

Teacher Advisory Committee Meeting
West High School Library
Thursday, March 28, 2019

Present:

Bob Thomas, Superintendent
August Askins, Holston Middle
Megan Christian, Bearden High
Amy Cox, Halls Elementary
Natalie Dowling, Carter High
Rachel Evans, South-Doyle Middle
Tiffany Holmes, Lonsdale Elementary
Lucius Irvin, Gresham Middle
Michelle Keaton, Paul Kelley Academy
Whitney Parson, Farragut High
Jim Porter, Powell High
Stacey Reece, West High
Lynn Shuryan, Norwood Elementary
Laurie Smith, Cedar Bluff Elementary
Paula Hancock, KCEA
Antoinette Williams, West Valley Middle

Guests:

Jon Rysewyk, Curriculum and Instruction
Brian Hartsell, Transfers
Ron McPherson, Finance and Human Resources
Tammi Campbell, Ombudsman

Not Present:

Blair Harrison, Pond Gap Elementary
Julie Langley, Karns High
Stephanie Lewis, Gap Creek Elementary
Nicole Sanders, Christenberry Elementary
Tanya Coats, KCEA
Ali Umbarger, Sunyview Primary

Superintendent Bob Thomas:

Mr. Thomas opened the meeting by thanking everyone for attending. He also welcomed Paula Hancock who was filling in for Tanya Coats and Ron McPherson who has returned to Knox County Schools as Chief Financial Officer.

- The Superintendent asked if there were any concerns from the committee:
 - There is no spokesperson on the Knox Supports committee. The challenge to TAC members is the time of day when the committee meets (during school hours). Lucius Irvin volunteered to be the TAC spokesperson for the Knox Supports committee. Everyone is invited to attend the meetings if they are available.
- Discipline will be a topic for April meeting.

Jon Rysewyk:

- Handout of current Board Policy, J-240, Use of Personal Communication Devices in School and handout of proposed revision of Board Policy, J-240.
- Discussion of current practices and issues with student use of cell phones in the schools:
 - Practices are not consistent within individual schools and by individual teachers.

- Several said cell phones are a breeding ground for bullying, distractions, cheating, and negativity.
- The current policy leaves much discretion of cell use to the individual school.
- Some teachers have students use their cell phones to do research within a class period.
- Parents text students during the school day which is also a distraction to students.
- Students need strict rules to follow regarding cell phone use during the school day. Students should be taught how to properly and responsibly use technology as a part of their class work and their social lives.
- Teachers should only use their cell phones for professional use during the school day.
- Students in 1:1 schools do not need to use their cell phones during class.
- The current policy is divided by grade bands. It also gives the principals leeway in making school rules.
- Proposed revisions:
 - Correction of a spelling error.
 - Heading to define personal communication devices (PCD) use for all grades.
 - A community member proposed the revision of the section “Use by Students in Grades 6-8.”
 - Several members of TAC agreed that the new proposed policy would be hard to defend. The language is “too loose.”
- The Principals Advisory Committee (PAC) has seen the proposed revision and preferred the current policy.
- Policy is written so that schools can tailor rules for their own school and still be within policy.

Brian Hartsell:

- Handouts: (1) Board Policy, J-194, Zero Tolerance Offenses; (2) KCS Procedure, J-194, Zero Tolerance Expulsions
- The policy is taken from state law. State law has twelve zero tolerance acts. Knox County Schools identifies four zero tolerance acts in the policy.
- Prescriptions, if shared with other students, is a zero tolerance offense.
- The state has changed “assault” to “aggravated assault” as a zero tolerance offense.
- “Possession of explosive or incendiary device” was added because of bomb threats.
- All schools follow the same policy.
- Zero tolerance expulsions/suspensions can be reviewed and modified at the end of the semester.
- If expelled, a student will be offered an alternative placement. Students have the right to accept or refuse the alternative placement.
- “Vaping” is not a controlled substance but should be treated as zero tolerance and then can be modified.
- All students follow the same zero tolerance policies. Special education students are not exempt from zero tolerance. An investigation determines manifestation.
- Zero tolerance expulsion students from other counties must be accepted by KCS if they meet the residency requirements. If not accepted, then that student is considered a drop-out from our system.

Ron McPherson:

- We are currently in the middle of the budget development process. There is approximately a \$4 million gap between new expenditure needs and estimated revenues for those needs.

- BEP funds from the State will be estimated in April and final in July. BEP funding makes up 45-50% of the Knox County Schools budget. Knox County Schools must submit their proposed budget in April.
- New expenditures are salaries increases, raises, step increase, employee benefits, retirement plans, TCRS matching funds, staffing requirements, and purchase of textbooks.
- Ron McPherson and Mayor Glenn Jacobs recently met with Governor Bill Lee. They expressed their concerns about BEP funding and how it was calculated and distributed to school systems in Tennessee. The new governor has proposed a smaller increase of BEP funds for systems. Less than half of teacher costs are funded by the State. A 2.5% increase state-wide is approximately 1.2% for Knox County Schools because of the equalization formula used to disperse funds. The Governor was attentive to the concerns expressed.
- Health insurance premiums may not increase for 2019-2020.
- \$1.5 million is required to fund a one-percent salary increase for school employees.
- There is a challenge to find the funds to bridge the gap in the desired budget and revenues.
 - Possibilities are asking the Mayor or County Commission for more funds by shifting money from another county department to the schools or a tax increase.
 - Fund balance money can be used but must be replaced. Fund balance is a minimum requirement of 3% of the total school budget that must be maintained, or the State can withhold BEP funds.
- Knox County Schools receives 4.5% of State funds while having 6% of all students in Tennessee.
- Central Office staff is trying hard to maintain teachers' salary increases and current programs. The Board will have the final say on the budget.
- Presently the county collection rate is trending at a surplus which benefits the KCS's fund balance. The collection rate is subject to change at any time.
- Approximately \$4.2 million is needed to buy new textbooks.
- School vouchers:
 - There is conflicting information regarding school vouchers.
 - The State would withhold money for vouchers.
 - Students in school systems can qualify for vouchers if the system has three or more schools (bottom 10% state-wide) deemed as low-achieving. Knox County qualifies because we are a large system.
 - Which students are really helped by school vouchers? Many students would not be able to afford private schools because the difference between the voucher amount and the tuition amount would be too much for some families to manage.
- Governor Lee is proposing to move \$235 million into a rainy-day fund. Those funds could be used for BEP but that is too much money in a rainy-day fund if school systems are being underfunded.
- Textbooks: Does each classroom need a full set of textbooks? Having textbooks for each student is the most equitable way but not the most efficient. The core of education is to provide the basic for every student. The online texts and resources have also become expensive.
- Schools and Positions: Some schools lost and some schools gained positions as the staffing formulas were followed more closely. There was addition of some special education teachers because of requirements. Several assistant principal positions and supervisory positions were cut from next year's budget. Some positions were eliminated because there was no rationale or justification in the staffing formula. Staffing is based on students' average daily membership (ADM).

Possible topics for next meeting:

- Discipline
- RTI and student scheduling
- Teacher salaries and teacher transfers

Next meeting:

- The next meeting will be Thursday, April 25, 2019