

United Parents Group Executive Board Meeting

January 12, 2009

Attendees: Paula Barvin, Megan Gorman, Cherie Leather, Donna Gordon, Dana Walker, Michael Szura, Tee Tolliver, Beverly Norward, Cindy Morales, Kate Darwin, Nancy Hellendall, Carol Trotman, Jennie Brantner, Christa Sywulak-Herr, Julie Cohen, Deb Mulligan, Sherry Hazlewood, Geneen Stuart, Kathleen Fitzgerald Camp, Rhonda Feder, Julie Haywood, Mary Davis, Karen Irgang, Bonnie Perlmutter, Cynthia Lawson, Kimmy Brennan

Welcome & Approval of Minutes:

Paula welcomed all, announced that Jim Butt was not able to attend the meeting, and then motioned to approve the December 2008 minutes. Without objection and requiring no discussion, minutes were approved by acclamation.

Treasurer's Report:

Sherry Hazelwood reported no transactions were made during the month and that the UPG balance remains the same as last month, \$3,083.16.

Misc. Announcements:

Rhonda Feder announced that all PTO's made their TAP contributions and that TAP nomination forms would be sent out to families within the week.

Presidents' Report:

Paula stated that she and Jim Butt would be meeting with Dr. Davis on January 27, 2009.

PTO Sharing:

Cedarbrook: The Cedarbrook representative announced they will not be participating in the MLK Day of Service as they felt most parents were obligated at other schools.

Elkins Park: EP will be participating in a MLK Day of Service and the activities will include painting the school lobby and making baby blankets for the Cradles to Crayons organization.

Myers: Meyers will also be participating in the MLK Day of Service. In addition, the Myers PTO is busy planning for their big fundraiser, a Silent

Auction, which is scheduled for February 7, 2009. They are also considering another fundraiser for the fall.

Wyncote: Wyncote will be participating in the MLK Day of Service. The PTO has scheduled 3 activities for the day including gathering donations for Cradles to Crayons, writing letters to service members in Iraq, and collecting books for donation to CHOP. Wyncote is also looking forward to their annual "Author/Illustrator" event, scheduled for February 6, 2009.

Glenside: Glenside will be participating in the MLK Day of Service. Additionally, they are busy preparing for their school musical, which will be held on February 5, & 6, 2009. Glenside also announced that they did not qualify for the Reading Rocks program this year and will therefore hold a book swap instead.

Cheltenham: There was no representative present from Cheltenham Elementary.

Winter Workshop:

Jenny Brantner reported on the progress of the Drug & Alcohol Workshop to be held on March 5th. Jenny announced that author, Michael J. Bradley, will be the keynote speaker.

Spring Workshop:

Carol Trotman gave a brief update on the spring workshop. The theme of the workshop has expanded and will no longer focus solely on cyber bullying, but instead will focus on Restorative Justice. A faculty member at the Institute will facilitate the workshop for Restorative Justice. Restorative Justice is defined as the "study of restoring and developing social capital, social discipline, emotional well being and civic participation through participatory learning and decision-making."

Guest Speaker:

Michael Szura, architect, and father of students at Myers Elementary and Elkins Park Middle school, spoke about plans to develop an open space courtyard/garden at Elkins Park School. *The Garden of Learning* project is the vision of an EP teacher, Mr. Rick Kraske and has already received a grant from the Cheltenham Foundation as well as funding from the PTO. In addition, the project has the full support of the School Administration, faculty, and families. Currently, the district's grant writer, Susan O'Grady, is searching for further funding options. Both in kind and contributions from community members are welcome. The garden will be completed over the span of 3 years and the current design (by Mr. Szura) will include a music

room/area, a Pennsylvania Woodlawn garden, a working garden and a "salad" party room (aptly named for the annual "salad" party held each spring by the outgoing 6th graders)

The second speaker of the evening was Anne Specter, Communication and Development Director for Cheltenham Schools. Anne discussed the goals of her office, the urgency of town partnerships, and how these partnerships add value to our schools. Anne spoke in depth about the success we've had with various partnerships such as Einstein Healthcare, The Princeton Review, Manor College and Arcadia College.

Group Discussion: Universal Acceleration (continued from Dec. 08 meeting)

Paula briefly outlined the highlights from last month's UPG meeting where the issue of "De-tracking" and Universal Acceleration was discussed. Paula asked the attendees to brainstorm a list of pros and cons:

Reasons for De-tracking (Pro)

Two schools at CHS is unacceptable Students say that "CP" stands for "Colored People"
80% of the students in CP are African American.

All the CHS Department Heads are in support of de-tracking.

Concerns (Cons)

Many changes: -from universal testing at the elementary grades, getting everyone to take Algebra 1 in 9th grade, using Foresight to track and evaluate student performance in a variety of skill areas, changes in the middle schools, Improving Achievement Plans at CBK and CHS presented at EA mtgs- have not been evaluated. The district moves on without evaluating what has been done. The 11th graders last year did not benefit from these changes.

Teacher training- Teachers have not taught to a broad range of skills. How will differentiation work in a 45-minute class? Are the teachers on board?

Is College- Prep really college prep? If it not, then the curriculum should be changed immediately. If the curriculum is below grade level – it builds distrust. Why call it "College Prep"? Real college prep should be taught.

What role does parent involvement play?

Why is Dr. Lewis opposed to opening up Honors and AP to any student who is motivated to take those courses?

We should learn more about what Abington is doing.

Class size- Enriched math classes have 31 students.

How many CP students could be moved up to Enriched?

Is the door open to parent input?

Timeline: Dr. Lewis plans to de-track 9th grade next September. Bonnie said that a decision would have to be made soon for that to happen. UPG believes de-tracking should only take place after the necessary training and supports are developed.

How do we ensure that the scope and sequence are being taught consistently by different teachers?

Inclusion needs to be evaluated. This is the district's first experiment in differentiated instruction. It needs to be evaluated. Many parents feel that their students have not benefited from being in inclusion classes. The next EA meeting will be on this topic.

We need to change the culture of the school- students should feel cool to be smart.

How will teachers deal with the behavior problems that interfere with class time? We need to learn more about restorative justice. Training on Jan. 26th.

Paula Barvin closed discussion. Meeting adjourned.