

DRAFT until Approved by the UPG Board

United Parents Group Executive Board Meeting - November 10, 2008

Attendees: Paula Barvin, Jim Butt, Kate Darwin-Liedtka, Rhonda Feder, Jennie Brantner, Sherry Hazlewood, Catherine Welsh, Tina Veletto, Garnet Turner, Tracy Brown, Ellen McClain, Colleen McHugh, Eileen Hillman, Mary Russell, Shirley Wilson, Christa Sywulak-Herr, Marlene Dencker, Carol Trotman, Jim Custer, Linda Morales, Mary Russell, Lise Schwartz, Cherie Leather, Monica Camhi, Tanya Soboloff, Tee Toliver, Robyn Margasak, Delores Wells, Nancy Hellendall, Kathleen Fitzgerald, Cynthia Lawson, Sarah Putterman,

Welcome & Approval of Minutes:

Paula welcomed everyone, then motioned to approve Ben Reich as UPG 2008-09 webmaster. Without objection, Ben was approved as webmaster.

Jim motioned to approve October 2008 UPG minutes. Without objection and requiring no discussion, minutes were approved by acclamation.

Treasurer's Report:

Sherry Hazelwood reported that Elkins Park PTO paid their UPG dues, though the check was damaged and must be reissued. The Elkins Park representative will get another check issued ASAP.

Guest Speaker:

Dr. Darlene Davis, the Assistant Superintendent of the Cheltenham School District, reviewed the district's 5-year strategic plan. Dr. Davis gave a brief history on the strategic planning process, which included the development of a district wide committee, formed in November 2007. The committee met on several occasions during which time they reflected on the strategic plan from 2002-2007 then defined a mission and ultimately set the strategic goals for the district.

Dr. Davis said that Cheltenham's plan is above and beyond the requirements set forth by the state of Pennsylvania. She said while the state has recently implemented a new format planning, Cheltenham's plan is exceptionally comprehensive and detailed. That said, Dr. Davis stated the state has yet to approve Cheltenham's strategic plan for 2008-2014, but is hopeful it will be approved soon.

Q & A:

1. How will the district measure its success in achieving the goals set forth in the plan?
Dr. Davis said the administration will hold a public meeting at the end of each school year to assess the district's benchmarks and to determine what goals are being met and what, if any other benchmarks must be set.
2. How do we compare globally?
Dr. Davis said she is unable to specify how we are performing against other nations, though, generally speaking, U.S. schools are falling behind many other developed countries. Also, Dr. Davis said the administration is constantly examining high achieving schools nationally and comparing our standards and strategies.
3. What is the administration doing to measure differentiated instruction?
Dr. Davis said the administration has implemented several strategies to help foster differentiated instruction including walk thru's, core extension, professional development/in service training, and flexible scheduling (which allow teachers time to plan lessons together and to share effective techniques).
4. Is there a relationship between positive school culture and restorative practices?

Dr. Davis said she believes there is a relationship between the two and that many of the district's goals are vertical, impacting high school, down to middle school, down through elementary school.

5. How is the administration addressing the tone/culture of schools and/or specific teachers and aides?

Dr. Davis acknowledged that school climate is critical to effective education, and beyond walk-thru, the administration needs support from parents to report their experiences. The most critical first step is to talk or write to the principal about their concerns and be as specific as possible.

6. Do principals have resources to address concerns with teacher aides?

Dr. Davis said that aides are required to participate in many hours of development and should be receiving ongoing feedback.

Misc. comments/announcements:

Several parents asked Dr. Davis about benchmark tests that were administered to students this fall. It seems many H.S. students are reporting that teachers are planning to use benchmark exam scores in their grading. Parents were under the impression that these scores were not to be included in grading, but rather were for assessment purposes only. Dr. Davis said she would get clarification for the parents as soon as possible. [Note: UPG later determined that benchmark test grades will NOT be included in grades.]

Some parents suggested that the administration seek student feedback on teachers and aides during school walk thru's.

The High School PTO representative announced that they are sponsoring a parent forum in December that will bring parents and administrators together to discuss where the district is headed.

PTO Sharing:

PTO representatives briefly discussed the issues facing "Green Committees" and noted that most of the changes schools need to address in order to achieve a greener environment, must be implemented at an administrative level.

Glenside Elementary school asked other schools to share ideas for Martin Luther King, Jr. Day of Service. Several suggestions were made as to how best to serve the schools and larger community.

Winter Workshop:

Jennie Brantner gave an update on the Alcohol & Drug Workshop. Jennie said the workshop is tentatively planned for March 5, 2009. The event will be mostly parent focused although they are considering having a student component as well. The workshop will be organized in a town hall setting, with a panel of local experts and hopefully a keynote speaker. Jennie said the committee is still trying to determine how to pay for the speaker.

Spring Workshop:

Carol Trotman gave a brief update on the Spring Workshop. The topic will be "Cyber Bullying" and Carol has just begun preliminary research but also hopes to find funding to pay for a Keynote Speaker/expert to lead the workshop.

Due to time constraints, the balance of the agenda was tabled. Meeting was adjourned.