



Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee
Meeting Minutes

April 29, 8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.

Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center

Abelardo Saavedra, Ph.D., Superintendent of Schools

The purpose of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) is to support public-engagement outreach for the district's efforts in providing high-quality education, communicate critically important information, and gain valuable input from key community members.

IN ATTENDANCE

Burt Ballanfant
Ann Blackwood
Martin Cominsky
Dale Davidson
Mary Scott Hagle

Arva Howard
Joyce Jacquet
Judy Long
Sandie Meyers
Carmen Nuncio

Laura Richardson
Rev. Leslie Smith
Melva Thornton
Maggie Utter Solomon
Lillian Villarreal (designee)
Janice Walker

INTRODUCTION

Members of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) were welcomed to the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center. Senior staff members in attendance were West Region Superintendent Barbra Thornhill, Deputy Superintendent for Human Talent Ann Best, Assistant Superintendent of Communications and Publications Lee Vela, General Manager of Academic Services Mark Smith, and Director to the Chief of Staff Susan Kaler. Chief Academic Officer Karen Garza was briefly in attendance before being called away. Dr. Saavedra and Chief of Staff Michele Pola sent their regrets as they were unable to attend the meeting.

DISCUSSION

Susan Kaler began the meeting by reviewing the meeting agenda, which included three primary topics: 1. proposed use of federal stimulus funds, 2. proposed modifications to HISD's grading and promotion standards, and 3. search for the next superintendent of schools. Beginning with a discussion of the proposed uses of the federal stimulus funds, Mark Smith indicated that HISD expects to receive approximately \$85 million in federal stimulus funds to be made available over a 27-month period through Title I and IDEA programs. In response to a question regarding federal guidelines governing the distribution of stimulus funds, Mr. Smith stressed that the dollars will follow the students and will be used for educational programming.

Dr. Garza then briefly joined the discussion and provided an overview of the proposals regarding use of stimulus funds and modifications to HISD's grading and promotion standards. With regard to stimulus funds, Dr. Garza echoed Mr. Smith's earlier comments and elaborated by saying that HISD is fortunate compared to other districts in the sense that it is not necessary to use these dollars to fund district jobs, but will instead use stimulus funds to enhance education programs. With regard to proposed changes to grading and promotion standards, Dr. Garza shared that HISD does not currently have a districtwide policy on grading and promotion standards and that establishment of such is necessary in order to ensure districtwide grading uniformity and to address potential inequities in grading systems among teachers. In response to a question regarding what such a policy might require, Dr. Garza stated that the purpose of such a policy would be to standardize student-performance metrics such as the number of graded assignments or class exams per reporting period as well as the weights given to those metrics in determining students' course grades. In response to another question regarding provisions within this proposed policy for professional judgment by principals and/or teachers,

Dr. Garza indicated that conditions will be created within the policy for teachers and principals to react to grading abnormalities. At this point, Dr. Garza returned facilitation of the discussion to Mr. Smith and apologetically excused herself from the meeting. The remaining discussion regarding proposed use of stimulus funds took the format of a question-and-answer session. Below are the questions posed and the answers provided.

Q: Is Title I identification made at the student or school level?

A: Both students and schools are identified for eligibility to receive Title I support. Student identification is concurrent with qualification for free/reduced-price meals. School identification is made on the basis of the percentage of enrolled students who qualify for free/reduced-price meals. Specifically, Title I schools are identified as such when 35 percent of the school's enrolled student population is eligible for free/reduced-price meals. As a point of note, all but eight schools within HISD are identified as Title I schools.

Q: What is the per-pupil allocation of the estimated \$85 million in expected stimulus funds? Does this allocation vary by grade level?

A: This information has not yet been determined. Because the Texas Education Agency (TEA) serves as the fiscal agent for funds that flow to Texas schools from the federal government (including Title I funds), information regarding specific allocations is contingent upon TEA's decisions regarding disbursement to its school districts. Further complicating this issue is the fact that HISD in turn serves as the fiscal agent for Title I private schools located within HISD's attendance boundaries. This means that when HISD receives its federal stimulus funds from TEA, a portion of those funds will be allocated to the Title I private schools within HISD's attendance boundaries. The remainder will then be allocated on a per-pupil basis according to Title I funding formulas. Although the allocation of Title I funds may vary by school level (elementary, middle, high), there is consistency in the allocation within each level. This means that all elementary schools receive the same Title I allocations, as do all middle schools and all high schools.

Q: What input has been sought from teachers, parents, students, and community members regarding the proposed use of stimulus funds?

A: Principal input has been sought and was used to develop the proposed use of stimulus funds. This proposal will in turn be used to provide other stakeholder groups with information to which they may react and offer suggestions. Examples of principals' campus-based proposals include ideas such as extended instructional time, specialized summer programming, expanded provisions for social and emotional support, enhanced elementary literacy programs, and flexible school-day options through expanded online/virtual school offerings. Proposals for districtwide options focus on professional development and include Neuhaus literacy training for all kindergarten through third-grade teachers and expanded training for all secondary-level math and science teachers. **A general meeting for all stakeholders will be held in the board auditorium at the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center (4400 W. 18th Street) beginning at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, May 5, 2009**, at which time the stimulus proposal will be presented and feedback will be sought from attendees.

Mr. Smith next turned the discussion to the issue of proposed changes to the district's grading and promotion standards. The group offered several suggestions, including an expanded comparison of HISD's standards beyond other public schools in Texas to include comparisons

to nationally recognized schools of excellence. Members stressed the importance of clear, concise communication to parents on matters such as this and expressed frustration about inappropriate performance comparisons made between HISD students and other groups.

Next, Susan Kaler introduced Nat Sutton and Les Csorba from the search firm of Heidrick and Struggles, the firm hired by the Board of Education to conduct a search for HISD's next superintendent of schools. Mr. Sutton and Mr. Csorba explained that they are starting with a blank job description and will use the input gathered to create the candidate profile that will guide the recruitment of candidates for consideration by the board. They also stressed the importance of transparency in the input offered to ensure the accuracy and quality of the feedback gathered. Members eagerly offered varied input, citing desired candidate characteristics ranging from visionary team player to skilled politician. The specific characteristics mentioned included:

- ability to work effectively with all constituencies, administrators, and board members; experience dealing with diversity
- resourcefulness is more important than education-specific training/experience
- strong communication skills, resourceful/strong manager, and courage to fire low-performing employees
- adept politician who can meld competing interests
- minority who is representative of stakeholder demographics

Mr. Csorba then posed a guiding question: after one year of service, what three criteria should be used to measure the new superintendent's effectiveness? The criteria offered fell into the following categories: 1. Increased student academic achievement (e.g., test scores, graduation rates), 2. Improved public support and confidence in HISD (e.g., increased student enrollment, improved community engagement and media coverage), and 3. A positive district culture (e.g., improved satisfaction ratings from survey results, improved morale among students, parents, and staff members).

CONCLUSION

Ms. Kaler then concluded the meeting by thanking members for their attendance and reinforcing the superintendent's gratitude for their commitment to helping HISD improve the quality of education provided to its students.

In closing, committee members were asked to complete the feedback survey before leaving.

The next meeting of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, June 24, 2009, at 8:30 a.m. in the Board Auditorium of the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center, located at 4400 W. 18th Street.

**Chief of Staff Michele Pola serves as the liaison to the committee.
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