



Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee
Meeting Minutes

August 26, 2009, 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

Ann Blackwood
Martin Cominsky
Dale Davidson
Mary Scott Hagle

Arva Howard
Judy Long
Linda Mercer
Sandie Meyers

Laura Richardson
John Robinson
Maggie Utter Solomon
Janice Walker

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Michele Pola welcomed members of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) to the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center. Senior staff members in attendance were Assistant Superintendent of Communications and Publications Lee Vela, Deputy Superintendent of Human Talent Ann Best, HISD Information Center Manager Lisa Bunse, and Director to the Chief of Staff Susan Kaler. In addition, Dr. Pola introduced the two newest members of HISD's leadership team: Tracy Dennis, who serves as the executive general manager for strategic planning and accountability, and Alexis Licata, who serves as the general manager of business assistance.

DISCUSSION

After welcoming the group, Dr. Pola shared updates from the beginning of the 2009–2010 school year, including:

- increased districtwide enrollment of approximately 3,300 students
- the board's announcement of the finalist for superintendent of schools, Dr. Terry Grier, and that HISD Chief Financial Officer Melinda Garrett will serve as interim superintendent of schools effective September 1, 2009, until Dr. Grier's start date, which is yet to be determined
- after officially assuming responsibility for HISD, Dr. Grier will review the role of the PEC and make a decision regarding its future.

Dr. Pola then reviewed the focus-group format for the meeting and asked members to break out into their respective groups.

Lee Vela facilitated a focus group on communications. Members of this focus group included Martin Cominsky, Linda Mercer, Laura Richardson, John Robinson, and Janice Walker. Laura Richardson served as the speaker for this group and reported that their focus-group discussion centered on four essential communication elements, as reflected in the table below.

Essential Communication Elements	Ideas/Focus-Group Discussion Points
Consistent Messaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Develop Web site templates for schools ▪ Create a Speakers' Bureau to ensure consistent messaging to every audience

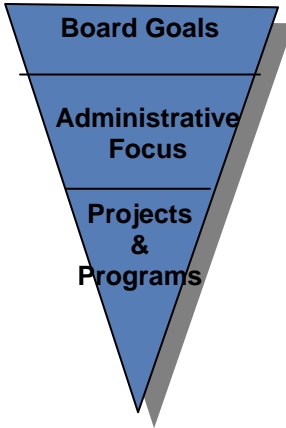
Essential Communication Elements	Ideas/Focus-Group Discussion Points
Visibility and Transparency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Sometimes positive stories contain negative aspects that need to be addressed. Fear of releasing negative information has to be overcome. ▪ Comments and questions from stakeholders have to be submitted more easily and responded to more quickly and accurately.
Two-way Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Engagement with the Houston Association of Realtors is important; they influence home-buyers' opinions. ▪ Leadership must know who is sending what messages, official or otherwise, about HISD.
Marketing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initiate a grassroots approach and recognize cultural differences. • Possible revenue-generating ideas were discussed, such as bus advertising and an Internet radio station. Such advertising should be locally driven and may spur more business involvement in the district. Partnerships with local media could be explored for cross-promotion on the Internet radio station.

Ann Best facilitated a focus group on human capital. Members of this focus group included Dale Davidson, Mary Scott Hagle, Judy Long, and Maggie Utter Solomon. Maggie Utter Solomon served as the speaker for this group and reported on the strengths and weaknesses identified by the group regarding HISD's human-capital efforts, as reflected in the table below.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recruiting team ▪ Proactive identification of campus leaders to recruit as teachers ▪ Trial-run during interviews where teachers are given five minutes to prepare, then have five minutes to teach ▪ Reward and provide career advancement that allows superior educators to remain in the classroom ▪ Offer "hazard pay" to teachers who voluntarily teach in struggling schools ▪ On-boarding will help define expectations and set the standards for success 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Online application needs improvement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Not user-friendly ○ Doesn't capture all necessary information ▪ Need a reassignment process to assist campuses and teachers when campus assignment is not working.

Tracy Dennis facilitated a focus group on performance management. Members of this focus group included Ann Blackwood, Arva Howard, and Sandi Meyers. Sandi Meyers served as the group's speaker. She reported that the discussion centered on three primary aspects: 1) accountability for all, 2) recognizing exceptional performance, and 3) providing support to departments whose performance does not meet standards. Last, she shared the following

diagram illustrating the relation of board goals, administrative focus, and projects/programs. Specifically, board goals should drive the administration's focus, which in turn should drive the district's projects and programs.



CONCLUSION

After reports of the discussions in each focus group, Dr. Pola concluded the meeting by emphasizing the district's focus on its six board-established goals. Following this recap, she thanked the members for their continued service to this committee and to the advancement of student achievement in HISD.

The next meeting of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee will be determined after the arrival of the new superintendent of schools.

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