

Good evening ladies and gentlemen of the board.

For the record, my name is William D. Alexander, III. I am a 2000 graduate of The School Without Walls and subsequently earned a B.S. in mechanical engineering in 2004 and an M.B.A. with a concentration in small business and entrepreneurship in 2006, both from The George Washington University. While in high school I served during my senior year as a member of the Local School Restructuring Team (LSRT) where the matters of needed repairs and potential partnerships were frequently agenda items; at GW, as both a Trachtenberg Scholar and, later, Presidential Administrative Fellow, I had the opportunity to again encounter and voice my concerns over the fate of my alma mater.

Although I've lived in DC all of my life, I only first came to Foggy Bottom in 1996 for my freshman year of high school. Much has changed in the 10 years that have elapsed since then, some for the better some for the worse. And regrettably, as time has passed, the condition of my beloved high school has been allowed to worsen. (That statement is not a criticism of the building staff who worked tirelessly to keep boilers running in the winters and fans in place during the summer with little in the way of funding or support from the city.) My stance regarding a potential partnership between DCPS/ SWW and GW has changed; I am not one who waivers or is easily influenced by others. Over the years I have argued that the physical condition of the facilities was merely cosmetic and the substantial import of the wealth and merit of School Without Walls lied in adherence to the mission upon which the school was initially founded: a mission of truly utilizing the city as a resource. Our program was never designed with the intent of crowding 300+ students within a single building ill-equipped to foster their educational needs. When I was a student there, although our beginnings were modest, we felt inspired to achieve more in spite of what we may have lacked in the ways of facilities...competitive sports teams in spite of lacking training facilities...competitive academic teams in spite of a humble library and limited computer access. We were accustomed to doing more with less.

I sat down to write this today and I came to the realization that the fate of SWW mirrors the fate of the city upon which it relies. I was here during the years of fiscal mismanagement and I was here during the various plans and directives that seemed to have been drafted by people completely removed from the situations they were tasked to solve. And with each failure, the names and faces changed and moved along, but it was the children who were here stuck, the teachers left unsupported on the front lines, and the facilities across the city languishing in embarrassing states of disrepair.

So you can probably gather that I was initially opposed to what I and my contemporaries viewed as yet another profit-motivated scheme to capitalize on our real estate at the expense of our well-being. I felt that way even for some time while at GW, attending classes and living in their dorms on their tab. And then last year I went in to Walls to use the bathroom. I wasn't living in the dormitories anymore; my apartment was a ways away and Walls had always felt like home to me; so I went in. But this wasn't my home. No one's home should have leaking pipes. No one's bathroom should be without

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stall doors or have inadequate plumbing. And then I wondered what students morale must be like when they have to come into a bathroom like this. What do you do when you are unable to meet even basic needs of comfort? And at that point I no longer knew what I was fighting for.

I see my city changing. No one can deny the changing tide of gentrification, completely altering the faces of neighborhoods I once knew. A change was needed; I'll give you that, and despite my misgivings of how the change was achieved, they were changes that the city seemed incapable of generating on its own. I saw what public-private partnerships did for McKinley Tech. I was there for the ribbon cutting and I wished for the same for my school. I've since met graduates of the old McKinley tech who are proud to see their school reborn. And maybe they'll never again be able to walk down a familiar corridor and find the locker they had freshman year, but the name and the legacy is still there. And I want that for School Without Walls. And I see GW being able to provide the means and the funding that someone will hopefully actually apply to bettering the situation.

I've seen the proposals; I've read the bullet points. Pardon the cliché, but I believe that GW is willing to put their money where there mouth is, at a time when others have only been paying lip service. I've changed my mind, quite simply because a change is long overdue.