention measures.

**Comment:** There were several commenters that noted concerns about campus over-crowding-related safety issues, especially around evacuation.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** This is a very serious concern for us. Evacuation plans are currently being reviewed by the architect team and will factor into the decision-making.

**Comment:** Autistic children have an extremely difficult time with chaos +extra stimulation they will not be able to function on a campus with over 1500 people. Will you privately place all these children as IEPs cannot be met here?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We will work the school leaderships and with the DCPS Office of Special Education to see if the selected option will have a negative impact on students with an IEP.

### **Miscellaneous Comments**

**Comment:** There were a few comments and concerns over the Lafayette construction completion date. Are they on track to be completed on time?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** The Lafayette project is currently on track to be completed by August 206. If this is the selected option we will monitor the project closely and develop a fallback plan, if necessary.

**Comment:** Is there an impact study on the neighborhood?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** There is an ongoing traffic study, which will analyze the impact of additional traffic on the neighborhood.

**Comment:** How will the site's environment (trees, grasses, animals, etc.) be impacted by the congestion?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Impact to the environment would have to be part of the design proposals as part of the permitting process. The agencies that oversee this aspect of the site will be part of the review process.

**Comment:** Has there been an infrastructure study done for done for trailers plus the new school? Can our pipes, etc., handle so many bodies?



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**DCPS/DGS Response:** The design team is currently evaluating this and if there are issues it will factor into the decision-making.

**Comment:** Several commenters noted that they felt the Murch community was unwelcomed by the Lafayette community.

**Comment:** Several commenters noted that this is unfair to the Lafayette school community after a year of construction already taking place.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We are evaluating all potential options for Murch, but we will measure the impact on both school communities when making a decision.

**Comment:** A commenter noted that there would be a diluted Murch identity with this option.

**Comment:** Murch hosted Lafayette during a 1980s renovation

**Comment:** Don't take off table until UDC option is signed.

**Comment:** There were several comments and complaints about the timing of the announcement.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We apologize if the announcement felt like it came out of nowhere. The swing space review for Murch has been going on for a long time. Both DCPS and DGS were optimistic that a good solution would be found for Murch during the construction years. After an extensive search and evaluation, there were only a few potential options to house the Murch students, and none without limitation. Given that the Lafayette trailer campus is one of the only options that can house the entire Murch student population, we felt it was important to fully evaluate the scenario and hear feedback from the community.

**Comment:** The Murch renovation coincides with the renovation of the Lafayette Park field house. I cannot imagine how 1400 students on this campus, plus the renovation of the field house will be safe or beneficial for the children, who will be even more squeezed.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We are having ongoing discussions with the DPR and DGS project teams to learn more about their schedule and analyze if there would be an impact on the school functions on the site and in the park. Safety is very important to us, so this will certainly be a big part of the decision making.

**Comment:** Consider portion of Murch at Lafayette site, rather than everyone/move half back-mid-way through project

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Splitting the school in large numbers creates logistical and educational challenges. It would require a large number of the staff to go between both sites and it would require doubling the specials and "big box" spaces, like gym and cafeteria between the sites. The proposal in scenario 2 is a limited split with two grades.

**Comment:** Have you looked at field on Fessenden Right above Reno (in Fort Reno / Deal) – either alone or as an addition to Murch Site?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** It was looked at, but this is federal land and the uses are extremely restricted.

**Comment:** We want to see the rubric. Just listing factors is not enough. When will they weight factors? Isn't that a way to rig the system to get the answer DGS wants?

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**DCPS/DGS Response:** For each of the scenarios we are evaluating all of the positive and negative aspects of them. We are also working hard to find solutions to as many of the identified negative elements of the options. This is a very complex decision, but we are not comfortable assigning arbitrary numeric values, especially for qualitative factors. When the decision is made we will make it very clear and outline the factors that led to the decision.

**Comment:** There will be additional noise for surrounding neighbors. Are you taking that into account and also taking into account the other city projects that have taken place recently (Lafayette Rec Center, River Smart)

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We want to be good neighbors and understand that the Lafayette community has gone through a number of projects over the past few years. The impact on the community is certainly something we are considering as we evaluate the options.

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## Scenario 4: UDC Trailers

### Safety, Security, and Disruption

**Comment:** A number of commenters shared concern about proximity to college students/wants physical barrier

**DCPS/DGS Response:** If this is the selected option, we will install a security fence around the perimeter of the trailer campus. The plan will be reviewed by the DCPS Security team and will include security cameras throughout the trailer campus.

**Comment:** Has the State department been contacted and are there security concerns with the Embassy's?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Our main point of contact has been with UDC and they agreed to put us in contact with the State Department to review the plans. There are several security elements in place to ensure this is a safe option.

**Comment:** A few commenters shared that they were happy it's away from construction.

**Comment:** Several commenters noted that they are happy the school stays together

### Logistics and Proximity

**Comment:** A few commenters noted that they want students bussed from current Murch site

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Bussing could be provided for families. If this is the selected option, DCPS will form a working group to help think through pick up times, the number of busses required, and other logistical challenges related to transportation. If this is the selected option a survey will be created to further understand the transportation needs

**Comment:** There is uncertainty and concern about teacher parking

**DCPS/DGS Response:** DCPS and DGS are still working closely with UDC and parking is part of the ongoing discussions.

**Comment:** A few commenters shared that they were pleased with the proximity to Metro.

**Comment:** A few commenters note that it would be convenient for Embassy staff's children.

**Comment:** One commenter noted that they were displeased w/distance from Murch.

### Programmatic and Layout Comments

**Comment:** Is there a common area/meeting space?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Yes, we will ensure that there is a large "big box" space for gym, dining, and meeting.

**Comment:** There are concerns about the uncertainty around the play spaces at UDC

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**DCPS/DGS Response:** DCPS and DGS are still working closely with UDC and play space is part of the ongoing discussions.

**Comment:** There are concerns that there are insufficient facilities resources for the students.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Our goal is to provide all of the necessary spaces for Murch staff to meet the needs of all the students. We are confident that we can fit an appropriate amount of trailers on the site.

**Comment:** Keep ELL pullout in mind.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Our goal in all of the scenarios is to ensure that the needs of all students are met. We will work with the school leadership to determine the necessary programmatic elements and spaces

**Comment:** Commenters were concerned about the aftercare/after school activities

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We know that aftercare is an important element and a resource for families. We will form a working group to ensure that the needs are understood and met in the selected swing space option.

### **Miscellaneous Comments**

**Comment:** A commenter noted that this is better for construction timeline.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** In general, the builders prefer to have an open site for them to do their work. Having it co-occupied with students limits areas of the building that can be worked on it.

**Comments:** One commenter noted that they are concerned that this is the most expensive option. Other commenters noted that it is worth the higher cost.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Yes, this is the most expensive option, but we are committed to doing what is best for the students and staff at Murch.

**Comment:** If UDC option is selected (\$6M) how will that impact the building quality choices? Will the design still be the same since swing costs are taken from building budget?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** The swing space work does come out of the project. Our goal is to deliver a high quality building no matter what the selected option is. A builder has just been hired and they will begin working with the subcontractor market and preparing cost estimates for the entire project.

**Comment:** It is impossible to evaluate the UDC option because there are no specifics or answers yet about space, security, traffic, or parking. It may be the best but we need more information

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We understand that there are a number of unanswered questions related to this scenario. We are working as fast as we can with UDC to get all of these questions addressed.

**Comment:** A few commenters noted that there would be no impact on Lafayette with this option.

**Comment:** This would be well-timed w/ great streets grants.

**Comment:** This option would give 2 years of stability for the school

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## Miscellaneous Comments

**Comment:** These are four flawed options and the decision timeline is short. Can the decision deadline date be extended and more options evaluated?"

**DCPS/DGS Response:** While there are some potential limitations on the options, we believe we have presented the more feasible scenarios. We need to make a decision in the very near future because the selected option will have to through design and the necessary regulatory process, which will take several months.

**Comment:** I would like to suggest that you have a conversation with the students (maybe the student council) for suggestions and ideas

**DCPS/DGS Response:** Interesting idea! We will pass this on to the school leadership to see if they'd like to have this conversation with the student council.

**Comment:** Please consider all operating budget solutions to the issues you identify as cons.

**DCPS/DGS Response:** We are evaluating all avenues, including operating budgets, to address as many of the cons as we can.

**Comment:** What is DCPS' policy on disposing of former school site? How did we get into a situation in which we have no swing school available in Ward 3/NWDC?

**DCPS/DGS Response:** The Deputy Mayor for Education (DME) manages the RFO process, which deals with surplus buildings in the District. Since we have started the school modernization program, there have not been any closed schools in close proximity to Murch ES.