

Time to break out of the herd

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When Adrian Fenty swept the mayoral primary last month, the *Washington Post* reported that on election night three business people raced from Cropp's campaign headquarters to Fenty's victory party, eager to shake hands with the presumptive mayor and start applying pressure. But it wasn't the business community that handed Fenty a resounding victory. It was the people of Washington D.C.-disgusted with the Williams' administration's pandering to major league baseball, real estate developers, and affluent newcomers-who voted for Fenty in hopes of getting a mayor who would break away from the herd of monied interests. Adrian Fenty represented the vast majority of D.C. residents in opposing public funding for the baseball stadium, and this summer he was the only council member who voted against the so-called "Emergency Crime Bill," calling it a knee-jerk reaction. He was a standout among council members like Jim Graham, Kathy Patterson and Phil Mendleson who headlined "putting more cops on the street" on their campaign literature.

The crime bill was the last touch of a mayor who neglected the youth of this city at every turn and was trying to clean up by sweeping them under the rug; the last act of a mayor leaving a divided city with a tattered school system. It is obvious to any person of conscience that the outgoing mayor did not have any deliberate educational policy and did not need it as his vision of D.C. centered on a mostly childless and wealthy population that did not require that kind of public infrastructure. Over the last eight years, as Williams and the business community realized their vision, we have seen the ethnic cleansing of significant portions of poor and working class Blacks of this city.

Voters in every ward and every precinct are now watching Mr. Fenty closely to see if his sweeping primary victory will fortify his courage-or will merely open him up to the

pressures of those very forces who worked against him during the campaign season. The grassroots voters are expecting Mayor Fenty to show the same kind of sobriety, bravery and deliberation he exhibited in his lone vote against a reactionary crime policy when he approaches our education system-which he says is the No. 1 priority.

I have read Mr. Fenty's education plan and it offers nothing new and in fact it sounds like Williams redux. Just like Williams, he wants to take over the school system and eliminate a democratically-elected school board. Just like Williams he is falling back on a mantra of choice in his support for underperforming charter schools. Charter schools and vouchers, which were imposed on D.C. by a Republican Congress, became the default position of the outgoing mayor when he realized that shoring up the traditional public schools was not necessary in the implementation of his program of gentrification and displacement. Faced with a sinking ship, the mayor decided to market life boats.

And now the life boats are sinking as well. Superintendent Janey got it right when he recently called for a city-wide moratorium on new charter schools.

The failure of charter schools and the danger they pose to our children's right to a quality public education has been recognized by the {New York Times}. On May 10 its lead editorial urged local and national officials to rein in charters and on Aug. 27 another noted that charter schools operating outside of school systems (as is the case with all the D.C. charters established by the Public Charter School Board) are the most egregious in their failure to monitor teacher quality and improve student achievement.

In light of these developments, I would urge Fenty to be deliberate in his educational policy by not supporting two contradictory programs and to focus on shoring up our traditional public school system. The \$3 billion school modernization bill, which he initiated, shouldn't become a slush fund for the philanthropically-minded venture capitalists and the outright profiteers who continue to support charter school expansion.

The Save Our Schools Coalition expects Mr. Fenty to support a city-wide moratorium on new and expansion charter schools. We agree with Mr. Fenty that our school system must be more accountable. But this does not mean running the schools like a business and relying on a corporate model.

Fenty has held up the New York City schools as an exemplar, both in terms of governance and support for corporate-backed small schools and charters. This is out of step with the latest news. The *New York Times* has recognized the marketing and cult of personality surrounding Klein and Bloomberg for what it is-great salesmanship that has produced, at best, mixed educational results and has undermined public accountability and democratic input. We all see what is happening around the nation and we know that, in this economic environment, charters and vouchers have become Trojan horses for the privatization of our public education system.

Superintendent Janey recently called this new school year a time of reclamation for DCPS, which has been fortified by the release of promising and ambitious modernization and educational plans for our schools. We hope Fenty stands by him in this project and supports the aspirations of the parents, teachers, trade unionists and community activists striving in the most scientific and sober sense to reclaim the public school system that once served this city well.

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