

SIT Meeting Minutes

February 3, 2009

Present: Dr. Crews, Kirk Rankin, Karen Langford, Andrew Smiles, Cheryl Ohlson, Mary Osterman, Malin Kerwin, Laure Hunter, Tawanna Franklin, Karen Kalat

Kirk began the meeting by explaining that we would address the remaining agenda items from the January meeting, which was cut short due to inclement weather. However, the discussion of SIT protocol and communications will be tabled until a future meeting when all (or nearly all) members of the SIT can attend.

PTA Budget:

Karen K. reported that the PTA's audit and budget committees will present a report at the next PTA meeting.

- At that PTA meeting the audit committee will explain its recommendation that the PTA maintain a reserve fund, roughly the amount paid by the PTA in teacher salaries each year.
- There has been less fundraising this year, so the potential for the PTA to run a deficit has increased.
- There has been a discussion of a possible "spend down" of PTA funds, and how money should be spent if there is extra money within the PTA budget. According to the PTA bylaws, the SIT is expected to maintain a prioritized list of school needs / wishes, and the PTA is expected to seek guidance from the SIT regarding the expenditure of "extra" money. It is recommended that any additional funds be applied to one-time expenditures (such as the air conditioners that were purchased for classrooms several years ago) rather than on something that will become an annual expense, such as teacher salaries.

Security Committee:

Tawanna reported that the PTA provided \$800 to be spent on security-related signs that will be placed throughout school grounds. A marquis sign has also been ordered for the front of the school (per DCPS requirement). Dr. Crews and Tawanna worked to ensure that the marquis would be as "subtle" and attractive as possible. The security committee is also trying to obtain four standard DCPS signs to be placed at the perimeters of the playground ("You're entering a peaceable school zone, no alcohol, etc."), as well as an additional sign explaining that the grounds are under 24 hour surveillance. It was suggested that the committee also obtain a sign asking that people do not walk through school grounds during school hours, as well as a faculty-parking-only sign in order to deter those parents who insist upon parking in the school lot during school drop-off and pick-up hours.

Tawanna also reported that all outdoor security lights are now working, and that Mr. Hillyer will be getting a fence to be placed between the soccer-field side demountables and the soccer field in order to deter people from walking through that narrow corridor. DCPS will not install any additional cameras

because they are considered capital improvements that will be included in Janney's renovation through the MFP.

Class Configuration:

The fifth and sixth grade teachers clarified that the students within these grades will be "promoted" rather than "graduated."

Dr. Crews reported that the LSP committee met last month, and that she had polled Janney families and teachers about their plans to return to Janney next year. The LSP committee looked at the results of these surveys, as well as school enrollment history and where the District is going (including an emphasis on early childhood/preschool education). As a result of these conversations she proposed that two additional prekindergarten classes be added next year, for a total of three pre-Ks (with three classes in each additional grade level K-5). She explained the concern that if our enrollment shrinks, the school risks losing staff. Furthermore, she explained her belief that the community could support the additional prekindergarten classes, as there is a significant waiting list for PK each year. It was also suggested that this might be an optimal opportunity to admit more out-of-boundary students, thereby diversifying the student body. Several teachers voiced their beliefs that out-of-boundary students seem to transition more smoothly to the school when they join the community in the younger grades, rather than in the upper grades. Mary mentioned that at one point new out-of boundary families were mentored by current families and very much embraced by the community, and that it is advisable when out-of-boundary families are brought in earlier. Dr. Crews explained that DCPS is moving towards expanding PK offerings throughout the city, as well as addressing the quality of the early childhood program.

Cheryl suggested that if new teachers are to be added at the PK level, Dr. Crews strive to find teachers with expertise in early childhood development and curriculum.

Dr. Crews also reported on related enrollment policy changes. She explained that the PK lottery will now be conducted by the central DCPS office, with the local school playing no role. The local schools will no longer be responsible for verifying addresses, and the central office, which will assume that responsibility, will not conduct address verifications until the summer. As a result, Janney will not know who will be coming to PK until mid-summer. As has been the policy for years, priority for PK enrollment will be given to those families who live within the school boundaries and those who have siblings attending the school. Discussion ensued about this priority policy, and Andrew suggested that we talk about the "elephant in the room." He explained that this year, contrary to stated policy, three out-of-boundary students were admitted to the PK while there were still several in-boundary and sibling families on the PK waiting list. Dr. Crews stated that one of those students is Mrs. Manning's son, who lives in Virginia and pays DCPS tuition, and that it is important that he attend Janney because Mrs. Manning is often required to work late, and having him in the school enables her to do so. Andrew referred to a situation in the Fall when a current Janney parent with a child on the PK waiting list asked the office staff about how the enrollment decisions were made, why several out-of-boundary students were admitted while in-boundary students were not, and if she could see the waiting list. The response of the office staff was to deny her request to see the list and to abruptly dismiss her questions. When

asked when and by whom these PK enrollment decisions were made this year, Dr. Crews stated that they were made before her tenure at Janney began.

Also related to school enrollment, Dr. Crews explained that all fifth and sixth graders who are currently enrolled at Janney (as well as other local elementary schools) are guaranteed a space at Deal, without having to go through the out-of-boundary enrollment process. The registration process for out-of-boundary families wishing to send their children to Janney has begun, will last approximately three weeks, and will conclude in early March.

The SIT then considered the plan for three PK classes in light of our current enrollment, which is as follows:

PK	22 students		
K	18 students	22 students	21 students
Gr. 1	23	23	23
Gr. 2	24	24	24
Gr. 3	24	23	22
Gr. 4	21	20	21
Gr. 5	27	26	26
Gr. 6	18	19	19

SIT members discussed the issue of class size, and several staff members cited the importance of maintaining stable enrollment numbers. It was mentioned that with class sizes in the low twenties, the loss of a few students could result in losing staff. Malin expressed concern about the size of the current second grade, and Cheryl raised the possibility that higher class sizes encourage families to look elsewhere. Laure stated that she does not consider the class sizes high at all, and remembers when the classes at Janney were closer to thirty students.

Karen K. voiced her concern that the addition of two PK classes next year would create a “bubble” of kindergarteners the following year, as many neighborhood families who choose to keep their children in neighborhood preschools will enroll their children in Janney for kindergarten. As a result, during the 2009-2010 school year the three full classes of pre-kindergarteners would move to kindergarten, and many new children from local preschools would likely enroll in kindergarten, creating the need for either more than three kindergarten classrooms or very high student:teacher ratios. Karen K. recommended that for this reason we be very careful about managing the numbers of PK classes. Tawanna stated that we can always change the configurations as needed. It was also mentioned that the addition of PK classes would require changes in the utilization of instructional assistants.

Kirk stated that there may be a difference of opinion and perspective between the staff and the parents, in that staff feel the pressure of the institutional drive to grow, or at least to stabilize our enrollment numbers in order to ensure the stability of staff, while parents may see some benefit to becoming a

“smaller” school, at least temporarily. It was mentioned that we have spent much time lamenting the school’s overcrowding, and stressing the need for expansion as we are “bursting at the seams,” and it may therefore be wise to take advantage of this opportunity to “breathe a little” in terms of enrollment and space. Mary expressed concern about the school population lowering, and Malin questioned where the attrition, if there is any, is taking place. The possibility of having two PK-4 classrooms and one PK-3 classroom was raised, and the group agreed that this would not occur as the inclusion of a PK-3 brings along with it a series of additional regulations (bathrooms, diaper changing, etc.) When asked how staffing decisions will ultimately be made, Dr. Crews explained that those decisions will be made by her self and the teachers.

Someone mentioned the possibility of having an extra classroom next year if enrollment is lowered, and asked how that additional room would be utilized. Several possibilities were mentioned, including using an extra classroom for office space, as a science lab, or moving the art or music room to one of the demountables. Mary mentioned that it is advisable to move as many classes as possible out of the demountables and into the building. Someone asked how other local schools are responding to the movement of the sixth grades to Deal, and it was indicated that all of the local elementary schools (except Mann, which will retain its sixth grade) are dealing with similar issues.

Malin stated that there has been much talk about overcrowding at Janney, and yet the current plan (to add two PK classes) will “fill up” the vacancies created by the sixth grade transitioning to Deal. Andrew stated that the current plan for three PKs will only leave Janney with sixteen fewer students, while there is the potential to have a net reduction of thirty-six students. It was again stated that this would result in the loss of staff. There was some discussion about how many teachers are likely to leave Janney at the end of the year anyway, and Dr. Crews said that we won’t know until the summer. Cheryl suggested that we look to years past for some indication of teacher attrition trends, and asked if there is an “average” loss of staff for any given year. Last year, in which Janney lost eight teachers, was an anomaly. After some discussion about past trends Andrew suggested that we can expect one or two teachers to leave, while others indicated that there is no way to know, and that there have been years in which no teachers have left. It was again mentioned that there is a certain inconsistency and illogic to the current plan to encourage the enrollment of significant numbers of new students (through the addition of two PKs) while we complain about overcrowding. Mary stated that we could lose families, and that if the numbers shift downward we lose staff, and that this plan represents a more stable approach.

Karen K. suggested that we take a more gradual and measured approach to the growth of the PK program by increasing PK by one class next year (for a total of two PK classes), and then waiting to see what happens as the PK students move on to kindergarten. It was agreed that having two PK classes, and three classes at each higher grade levels, would be an appropriate solution.

Local School Plan:

Dr. Crews informed the group that plans for the afterschool tutoring program are underway, and that our aim is to have all students test within the proficient or advanced range. Like last year, the program will be designed to support children who tested at the Basic or Below Basic level and to address test

taking skills. Kids who are eligible for the program are currently being identified based on 2008 DCCAS scores. The program will also support those children who last year tested “on the cusp” of proficiency, in order to prevent them from “slipping.”

Dr. Crews distributed the goals from the LSP, which also included the 2008 DCCAS data. She stated that the LSP will review the goals and write an action plan designed to help ensure that the school achieves these goals.

Principal Review Committee:

Dr. Crews left the meeting, and Kirk distributed a letter from Michelle Rhee’s office explaining the procedures for principal determination for the 2009-2010 school year. Kirk explained that, like all new principals within DCPS, Dr. Crews retains the title of “interim” principal, and, as such, is required to undergo a review in order to determine her status for the next school year. The SIT is responsible for putting together a panel that will be charged with representing the school community during this review process. The SIT discussed the two options for assembling this panel, which include either re-assembling the original Principal Selection Committee that interviewed Dr. Crews last summer or charging the SIT with this responsibility. The pros and cons of each option were discussed, and it was agreed that the committee should include equal representation of parents and staff. After this discussion it was agreed that the SIT would vote on the options. SIT members who were present voted, and, as several SIT members were not present, the remaining votes will be obtained by Kirk via email or phone conversations.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:40.