

DISTRICT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
October 22, 2009

Members Present: Teresa Arrambide, Johnnie Mae Carter, Tony D'angelo, Roseline Emeghebo, Nimfa Gallardo, Reba Goodman, Mary Hacopian, Sydne James, Roslyne Kennedy-Taylor, Carolyn Love, Danette Maldonado, Dayna Michels, Ron Parnell, James Roland, Wanda Thomas, Debbie Wright, John Haro, Mark Smith, and Sylvia Valverde.

Mark Smith began the meeting at 3:30 p.m. and had the members introduce themselves. He then told the members that he wants the meetings to be meaningful and informative and welcomes the parents and community members to attend so that they can be involved.

Parent-Student Connect

1. The district wants to refine it and make it more user-friendly.
2. There are over 25,000 registered users. Over a third of them are students.

Mark demonstrated the use of the system to show the committee what parents see. He reminded the group that teachers have to login to GradeSpeed to see notes from parents.

Augmentations for next year:

1. Registration piece created by HISD in English will now have directions in Spanish;
2. Spanish language features will be coming soon for parents and students to use;
3. There will be a standard Montessori report card;
4. For schools that create their own report cards, there will be a template designed so that they can put in their matrix;
5. Modifications for Special Education; and
6. The assignment page will be made more attractive.

The system has had a few glitches but they've been corrected. If a student doesn't have a Social Security number, parents must go to the school to get a student number. This is done for security reasons.

Question: Have changes been made in HISD grading?

Yes, to comply with state law, not because of GradeSpeed. HISD does not have a policy on a maximum grade for make-up work. Some schools have created their own policies such as averaging grades, nothing higher than an 80, or to give the higher grade. Schools have flexibility on what they want to do but they must get consensus from their staff and SDMC.

Question: Why can't attendance be taken at homeroom or advocacy?

Chancery and schedules have to work together.

Regional Superintendents have asked to have attendance changed from unexcused to excused because it creates a lot of work for the clerks. This will allow schools to notify parents about sending notes for absences and also lets high schools find "skippers."

Question: Do Ancillary teachers have the ability to put in grades?

Yes, they can put in mass amounts of grades. They are teachers of record so they need to be able to put grades in.

Question: Is there a district policy on the number of grades per week?

No. Each school can create their own policy.

Danette Maldonado, principal of Wharton ES, told the committee how she has implemented a plan at her school to help parents with GradeSpeed.

2010-2011 Academic Calendar

Mark passed out copies of the current school calendar and a draft copy of next year's calendar. The current calendar has 175 school days – 80 school days in the fall and 95 in the spring. There are more days in the spring semester to allow for test days. The fall semester ends before Winter Break to be aligned with universities since many of our high schools give dual credit.

Mark noted that on the 2010-2011 calendar, the days marked in red in August (9-20) are for staff development. There are three waiver days in December (20-22), one in February (21) and one in April (22). This calendar has 176 days because a day in the fall semester needs to be designated as a holiday. Some have suggested September 9, 2010, for Yom Kippur or November 29, 2010, the Monday after Thanksgiving.

The calendar committee is composed of members from religious affiliations, consultation groups, parents, staff members from the testing department and other district personnel.

Comprehensive Review of Special Education

Mark reviewed the Request for Proposal (RFP) that was developed for the comprehensive review of the Special Education Department. It has gone through the RFP process and there is a 30-day notice for proposals. The Procurement Department advertises and makes sure the RFP process is followed. The best bid will be taken. The scope of the work to be done is on the handout:

The following suggestions were mentioned to be added to the Scope of Work:

1. Add counselors. Special Education has counseling as a related service, therefore counselors are needed.
2. IAT Referral Process – need experts in the referral process.

High School Credit Recovery Centers

Mark gave each member a copy of the work plan developed by Dr. Grier to create credit recovery centers at the high school level. It is anticipated that these research-based centers will be fully operational by January 2010. Graduation coaches will seek students that are failing and will work with them so that they will graduate. There will be a pool of applicants and the principals will choose a graduation coach from this group.

These centers will operate based on findings from trips recommended by Dr. Grier. They may be held after school, on Saturdays, or evenings. There are 23 comprehensive high schools but 58 high school programs in total. Some high schools, such as HSPVA, DeBakey, etc. won't need a graduation coach or a center.

Another work plan is being developed to focus on over-age students.

There are plans to address the attendance rate of LEP students by talking to their parents about sending their children to school. It has been documented that by the fifth grade, many LEP students have missed one full year of school.

Dr. Grier is bringing new ideas for elementary schools and over-age students because he believes we cannot waste time when dealing with the lives of students.

Mark told the group that the grading policy will be discussed at next month's meeting.

The next meeting will be held on Thursday, November 19, 2009, in room 3C10, at 3:30 p.m. There will also be a meeting on December 17, 2009, at 3:30 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 5:10 p.m.

COMMENTS FROM THE AGENDA

Parent Student Connect

- ESL teachers at the elementary level have as many as eight screens to open and close to enter grades or assignments. Could there be a way to override this, at least for grading purposes? Lifeskills students are graded on their IEPs, not on assignments. Could we type actual IEPs in?

2010 – 2011 Academic Calendar

- Columbus Day in October.
- I think Columbus Day would be a good day to take off since so many businesses often close and our families won't have to find daycare.
- Either a day off in October or add the Monday after Thanksgiving.
- November 29th for travel time.
- I would say take off Columbus Day this year. It is a long stretch from Labor Day to Thanksgiving. We had many daycares that were closed, leaving parents without after-school care this year.
- November 29th or any day in October.
- October – Winter Holiday.

Comprehensive Review of Special Education

- General education supports prior to Special Ed. referral
- IAT
- Pre-IAT
- Please look at staff-to-student ratios across the district. The West Region is busting at the seams---10, 11, 12 kids in some classes. We are closing schools and enrollment is down in other parts of the district. Why isn't that staff moved? To better meet the needs of the students, where are they now?
- Paperwork was completed last year but the student was not tested. Now we have to start over again. The student needs service.

High School Credit Recovery Centers

- For special education students, what supports are in place to assist with academic work?
- Start the same procedures in elementary and middle schools for students who are one to two years behind. Making all summer schools pro-active (moving forward) rather than playing catch-up.
- Really excited about this!
- Failing students in elementary (K/1st grade) should not happen!
- Great!

Grading Requirements

- Teachers not following students' modifications/accommodations