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Final Thoughts: Part 2

EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATION

Ideas to Transform Education in Richmond

Here is my top 5 countdown list for ideas to transform education in Richmond:

1. Get real community schools.

In the fall of 2015, before Richmond Forward, I posted my research and thoughts on a lonely blog. My most read post presented research about best practices from community school and new school facilities investment in Cincinnati, Chicago, New York City, Orlando, and Tulsa. If you read nothing else, please check out this 20-year Memorandum of Understanding between Orlando Schools and Children's Home Society, and someone - please - call Darlene Kamine and bring her to Richmond to speak. Her work in Cincinnati is my favorite best practice for how to use community engagement to inform design and partnerships of new school investment.

We may call our facilities "community schools" in Richmond, but we have none that meet the basic definition of the National Center for Community Schools (NCCS). By the way, be sure to sign up for NCCS newsletters for legit information.

In a best-case scenario, we could have a commitment to establishing community schools that would inform the development of partnerships and school design BEFORE facilities dollars are allocated. It seems like the timeline for the first $150M of new construction may negate this from being in place, but we definitely need it going forward.

2. Leverage our small geography.

As seen in this utilization analysis, where kids live and attend school (Elementary, Middle, and High) is a complete mix. We are sending students all around the city.

Let us take advantage of this reality and make all schools open enrollment to increase school choice and balance utilization. I would love to see a K-8 model piloted in Richmond and have every primary school set up as a community school with long-standing partnerships located on the campus to provide wrap-around services to children, parents, and the community. In talking

with education researcher [Dr. Genevieve Siegel-Hawley](), research shows that student achievement is not driven by where students get on the bus, but by where they get off.

In this future, we would hopefully avoid the political stagnation around rezoning. For example, the inability to rezone Broad Rock Elementary to address severe overcrowding has led to millions of dollars being wasted on outdoor classrooms. 8th district School Board representatives Derik Jones and Dawn Page have both received instruction from school administration that this could be easily solved through rezoning to nearby schools, yet they (and the School Board) have chosen inaction.

Another example would be to address the enrollment discrepancies between overenrolled Mumford and Fox, and nearby under-enrolled Cary and Carver. Even better, if we were to set goals for increased racial and economic integration, we could make this a test case for equitable action throughout the city.

North of the river, our high schools, and specialty facilities are incredibly [underutilized]()(building space vs. student enrollment). Let us take advantage of these extra seats by teaming with regional workforce leaders to "adopt a school" and program it as a specialized learning center (e.g. Armstrong School of Business by Genworth Financial, Wythe School of Science by Altria, Open High School for the Arts by VCU, and the Marhsall School of Technology by Amazon). To gain county support for funneling investment into city schools, we should open a certain number of seats to students throughout the region. Use our open seats and overly built facilities (at least at first) to incentivize regional integration.

3. Build relational networks.

As a policy and planning nerd, I think a lot about systems. But, as a historian, I cannot deny the impact of individual relationships. "Each one reach one, each one teach one" is a personal favorite from the civil rights movement. Used by black leaders during Jim Crow, this practice developed the groundwork organization that spurred the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 60s.

As a person of faith, I would love to see groups like [BlessRVA]()or the [Micah Initiative]()organize this effort as a call to match each Richmond student with a mentor. This could have a transformative impact not only on the individuals but could bring systemic change.

4. "Easy" policy wins based off best practices literally everyone else is doing.

My thoughts on Richmond's self-inflicted exclusiveness were explained in the [last post](). To combat this stagnation, I have to believe that we need to keep pointing at best practice solutions that many of our Virginia neighbors are doing today. Here's my list:

- [Roanoke's 40% solution]() to dedicated school funding which would solve our annual political budget showdown and force the School Board to factor debt payments into their allocated funding
- [Norfolk Public Schools decade-long history]()with public-private partnerships (PPEAs) constructing new school facilities.
- Join literally EVERY OTHER CITY IN VIRGINIA with a [cigarette tax]().

- Payment in Lieu of Taxes (PILOT) agreement from major schools, hospitals, and cultural institutions. Entities who are tax exempt, like non-profit hospitals, colleges, or state government, make a voluntary contribution in the form of cash and community programs that uniquely benefit the City's residents (e.g. Boston). Using GIS to analyze property tax data from last year, my results show the following total assessed property values: $2,296,312,000 for university (VCU, MCV, UR, and VUU) and $781,689,000 for the state (Commonwealth of Virginia).