

**CITY OF GREENBELT
ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION**

Tuesday, February 23, 2016. Meeting was held in the Council Room and presided over by Chair, Susan Breon. Meeting started at 6:30pm after refreshments.

PRESENT:

ACE - Susan Breon, Jon Gardner, Don Rich, Melinda Brady, Veronica Martin-Alston, Janet Mirsky, Elsie Waynes, Sudhanshu Sinha, Katherine McElhenny, Ema Smith, Leta Mach, Rosalind Ceasar.

Schools - Reginald McNeill (ERHS), Judith Blackman (GES), Phyllis Gillens (MES), Lois Scales (TPA)

Other – Jacob Taylor (GNR)

ABSENT:

Schools – GMS, DKFI, SHLES

PRINCIPALS' MEETING

After introductions, Susan explained the role of ACE and then invited school representatives to share.

TPA – Ms. Lois Scales, Character Education Program Director at TPA represented the principal. She reported that the school has introduced a number of initiatives in an effort to help both students and parents adjust to Common Core. She said TPA holds parent sessions called Discovery Nights, where they provide information and material to help parents understand how to support their children. For students, she said they have math clubs that focus on helping students grasp concepts and gain mastery. Outside of academics, the school reinforces concepts of personal drive, developing character, providing peer support etc. through the Character Education Program.

TPA's population is drawn from a large catchment area so she said organizing afterschool activities is a challenge because of difficulty with transportation afterwards. She also reported that traffic congestion around the school is very bad but the county refuses to pay for a crossing guard because the school does not have enough walkers to justify the expense. She indicated that she would appreciate input from other schools on the issue.

GES – Ms. Judith Blackman, Instructional Lead Teacher, represented her principal. She said the school will carry out infrastructure tests this week in preparation for PARCC and other tests. The exercise allows students to test the school's computers and to familiarize themselves with the test-taking process. She remarked that the Chromebooks supplied by the school system were not durable and seemed to develop touchpad problems frequently. She said parents are very helpful in getting students to practice; and teachers provide extra support for children without access to computers at home. She said the school obtains a lot of support from their PTA.

ERHS – Mr. Reginald McNeill, Principal, reported that ERHS completed their infrastructure testing earlier in the day. He said the PTSA at the school was very active and contributed significantly to the school's performance. In terms of other improvements, he said they had just

installed a new air-handler system and so temperatures in the school should become more uniform. He said they are also working on constructing a black box room to make more space for drama performances, and he thanked ACE for its contribution to the project through the Grants Program. He said four Japanese students just participated in ERHS' science fair and ERHS will be reciprocating the gesture later in the year by sending some students to Japan to participate in a science fair there. The school will also be hosting 37 Japanese students in March.

Mr. McNeill indicated that the school was having difficulty providing a safe and orderly environment after school because parents were not picking students up in a timely fashion following extra-curricular activities.

MES – Ms. Phyllis Gillens, Principal of MES reported that the school's robotics team collaborated with Makerspace this year in the robotics competition. The team has qualified to participate in the state competition. It placed third of out of thirty-two for innovation. She said parents picking children up after extra-curricular activities was a challenge at MES as well. She was very pleased that the school had introduced a Language Program which allowed all 6th graders to take Spanish. She said her PE and Music Departments were collaborating to make exercising more fun for the children.

She also thanked ACE for its work, especially for the Educator Awards which was a very appreciated and anticipated event at her school.

Discussion

After the presentations, Susan asked if there were other challenges with afterschool activities. Ms. Scales indicated that at TPA, many of the teachers were young and so they were unable to commit the extra time because of the demands of their personal lives. She also said accommodation was a huge factor i.e. since the school leases space they have to schedule activities around the landlord's activities. Also, because of the Charter status of the school funds for such programs are limited and so a lot of fundraising effort is required from students.

Don asked if there was a movement or organization helping TPA build or acquire their own space. Ms. Scales said they have considered some existing buildings but costs for renovations and upgrades are prohibitive, and support from the county is minimal because of their charter status.

Ms. Blackman said GES has a lot of afterschool activities, some of them run by parents. She said they are making efforts to grow their Arts Integration Program this year.

Ms. Gillens said MES also has many programs, but as a school policy they always have a staff member assisting when programs are run by non-school staff. She suggested that TPA could address the problem of getting county funding for their traffic situation by hiring a surveyor. She said MES had a similar problem a couple of years ago but a traffic survey helped the school provide concrete data about safety that convinced the county to fund a crossing guard. She also suggested that the school contact their Councilman for assistance.

Susan asked how the schools were handling the Common Core curriculum. MES said they had embraced it as a new set of standards and so the teachers were adjusting to the changes required.

ERHS said they had also embraced it, along with PARCC, because PARCC is aligned with the new PSAT & SAT. Mr. McNeill said the change allowed learning in the classroom to be transferred directly into content for the SATs. Ms. Blackman said they were noticing difficulties with math fluency at GES because of the difference in standards between the new and previous curriculum. She said there was a gap in knowledge that would take a while to fill.

Ms. Gillens said MES did not apply for grants this year because she was unavailable when the call for proposals went out; however she promised that they will make up for it next year. Mr. McNeill expressed gratitude for the different grants that ERHS received this year. He was especially excited about a grant that would allow the school to start a Pep band. He also informed members that the school just received results of a survey of graduation rates and ERHS' rate 90.45%. He said the school was putting in interventions to help struggling students in order to boost the rate.

Sudhanshu suggested that if the schools had newsletters, they include their liaisons on the mailing lists. The schools agreed.

Susan talked briefly about the ACE clubs, emphasizing that allocation for grants and clubs were balanced to ensure that all schools enjoyed some funding. She made the schools aware that if they were interested in starting clubs, they could present proposals for ACE's consideration.

Jon asked if the schools required ACE or, by extension, Council's assistance. Mr. McNeill said ERHS would appreciate ACE's help in establishing a link with the business community in the city. He said the school needed a Press Box on their field and so they wanted to engage the business community for support.

Leta responded that City Council's quarterly meetings with the business community could offer a forum for the school to communicate directly with the businesses. She offered to notify Mr. McNeill of the next meeting.

When Susan asked about specialty programs offered at the school, Mr. McNeill said they currently offer the Capstone Program and the Academy of Business & Finance but they intend to offer a Health and Biosciences Academy in 2017.

PREVIOUS MINUTES:

Minutes of December 8th were approved without amendment.

Welcome New members

Susan welcomed new members Ema Smith, liaison for the Youth Advisory Board and Katherine McElhenny, new appointee to ACE.

Educator Awards

Rosalind reported that she had forwarded names of the awardees to the appropriate offices for certificates and citations. She said all, but one school, had submitted their awardee write-up; both Council Member Turner's and Board Member Grady's offices had indicated that they officials be attending, but the office of the MD delegates could not confirm if they would be sending a representative.

It was decided that each liaison should edit his/her school's write-up and submit it to Susan by 1st March for compilation into the final script. The final script will be forwarded to Cindy Murray on March 7th. Janet and Melinda offered to be presenters.

Meeting with Club Facilitators

Don reported that in private communications with MES principal, he gathered that the time of the meeting may be a constraint for the facilitators at her school. Members therefore decided that Rosalind should contact the facilitators individually to ascertain the likelihood of their attending a meeting. In light of that, members decided to maintain the meeting time at 7pm instead of 6pm, as had initially been proposed.

UPDATES

Clubs – Rosalind reported that all the clubs, except one, were running because they were submitting their reports and invoices. She noted that the one club which was not submitting any information, was run by the same facilitator who had run it the previous year but who never submitted reports or invoices for payment.

Grants –

Jon reported that he presented the Grants report to Council. One Council member questioned whether a couple of proposals went towards items that should be supplied by the school system, but in the end was satisfied by the explanations. Council unanimously approved ACE's recommendations for the grants.

He pointed out that GMS submitted a number of proposals this year and he postulated that it was because the grant-writing workshop was held at the school. In light of that, he suggested that the next one workshop be held at GES because although they submitted many proposals only a few were approved.

AOB

Ema spoke briefly about her experience on the YAC. She said she was a 10th grader at ERHS and has been a member of the committee since May. She said the committee was currently raising money for summer camp scholarships. They have also submitted a report to Council to amend their charter to lower the voting age to 16.

Feedback on Work Session – Kate attended the session and she reported that Dr. Max seemed an avid proponent of Pre-K programs but he was faced with housing problems. She said he seemed to be advocating moving 6th grade from elementary school to make room for Pre-Ks. She said Lupi Grady also talked about collaborations with non-profits as an alternative to school suspension.

Leta said Council raised the issue of relocating the bus lot near GMS but they found out that the last proposal for an alternate site fell through because of costs. She said Council continued to lobby for Greenbelt children to go to Greenbelt schools and questioned the executive's rationale for the decision regarding the rezoning since it was not supported by the data. He offered to allow Council to meet with the officials responsible for drawing school boundaries. Leta noted that since there were no students in the South Corridor yet this gave Council time to continue lobbying.

Leta said in light of the discussion about the grants, when Jon presented the report, Council had intended to raise the issue of what supplies the county was supposed to provide for schools but they did not get the opportunity.

Liaison Assignments

There was a reassignment of liaisons. Jon suggested assigning one member to attend important meetings like the aforementioned work session. Leta pointed out that in the past, one member was assigned to follow the School Board's agenda and alert Council of items relevant to the city. The new assignments were as follows:

MES - Don
GES - Kate
GMS - Veronica
ERHS – Jon/Susan
TPA - Elsie
SHL - Sudhanshu
DKFI – Janet
At Large - Melinda

NEXT MEETING - The meeting ended at 8:30 pm. The Educator Awards is on March 14th and the next regular meeting is on March 22.