Beacon Heights Elementary Meeting Minutes
January 10, 2023, SCC Meeting 7:30 am (Zoom)

In attendance: Tim Miller, Kelly Lear, Megan Ause-Carlisle, Natalee Nelson, Brian Lowe-Kretschmar, Aaron Fischer, Lacy Egbert, Mary Kathryn Harman, Kristi Swett, Cecilia Preston, Chris Gestland, Dean Johnson

● Welcome Kelly Lear

● ASCEND and Beacon Heights Elementary Merger
  ○ “The ASCEND Program provides intensive behavioral and mental health supports to students in Salt Lake City School District. This team is made up of Board Certified Behavioral Analysts, licensed psychologists, clinical social workers, graduate clinicians in counseling and school psychology, special education teachers, and paraeducators. The ASCEND team operates at Beacon Heights Elementary School and serves students in grades K through 6th. They serve students identified by SLCSD as needing intensive behavioral or mental health support. All ASCEND students receive special education in a behavior support classroom.” “Project Descriptions.” U-TTEC LAB, www.u-tteclab.com/project-descriptions.html.

● Chris Gestland, SLCSD:
  ○ The district underwent an audit and determined Beacon Heights and ASCEND were set up as two separate schools with two different school numbers. In order for these two schools (Beacon Heights and ASCEND) to exist as two schools, and for this arrangement to continue, they would both need to be able to function as two separate stand-alone schools.
  ○ The ASCEND program would have to have its own administrator, it would have to have a much more distinct and separate budget than currently exists or has historically existed, and the supports that would come to that school would have to mirror the supports that would go to any other school that we have in our district.
  ○ Due to the expense of funding a school in the SLCSD, the lack of precedence of a stand-alone school existing within a school, and the absence of ASCEND having its own administrative team, it was determined ASCEND is a program within the school and not a separately functioning school within a school.
  ○ Concerning reporting and when the special audit happened questions arose as to why ASCEND was categorized as a stand-alone school that did not have an administrator that was hired specifically for that program and why ASCEND was not being provided all the same support as if it was its own school.
  ○ In the eyes of the federal and state government, ASCEND is a program that exists within a school and not a separately functioning school housed within Beacon Heights.
  ○ To be compliant with the law, the two schools/programs have now been combined.
  ○ This is a nonnegotiable merger.

● Megan Ause-Carlisle and Brian Lowe-Kretschmar asked how this merger would impact faculty FTE, as ASCEND has smaller class sizes than Beacon Heights.

● Chris Gestland responded:
  ○ “there will be no fiscal impact in terms of FTE or the current level of special ed funding that does go into ASCEND that component will continue to exist just as it does for any self-contained program that we have in the district…this won’t this won’t affect how that determination is made.”
  ○ “procedurally all the things that currently exist at Beacon Heights to support both the general ed program and the ASCEND program will continue to exist and operate as they do.”
  ○ “This is largely a function of numbers on a piece of paper. In terms of budgeting, FTEs, current structure, and process none of that stuff will change”
  ○ “The only impact ASCEND students could conceivably have on Beacon Heights would be end-of-year test scores.”
● The SLCSD sees this as an opportunity to promote an inclusive learning community.

● ASCEND team is concerned this merger will put undue pressure on their students from the community and does not wish to add more stress to the students and their parents.
  ○ ASCEND students are the most marginalized students within the district and they’re being bussed into Beacon Heights from across the district. Unlike a traditional neighborhood school with an average proportion of students who are receiving special Ed services, ASCEND is a disproportionately impacted group who will disproportionately struggle on their standardized testing.
  ○ Both Aaron Fisher and Brian Lowe-Kretschmar asked about options for ASCEND students to be protected from the pressure of standardized testing.
  ○ Chris Gestland responded to test score concerns “I’ve been told by our assessment and evaluation department that they don’t see the number of test scores coming out of ASCEND as having an impact that would change Beacon Heights letter grade or anything else. I’ll push to get those into Mr. Miller’s hands so you all can see that as well.”

● The Beacon SCC and parents are concerned that this merging of the two schools will affect school test scores and overall school performance grade.
  ○ Beacon Heights is a top-performing school in the state of Utah.
  ○ Currently, 24% (nearly one-quarter) of Beacon’s student population comes from out-of-school boundaries.
  ○ Even a small drop in test scores and school rankings could affect enrollment, and decreased enrollment is a liability to Beacon Heights.
  ○ Parents can shop for schools and if Beacon Heights test scores lower dramatically, and Beacon Heights is no longer a top ten school, parents who shop for schools will not consider Beacon Heights.
  ○ By combining the Beacon Heights and ASCEND scores Beacon Heights could drop from an A to B or maybe even a C school.
  ○ Test scores are the only way Beacon Heights can advertise and attract out-of-boundary enrollments.
  ○ Without out-of-boundary enrollments, Beacon Heights, and the shrinking Salt Lake City population cannot sustain the numbers needed to keep Beacon Heights open.
  ○ This merger is good for the long-term health of Beacon Heights.

● The Beacon SCC, faculty, and parents are concerned about communication from the SLCSD, transparency, and shared governance regarding the audit, the decision to merge the two schools, and the impact this merger will have on the entire school community.
  ○ Kelly Lear raised the question about what support ASCEND may need and how to avoid any potential negative impact on ASCEND students.
  ○ Tim Miller affirmed the ASCEND students are part of Beacon Heights and that the administration and faculty care deeply about the ASCEND students.
  ○ Tim Miller asked the SCC to be aware of the audit, this merger, and the potential impact of this on Beacon Heights.
  ○ Beacon is an inclusive and diverse learning community. Including the ASCEND students is important to the faculty, administration, and parents.
  ○ This is not simply an issue of “protecting our numbers”, it is a matter of holistically approaching this decision and future decisions from a point of view that encourages cooperation and understanding from all stakeholders.

● The Beacon Heights administration, faculty, SCC, and parents, are very invested in Beacon Heights succeeding as an inclusive, supportive, and viable learning community.
• Kristi Swett from the Salt Lake City School Board addressed the SCC.
  ○ Communication needs to be a priority.
  ○ Principal Miller needs to feel supported.
  ○ Test scores will not directly impact Beacon Heights regarding potential school closure.
  ○ Enrollment drop due to decreased test scores could impact Beacon Heights.
  ○ Kelly Lear asked if the audit and state/federal requirements were the true impetus for this change or if this change was the easiest way to meet state/federal requirements.
  ○ Kristi said she would ask more questions and get additional clarification for the SCC.

• Kelly Lear asked the SCC members to reach out to Chris Gestland via email to thank him for coming to our meeting and highlight your concerns and the concerns of the community you represent on the SCC.

• SCC members and parents can contact Chris Gesteland chris.gesteland@slcschools.org and or Kristi Swett: (801)238-5587 kristi.swett@slcschools.org.

Adjourn Meeting: next meeting is February 7, 2023.