

Parent Advisory Committee Meeting Notes – May 20, 2009

The Parent Advisory Committee Meeting was held from 6:30 to 8:30 P.M. in the auditorium at 850 Hungerford. This was the final PAC meeting of the 2009-10 school year.

Attendees-

Parent Advisory Council: *Juliet Mellow, Vicmarie Arocho, Holly Searl Hurst, Kelly Eiskant, Sharon Mosley-Ramsey, Jill Ortman-Fouse, Bonnie Arze, Alma Orellana, Wanda Coates, Tori O'Neil McElrath, Sandeep Khanna, Hugo Escobar, David Griffith*
MCPS: *Aggie Alvez, Eric Davis, Denise Stultz, Chris Sturm, Mary Ellen Icaza, Nilda Colgrove, Ben Lesnick*

Welcome / Outcomes / Review Agenda

Eric Davis welcomed everyone to the final meeting of this year's Parent Advisory Council. He thanked Dream Dinners for providing a wonderful meal which included lasagna and turkey meatballs. Interested parties can learn more about Dream Dinners online at www.dreamdinners.com. Next he thanked everyone for the success of the PAC-planned and run Parent Academy session. Eric also introduced Aggie Alvez, Director of Communications and explained that the star-shaped sunglasses were because the PAC members had been real MCPS all-stars.

New MCPS Parent Page Feedback

The web team began by asking who in the group had visited the MCPS site, their child's school's site and the current Parent Page. A majority of members used the former, but only four were familiar with the Parent Page. The problem, Mary Ellen explained, is that there is too much information being put together in one place. It's confusing for the average user, who generally wants to find a specific form or date.

As a result, the web team is rebuilding the Parent Page. For the past two years they have been collecting a variety of metrics upon which to base the new site, including what information is most frequently accessed through the MCPS site and what information various focus groups have said they wanted. Instead of a single jumble of text the new site will be divided into several selectable modules including News, Information and a To Do List.

The question today focused on the To Do List, which will be a rolling schedule designed to offer parents the information they need at any particular time during the school year, ie it will display summer volunteer information in April and May and school registration information in July and August. It will change to fit the day. In order to populate this list, web services would like suggestions and feedback from the Parent Advisory Council.

PAC Content Suggestions

- School performance information, district report card.

- Demographic report on ethnicity trends
- Open house dates, specifically for the Edison school.
- Can it be merged with school calendars? (Web services replies that this is a good point and something being worked towards; at present there is a disconnect with schools)
- Dropdown menus? (Web services replies that they are trying to avoid dropdown menus, but will work on other ways to simplify item selection)
- An option to choose particular items to be notified about.
- Parent Academy schedule
- Activity fee dates, pay information.
- Better advertise “Ask MCPS” services.
- Scheduled dates for document releases.
- “Contact Us” is confusing in some places.
- Attendance policies
- Glossary of MCPS terms.
- Job descriptions, descriptions of roles.
- Parent Surveys, results.

Review April 30 Feedback / Next steps for PAC

Denise began the review of the April 30th Parent Engagement Parent Academy session with several ‘tweets’, celebrating the excellent sharing, outreach and attendance she witnessed at the event. It was a great and enthusiastic events and the feedback (passed out) reflects this universally.

Denise asked the group to list what worked well and what should be improved upon next year. The general consensus was that the sharing, the awareness of the situation, the small group work, the safe environment and the spirit of inquiry all worked very well.

Worked Well

- Attendance was great
- Diversity of the parents
- Safe environment
- Small groups worked well
- Sharing and exchange of ideas
- Great tips were generated
- All parents seem to have similar concerns
- Feedback is fantastic!
- Specific comments on feedback are very insightful and need to be shared with schools staff
- Feedback is helpful to plan next steps
- People shared good ideas
- Fostered cultural understanding
- Willingness of parents to share information

- Greater appreciation of power of small groups, people were comfortable and the discussion was rich
- *That's Me* warm-up worked well. Parents heard and saw each PAC member, it was quick, got everyone up and comfortable and helped us all realize we have lots in common
- Format of meeting was effective – variety of activities
- Well-planned lesson

Changes

- Outreach to high school parents
- Consider more ways to publicize – from the feedback over half the parents marked they heard about the workshop either on Quicknotes or the MCPS web site – need creative ways to get information to parents who do not use computer regularly.
- Start workshop with PAC members sitting at the small group tables

All current PAC members are invited back next year! A small comment card was distributed allowing anyone to privately accept or bow-out of this invitation. All who agree to serve a second year will be contacted in the near future. New members will be chosen to fill in any empty seats.

Group comments for next year:

Think About	Next Steps – To Do List
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parent Leadership Training Workshops to build parent leaders at all schools • Hold a Parent Leadership Workshop in each quad-cluster • Special education topics • For next year have PAC chairs or co-chairs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share feedback with principals and teachers • Develop more scenarios – specific examples • Post the Barriers to Parent Involvement, Parent Tips, and Parent Advocacy page on the web site

PAC members were also asked to fill in a consensogram marking how frequently they would like to meet next year. There was a general agreement that four times a year was too little for such an effective group. Plans for a larger scale continuation of the Parent Academy will begin in earnest this summer. Eric hopes to run at least three sessions in the fall, with possible breakout sessions devoted to particular more-specific topics also under consideration.

Eric says that the summer group will be involved in the Back to School Fair scheduled for August 29th.

PAC Recognition

Aggie thanked PAC members for their dedication this past year and spoke of how valuable the group's work had been for the Department of Communication and the school system in general. Everyone has helped make great progress on the road to improving parent engagement with the school.

Eric and Denise presented each PAC members with a certificate for outstanding service on the PAC this year. The group, in turn, thanked Eric and Denise for their dedication. A successful year!