Superintendent's Advisory Council Minutes
Oct. 29, 2015
9:15 a.m. – 11:15 a.m.
MISD Board Room

Members Present: Mindi Oberg, Evelyn Jimenez, Myra Lupton, Stephanie John-Lewis, Gary Plano, Goichi Shiotsu, Robert Thorpe, Emmett Maloof, Debbie Hanson, Tom Tivnan, Elaine McClellan, Mike Radow, Jenny McAlaine, Jackie Brown, Rory Murphy, Sarah Stewart, Ashley Dickenson, Taylor Kao, David D'Sousa, Fred Rundle, Mike Bylsma, Mary Grady, Debbie Bertlin, Kim Comstock, and Genelle Honeycutt.

Members absent: Jayme Witman, Cindy Goodwin, Ken Tracy, Nova Williams, Paulette Denman, Janae Serena, Dave Myerson.

Welcome

Dr. Gary Plano called the Superintendent's Advisory Council (SAC) meeting to order at 9:20 a.m. Members of the group introduced themselves. Dr. Plano asked each to remember what they had been doing ten years ago on this date.

Develop and Finalize the Agenda

No changes or additions were made to the agenda.

The minutes were reviewed and approved.

The minutes and talking points from the June 4, 2015 meeting were reviewed and approved. An update on the High School Start time Survey key findings, presented at the June 4 meeting were distributed to the group.

Role and Purpose of SAC

The role of the SAC and individual members was discussed. The SAC is a representative body that will communicate with stakeholder groups on a variety of important topics raised by the Superintendent and SAC members. The SAC will advise the Superintendent on policy matters as they pertain to topics discussed at SAC meetings. Part of the group's role is to confront misinformation in the community and share accurate information and clarification. If members of the SAC hear negative or incorrect information, they should go to the source to get the correct information and bring such issues to the SAC meetings. Members should view themselves as a kind of intermediary between the administration and the community.

What members hear and observe in the community can be helpful as input on policy work.

Superintendent Topics

2014 Bond topics:
Committee members were urged to see the new technology and science wing at the high school if they had not already done so. The wing was completed on time and within budget. It has helped with scheduling and overcrowding problems at the high school. In the spring there will be 'field trips' for students who will attend Northwood Elementary School in the fall, to see their new school.

Northwood Elementary construction is on time, in budget and even slightly ahead of schedule. It will be a 'lighthouse' elementary school and should win awards.

Even though it is difficult to see from the street, construction at Islander Middle School is also on time and within budget. It will be another amazing space with the new student commons, the gyms and classrooms. Next summer, asbestos abatement needs to be done to the existing commons area, which will be complete before the school opens. The summer will be needed to get the site ready.

There was a brief overview of the 2014 bond issues. Dr. Plano explained that the school district received $98.8 million in the bank when it sold bonds recently, but will be retiring $90 million of bonds to the taxpayers. Consequently, the school district received $9 million in premiums paid by the investors due to our superior credit rating.

The assessed valuation of the community is $9 billion. The credit rating of the school district is Aaa. That rating reflects the district's sizable tax base, stable financial operations along with reserves that are strong for a Washington school district, and manageable debt and pension liabilities.

The economy aided in helping the district save money. The district was ready to bid, rates were low and there was less construction activity and contractors were available.

February 2016 Levy

Members discussed the upcoming levy in terms of what is included and how to communicate with the community. Members talked about setting up a communications page within the EC guidelines for PTA social media sites. Other questions included if daycare should be made available through Island schools; how do propane-fueled buses perform as compared to gas-powered vehicles; and how could Metro bus service help with transportation needs.

The transportation levy (a one-year levy) is $700,000 for replacing buses with propane-fueled vehicles. The goal is to keep the bus fleet modern and young. It will take at least two 'transportation levy cycles' to replace all buses. Propane is not cheaper but is more eco-friendly.

The district also needs to identify new fueling site and is working with city on such a site. The City is also considering moving toward using propane for its fleet. It may be on city land.

The board approved a Voters' Pamphlet for the special election in February. The district is responsible for identifying pro and con committees to write statements that will go in the Voters' Guide. The committee to write the statement for the approval of the February Levy has already has the three people needed. The opposition statement remains unfilled.

The Mercer Island School District is the owner and operator of the Mary Wayte Pool. The pool is now 40 years old.

The City of Mercer Island provides a subsidy each year to help the school District operate and maintain the pool. The agreement with the city has recently been renewed. In 2016, the subsidy will be $126,500. The agreement was for 10 years. Each year the amount will be adjusted for inflation. The school district could not operate the pool without the subsidy.

The 2016 Capital Projects Levy includes $3.8 million of work for the pool. It should extend the life of pool about 25 years.

Other capital needs that are included in the bonds include:

Replacing roofs at all buildings will cost about $800,000 each. Those new roofs ensure the health and safety of students and staff. All of our existing schools' roofs will be replaced by the time the 2016 levy expires.

A student committee member said the new buildings should include environmental upgrades. It was explained that making buildings greener and more efficient has been taken into account in all of the planning for the new school and upgrades to existing buildings. Examples include the 'living roof' at Northwood Elementary, as well as the rain garden, solar power, and other plans are in the works.

Mutual Respect and Shared Decision Making

Previous written commitments regarding mutual respect and shared decision-making were reviewed. These agreements, involving students, staff, PTA Council, and School Board, resulted from work done by the School Board and these groups during 2004 and 2005. The work was the result of a tumultuous period within the district where there had been several changes in leadership and growing distrust in the community.

Members indicated that the agreements were important and that they need to be revisited. There are recent examples of a breakdown in how people express their differences over changes in school policies and other matters.

Members noted that many did not know about the agreements now because they are new to the district. Even though the agreements represent common-sense ideas, members believed that the agreements should be reintroduced. There was a sense that another breakdown in trust or communications might occur.

One member noted, that "if you were here or weren't here during that time, it is always time to recommit to civil behavior."

A student member noted that she and many of her fellow students, are adults, and expect to be treated as adults. It seems we need to have 'permission' to be treated equally.

Tag issue

The Council discussed the public's reaction to the district's move to limit the game or encourage alternative playground activities, to ensure student safety.

The superintendent was not able to speak freely with media in order to protect student privacy as to what precipitated the school's change in practice on the playground. When queries came from the media he did not want to reveal actual student issues.

Everyone here in the district needs to trust that the staff is working in good faith. They must trust that we have the best interest of children at heart.

The hope is that in the future, that there will not be a social media campaign to oppose what school leaders decide a school matter.

The school district was not the first to think of limiting tag. An administrator in the Seattle Public Schools called to say there had been similar discussions about tag in Seattle and tag is presently not permitted on school playgrounds.

Members spoke of how parents and community members could help in these situations by speaking out when they hear negative talk or incorrect information.

In a situation like this, SAC members should to ask themselves; “What role do I have.” Or, “I need go to the source and find out more.”

It was suggested that students should be encouraged to go to their principal when these issues come up. It would be a way to give the problem back to the students and empower them to decide what should be done.

Teaching emotional intelligence within the classroom curriculum could be a topic to be discussed by the School Board.

It was suggested that school announcements could be a way to remind everyone about respect and civility.

There was a discussion about how an issue like tag can be dealt with via the School District’s social media tools. Many agree that there would have to be a set of rules regarding appropriate content, privacy or public records implications.

Diversity

The new Diversity Advisory Council is up and running. Every school and department has a diversity action team – including the transportation department. The city is also active in addressing diversity issues.

The district is working toward creating a school culture where diversity, equity and inclusion is valued and celebrated.

The population on Mercer Island is becoming more diverse on many levels. Diversity includes economic diversity, gender, sexual orientation and national origin and other characteristics. Dr. Plano noted that of the 300+ new families who are enrolled in our schools, there are slightly over 125 non-white families.

Dr. Plano described the work of our School-based Diversity Action Teams. He noted that, there is concern about the number of girls enrolled in science classes. There should be more. He added that the school was examining whether or not there were implicit signals being sent about girls and their access to the science electives such as robotics. Dr. Plano shared another example where a school team found disproportionality of race in AP classes. The schools and the community need to pay attention to any indication of bias.

World Languages

Dr. Plano summarized the initiative regarding a Spanish-language program in elementary grades potentially beginning next fall. The school day would be extended to include the class. There are plans to recruit teachers from around the region, nation including Puerto Rico. He noted that there will be a survey for elementary school parents to give input about whether additional time should be added at the beginning or end of the school day to accommodate this potential program.

Late Start

Discussions on late start for the high school are continuing.

There has already been a survey regarding the need or preference for late start at the high school. Updated survey data was distributed at the meeting. The observation was made that parents who have students attending the high school do not favor a later start time. Elementary and middle school parents tend to support a later start time. One important impact of a later start is the 5th grade music program, which occurs before school.

The district is following how late start works at other schools districts. An 8:55 a.m. start on Wednesdays is being considered but is not yet planned for next year.

There is also a need to shorten bus rides to15 minutes and/or provide extended day student transportation. Adding two more Metro routes could cost $100,000.

A member asked if there would be a follow up to the active shooter drill. More on this topic will be shared at the February meeting.

The next Superintendent's Advisory Council meeting will be scheduled for February 2, 2016.

Dr. Plano adjourned the meeting at 11:20 a.m.