

**APPROVED
MINUTES OF THE
EDUCATION ADVISORY BOARD MEETING
Fort Lauderdale, Florida
100 North Andrews Avenue, 8th Floor Cafeteria/Lounge
Thursday, September 18, 2008, 6:30-8:30 p.m.**

Members	Attendance	Cumulative Attendance	
		Present	Absent
Dr. Elizabeth Hays, Chair	A	4	1
Phaedra Xanthos	A	3	2
Laura Clark	P	3	2
Lu Deaner	P	5	1
Elaine Schulze	P	4	1
Niara Sudarkasa	A	1	4
Maureen Witting	A	2	3
Connie Christensen (arr. 6:52)	P	3	2
Gilbert Borrero	A	2	3
Edna Elijah	P	2	0
Gloria Barr Jackson	P	1	1
Ed Parke	P	2	0

Total Members Present: 7
Current Membership: 13; Quorum: 8

Others Present

Julie Richards, Interim Staff Liaison
Betty Shelley, Fort Lauderdale Council of Civic Associations
Charles Webster, Liaison, Broward County Public Schools

A. Opening – Laura Clark/Lu Deaner

- **Attendance and Sign-in**

The meeting was called to order at 6:35 p.m., and attendance was taken. It was determined that a quorum was not present.

- **Approve Minutes (August) and Agenda (September)**

As a quorum was not present, the minutes of the August 21, 2008 meeting could not be approved.

- **Introduce New Member(s): Gloria Barr Jackson**

Ms. Jackson was welcomed to the meeting, and briefly introduced herself to her fellow Board members. Ms. Jackson, a native of Fort Lauderdale, had worked for the school system in many different capacities. She retired in 2006, and currently works part-time with a tutorial program.

The other Board members and staff introduced themselves to Ms. Jackson as well.

Ms. Deaner announced that new member Jacqueline Ackerina has been appointed to the Board, although she was unable to attend this meeting.

- **Guest Introductions: Maureen Dinnen; Mattie Benson; Thaddeus Hamilton**

Maureen Dinnen, School Board Member representing District 3, attended the meeting to present a School Board Report.

Mattie Benson, Principal of Sunland Park Elementary, and Thaddeus Hamilton, also representing Sunland Park Elementary, were in attendance to provide updates on the school.

B. Current Business

- **School Board Report – Maureen Dinnen**

Ms. Dinnen informed the Board that the School Board is emphasizing two new programs in the 2008-09 school year.

First is the Anti-Bullying Policy, she said, noting that Broward County has been a leader regarding application of the new law: while the deadline for implementing the policy is December, Broward County had written their policy by July.

The purpose of the policy is to raise awareness throughout the system of parents, teachers, and students of the bullying and mistreatment some children suffer at the hands of other students, although Ms. Dinnen noted that bullying may extend to adults bullying children or other adults as well. She described bullying as a contributing factor to suicide as well as school violence.

Awareness is being raised not only from the school principals' level, she affirmed, but at the student level as well.

The second rollout in Broward County schools is an attempt to lead the state in changing the "overemphasis" on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test

(FCAT). The test was implemented in 2000 and is administered to Florida students statewide. However, Ms. Dinnen advised, Broward County is concerned that the FCAT determines too many factors for the schools: the amount of money coming to each school and the changes in instructors' salaries, for instance.

The test itself changes periodically, she said, yet one grade level is consistently compared with another despite different student "audiences" taking the test. Ms. Dinnen likened this comparison to "apples and oranges."

In 2008-09, for instance, there is no "normed reference" for the test, in which Florida students are compared to other students outside the U.S. The State Department of Education has eliminated this comparison, Ms. Dinnen said, although most people found it to be valuable.

Ms. Christensen joined the meeting at this time (6:52 p.m.).

In addition, when the test results are averaged with previous results, a school may receive a higher or lower overall grade, although the test might have been radically altered from one year to the next.

What Broward County schools attempted in 2007-08 was to "end the FCAT frenzy." Ms. Dinnen felt this message had been successfully communicated to the State Legislature, as other measurements and evaluations were now in use in the school system. She advised that these changes would first take effect at the high school level, but ultimately she felt some legislators were changing their minds regarding measurement of school performance.

Perhaps at a later time, she said, the FCAT will be considered one measure of school success, rather than *the* measure.

Ms. Dinnen addressed the budget cuts to education, noting that, aside from the current national economic dilemma, education had already suffered significant cuts in funding. Florida is 50th in the nation for money spent per capita on public school funding, she said.

One difficulty in funding, she stated, arose when the State altered its policy of contributing 60% of monies to public schools while local property taxes made up the remaining 40%. Currently these percentages have reversed, with the State now paying 40% toward public schools and property taxes raising 60% of the necessary funds.

Ms. Dinnen pointed out that, as a District, Broward County had begun to make up for many "unfunded mandates," or laws put on the books without sufficient money to implement them, which then penalized schools in which these laws

were not in effect. Penalties included withdrawal of other funds or punitive restrictions placed on the schools.

Ms. Dinnen advised that the number of current unfunded mandates in effect make up “three or four pages” worth.

She pointed out that she personally supports the Class Size Amendment, as she understands that smaller class sizes are more conducive to students’ learning; however, the County was required to supply a substantial amount of funds to implement this Amendment. This, Ms. Dinnen noted, is contrary to the language included in the Amendment itself, which states that the law will be entirely state-funded. Broward County has been required to hire more teachers and build more classrooms to put the Class Size Amendment into effect.

Ms. Dinnen raised the subject of three Amendments that were to be included on the ballot in November 2008, which, she stated, had raised a good deal of local interest. She described Amendment 5 as a financial change, while Amendments 7 and 9 were related to the funding of private and/or religious schools.

All three Amendments, she said, would have taken more money away from an already restricted budget, as schools had suffered further budget cuts in 2007-08. Ms. Dinnen pointed out that, last year, budgets were written for schools after the State Legislature had recessed; then the Legislature held a special session and decreased the budget, which meant another education budget must be developed; then another session forced the education budget to be cut even further. She described this as “very difficult” for the schools.

Over the past two years, \$94 million was cut from the Broward County Schools’ budget, Ms. Dinnen said.

Funds were also reduced in ways Ms. Dinnen said she found “very disturbing.” For example, Broward County has more National Board-certified teachers than any other Florida county, she said; however, the funds for educators to apply to the National Board, and the mentoring money used to assist other colleagues, were reduced.

Funds were also cut for advanced classes, she continued, and statewide International Baccalaureate Programs, both of which could have significant academic ramifications.

Ms. Dinnen explained that the School District receives State funds in “a big package,” the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP). In 2007, she noted, portions of this money were removed from one designated set of expenses and added to another: for instance, funds moved to one area were removed from the

Transportation budget and the Student Achievement budget. When this was released to the press, she added, it resembled a fund increase.

The Broward County School Board chose to “mount a campaign of information” regarding the three Amendments that would have appeared on the ballot in November 2008. While public officials are not allowed to endorse or reject a ballot initiative, Ms. Dinnen noted that the School Board is allowed to inform the public of the repercussions if a particular Amendment passes.

She noted that Charles Webster, BCPS Liaison, had been instrumental in gathering information related to the information campaign. However, before this could be carried out, the Amendments were struck from the ballot by the court system.

Ms. Dinnen stated she felt the information campaign had had sufficient momentum and public interest behind it that it should not be allowed to dissipate. She advocated building “a collection of people” who would make up a broad system of support for public schools throughout the State of Florida. She felt that individuals with classroom experience and knowledge could be strong advocates for realistic improvements in education.

To this end, she said, the School Board had helped start Floridians for Quality Education (FQE), a group of individuals who could, unlike the School Board, take a strong position on State decisions regarding education. Their intent was to use the information provided by the school system regarding the negative and positive actions involving education, and, with the help of other community groups, raise funds, make contacts in the business community, and be visible to the State legislature. She described the group as “more high-profile” than similar advocacy groups in the past.

A group of volunteers was asked to go to the polls on November 4, 2008, with a petition or a similar collection of signatures, asking voters to sign and show their support for public education in Broward County. The volunteers would ask for minimal information from those who signed up so FQE or like organizations could keep in touch with these individuals, letting them know when education issues came before the State Legislature. Ms. Dinnen felt this was an excellent way to “keep the momentum going.”

Ms. Dinnen invited the Board’s members to become part of this mailing list.

Ms. Deaner pointed out that tonight’s meeting had originally been intended as a forum informing the public of the intent behind the removed proposed Amendments 5, 7, and 9. She felt the Board was “definitely interested.” She also noted that members of the public in favor of the removed proposed Amendments

were already organizing to have similar initiatives be included on a ballot in the future.

Ms. Dinnen noted that she had been present at one meeting in which the removed Amendments had been approved for ballot inclusion, and that members of a former Governor's administrative office had been very interested in gaining approval for Amendments 7 and 9.

Ms. Clark added that she had attempted to find an elected official to address regarding the Amendments, but could find no such person currently in public office.

Ms. Dinnen noted that the Broward County School District had recently been selected as a finalist for a national award given to urban school districts. She added that for the last seven years, the Council of Great City Schools had also chosen the District as having some of America's best urban schools. She felt there was much to celebrate in the District.

Ms. Deaner asked Ms. Dinnen to comment on three related Committees in the District.

Ms. Dinnen stated that in the last year, the City of Fort Lauderdale and the School District had agreed to each become more involved with the other, and with assistance from the City Manager, some community organizations had been formed to this end. A Parent Involvement Committee, Community Involvement Committee, and Safety Committee had been established, although Ms. Dinnen noted that the Safety Committee had eventually been "folded into" the other two Committees.

She hoped the combined City and District involvement would continue this year, and invited the Board to become involved with these Committees.

Mr. Parke stated that he had attended school in another country and was surprised that a "turf war" seemed to exist between States in the U.S., with different testing systems in place for different States. He felt this contributed to an overall lower standard for education, and asked Ms. Dinnen if she had any thoughts on the resolution of this problem.

Ms. Dinnen explained that each State determined its own educational system, which was very different than the school systems in place for other nations. She did not feel this would change, as it had been a long-standing practice in the U.S.

She advised that the way to change the educational system was to work through each individual State, as only 7% of school funds came from the Federal government. The remaining 93%, she said, was paid by State and local taxes.

Regarding the amount of money spent on education in the U.S. relative to other nations, Ms. Dinnen said she did not have information at hand on how the U.S. compared internationally.

She agreed that some individuals felt there was “wasteful spending” within the education system, but also noted that not everyone is aware of the wide-ranging nature of school expenses. She pointed out that the bill for electricity has recently increased by \$11 million for the District, and insurance costs have risen for comparatively less coverage.

Ms. Dinnen noted that the cost of construction had “leveled off,” and that at this time only older schools were being replaced.

Ms. Schulze wondered if money could be saved were the system to return to “neighborhood schools” rather than busing students to magnet schools. Ms. Dinnen allowed that this might happen, but the popularity of magnet schools made it highly unlikely. Asking parents to drive their children to magnet schools rather than have them bused there could be discriminatory, Ms. Dinnen said.

Thaddeus Hamilton, of Sunland Elementary, felt the education system was a preemptive solution to the nation’s problems with its prison system, particularly as so many young people found involvement in crime. He believed it was unfortunate that education was so often treated as an “afterthought” when it came to budgeting.

Ms. Dinnen provided handouts to the Board regarding the community organizations she had mentioned.

- **Sunland Park Update – Mattie Benson**

Ms. Benson opened her discussion by stating that Sunland Park Elementary is “doing very well.” She had first begun work at the school in what she described as “a difficult situation,” as many of the school’s staff thought highly of their former principal and felt a loss at that time. The difficulty had been felt by parents and children as well, she said.

She had realized that the school faced several challenges on a daily basis, including student behavior. Ms. Benson noted that the system in place at the school had been unsatisfactory to her, but she had felt it would be unwise to make immediate changes in the school rather than gradual ones.

She had applied an open-door policy to her position, Ms. Benson said, for teachers, staff, and parents as well. With this in place, she felt the school had slowly begun to make necessary changes.

When the first set of school test scores returned, Sunland Park remained an “F” school, Ms. Benson said, although there were appreciable gains in test scores among third, fourth, and fifth grades in particular, while the District and State scores had actually declined in some areas. She felt it was unfortunate that these improvements were not as widely noted as the school’s overall score, as the gains could be a point of pride for the school.

To make sure this was known at least at the school level, Ms. Benson said, she had prepared, with her Assistant Principal, a PowerPoint presentation with this data to be shown to teachers and staff. She felt this was important in the interest of morale.

She had worked closely with her Assistant Principal, meeting with a team of Sunland Park teachers during the summer to develop an instructional focus for the year, along with lesson plans and objectives. Ms. Benson said the result was a solid comprehensive plan for the school.

They developed a series of workshops as well. One such workshop was entitled “Understanding Poverty,” which, Ms. Benson stressed, was not about race, but about economics. She had used the same workshop at another school faced with different issues as well, to good results. At Sunland Park, she said, teachers and staff enjoyed the workshop, particularly the younger educators.

The workshop had involved office and facilities staff as well as teachers, Ms. Benson said. Its end result was a sense of teamwork that made it easier for the school to roll out its improved curriculum at the beginning of the school year.

Among other changes at the beginning of that year, Ms. Benson said, she had hired a behavior specialist, as she wanted some of the problem behaviors at the school addressed in a positive manner. She felt this was preferable to a security specialist.

As a result of the improvements, even substitute teachers wanted to work at Sunland Park now, Ms. Benson said. The school had had a troubled reputation in the past, although persons who worked at various schools within the District now felt it was “a nice school” and just as comfortable for them as other facilities.

More workshops were being conducted this year as well, she advised, focusing on high-yield strategies and other topics. Ms. Benson stated she has a curriculum team that meets regularly to discuss how items should be presented and directions the school should move in.

A recent decision of the curriculum team, she explained, is to capitalize on the individual expertise of team members in different fields. For example, a team

member with strengths in science and math will teach those fields to students, while another educator with a strong background in writing might teach that skill. This gives team members an opportunity to use their skills in a manner with which they are comfortable, she explained.

Another accomplishment at Sunland Park has been a close examination of the budget, which has allowed the school to allocate money for necessities, such as more computers and equipment. Also, when teams identify something they don't like – for instance, older equipment being used in the cafeteria – it was replaced with better and newer equipment.

Ms. Benson noted that she felt very strongly about this particular issue, as she had worked for the School District in other facilities and knew resources were available for new equipment at these locations. In that case, she pointed out, new equipment could come to Sunland Park as well. The same determination had helped the school acquire new playground equipment as well.

Parent involvement is also a focus at the school, and Ms. Benson informed the Board that a recent Open House had been attended by 163 parents representing 150 of 300 students. She felt a great deal of enthusiasm was now felt by parents and students as well as staff.

In conclusion, Ms. Benson invited the Board to attend an upcoming School Advisory Council meeting at Sunland Park.

Ms. Clark added that understanding poverty was a matter of practicing and teaching social skills to teachers and staff as well as students. She stressed that teaching had shown her that what she might see as unacceptable in a student's behavior, such as cursing or failing to wash hands, might be normal in that student's home, and required patience and understanding of the differences in situations.

Ms. Benson affirmed that this is true with all children, regardless of their economic circumstances. She advised that people who work with children must be aware that they must treat their students with respect, as they hope the students will treat them.

Ms. Shelley asked if the EAB could help Ms. Benson, and Sunland Park in general, in any way.

Ms. Benson said the school could use assistance with some of the incentives it provided for the students – stickers, certificates, and other small signs of encouragement for good behavior. She noted that the students often respond to these incentives and most of them can be found at dollar stores.

Ms. Deaner complimented Ms. Benson on her enthusiasm for and success with Sunland Park, and wondered if the school has a PTA or similar group to harness further parent involvement.

Ms. Benson said now the school has not only a PTA, but a School Advisory Council as well; the latter organization assisted in writing the school's improvement plan. When the school was asked at a later time to write a Parent Plan, the SAC was helpful with constructing that as well. She observed that parent involvement in the school was growing.

Ms. Deaner offered that she had proposed a "mini-horticulture" program for the school at one point, although the administration at the time was not receptive to the idea.

Mr. Hamilton stated that he had volunteered at Sunland Park for several years and was disturbed by the level of misinformation about the school within the larger District. He pointed out that while in 2005, the school earned a C in testing that was administratively reduced to a D; rather than addressing the basic problems that caused the low score, the entire teaching staff was replaced, while the fundamentals on which the school was operating did not change and the problem went largely unaddressed.

The school also suffered from deficient facilities, he added, noting that a problem with mold and mildew, and non-functional air conditioning units, also went untouched for quite some time.

He affirmed that Ms. Benson had begun making a difference at the school within two months of her arrival, due to her commitment to help the children and the school.

Mr. Hamilton added that the school was requesting approval of a \$50,000 Pilot Project to bring in a Teacher's Assistant for every grade level at the school. He stated that he had personally asked that the City of Fort Lauderdale partner with the school on this effort, as this could "take [the school] to the next level."

Ms. Benson informed the Board that Sunland Park will also be participating in the "Good Fit" program, which brings in young people to work in the classroom with experienced teachers. The participants will come from Florida Atlantic University, she said. She also noted that the Black Student Union at a local college had contacted her with an interest in mentoring some of the students.

Ms. Schulze recalled that a speaker from the previous spring, representing the School Board, had stated that she would train liaisons to seek out partnerships, which could apply to the school's need and desire for both incentives and a Pilot Project.

Ms. Jackson added that a Grandparents' Association could have the same impact as a PTA. Ms. Benson agreed, stating that grandparents should consider attending for the good of the community.

She added that Mr. Hamilton had shown outstanding support for the changes she had made to the school, as well as to Sunland Park itself.

The Board thanked Ms. Benson and Mr. Hamilton for attending the meeting.

- **Discussion Item – CCC Project Update/Reaction**

Ms. Schulze felt that Ms. Mary Fertig, in a PowerPoint presentation on the work done by Citizens Concerned for our Children, had "made it evident" that the Board's former practice of "shadowing" a student for a day, and returning to report on the school and its conditions, was worth reconsideration.

Ms. Deaner felt that the issue with shadowing had been the possibility that the intent of the person visiting the school might be misconstrued by the schools. She felt this responsibility was already being met by the Diversity Committee, and suggested that a member of the Board also become a member of this Committee in order to participate.

Ms. Shelley reminded the Board that the Board and the Diversity Committee had met together in the past, so each group could get a better sense of the other's responsibilities.

Ms. Deaner added, however, that members were appointed to the Diversity Committee rather than volunteering for it. She recommended that anyone interested in joining that Committee, Ms. Dinnen would be an excellent person to contact.

Ms. Shelley noted that, with prior approval, individuals had shadowed teachers or counselors as well.

Ms. Schulze pointed out that a citizen calling attention to deficiencies could often have a greater result than a principal or school employee reporting the same issue.

Ms. Elijah suggested that a better course of action might be to meet with the principal of a school, or a member of the school board, and call any deficiencies to that person's attention. She said this might foster a sense of partnership rather than any potential for disagreement.

Mr. Parke felt that an official position could be created for an individual to go into schools and report on findings, rather than its being carried out in what could be perceived as a random manner.

Ms. Deaner felt the discussion, like the presentation last month, spoke directly to the EAB's goals, and felt the matter would best be deferred to a later date at which a quorum is present.

Mr. Webster pointed out that a good principal would naturally express concern at who was coming into or leaving from his/her school, as a safety consideration at the very least. He also felt a responsible administrator would want to ensure a person visiting the school in an official capacity was properly trained. Similarly, he felt that administrator might not always be able to accommodate a visitor, regardless of that person's positive intentions.

Ms. Schulze suggested that the next meeting might be best left open, without a speaker or presenter, to allow the Board to discuss its goals at length.

To this end, Ms. Deaner recommended deferring the following Agenda items until the next meeting:

- Arthur Ashe update (no report available);
- EAB discussion of goals;
- 20-day counts;
- Student member to the EAB;
- Staff Liaison Report (no report);
- Council of Fort Lauderdale Civic Associations (no report);
- Fort Lauderdale Centennial Celebration.

Ms. Deaner also informed the Board of the resignation of member Klaron Grigsby.

- **Broward County School District – Charles Webster**

Mr. Webster recalled that there had been some prior discussion of inviting a speaker on the topic of "green schools." In the interest of clearing the Board's schedule, he stated he would move this potential engagement to the Agenda of the November meeting.

He noted that two Town Hall meetings remain on the School District's calendar for October:

- October 2, 2008: Monarch High School
- October 15, 2008: Piper High School

Mr. Webster also informed the Board that a Community Forum for Minority/Women's Business Enterprises will be held at 6:00 p.m., Thursday, September 25, 2008, at the K.C. Wright Building.

He noted that there has been a change in the boundaries process. Mr. Webster reminded the Board that the District's five-year capital plan describes when and where capital improvements should be funded, but funding for this plan is dependent on State review and approval, through what is known as a State plant survey. The existing State plant survey has been in place for five years and will expire in October 2008. This current plan states we must use all space before new classroom additions or new schools can be approved.

Two major requirements must be met, Mr. Webster said: State-required class size regulation and school concurrency issues. These two items will be key considerations for the School Board as they develop a new five-year plan.

Class size mandates place the following limitations, he said: pre-K through third grade classes may have no more than 18 students; fourth through eighth grades, no more than 22 students; and ninth through twelfth grades, no more than 25 in all core courses. This states, in essence, that the District must provide sufficient classroom space and personnel to accommodate this regulation.

Also new this year is State-mandated concurrency planning. School concurrency means the District must provide classroom space for students from new residential developments upon the time of their occupancy. Mr. Webster advised that this also means residential developers are not required to pay for additional schools or classrooms if there is space available at adjacent schools.

With the new criteria, the School Board will review school enrollment data during the last week of November. In December, only those schools on the list to participate in the boundary process will have boundary conferences to meet with the community and inform them of a potential boundary change. Mr. Webster offered to put the Board members in touch with "experts" on the subject if further explanation of the boundaries process was needed.

In conclusion, Mr. Webster provided the Board members with a handout covering "Frequently Asked Questions" about the Anti-Bullying Policy.

C. Old/Ongoing Business

Ms. Christensen recalled that at her last meeting, she had mentioned opportunities available for students through the Freedoms Foundation. Brochures on these opportunities were now available, she stated, and she would scan and email them to the Board members.

She also noted that a fall conference was planned by this Foundation, from October 30-November 2, 2008, and the Broward County Freedoms Foundation would fund 25 students, at approximately \$1000 per student, to attend. Letters have been sent to many schools, but the response, she reported, has been poor so far.

The fall conference, called the American Leaders Youth Summit, was described as a "school of patriotism," and is held at Valley Forge. Ms. Christensen stated she planned to attend a neighborhood conference of this Foundation, and would also pick up applications for programs for teachers. The Broward County Chapter of the Foundation planned to fund three to four teachers' attendance at graduate programs.

The Foundation also planned to send 100 students to four different youth conferences, Ms. Christensen said. The dates for these meetings were as follows:

- October 30-November 2, 2008;
- February 26-March 1, 2009;
- March 12-March 15, 2009;
- April 23-April 26, 2009.

It was proposed that, with Ms. Grigsby's resignation, a quorum of the Board members might be present. However, it was noted that the number required for a quorum did not change with the number of overall members.

The reason for this stipulation, Ms. Richards explained, was so a Board's membership could not dwindle to an extremely low number and treat a slim majority as a quorum.

Ms. Richards conveyed that this concern was raised at the last City Commission meeting, and the Commission asked that the City Attorney look into the matter and determine how to address it.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

