



Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee  
Meeting Minutes

**January 19, 2010, 8:30 a.m.–10:30 a.m.**  
**Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center**

Terry B. Grier, Ed.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  
Elliot Gershenson  
Mary Scott Hagle  
Arva Howard

Joyce Jacquet  
Judy Long  
Linda Mercer  
Sandie Meyers  
Mary Nesbitt  
Carmen Nuncio  
Laura Richardson

John Robinson  
Francisco Rodríguez  
Leslie Smith  
Melva Thornton  
Maggie Utter Solomon  
Lillian Villarreal

**INTRODUCTION**

Dr. Terry Grier welcomed members of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) to the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center. Senior staff members in attendance were Chief Human Resources Officer Ann Best and Director to the Chief of Staff Susan Kaler.

**DISCUSSION**

After welcoming the group, Dr. Grier shared information pertaining to the district's reorganization. He emphasized the goals of the new organizational structure: 1) to optimize functions and services for schools through economies of scale and use of best practices, and 2) to ensure accountability at all levels. Specific elements of the reorganization plan, to be implemented for the 2010–2011 school year, include:

- Continue to place district resources closest to our students and make sure the system for providing services includes accountability for quality, accessibility, efficiency, and effectiveness.
- Be guided by data-driven decisions based on district needs and priorities.
- Remain true to the concept of schools' and principals' retaining the authority over personnel, budget, and other key school-improvement decisions, with decentralized decisions receiving centralized support.

The superintendent stated that the current regional structure will be replaced with a structure whereby campuses are grouped by instructional level (elementary, middle, and high). Three chief school officers, 20 school improvement officers, and a school compliance officer (for external charter schools) will be responsible for continuous improvement at the campus level.

The discussion then turned toward the district's use of the [Haberman Profile](#) to identify a candidate pool of educational leaders (e.g., chief school officers, school improvement officers, principals, assistant principals) to join Team HISD.

Following this discussion, Dr. Grier asked the PEC members to break into groups to discuss ways to improve parent engagement. The following feedback was provided:

- Schools must create an inviting atmosphere where parents are welcomed, even when they arrive unexpectedly.
- Schools must be better prepared to meaningfully engage parent volunteers.
- Neighborhood schools must market themselves in order to recruit students who choose to enroll in other schools.
- HISD must provide parents with a clear chain of command so that they know exactly whom to contact when they have a problem.
- Administrators must be available at times convenient to all parents (i.e., working and stay-at-home parents).
- The district should host parent meetings so that parents have the opportunity to network with parents from campuses across the district.
- The district should launch a media campaign directed at parents and asking questions such as “Did your child finish his or her homework tonight?”
- HISD should acknowledge outstanding parent volunteers in a visually obvious way, such as awarding medals or lapel pins, something along the lines of what is done to acknowledge Employees of the Month.
- HISD should implement a parent accountability system that is tied to social welfare programs, where school-wise choices result in civic rewards.

Lastly, the groups were asked to reconvene and develop two to three specific actionable strategies for HISD to consider regarding improved parent engagement. The following feedback was provided:

- Hire a parent to serve as a districtwide parent engagement officer to oversee all parent engagement efforts.
- Require teachers to communicate weekly with every student’s parents.
- Provide parent report-cards reflecting the extent to which each student’s parents are doing their part to ensure their child’s academic success.
- Share EVAAS data with parents.
- Investigate the intersection of public policy and education policy—are parents incentivized appropriately?
- Assign to each board member a parent liaison whose job would be to facilitate two-way communication between trustees and the parents they represent.
- Partner with existing community and/or religious organizations that are already entrenched in the hardest-to-reach sectors.
- Begin a marketing campaign directed at parents of not-yet-school-age children to emphasize the benefits of enrolling their children in HISD.
- Provide every teacher with a cell phone, and give the cell-phone number to each parent in every teacher’s classroom.
- Commit to addressing at least one issue a parent brings up and providing a timely response.

## **CONCLUSION**

In closing, Dr. Grier asked PEC members about their interest in continuing this committee. The response was a resounding “yes.” The group provided feedback about the meetings’ structure and discussed alternative membership ideas; for example, perhaps students and/or teachers could be included in the quarterly meetings. The suggestions offered will be considered, and viable options will be communicated back to the group.

**The next meeting of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee is tentatively scheduled for Wednesday, April 21, 2010.**

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