

ACCESS PTA

General Membership Meeting

November 18, 2010

CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by PTA President David Fikstad at 6:41.

GUEST SPEAKERS

PPS BOUNDARY COMMITTEE

Visitors: Amanda Whalen, Assistant to the General Counsel
Judy Brennan, Director of Enrollment and Transfer
Sue Anne Higgins, Director of Ed. Options

Discussion of boundary changes:

Sue Ann Higgins is new to the role "advocate for Access" at the PPS District level. Sue wants everyone to understand that the District sees Access as an important resource for students and families. The District is "unambivalent" in its support of Access. There are long term picture issues, and other issues (i.e., size, grades, etc.), but there is a very clear commitment to Access.

Sue Ann has enjoyed visiting Access. She thanks the parents for their participation in Access. Pat Thompson has been gone for a few weeks. She has had two hospitalizations and will be requiring fairly major surgery. The hope is that she will return by early January. Gail Weslin and Dana Jacobs will continue to be the support team in Pat's absence.

Amanda Whalen and Judy Brennan are in charge of the process in the Grant Cluster regarding modified enrollment within the middle schools in that cluster (Sabin, Alameda, Beaumont). The Sabin neighborhood school has 58 students in grades 6-8. Alameda has over 750 students in its middle school. Beaumont has only 1 feeder school and does not "have enough" students - only 450 students.

Staffing in PPS schools is based on the number of students. Without enough students, a school will not have sufficient program opportunities. To be a "robust" K-5 school, there must be approximately 150 students; a "robust" middle school needs about 550 students. NOTE: The staffing formula at Sabin is different than the staffing formula for Access because Access is a program that is funded differently.

The PPS plan is to balance enrollment. Access plays a role in the discussion because it is based in the Sabin building. A committee is being formed with 2 parents from each school (including Access) and the principals of those schools. The committee intends to investigate options and prepare a report by January. The District is hoping for a vote on a plan by the end of January in time for the transfer window.

Q. Will Access be moved out of the Sabin building? Access needs to grow, and there is no where to grow in this building.

A. That option will be considered. However, right now, it is highly unlikely Access will be moved by next year. By saying Sabin 6-8 is too small, PPS "expects that means they need more space."

Therefore, the conversation cannot happen without Access. There could be strategies to shore up the program at Sabin that do involve Access. However, a placement change for Access is not necessarily on the table. The District is aware of the space concerns at Access but this does not mean Access will be moved. Secretary's Note: this is how the conversation went, despite the seeming conflict: – "Sabin middle school needs more room to grow, Access needs more room to grow, but growing Sabin does not necessarily mean moving Access."

Q. Why do these other schools need more space and not Access?

A. We want Access to be part of this larger discussion; however, right now we are looking at inequity in boundaries. Access does not have boundaries. Access's needs in terms of enrollment and space are part of the consideration. The boundary problem may be solved within the 3 schools without moving Access. Access is a district wide program, drawing from all over. Access has a different issue.

Q. If I am on the Sabin committee and trying to grow the middle school by 100 kids, the only way I see to grow by 100 kids is to move Access. The only other choice is for Sabin to go back to being a K-5. It seems like Access is the key to the problem. Or part of the key, if Access moves.

A. No answer here because the question continued --

Q. Could we have a snapshot of where this discussion has gone in the past?

A. I would suggest as you are thinking about your representatives on this committee, you look to the parents and teachers who have been involved in Access site/size issues in the past.

There is not a document laying out the possible solutions to the problems, or even setting forth the problem. Amanda will give PTA President David Fikstad a memorandum that sets forth the number of students at the three schools and the numbers in the neighborhoods.

In regards to Sabin, when it was converted to a K-8, the Sabin families were guaranteed enrollment at Beaumont if they so chose. Many of the Sabin students made this choice. This transfer option will end 2011. However, Beaumont will still allow transfers based on a lottery.

The District would like to see stronger programs across all schools. There is a possibility of Sabin moving to a K-5. We have already heard lots of suggestions around grade configurations. It is not solely focused on boundaries.

Q. Is there a strategic plan for Access?

A. Amanda knows there was a "proposal," she knows it has been updated. But, she does not know when that plan has last been updated.

Q. Is there a given for next year?

A. The District is committed to having Access, for next year and beyond. Pat Thompson is incredibly committed to Access. She keeps "ringing the bell" at a District level for the needs at Access. Pat Thompson advocates for Access' needs, both on a daily basis and in the much larger picture. With respect to a new site, the District is not in a position to put a small program on its own in a standalone site and be able to resource that program in at any meaningful level. So, it is a bit of a "cart and horse" problem. Access can't move unless it has hundreds more students, yet Access can't grow to hundreds more students without the space to grow. It's a tricky issue.

- January 4, 2010 Community Meeting. There will be a Community Meeting on January 4, 2010. More information on time/place of this meeting will be provided.

Q. Is equity a theme in the District?

A. Yes, there is a policy around boundaries that factors a number of criteria, and diversity is one of those criteria.

Q. In the calculus for a “robust program,” how do shared resources fit in? For example, with Access and Sabin sharing staff, the consideration of Sabin’s size should maybe take into account Access numbers.

A. It is part of the equation. And we recognize that in addition to getting additional resources, the sharing between the two schools helps both schools.

Criteria for Access: Access is an “Alt Ed. School.” To enroll in an “Alt. Ed. Option”, the student must have “failed” in their neighborhood school. Therefore, qualifying at 99% or above academically is not the sole criteria for Access. Access students must also identify an “alt. ed.” specification. i.e., that their neighborhood school is “failing” that student. There must be some identification that the neighborhood school is not working.

There is NOT a discussion right now about cutting 2nd grade at Access. However, there is not a priority right now to grow back 1st grade. Access 2nd through 8th at Sabin has “priority seating” right now in Amanda Whelan’s mind and “priorities.” That said, the District is open to other options following conversations.

PRINCIPAL’S REPORT – Gail Weslin

- Gail is excited to have such strong parent advocates. Gail and Dana are committed to our children. She is spending time in the classrooms, she is committed to listening to parents, teachers, and students.
- What she sees are highly engaged learners. The level of instruction and the ability of students to articulate what they are learning is impressive.
- Access is working on “school climate.” The three questions Access students are being taught to ask are: Is it safe? Is it respectful? Is it responsible? This goes for students, staff, and parents. This past Monday morning there was a roll out of discussions around playground behavior and lunch recess. This will be an on-going discussion.
- Peer mentoring programs will hopefully be started. Gail would like to see 7th and 8th graders trained as peer mediators and then work with the younger grades in resolving conflicts.
- Site Council is being launched. There will be nominations for voting members, then an election. There is no one who can continue from last year because Sacha Gilbert served 2 years and the other member from last year has moved. The By Laws will be consulted before moving forward.

- Boundary Committee: Gail thinks people should nominate themselves to be parent representatives on the Boundary Committee. The first meeting is the first Thursday after Thanksgiving. Sacha Gilbert (parent of K, 3rd, 5th graders) and Michael Kubler (parent of 6th grader) nominate themselves to be on the boundary committee. Motion to recommend that Sacha and Michael be the Access parent representatives to the Boundary Committee. A vote was taken, Sacha and Michael were unanimously approved.
- There will be an Access community meeting with Sacha and Michael present on Tuesday, November 30, 2010 at 6:30 in the Sabin library to receive parent feedback regarding Boundary Committee issues.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

- December Craft Fair : There are at least 7 vendors and 6 activities for the kids including card and ornament making and dreidel games. The committee could use some folks to help with set up and clean up. And it would be more fun and more successful the more vendors we have! Camela Hicks will try to have scrip on hand, and will be selling Mr. Lamp's calendars. Vendors will be donating at least 20% of profits. If there is anyone who'd like to do something completely secular (maybe snowmen? something just wintry?) that would be a very welcome addition.
- Scrip: This is an opportunity for ACCESS to make a lot of money. Camela Hicks sent out the order forms to the teachers on Monday. If parents haven't gotten them, and want to order, there are more forms in the office. The first deadline is next Tuesday at 5:30; any ordered by that time will be delivered the following Friday.

Motion made to table rest of meeting issues to December PTA meeting. Seconded. Passed unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 8:25.