

Minority Education Concerns Advisory Committee Meeting
February 19, 2009

MINUTES

Members Present

Dr. Ellsworth James
Jonathan Larson
Polly Miller
Lori Pickett
Dan Loring
Atisa Logo
Lamin Jobarteh

Members Absent

Damito Owen
James Beverly
James LaBelle
Fa'aana Tosi

Others Present

Jeff Friedman, School Board President
Rhonda Gardner, Assistant Superintendent
Susan Williams, Manager, 21st Century Program

Dr. James called the meeting to order at 4:35

Approval of Agenda

Mr. Larson wanted to add the closure make-up days and Indian Ed funding under announcements

Ms. Gardner added the appointment of an MECAC member to the Capital Requests Advisory Committee.

Mr. Loring moved to approve the agenda as amended. Ms. Pickett seconded the motion. Agenda passed unanimously as amended.

Approval of Minutes

Ms. Gardner corrected Susan Williams' title to Manager of the 21st Century program.

Mr. Loring requested that the minutes be sent to the committee members five days prior to each meeting as per guidelines.

Mr. Loring discussed concerns with the amount of time left to discuss business when there are presentations. This has always been a challenge.

Ms. Gardner was asked to send everyone the revised MECAC policy that is currently under review by the School Board policy sub-committee.

Mr. Loring moved to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Pickett seconded. Minutes passed unanimously as corrected.

Announcements

Dr. James advised the group that Tammie Smith, representing the West High Alumni group, will attend the March MECAC meeting to discuss the ongoing theater renovations. They are seeking a letter of support.

Indian Ed Funding

Mr. Loring said that the CITC parent advisory committee decided to hire an evaluator, at the cost of \$10,000, to evaluate Johnson O'Malley program. He suggested that MECAC might recommend to the School Board that they allocate funds for an outside evaluation.

Mr. Loring noted an article in the Anchorage Daily News that told about an agreement between UAA and the Native corporations to find curriculum that works for Native students. Other cultural groups don't have advocacy groups like the Native corporations.

Make-up Days (for school closure due to ice and wind)

Mr. Larson expressed concerns with the decision to cancel parent/teacher conferences to use those days as make-up days because it sent the wrong message, particularly to minorities. Not impacting spring break only impacts the wealthier students. He agreed that the days should not be added at the end of the school year.

Mr. Friedman explained that it was an administrative decision, not a Board decision. He suggested that the MECAC input would be helpful for future decisions.

Ms. Miller said that in other school districts everyone knows the make-up days are added at the end of the school year.

Mr. Loring said that at first he thought the district was being over-cautious, but then thought about the liability issue.

Ms. Pickett noted that different parts of town were impacted differently.

Mr. Larson said that more information about how the decision was made might have been helpful.

Dr. James gave the district Kudos for how the school closure was communicated to the community.

Mr. Loring thanked Mr. Friedman for attending the MECAC meeting and thanked Ms. Gardner for her direct answers over the course of years. The committee will miss her.

Mr. Larson attended the last meeting of the Native Advisory Committee where there was a presentation on Alaska Native data. There were depressing results related to the achievement gap. There are other meetings coming up for public input on the data. He noted concern with programs receiving the test

data after school is out; hard to make decision on summer school and align with subsistence needs, etc.

Mr. Loring noted there are many people vying for the school board seats; lots of people who want to be involved in public education. MECAC should solicit their ideas and enlist their help.

Mr. Loring talked with Diane Hirshberg at the University of Alaska Anchorage about a report on disproportionate discipline for minority students.

There was a long discussion about the need for ongoing communication between families and teachers about student achievement. There are serious problems for families and those problems are expanding. For example, the number of people living in their cars has jumped 30 percent. Mr. Loring would like to see the committee make a recommendation to the school board to create a policy requiring parent contact by teachers be a part of their evaluation. Ms. Pickett said policies are meaningless without accountability.

Mr. Loring nominated Mr. Larson to chair the Outreach committee. Ms. Pickett seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Mr. Friedman suggested that the committee members ask a teacher they know if they could shadow them for a day.

Sub-Committee Reports

Special Education Concerns committee- Ms. Pickett presented her report. Ms. Gardner explained the role of the Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). Mr. Loring was planning to attend the SEAC meeting that night. Ms. Gardner offered to have the administrators of the special education division meet with the committee. Ms. Gardner said the solution to the confusion is strong customer service to improve helping parents through the process.

Recommended Actions to be Taken-

- Set up a community input process in which five to seven public comment opportunities will be provided over the next three months - including elementary schools and churches and other appropriate locations.
- Publicize the public comment opportunities through the means available to the district-Sped teachers, school news letters, web site, along with the Stone Soup group, Alaska Youth and Family Network, Disability Law Center, Gov Council on Disabilities and Sped, and ADN web site.
- Receive from the ASD a break down of the ethnic make up and categories for students falling under the SWD designation.
- Receive from the ASD an explanation of what RTI is and what role it plays in Special Education.

- Create a MECAC report including recommended policy changes based on the information delivered by the public and through committee research to be delivered and discussed at the May 21 meeting.

Mr. Larson moved to approve the recommended actions, with the addition of forming a partnership with the SEAC in these efforts. Ms. Logo seconded. Ms. Pickett offered a friendly amendment to add Mr. Loring as the SEAC liaison. It was duly seconded and both the amendment and motion passed unanimously.

Old Business

School Feedback

Mr. Larson stated that Native Youth Olympics should have the same status as other sports.

Dr. James visited West High School and will go again for African-American Heritage month. Students were very engaged; he was impressed.

Mr. Loring visited Mears and Romig and commented on the very different dynamics at the two schools; stressed the importance of committee members developing a relationship with the schools.

New Business

Ms. Pickett nominated Ms. Logo to serve on the Health Curriculum committee. Mr. Larson seconded. Passed unanimously.

Mr. Loring nominated Mr. Larson to serve on the Capital Requests Advisory Committee. Ms. Pickett seconded. Passed unanimously.

Mr. Loring and Mr. Beverly will contact Ms. Gardner's office to set up meetings to work on the Orientation Manual and the Website.

Ms. Gardner announced that Ed Graff, currently Executive Director of Elementary Education, has been named to succeed her as Assistant Superintendent of Instruction when she retires at the end of June.

Mr. Friedman thanked the committee for a productive meeting.

Ms. Garner reminded the group of the March 5 school board work session on the Graduation Support and Drop-out Prevention Plan.

Mr. Larson moved to adjourn, Mr. Loring seconded. The meeting adjourned at 6:26 p.m.