

Community Committee on Neighborhoods and Schools Summary of Meeting June 26, 2007
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Member Attendance:

Andy Anderson	Present
Sally Brackett	Present
Terry Clark	Present
Christiane Woodley Erwin	<i>Absent</i>
Chiquita Watt Eugene	<i>Absent</i>
Lourdes (Lulu) Flores	Present
Linda Gibeaut	<i>Absent</i>
Rev. Sterling Lands	<i>Absent</i>
José Marrero	Present
Rachael Proctor May	<i>Absent</i>
Susan Moffat	Present
Leroy Nellis	Present
Yolanda Pedraza	<i>Absent</i>
Rev. Ivie Rich	Present
Paul Saldaña	<i>Absent</i>
Alfredo Santos	Present
Kathie Tovo	Present
Jim Walker	Present

Others in Attendance:

Joey Crumley, AISD Planning & Community Relations
 Heather Dalrymple, AISD Planning & Community Relations
 Dr. Zoe Griffith, AISD Student Services/Records
 Dr. Janis Guerrero, AISD Planning & Community Relations
 Dr. Maria Whitsett, AISD Accountability

Proceedings:

- The meeting was called to order at 5:50 p.m. in Conference Room A-230 of the AISD Carruth Administration Center.
- There were no citizen communications.
- Andy Anderson opened the meeting by reviewing the Committee's charge. Discussion points included:
 - Clarifying that the Committee will focus on making broad-based policy recommendations rather than addressing issues unique to any particular campus.
 - The Committee will look at reports from other committees that may have addressed similar topics to see if they contain information useful to this committee's work.
 - Need to look at best practices and alternatives as well as developing processes.
- Dr. Maria Whitsett with AISD's Accountability Department presented information on the state and federal accountability systems. Highlights of the presentation included:

State Accountability System

- ☞ Previously, if students dropped out, returned to school, and dropped out again, they were only counted once in the dropout statistics. Under the new methodology, those same students would be counted both times.
- ☞ Schools that fail to meet standards face sanctions. Some of the sanctions being used were already in place but are now seen earlier in the process as standards have become more rigorous. The district has an increasingly intensive framework of supports in place to assist schools struggling to meet the standards.
- ☞ Technical Assistance Teams (TATs) were created to assist schools at risk of not meeting standards in the future. TATs ensure that activities targeting areas of academic need are being implemented. The district employees that make up the TAT are either from central office or are instructional specialists, not campus staff.
- ☞ At *Year 1 Academically Unacceptable (AU)*, a Campus Intervention Team (CIT), with 50% external membership, has to be established.
- ☞ The School Leadership Pilot, funded by TEA and AISD, pays travel expenses for principals at *Year 1 AU* schools to attend training on school management.
- ☞ Under the *Year 2 AU* Reconstitution Plan, the state wants to retain core teachers whose classroom achievement levels have shown improvement. This allows reconstitution efforts to be focused on specific departments instead of implemented school-wide. Principals may also be removed at this point if they have been at the school for the entire two-year period.
- ☞ Factors outside of a principal's control may prevent adequate improvement in school achievement from occurring within the two-year timeframe. At *Year 3 AU*, a required hearing with the TEA Commissioner serves as a safety net for principals whose schools have failed to meet standards. This hearing allows for a discussion of methods that have been tried to raise scores and an evaluation of contextual information that might have resulted in a failure to meet standards.
- ☞ At *Year 4 AU*, the Commissioner may order closure or allow the school to pursue an alternative management entity. At *Year 5 AU*, the school must close or pursue alternative management.

Federal Accountability System (NCLB)

- ☞ At *Stage 1, Needs Improvement*, parents are offered the choice to transfer to other district schools that are not in improvement status.
- ☞ Title I Campuses enter *Stage 1, Needs Improvement* if they miss standards in the same subject for two years in a row.
- ☞ Title I is a federal pass-through program where supplemental dollars are used to target concentrated areas of economic need. It can take the form of either targeted assistance to individual students with recognized economic and academic needs or school-wide assistance where all students in the school are allowed to participate. These funds do not transfer with students if they change schools.
- ☞ AISD, which uses the school-wide assistance format, has 68 Title I schools. These are mostly at the elementary level.
- ☞ At *Stage 2*, schools must make Supplemental Educational Services (SES), which are free tutoring services provided outside of the school day, available to students participating in the free or reduced lunch program.

- ☞ Schools must develop a corrective action plan *at Stage 3* and a restructuring plan at *Stage 4*. At *Stage 5*, schools must implement the restructuring plan.
- Discussion points emerging from this presentation included:
 - Because principals provide stability to schools, preventing turnover is important. Two years in the position is not enough time for principals to become familiar with parents and establish good working relationships with them.
 - The focus cannot be just on having good principals. Because strong relationships are vital to the success of any school, dedicated teachers are necessary. Student behavior issues also have to be addressed. Disruptive students can prevent other students from learning.
 - In some districts, if adequate district-wide improvement is not seen, the superintendent is replaced more frequently than is the case with AISD.
 - The committee wanted clarification as to whether the process it develops should be geared to the federal or the state standard.
 - As much as academic concerns, the real issue is a breakdown in communication. Any process developed by the committee must address this component.
 - Because standards are becoming progressively more stringent, the community needs to be engaged at the first warning sign of difficulty in meeting standards rather than waiting until *Year 3* or *Year 4* to address problems.
 - The Superintendent is making efforts to reach out to the community earlier by making parents aware of school ratings by Back to School Night in September.
 - Community members and the faith community need to be included along with parents of school-age children. The time a student spends in any given school is relatively brief while school quality issues can impact neighborhood pride and property values.
 - Having the School Leadership training occur during the school year instead of over the summer may take principals out of schools during a time when their presence is needed.
 - That the prison system uses second-grade reading scores as a way to project future jail bed need suggests that academic deficiencies need to be resolved at the earliest possible level. The longer students struggle academically, the more difficult it becomes to keep them engaged in school.
 - Parents with limited English proficiency need to be provided with adequate information to allow them to understand the issues facing schools. They need leadership training to empower them to effect change in the schools. The district needs to remove barriers to participation by providing childcare at community meetings.
 - The district understands the need for parental involvement and community engagement. The real challenge lies in turning that knowledge into on-going community-wide participation involving a wide spectrum of participants.
- The focus of the meeting then shifted to the upcoming community involvement process. Discussion points included:
 - As committee members prepare to meet with their networks, they should keep the following suggested guiding questions in mind:
 1. What process should the district use to identify and consider alternatives for underutilized and overcrowded schools?
 2. What process should the district follow to inform and engage the community and stakeholders when a school fails to meet state or federal accountability requirements?

3. What can the district and community do together to ensure ongoing stakeholder engagement and participation?
4. Who are your community partners? Who can support you?
 - Developing a unified set of questions will allow committee members to elicit similar types of information from community members. A request was made to include a question related to best practices, according to the committee charter. The questions will be finalized by the August 14, 2007, meeting.
 - Input will be gathered from the community at multiple points through the Committee's process. To keep the task of gathering community input at a manageable size, the suggestion was made to break the district into sections and give each Committee member responsibility for a given section.
- Committee members requested data on AISD's principal turnover rate and information on how individual schools are utilizing their Title I funds. The Title I information can be found in the CIP at each campus.
- The committee requested information on guidelines currently used by the district to communicate with parents as schools enter various levels of sanctions.
- Before the next meeting on August 14, 2007, which focuses on planning for gathering community input, committee members should have begun thinking about which community groups they will engage. Staff will put together a collection of resources for the group to use.
- The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 p.m.