

**Teacher Advisory Committee Meeting
West High School Library
Thursday, October 20, 2016**

Present:

Buzz Thomas, Superintendent
Eric Aguilar, Chilhowee Intermediate
Merry Anderson, Karns Middle
Chris Beatty, System-wide
Jannice Clark, Kelley Volunteer Academy
Laura Davis, West High
Rebekah Ellis, L&N STEM
Kelly Farr, Mount Olive Elementary
Jessica Fine, Cedar Bluff/Hardin Valley
Catherine Harrison, Pond Gap Elementary
Jessica Helman, Vine Middle
Lauren Hopson, KCEA
Beth Howard, West Valley Middle
Wanda Lacy, Farragut High
Ryan Milani, Career Magnet Academy
Jarrod Pendergraft, Halls Middle
Jim Porter, Powell High
Kitty Pruet, Northwest Middle
Nicole Sanders, Christenberry Elementary
Antoinette Williams, Farragut Intermediate
Lee Anna Wright, Northwest Middle/Ridgedale

Guests:

Patti Bounds, KCS Board Chair
Clifford Davis, KCS Chief of Staff
Evelyn Gill, County Commissioner
Bridget Waller, GSP
Stephanie Welch, GSP Director
Media

Introduction

The Teacher Advisory Committee is designed to provide advice to the superintendent. The School Board also requested the TAC's advice on the Resolution in opposition to TCAP scores being used for student grades and teacher evaluations that was under consideration by the Board.

Interim Superintendent Buzz Thomas

- Welcome and Introductions of Committee Members and Guests
- No one is more important than our teachers
- Trying to create a central office culture that is about candor and trust
- Try not to be defensive when things are challenged
- Closer you get to the power structure – the more folks tell you what you want to hear
- Trying to get out to the schools to make sure he is hearing what he needs to hear
- This group doing a critical service to the district by being just as honest as they can be
- This initial agenda was created by Superintendent Thomas, but going forward he wants the committee to put together future agendas

Great Schools Partnership

- Public schools are publicly funded institutions; this limits their ability to do research and development
- Great Schools Partnership is a research and development partner with KCS to try out new things – TAP, Pre-K, AVID, All-Day Kindergarten are just a few good examples
- Great Schools Partnership also partners with KCS to manage all Community Schools programs with the exception of the Pond Gap Program which is operated by the University of Tennessee
- Stephanie Welch, Interim GSP President, and Bridget Waller, GSP Staff introduced
- a strategy/campaign about KCS being the "Best Schools in the South"
- Campaign will center around how GSP can best support the work of the district, the Board and the staff
- GSP recognized that there is sometimes a gap when it comes to the positive, proactive movement and amazing work that KCS is doing – GSP wants to help get that story out to the public

- GSP is gathering feedback from multiple stakeholder groups about the things the community believes that KCS should do to create the best schools in the south
- GSP wanted to hear from the folks on the front-lines of education first, so initially asking for feedback from this committee – will be asking for feedback from students, parents, community members, etc.
- City of Knoxville, Knox County and the Knoxville Chamber will also be engaged in this effort – all want people/families to want to live here and draw people/families who want their children to come to school here
- All want Knox County/Knoxville to have a great work force as well

What does “Best Schools in the South” mean?

- Top curriculum in the state
- Rigor for all students – all should take at least AP while in HS – not valued as much as it should be
- Value whole child – not just academics, but arts as well
- Great education for ALL students, celebration of diversity – don’t want education to be “cookie cutter”
- Having community stakeholders in our schools who are involved and supportive
- Moving away from truancy and chronic absenteeism
- Great partnerships with businesses and colleges
- Safety nets for those children who need housing/emotional support
- Technologically up to date and savvy
- Understand from lots of research that children make the best gains with small student/teacher ratio – 8 to 10 kids per class including at the high school level
- Partnerships among schools would help as well
- Starts with students – continued support for teachers to address needs
- Forward thinking with ideas and programs – CODETN needs to be larger – innovation huge part of our world
- Doing what we say we are going to do – looks bad when we don’t follow through on commitments
- Partnership between schools and would be good to have time to collaborate with other schools – some single teachers are alone at schools
- Need broader vision of what it means to be “college and career ready” – kids need to feel their goals are important no matter what field is and what success is to them
- Show an air of support for our teachers, need to be truly valued and have the best work conditions
- Especially in elementary – find a way to continue their curriculum outside the classroom in “real life”
- More time and opportunities for hands-on, real life experiences
- More services need to be offered during school hours to keep kids in classroom – social work, health services, etc.
- Need kids to want to come to school – wanting to come would take care of a lot of problems
- Some schools are lucky enough to have a Community School program, but we need more community schools
- Schools need to share best practices at all levels
- More special education services are needed - 786 children with autism in KCS – only small number of teachers with expertise that help students with those needs - – need more teachers that specialize in specific areas
- Need true apprenticeship-type programs at the high school level
- Need to broaden horizons for regular education teachers, especially with RTI in place – children are less likely to be in a special education program – regular teachers are not trained to deal with some areas Teachers need Dyslexia training (we are doing this)
- Provide more opportunities for parents to help them know how to help their students
- Feel parents are embarrassed to ask the right questions – so better ways to communicate
- Need more translators – some teachers in school just happen to know other languages, but great need in this area
- Need diversity training – need to understand what certain things mean in different cultures – the way you stand, inflection in your voice, etc. – educators need to be prepared
- Give kids the best possible experience in everything, so urgent need for proper funding
- Stress on importance of character and character appreciation – service projects, etc.
- KCS needs to be more than ACT scores and graduation rates – these will happen naturally as other things are in place

Resolution in Opposition to TCAP Scores Being Used for Student Grades and Teacher Evaluations 2016-17

Board of Education considering resolution on testing and evaluations at November meeting and have asked this committee for a recommendation (**The following are comments made by individual committee members**)

- Most of the teachers at Northwest Middle School are in favor of asking for a waiver from including the scores for this school year; they are very concerned about the tests and the format, but bigger point was that they believe the TEAM evaluation system is flawed and KCS should do something about it, believe that KCS is a strong enough system to be the leader
- Survey was done at individual school and 15 responses so far, 14 who responded are for a waiver, 1 was not for the waiver if it meant being scored harder on evaluation
- An e-mail was sent to West High School staff and majority do not want to give a test that doesn't count, belief that it takes away the validity and that time spent on preparation is wasted; makes staff nervous that time is wasted on a test that doesn't mean anything and feel strongly that kids won't push through the hard questions
- A lot heard about dissatisfaction on being evaluated on scores that they do not have direct influence on; feels that teachers must have something to be evaluated on, but question is what percentage does it count and what data will be used
- Also sent e-mail to staff at West Valley Middle School, but feels that only those with negative comments tend to respond – when talking to someone face-to-face, they said they wanted to use the data and wanted it to count for both teachers and students; they saw great students not try hard because test did not count last year; some teacher count on test scores to bring their evaluation scores up
- Heard some say make scores count for students and teacher, but most e-mail said please don't use the data
- Overarching point is still more important - most people do not want the resolution – but most felt a waiver would be less stressful and often hears that test does not always show what students know
- Also heard that TCAP scores are one more data point that helps teachers information their instruction
- Most teachers want assurance that test will be based on standards
- Educators that serve in school service personnel roles have to pick from school-wide scores, this isn't fair when having to pick scores from students they don't even teach or interact with
- It serving at a low socio-economic school, kids have no motivation at all – hard to be graded on kids that you can't motivate
- Also sent e-mail, 94% of teachers responded and majority said want to be held accountable, but do want a waiver this year – lots of layers to this topic
- Belief that teachers want to be held accountable, but not like this
- Some feel that if scores count for students, it should count for teachers, but if scores are not received until the fall of next year, all will that work?
- Concerns about statements being made last year by state that the problems with the MIST platform could not have been foreseen, the platform broke every time it was used – so this is causing a lack of trust
- Scores did not used to count toward student grades – what was their motivation at that time?
- Clarification that resolution is just a position statement
- After talking with lots of teachers following October meeting, most want the kids to take the test and then curve it – but the data is needed and if this keeps being postponed that is not good
- Some teachers feel test should count a low percentage of grades and evaluations this first year
- Strong feeling from some teachers that students need to take the test and this will tell their teacher if they are doing a good job teaching
- Some believes that testing is imperative for students to gain that skill, but it needs to be meaningful and belief that students want to know how they rate as well
- Students must take tests in college, TCAPs are a good way to prepare them
- Spoke with majority of staff at CMA and most are in favor of the resolution; they feel that the test has been a train wreck and the State needs to do the right thing; teachers do understand that resolution is just a statement, but they are nervous about the tests counting for students and teachers
- Most teachers at Farragut Intermediate School are in favor of the resolution; they are in favor of testing students, but feels that scores/feedback need to be more timely – they want to know what mastery of materials looks like
- If the upper grades at a school fails, then everyone feels the pressure – there are many different layers
- Some teachers fear that they are not covering the material that will be on the test
- Some fear that teachers don't understand the resolution is just a statement – what are we trying to accomplish
- Some are never going to be happy and there is not a sparkling clear answer about what teachers are judged by
- Tests and evaluations are never going to be something that everyone loves because what teachers do is an art and is very difficult to judge
- Heard someone say that if we don't want the information, feels like we are choosing not to know and can just discount it as a district
- Some feel that if the Board says the tests do not count, the message is that KCS doesn't think this is important and that changes everyone's mindset
- Grades are not what motivates kids
- Some feel there may be a problem communicating that the resolution means

- Some think resolution is not saying we don't want the scores to count ever, but just this year because we do not know what the test looks like
- Would like to know, just once, that we have a good tool
- Some would like to have more confidence in the system before the tests count
- It will be extremely important to the correct communication to go out to the community
- Some teachers feel very strongly that that need a tool to measure their teaching
- There is a difference between elementary and high schools on this subject – tests are different for younger students and special education students
- Some still feel that we have a lot of technology, but some of students do not have the skill to use
- Combining the evaluation of teachers and the scores of students – everyone knows that can look different between each school and from evaluator to evaluator
- Do not need to equate teacher evaluation scores to what could be best for the students
- As a test proctor, has personally seen that if student know the scores do not count it does make a different
- If a statement is made about what is not valued from the state – KCS may not have the best seat at the table when it comes to tweaking what is put forth, so this resolution statement may throw everyone under the bus a bit
- Some think the State may listen to the folks who counted it more
- All believe that our students are listening, especially at the high school level
- All feel it would be a good idea for the Board to seek input from parents and others since parents have very strong feelings about this too – their feelings are valid
- Talked to multiple teachers from multiple schools and most were in favor of the waiver for one year – still fear about what happened with tests last year
- Some read the newspaper article about being either pro-teacher or pro-achievement – it was interesting to read that the impression was that if this resolution passes, teachers do not have to try as hard – even if the tests do not count, teachers would still use the data – they use lots of sources of data
- Last year someone from the State told some teachers what would be on the social studies test and then it was not on there and so they just do not trust what they are told
- As a body, KCS has to make it clear that pro-teacher vs. pro-achievement is not true at all
- Survey done at Kelley Academy and one response was that the State needed to get the tests right before they count
- A long time ago, had Gateway tests that students had to pass to graduate – very, very few students didn't pass the test because they counted - what has occurred?
- Some teachers do not understand why State cannot hire someone to write a good test
- Obvious that lots of different opinions and that there is not one consensus among this committee about being in favor of the resolution or against it
- So much confusion, too much is being confounded about the tests and evaluations – for that reason, some would caution the Board to take this into consideration
- This will be the third year that the State test does not count for social students – if not now, when will it count?
- Some want assurance that this will be the final year that the tests do not count if a waiver is granted
- Committee members were offered a ballot for an anonymous vote and whether they were in favor of the resolution or against the resolution – the final results were 12 in support of the resolution and 8 in opposition
- Some teachers do not like linking compensation to test scores

Wrap-up and Ideas for Future Committee Agenda Topics

- KCS is a teaching and learning organization and we want to listen to our teachers first and foremost
- Heard that a statewide survey showed that 70% of teachers felt evaluations had become comfortable and were informing their instruction
- State has allowed some districts to develop their own evaluation system and some have (ex. Maryville City)
- Have asked the State if KCS can develop our own evaluation system that satisfies the core teaching concerns
- Need something better for fine arts in regards to evaluation
- In regards to evaluations some feel that they need more support and more staff; the higher-ups do not understand a teacher's job anymore
- Textbooks
- Building-Level Technology Coordinators
- Staffing is driven by money – cannot do some things we want to do
- Social Studies standards
- Special needs students

- Discipline; disparities task force recommendations, but also safety for students and staff – running scared sometimes
- Teacher autonomy; lines are blurred – what do they have autonomy on and what do they not?
- Could meeting agendas be less strict? Maybe one big topic and then whatever the current need is? There are so many good topics and some get pushed down further and further on the list
- Committee members were thanked for the time and bragged on for their bravery; great candid conversation and caring for what everyone at the table had to say
- Rugged individualism is highly over-rated – everything gets done by a team

Next Meeting

- Tuesday, November 29, 2016 – 4:30 pm West High School