



Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee
Meeting Minutes

April 21, 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

Leonard Barksdale
Beth Brown
Dale Davidson
Laura Grobowsky
Mary Scott Hagle
Veronica Hernández
Arva Howard

Joyce Jacquet
David Jaroszewski
Howard Jefferson
Judy Long
Shawn Raymond
Laura Richardson
John Robinson

Francisco Rodríguez III
Leslie Smith
Maggie Utter Soloman
Bessie Swindle
Lillian Villarreal
Leah Wolfthal

INTRODUCTION

Dr. Michele Pola welcomed members of the Superintendent's Public Engagement Committee (PEC) to the Hattie Mae White Educational Support Center. After welcoming everyone, introductions were offered to help acquaint new and continuing committee members.

DISCUSSION

After reiterating the superintendent's commitment to elicit committee members' input on issues that concern their communities, Dr. Pola opened the discussion by inviting members to voice questions or concerns they wanted to bring forth. Dr. Grier joined the meeting and picked up the discussion regarding communications, placement of the K–8 school improvement officer, and turnaround schools.

Below, grouped by topic, is a summary of the issues raised and responses provided.

- **Parent Engagement:** Members expressed concern regarding the role of certain parent-teacher-student organizations and a desire for the district to engage a broader parent base rather than tap the same parents to serve on numerous committees. Dr. Pola responded by informing the group that a database of committee memberships is being created and in approximately six months the district will be able to track such memberships and, in turn, broaden its parent base. She also informed the group that the Parent Engagement staff has been moved under the purview of the Student Support Services Department with the intent of providing better access to staffing and monetary resources. More information is available [online](#).
- **Communications:** Members shared observations regarding increased positive media coverage of the district and applauded its recent presence on HISD-TV and PBS. However, communication continues to be a concern as it relates to reductions-in-force, response to critics, and getting ahead of rumors when controversial issues arise. Dr. Pola acknowledged the need for continued improvement and

encouraged committee members to help dispel rumors by redirecting peers to a knowledgeable source within the district.

On a related note, it was announced that a new [Chief Communications Officer, Ms. Aggie Alvez](#), will be joining Team HISD. Alvez is succeeding William “Lee” Vela, who has chosen a newly created position at HISD, general manager of student initiatives.

- Placement of K–8 schools within reorganized structure:
Dr. Grier clarified that the school improvement officer (SIO) responsible for oversight of the district’s K–8 schools will report to the chief school officer (CSO) for elementary schools. This issue was posed to Samuel Sarabia, Elementary School CSO, and Dr. Dallas Dance, Middle School CSO, who confirmed that while the K–8 SIO will report to the Elementary CSO, s/he will be involved in all middle-school meetings, collaborate with both elementary- and middle-school teams on issues specific to those instructional levels, and will work with the K–8 principals to embed the frameworks appropriate for each instructional level represented on K–8 campuses.
- Priority Schools:
Dr. Grier summarized the district’s four options (i.e., turnaround, transformation, restart, or closure) regarding its priority schools that have been rated as academically unacceptable for several years. He emphasized the administration’s and board’s commitment to implementing a solution that offers students the best outcome, and he advocated for either the turnaround or transformation model. More information on the priority-school improvement options is available [online](#).
- Magnet Issues:
The issue of fair and equitable funding for HISD’s Magnet schools was discussed, with particular focus on Dodson and Garden Oaks Elementary Schools. Dr. Pola clarified that the Garden Oaks Montessori program will be gradually expanded to ensure that students presently enrolled in the traditional strand will be able to complete their studies. With regard to Dodson Elementary, in August 2010 the entire Montessori program at Whidby Elementary will transfer to Dodson; students enrolled in the traditional program at Dodson be allowed an extended transition. More information is available [online](#).

Other topics of discussion included recent [reductions in force](#), HISD’s appearances on [PBS’s Houston Have Your Say](#), and board member [Paula Harris’s show](#) on the district’s own television channel regarding value-added data. Dr. Grier also shared that the district is considering extending its partnership with Community Education Partners because, at this time, HISD cannot implement an adequate disciplinary alternative-education program in-house.

CONCLUSION

In closing, Dr. Grier summarized research findings by Dr. Roland Fryer of Harvard University's [EdLabs](#), whose studies have identified several contributing factors in closing the racial achievement gap. HISD is considering a partnership with EdLabs to implement Dr. Fryer's reform model in 20 of the lowest-performing HISD schools.

Prior to the next PEC meeting, members will be invited to submit questions and topics for discussion. In addition to encouraging others to [subscribe to HISD eNews](#), members are encouraged to share HISD communications with colleagues, neighbors, family and friends.

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

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