

MINUTES OF MIDDLE SCHOOL ADVISORY COUNCIL MEETING

February 1, 2010

The Middle School Advisory Council Meeting of the Board of Education was held February 1, 2010, at the Government Center, 888 Washington Boulevard. The meeting was called to order at 5:08 p.m. by Dr. Joshua Starr, Superintendent.

Council members were asked to comment on the Community Forum held on January 21. It was noted that some parents expressed concerns about keeping higher achieving students moving along. Language needs to be refined, especially “ability grouping vs. tracking.” Differentiated instruction is not widely understood; parents don’t see it in action and, consequently, don’t have faith in it. Dr. Starr indicated that copious notes were taken to learn what parents need to know.

An article by Carol S. Dweck, “Mind-Sets and Equitable Education,” which describes a fixed mind-set (intelligence is a set trait) vs. a growth mind-set (intellectual ability can grow), was distributed and discussed. It was stated that we must send the message that effort, hard work, and practice leads to achievement and success. Teachers need to be aware of negative messages they may send subliminally and their power to make or break a student.

Dr. Hamilton noted that results of the recent assessments are not in yet. Numbers of students to be regrouped will be announced soon. Middle school transformation is still a work in progress. Input from multiple perspectives, including the MSAC, will be considered in determining regrouping criteria.

The Council broke into five smaller groups to study honors placement. The groups were presented with four scenarios created from criteria suggested at the last MSAC meeting for consideration in moving students. Data was provided on four hypothetical students, and participants were asked to rank criteria to be considered for movement.

Small group discussion then centered on the timeline for regrouping assessments. Opinion among the five groups varied.

Dr. Hamilton pointed out the importance of removing the mystery from the placement process by establishing concrete criteria and consistency in all schools. She stated that we have worked hard to have the same curriculum with standard assessments. By raising the bar, and with proper support, students will enter high school on an equal playing field, ready for CP courses in grade 9 and better prepared to compete later in college.

Dr. Hamilton stated that Dr. Starr will have a proposal soon to move reform into next year. She thanked Council members and expressed appreciation and respect for their time and collective wisdom.

The next scheduled meeting of the MSAC is Monday, April 5, 2010, at 5:00 p.m.

The meeting adjourned at 7:03 p.m.