

TOPS Site Council Meeting Minutes **05/27/09**

Present: Tiffany Davis, Staci Delgado, Catrice Dennis, Wayne Duncan, Lori Eickelberg, Lisa Fitzhugh, Maureen Germani, Justine Guarda, Steve Haines, Leslie Hazlewood-Spurr, Collette Hubbard, Dan Hurley, Jeanne Kuban, Jo Lute-Ervin, Jennifer McCall, Ruth Metzger, Leslie Nilan, Barbara Rockey, Kathy Schmid, Clara Scott, Cliff Shettler, Catherine Staunton, Kristina Stoneberg, Karen Stuhldreher, Susan Welch, Betsy Wells, Janis White, Walter Zisette

New Principal Visit: Ms. Scott introduced Jo Lute-Ervin, currently Principal at Leschi School, who has been assigned to TOPS for next year. Ms. Lute-Ervin distributed a statement of her “Core Values” and talked about her experience as an educator, administrator, and parent. She has taught at the elementary level and been an administrator at both elementary and middle school levels. She highlighted her respect for teachers and parents and her commitment to the availability of alternative education.

Draft Letter(s) re Principal Selection Process: The draft letter including Lawrie Williams’ edits is attached to the minutes. Also attached is a draft letter sent out for an email vote by Susan on Susan Welch stated that she believed it is Site Council’s responsibility to address the Superintendent’s selection of TOPS Principal without community input. She said it was an indication of lack of communication between the School District and the parent (and teacher) community. She reiterated that several things about the letter were up for discussion, its content and how it should be sent (as an official Site Council communication or as a letter signed by those wishing to sign it).

- Betsy Wells requested adding a statement indicating we are not specifically criticizing Jo Lute-Ervin.
- Lori Eickelberg reported on a faculty discussion about the letter. She pointed out that it addresses two issues, Principal selection and the upcoming Alternative School audit. She suggested taking out items 3 and 4 and the second set of people to whom the letter is cc’d. She said it makes sense to send it to the School Board but not the others.
- Barbara Rockey noted the need to keep other parents in the loop. She believes we may be moving too quickly and that we should seek broader community input.
- Staci Delgado asked who the letter would be from.
- Lori Eickelberg pointed out that TOPS has never selected a Principal. Gary Tubbs was assigned by John Stanford. In early 90’s when we began to do site-based management, that is where Site Councils came from. TOPS voted for a Site Council. There is a shift in the District away from site-based management. It is important to get our energies around things that matter to us – that is children.
- Clara Scott raised the issue of the two teachers who have been rified and why Site Council is choosing not to act quickly to voice an opinion about that.
- There was some discussion about the situation with the teacher riffs.
- Wayne Duncan thought adding points 3 and 4 about the audit was useful. Wayne wrote a letter to Dr. Goodloe-Johnson and the School Board. The only response was from Harium Martin-Morris who expressed concern about the lack of process and input. Harium told Wayne that he thought the Alternative School audit is starting. If the audit is going to happen prior to end of school year, it makes sense to get involved.
- There was discussion about what an audit would entail.

- Clara explains that usually before an audit, there is notice in writing and the school is given criteria for the audit. She has been given no sign of this happening soon.
- Cliff, suggests losing points 3 and 4 as it would change the subject and keeping a respectful tone, not letting passion overwhelm the message.
- Questions are raised about how this letter was drafted, who attended the School Board meeting and submitted a letter there, etc.
- Susan Welch, Lisa Fitzhugh, and Janis White try to explain what their process has been. Janis attended the School Board as an individual parent and submitted a letter from herself. Lisa drafted a first draft of the letter we are now reviewing.
- Kristina Stoneberg raised concern about how we may appear to the rest of Seattle, because there are a lot of schools in the city, not just TOPS. She and her colleagues are really most concerned about peers losing their jobs.
- Maureen Germani cited Site Council policies about participation in staff selection and the School Board Alternative School Policy. She supports both issues in the letters but would support two letters.
- Walter Zisette made a motion to immediately draft a letter regarding lay-off of teachers Tom O'Connor and Elizabeth Reiter and to table the Principal process letter for the June meeting, working on it between now and then given input at the meeting. A second letter would be drafted asking to have more engagement in processes like the audit.
- Dan Hurley seconded the motion.
- Collette Hubbard noted that the letter regarding O'Connor and Reiter was urgent, as a job fair was being held 5/28.
- There was discussion about content of the letter regarding lay-offs. Whether the two teachers are called back is not controllable, but letters may help them come back to TOPS if they are called back.

Site Council Members for 2009-2010: A vote on Survey Monkey needs to happen prior to the June 10 meeting and new members should be at the last meeting. The first part of the meeting is budget and the second part is election of the new board. We need to have a co-chair for next year. We also need elect a BLT representative. It was pointed out that we need to have the school population represented on Site Council.

May 21, 2009

Maria Goodloe-Johnson, Ph.D.
Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools
John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence
2445 3rd Ave. South
Seattle, WA 98124

Subject: Restoring Collaborative Process

Dear Dr. Goodloe-Johnson;

Three years ago, the Seattle School Board adopted the Alternative Education Policy, which identifies shared decision making on program design as a central tenet for designated alternative schools. Specifically, District Policy C54.00 supports the active involvement by the school community in all instructional and administrative staff selection decisions. The purpose of this involvement is to maintain the integrity and quality of the academic program at all levels and thus is, in fact, “best practice” for all schools.

Only one week after the announcement of our current principal’s retirement in early May, TOPS was notified of her replacement. Contrary to the express intent of a Seattle Public Schools’ policy, the District made the most critical hire decision for our school without any input or involvement by our community of teachers, parents and students.

Just this week, the Seattle Public Schools 2009 Annual Report was issued. In it are many references to the commitment of the District to full engagement and involvement of the community of teachers, parents and students in shaping an excellent school system. The document reiterates that our schools’ success *depends* on this kind of collaboration. The District is now receiving stronger backing from local funders in large part because of confidence in its ability to put actions into words and make excellence happen for all children in every school.

The recent decision to place a new principal at TOPS without input from the school community, however, reveals a significant gap between words and actions. We are concerned that this communications gap will continue to erode the school community’s confidence in the ability to collaborate with the District in important processes such as the upcoming Alternative School Audit and in any changes to existing programs that may result from them.

Engaging school communities in collaborative decision-making is described as both a value and practice of the District yet, we have not been included at all in the recent process of hiring our principal. Therefore, we request the District:

- 1) Provide an explanation of why the Alternative Education Policy was not followed in connection with the appointment of a new principal at TOPS so that our school community can gain some understanding. .
- 2) Reaffirm the Alternative Education Policy adopted June 2006 regarding procedure for staff and teacher hiring..
- 3) Commit to making the proposed Alternative School Audit fully transparent – in its timing, timeline, objectives and procedure – and that there will be procedure for public

comment in each of these areas.

- 4) Share the outcome of the audit in a timely manner and invites the broader community of teachers, parents and students to collaborate in the determination of how the audit information is used to improve upon our existing alternative programs in a fully transparent way.

Sincerely,

cc:

Sherry Carr, Seattle School Board Member
Harium Martin-Morris, Seattle School Board Member
Peter Maier, Seattle School Board Member
Cheryl Chow, Seattle School Board Member
Steve Sundquist, Seattle School Board Member
Mary Bass, Seattle School Board Member
Michael DeBell, President and member, Seattle School Board

Carol Rava-Treat, Seattle Public Schools
Bridgett Chandler, Seattle Public Schools
Patrick D'Amelio, Alliance for Education
Kimberly Mitchell, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
Molly Stearns, Seattle Foundation
Chris Korsmo, League of Education Voters
Lisa MacFarlane, League of Education Voters
Venus Velazquez, Community & Parents for Public Schools
Kevin Washington, Tabor 100
Linda Shaw, Seattle Times
David Brewster, Crosscut.com

June 3, 2009

Maria Goodloe-Johnson, Ph.D.
Superintendent, Seattle Public Schools
John Stanford Center for Educational Excellence
2445 3rd Ave. South
Seattle, WA 98124

Subject: Restoring Collaborative Process

Dear Dr. Goodloe-Johnson:

Three years ago, the Seattle School Board adopted the Alternative Education Policy, which identifies shared decision making on program design as a central tenet for designated alternative schools. Specifically, District Policy C54.00 supports the active involvement by the school community in all instructional and administrative staff selection decisions.

The purpose of this involvement is to maintain the integrity and quality of the academic program at all levels and thus is, in fact, “best practice” for all schools.

In your written comments on the District blog and in your spoken comments at the most recent School Board meeting, you suggested that this policy does not apply for principal appointments and that you have sole authority to make these appointments.

Though you have received an opinion from a District attorney, which supports this approach, it is inconsistent with the history of alternative education programs at the District. In fact, District Policy C54.00 simply states in writing what has been District practice for alternative programs over the years. Parent and community participation is central to all aspects of the alternative schools’ design and operations and has been clearly articulated throughout the programs’ published material.

Your willingness to side-step this long-standing practice – one that you followed in the principal selection at schools such as Kimball and Loyal Heights just last year - is inconsistent with information in your current annual report, the content of your Alliance for Education keynote address, and most importantly best professional practice in education (see John Hopkins’ University’s research on the essential nature of parent participation published through its Center on School, Family and Community Partnerships).

It is concerning to us as a school community with a long history of parent involvement that you would take this approach at time when the District so clearly needs community support for implementing larger-scale change, building new programs, and for maintaining the excellence of already high-performing schools, such as TOPS @ Seward, a school with one of the most diverse student bodies in the District.

We ask that, on a going forward basis, you do not ignore the history of parent and teacher involvement in administrative and teacher hiring decisions in this or any other school in the District and that you commit to working collaboratively with all school communities to further the goals for excellent education for all of our students.

Accountability for the District’s programs does not rest solely with you and the School Board.

Each school community also shares in this responsibility. Shared decision-making and governance are key aspects of a successful public school system, especially when the lead partners are parents with the greatest investment of all.

Sincerely,

cc:

Sherry Carr, Seattle School Board Member
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