

Superintendent's Advisory Council Minutes
February 2, 2016
1:30-3:30 p.m.
MISD Board Room

Members Present: Julie Steel, Jerry Kavesh, Emmett Maloof, Myra Lupton, Derek Franklin, Robert Thorpe, Taylor Kao, Dan Grausz, Stephanie John-Lewis, Fred Rundle, Tom Tivnan, Mike Bylsma, Kim Comstock, Elaine McClellan, Dave Myerson, Mike Radow, Evelyn Jimenez, Sarah LeClercq, Jenny McAlaine, Paulette Denman, Tiger McBurney, James Bellitto, Emmett Maloof, Gary Plano, Rhenda Meiser

Absent: Mindi Oberg, Jackie Brown, Debbie Hanson, Rory Murphy, Sarah Stewart, Ashleigh Dickenson, Janelle Honeycutt, Jayme Witman, Goichi Shiotsu, Julie Steel, Jenae Serena

Welcome/Committee Role & Purpose

Dr. Plano called the meeting to order at 1:30 p.m. He reviewed the committee's purpose, which is to advise the superintendent on policy matters, stay informed about district decisions and why they were made, and communicate about school issues to constituents. The members then introduced themselves.

Develop and Finalize Agenda

The minutes were reviewed and updated to reflect that Kim Comstock and Genelle Honeycutt attended the last meeting. The council then approved the minutes.

Dr. Plano added Pathfinder Award to the agenda. Kim Comstock requested a discussion about a technology club at the middle school.

1. Levy Propositions

Two propositions are on February's ballot. Proposition 1 funds our technology program, including the 1:1 program, plus improvements to fields and facilities. We are nearing the end of the 20-year life cycle of several facilities' roofs. A member reported that some residents have mistakenly perceived that we already have 50-year roofs. We do not.

Over 2,200 ballots have been returned, however we haven't reached the threshold of 40% of the prior electorate participating and validating the election, so more people must vote. Members were urged to return their ballots and remind their neighbors and colleagues on social media. The Committee for Mercer Island Public Schools (CMIPS), the pro campaign, will likely coordinate robo-calls to encourage voting.

A member asked how the state Supreme Court's McCleary decision will influence levy funding. Some legislation is now under consideration that could complicate the district's ability to raise local dollars or keep them in our zip code. According to Dr. Plano, Propositions 1 and 2 are not part of the state's "basic education" requirement and they shouldn't be impacted. However when the district runs a Maintenance & Operations Levy, the legislature could take some authority away. Mercer Island School District *is grandfathered* to be able to collect from local property

taxes 37 percent of the prior year's general fund amount. The state might take use these taxes and redirect them to state funding in order to comply with McCleary.

Proposition 2 will fund new school buses that are safer and more energy efficient. Assistant Superintendent Fred Rundle pointed out that the district has to upgrade buses periodically, in order to qualify for state transportation funding.

2. 2014 Bond Projects

The new technology and science wing at the high school is now in use—10 classrooms, including 4 science labs, a materials science class and new robotics class. Islander Middle School's rebuilt and new classroom wing is under construction, on budget and on time.

Northwood Elementary School's interior classrooms are being roughed in with most windows installed. The school will feature a commons just for the lunchroom with adjoining quiet spaces for students and meetings. Northwood has 20,000 more square feet than our other elementary schools with state-of-the-art, flexible learning space. It will be completed in June 2016, featuring a dedication event. Field trips will be offered to incoming students.

A member inquired whether the other three elementary schools will be updated. Health and safety upgrades are planned including new carpet, roofs and boilers, however there is no plan to upgrade the schools with major infrastructure given their age. Principals are working with the district's head of operations to determine upgrades. One change desired for the schools is re-orienting the office area so that doors can be easily locked for safety reasons. Portables will be removed except for two double-wides at each of the three existing schools. By the 2016-17 school year, schools should be right-sized with the remaining portables used for art rooms or other purposes set by the principals.

3. Diversity Policy

The district has been following a new policy for equity and diversity for six months, developed by the Diversity Advisory Committee plus past and active school board members. Dr. Plano fully supports the policy, which defines concepts of implicit bias and institutional racism, educational equity, plus key staff leading the initiative. The district's greatest challenge is achieving educational equity because many educators want to treat every student exactly the same, believing that's fair. However the district wants to open people's thinking to understand that providing something extra to a child who needs more attention or services is not unfair; it's meeting that child's needs. This will likely generate discussion.

Members are urged to promote an event on March 23 with Dr. Pedro Noguera, co-author of ***Excellence through Equity: Five Principles of Courageous Leadership to Guide Achievement for Every Student***. That day he will speak to all teachers and support staff, the diversity committee, and to parents in the evening at a PTA co-sponsored event. The evening event will begin at 6:30 p.m. and held in the Performing Arts Center (PAC).

Each school will have a diversity action plan. A member remarked that the district already assures equitable access to services for special-education students. Dr. Plano confirmed that

the plan will serve more students who may be behind academically but don't qualify for 504 services, such as English Language Learners or Title 1 Students.

A student member indicated he had not heard of the diversity initiative before. He described his experience of reading *Huck Finn* as a junior and recalled that teachers approached the topic of using the N word in their own unique ways. He appreciated that teachers could use different approaches to broach the lesson and cautioned against requiring educators in the classroom to use a one-size-fits-all standard approach to promote equality.

A member inquired about the Martin Luther King assemblies and Dr. Plano confirmed they are part of the diversity initiative, having made a powerful impression on students at Islander Middle School. He remarked that the community is evolving into a different demographic and this is our opportunity to optimize learning for all. For example, West Mercer Elementary's diversity has almost tripled with more students from Hispanic, Asian and multi-ethnic backgrounds.

4. 2015-16 District Improvement Plan

Fred Rundle presented the draft District Improvement Plan for the 2015-16 school year. Last spring across the state, many students and parents opted out of taking the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC). This impacted Mercer Island School District and every district in Washington, which was the only state in the nation that lost its ESEA (Elementary and Secondary Education Act) waiver. The waiver had given other states temporary relief from meeting the exacting requirements of No Child Left Behind.

One of NCLB's requirements was to have 95 percent of students and the subgroups (special education, English Language Learners, and multi-racial students) take the assessment. For the first time, Mercer Island School District was designated as a district *in improvement* following the 2014-2015 academic year, because it did not meet the threshold of having 95 percent of students participate in the test. In the district, most students who opted out of the SBAC were in high school. We believe these students chose not to participate because it wasn't a graduation or college requirement. Some middle school students also opted out.

Therefore, in the 2015-2016 District Improvement Plan (DIP), the district will focus on supporting students who are most at risk of not passing the SBAC or making appropriate progress as set by the district. The improvement plan focuses on the Mercer Island School District's 2020 Vision and 7 Fundamentals. It also embeds the strategies and goals of each school.

This year the district's DIP priority is to improve Fundamentals 1, 2 and 7. They are: 1: Assuring personalized learning tailored to the student, 2: Maintaining highest standards in academic and health-related subjects, and 7: Fostering diversity, inclusiveness and equity. To tackle equity, the district will provide Title 1 students with extra support.

The district is now producing a video and will send a letter to parents encouraging participation in the SBAC. It is important to participate because the district will avoid unnecessary bureaucratic steps and the data helps us improve as we benchmark our performance against other communities.

A member reported that Lakeridge was also designated a failing school because not enough special education students took the test, even though the SBAC was not appropriate for these students.

Dr. Plano reminded members that the improvement plan responds to a lack of participation in the test, not poor achievement. In 8th grade, Mercer Island is ranked in the top 10 of all schools and at the elementary level, we rank in the top 1 or 2 of all schools in Washington. Of the 22.1 percent who took the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment, 81 percent were proficient—placing Mercer Island at the top of the state.

5. High School Start Times

The district is planning a late start for the high school on Wednesdays only. By adding Northwood Elementary to what is now called the North Mercer Complex, the district will operate an elementary school and high school in close proximity. They can't both release their students at 2 p.m. and 2:05 p.m. respectively. So next fall, the district will delay the high school's start time on Wednesdays to 8:45 a.m. ending at 2:50 p.m. Northwood will start at 9:15 a.m. and end at 2 p.m. The change won't affect band start times on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday.

The high school day will still total 6 hours and 5 minutes. The change will create a 30-minute gap to accommodate traffic and the transport of elementary-age students to school before the high school commute begins.

The district surveyed 530 parents, staff members and students to develop this plan. Ninety-two percent of the staff said they would support or are neutral on this decision.

6. Spanish Language Program

The district continues to study the feasibility of introducing a Spanish-language program in the elementary schools. The district's goal is for a student who chooses to study Spanish throughout the 13 years, to be bilingual by 12th grade. This all starts with Spanish conversation in elementary school and continuing with language instruction in middle school. In 6th grade, students may continue studying Spanish or begin another language.

Research shows that:

- Students have an easier time learning a language when they younger. They are more facile with language starting at age 5 instead of age 11 or 12.
- When students listen to phonic sounds in a second language, it also develops their understanding of their native language.

Funding for the program won't be taken from any other program. It comes from a state grant for additional K-3 classroom teachers.

Members reported that some teachers have concerns. Would hiring four Spanish teachers occur at the expense of hiring four elementary teachers? How would this impact the teachers'

planning time? There is also concern that too much change is happening at once with the new building and new reading curriculum.

Dr. Plano responded that there is no perfect time to introduce disruption and that the funding and planning have been put into place. It shouldn't disrupt elementary teachers because there's ample space for Spanish instruction to occur in its own classroom.

A member and Spanish teacher reported the most successful students she has taught had taken earlier languages lessons or were already bilingual.

Another member reported that teachers support the program but not before 2017-18. They found the middle school Spanish courses lacking because only two trimesters were offered and students had to retake Spanish 1 in high school. Other members indicated they would like the program implemented as quickly as possible.

7. Pathfinder Award

The district is accepting nominations for the first ever Pathfinder Alumni Awards through Feb. 19. Please spread the word. We will honor three honorees on April 26 at the foundation's *Breakfast of Champions*.

8. Other News

A member reported that plans are in place to add a turning lane onto 86th Street from 40th Street during the summer of 2017.

A member heard a rumor that a new Tech Group was forming at Islander. Dr. Plano reported that no formal plans exist.

The next Superintendent's Advisory Council meeting will be scheduled for the morning of June 1, 2016.

Dr. Plano adjourned the meeting at 3:20 p.m.