Fernbank Elementary Principal Advisory Council



August Meeting Minutes

Date: August 13, 2019

Location: Admin Conference Room

Attendees:

Joan Ray, Principal

Bradley Strawn

Steve Langdon

Kara Rozell

Diana Shoemaker

Charlie Rogers

Cassie Sheldon

Non-Attendees:

Becky Vaughan, Teacher

LaShia Brooks, Teacher

Alison Stetler, Teacher

Copies to: All

Prepared by: Kara Rozell

01 – PAC

**2019-2020 PAC Elections**

To date, 7 parent candidates have declared with DCSD for 5 open seats and 2 teacher candidates have declared for 3 open seats. One elected parent member and one elected teacher member will be elected for a one-year term for the Fall 2019 election to stagger open candidate positions for future elections. The other elected members will hold the position for a two-year term.

* **ACTION** - Elections will be run by DCSD through email 8am Tues. Sept. 17th – 8pm Tues. Sept. 24th

02 – Principal

**Student Enrollment Update**

Overall, enrollment numbers are a little under what was expected. Most grades have average class sizes at the minimum level for being fully-funded; however, 2nd grade has two classes that are significantly under enrolled. DCSD has been notified and suggested no action at this time. FES has 7 Kindergarten classes, 6 classes for 1st/2nd/3rd grades, and 4 classes for 4th/5th grades. There were 8 new students enrolled through School Choice so far this year.

* **ACTION** – Continue to monitor student enrollment numbers.

**CCRPI Score and Goals**

New CCRPI scores will be released in October. Overall, GA Milestones Test Scores were up significantly. Improvements were seen across all demographics. There was significant improvement in Reading scores, which may be attributable to the additional Reading Specialists hired through Fernbank Foundation funds to work with students with deficits. More improvement can be made in Math scores. This year, upper grades are starting Math compacting earlier in the year and will address geometry concepts more consistently throughout the year.

* **ACTION** – Principal Ray will distribute new CCRPI scores to PAC members when available

**Consolidated School Improvement Plan (CSIP)**

This year’s focus of the CSIP will be on literacy and numeracy. FES no longer has Title 1 status (as of Aug. 2019). FES had earned some additional resources in the 2018-2019 school year due to its Title 1 status ($105K) which was taken away unexpectedly in Aug 2019. FES may also lose some Chromebooks and Printers (currently packed up in storage waiting for reassignment). The current plan does not have these resources follow the students that were redistricted back to Cross Keys Cluster, but instead to another Title 1 school that already has 1-1 computer resources for students.

* **ACTION** – Principal Ray will distribute FES’s CSIP to PAC members and continue to update the PAC on the issues outlined above.

03 – Students and Teachers

**Update on Transitions for Redistricted Families**

There seem to be increased anxiety among new families this year. There is noted increase in Facebook posts on the FES Parent Group, some of which are beyond the intended scope of that resource.

* **ACTION** – Facebook Group Administrators will post a reminder of the intention of the FB group resource and attempt to redirect concerns to the appropriate person.

**School Dismissal Manager**

Fernbank may soon be implementing a new system for parents to communicate school dismissal plans for students online. The system will track all changes that were made by parents through the online system up until 1:15pm that day, after which FES administrators can print lists for bus drivers/aftercare/teachers to follow and ensure children arrive at the expected afterschool location.

**Mutt-i-grees Program: Creating Calm Confident, Caring Kids**

Sarah Hunsberger, FES Teacher, presented information about potentially incorporating Mutt-i-grees curriculum at FES. The curriculum focuses on social-emotional skill development through the use of dogs/cats in the classroom. The goal of the program is to 1) enhance children’s resiliency and social-emotional competence and 2) promote awareness of the desirability of shelter pets. Other schools who have implemented this program have seen improved student behavior, a more positive school climate, and increased parent involvement. Some teachers report increased engagement in reading and interest in animal welfare. PAC members discussed how the curriculum would integrate with IB and DCSD curriculum and how the program would be implemented at FES if approved. The program is designed for use with 1 dog and up to 2 cats. Ms. Hunsberger currently fosters dogs through DeKalb Animal Control, Southern Animal Rescue, and Animal Action Rescue and would volunteer to bring her foster dogs into the school from her home. The proposed location of the animals within the school building is TBD.

* **ACTION** – Ms. Hunsberger will continue to present the curriculum to other parent groups (PTA, etc.) and gather input about implementation and interest.

04 – DeKalb County / Region 2

**DCSD Policies for Curriculum, Lesson Planning, and Benchmark Assessments**

1/15/2019 – In Fall 2018, DCSD implemented a new curriculum & testing requirement (Illuminate) to have a universal tool to measure student progress more frequently than existing testing and focus on closing achievement gaps. FES is under more stringent monitoring from DCSD due to recent drop in CCRPI scores. There are post unit tests for every subject resulting in 24 assessment tests for each student on top of MAP and Milestone testing. Some teachers estimate they lose 12 instructional days due to implementing the Illuminate test, 24 if you include pre-testing. Teachers feel that the curriculum/benchmarking testing is not always developmentally appropriate, test questions are written poorly (especially for lower level students), not aligned with state testing requirements for 3rd – 5th grade, and not sequenced properly for testing requirements. Additionally, teachers find that the lesson planning is designed for single subject teachers which is not compatible with the IB model as well as being extremely time demanding and not sustainable. It is not possible to overlay IB model on top of this model, making it difficult for teachers to fully invest in IB teaching. There is no dispensations for IB/STEM/Gifted/ESOL/EIP adaptations. Teachers are penalized for not following the required curriculum, even if it is not best for the needs of their students. Teacher morale is very low and this has the potential to affect teacher retention/recruitment.

3/19/2019 – In February, parents of the PAC (separate from teachers and administration) decided to gather more data about teacher perceptions of the issues detailed above. Kara Rozell developed and distributed a survey to all teachers at Fernbank. This survey was shared with other elementary school PACs in the Druid Hills Cluster to broaden the scope of feedback and collaborate together to find solutions. To date, two schools have implemented the survey and one more expects to do so within the next week. Data will be compiled and shared with District-level administration and School Board members when the analysis is complete.

5/14/2019 – There was significant discussion at the Feb. Druid Hills Cluster Alliance meeting regarding assessments required by the state and county. Many DHCA parents expressed concern about the current amount of testing required being too excessive and having adverse effects on students, teachers, and classroom instruction time. Druid Hills Cluster Alliance (DHCA) representatives have completed a survey of teachers at 4 cluster elementary schools and shared the survey tools with elementary schools in Dunwoody. DHCA has also met with Trenton Arnold and Marshall Orson to discuss the results of these surveys and request changes be made to the lesson planning format and benchmark assessment platform before next school year. DHCA is also trying to connect with Parent Councils United to develop a broader coalition of support. To date, 11 teachers have given notice that they are leaving Fernbank next year.

**8/13/2019** – DCSD announced to all teachers in late July changes that would be made to reduce benchmark assessments and improve the lesson planning format. It is yet to be determined if the benchmark assessment test questions have been improved or not. There is more work to do (e.g., reducing the number of standardized tests in the Spring to either the Spring MAP or GA Milestones, but not both), but this is a step in the right direction. With Dr Greene’s announcement that he will not renew his contract as Superintendent after May 2020, the likelihood of significant changes being made this year is unknown.

* **ACTION** – Continue discussions at DHCA meetings and involvement with Parent Councils United.

05 – Facility Items

No new items

06 – PTA

No new items

Next Meeting: **Tuesday, October 1, 2019, 3pm**

[End of Minutes]