



February 20, 2014

Re: Delay in the Construction of the New Special Education Center located at River Terrace Elementary

Dear Mamie D. Lee & Sharpe Health Families,

During the fall of 2012, DC Public Schools began meeting with DCPS families and the community to develop a state of the art special education facility at the former River Terrace Elementary School site.

We have recently learned that the initial archeological study associated with this project (standard for construction projects of this size and scale) has uncovered historically significant artifacts on the grounds of the site, which is located adjacent to the Anacostia River. The archeologists working on the project believe these items are from Native American settlements. This discovery will cause a delay in the construction schedule previously developed by District of Columbia Department General Services (DGS). It will delay the opening of the new special education facility for one year. The new building will open in the August 2015.

The goal for creating the new school is to create an improved educational environment for our students with multiple diagnoses – including intellectual disabilities, visual or hearing impairment, and autism. An important part of the new school plan includes the consolidation of Sharpe Health and Mamie D. Lee School into one school at the new River Terrace location. All along, DC Public Schools has worked with DGS, DCPS families and the River Terrace community to make this possible.

Despite the delay, the new academic programs will be started next school year. Next year, there will be one school with a single Principal. Both Sharpe and Mamie D Lee will remain open and students will stay in their current school building until the new building is open. We are committed to building one school culture, with one faculty, and one leader that we trust will be able to make academic progress, and gain momentum in the year leading up to the opening of the new facility. This will require some staff transition at both schools, the DCPS Office of Specialized Instruction and the Office of Family and Public Engagement are working hard to make sure that our students and families are supported throughout this process.

I know that each of you will have questions about how this will directly impact your child's education and the staff working with your child. In response, the Office of Specialized Instruction will be providing additional information on these topics over the coming weeks, and we will work with each of your principals to identify an appropriate time and location for parent update meetings. As always, we are committed to delivering the best possible results for our students and families.

Sincerely,

Nathaniel Beers
Chief of Specialized Instruction
DC Public Schools