

Business and Community Advisory Council
April 21, 2009

Welcome

The BCAC and CLC have been combined and the newest members were acknowledged by Dr. Dale and Andrea Sobel. School Board member, Dan Storck was in attendance. The round table introductions began with Andrea Sobel.

Superintendent Update

Dr. Dale began the meeting with the budget updates. The budget is being prepared and the Board of Supervisors is currently working on the mark-up.

Tier 2 of the proposed budget has the deficit decreasing from \$50m to \$26m with the current cuts and the increase of the classroom size. With the modification to change the bell schedule, it is estimated that there will be a reduction in fuel cost and transportation costs.

It is projected that the school population will increase by 4000 students. This is an increase of more than 800 students from last year. There are fewer students leaving Fairfax County than in previous years. It was noted that that many students who were enrolled in private schools are now leaving and entering public schools.

Title 1 schools will receive approximately \$25m from the stimulus package.

Discussion

Comment:

Would it be possible to charge fees for SACC activities?

Answer: SACC is paid for by the parents and subsidized by Fairfax County.

Comment:

The AP & IB testing fee is \$25 per test. Many families cannot afford these fees.

Answer: The fee is waived for students who qualified for free and reduced lunches.

Comment:

Students who are not part of the free/reduced price program but have limited income, may not take higher level courses that have fee based tests as they may feel that the alternative courses are adequate and they are free.

Comment:

Parents need to know what the fees for the tests will be in order to make a choice for their child.

Comment:

Is there a possibility of an early retirement bridge with revised funding? Is there a plan in place for the next few years?

Answer: The actual cost is too expensive and never broke even in the cost analysis. The actual cost was from 100% of an employee's salary to 50% of the salary for retirement.

Eileen Kugler – Consultant to National PTA

The National PTA recently developed new Standards for Family-School Partnerships that provide a framework for how families, schools, and communities should work together to support student success. Through the Standards, the National PTA is working to develop the capacity of local PTA leaders to be cultural brokers and to develop an inclusive organization that represents the diversity of the school's community. The Standards are focused on activities that support student learning, including helping families build social and political connections that empower them to partner with school staff. An assessment guide, available on the PTA website, helps PTA leaders and school officials determine how well they are meeting Goals set out in the Standards, such as "Welcoming all families into the school community," "Supporting learning by engaging families," and "Connecting the School with community resources."

Nancy Briggs – Coordinator of Family and School Partnerships

There is a need for throughout the system for more parent engagement and involvement in the students learning. The PTA standard revised 18 months ago is geared to what the school and family is doing together. Listed below are some actions that can help ease the confusion and also help educate parents that are coming into FCPS for the first time.

- Welcoming families into the school.
Each new family should be welcomed and given a walk through of the school. The school needs to take a look from the visitor's point of view and be able to answer questions.
- Communicate effectively
There are many ways to effectively communicate. Parent liaisons are very important within the schools.
- Supporting Student Success
Every student should be given a student handbook. All vital information is included in the handbook.
- Speaking up for every child
There are a variety of programs which include parent involvement and parent engagement. Sharing information and collaborating within the community is vital.
- We need more involvement which may lessen the stress of many people.
- We need to encourage more mentors in the schools. Mentors can share their expertise and encourage a more positive attitude. More companies could become a business partner with the schools.

Molly Bessinger-Lacy – Principal, Graham Road Elementary School

The student population of Graham Road Elementary School is 64% Spanish speaking. Students living-in-poverty is at 81% and English is not the primary language in 85% of the families.

Every new parent to the school meets with the school liaison and receives an agenda notebook which the student must use daily. There is a school contract which is signed by the student and parent.

Younghee Kang – Parent Liaison, Chantilly HS and Oakton HS

The liaison helps communication between the school and the homes and to help understand the many different cultures. The main role is to understand what the family is experiencing and to ease the confusion and make the parents feel much less intimidated.

Maria Demarest – Parent Liaison, Bailey’s ES for the Arts and Sciences

There is a need to integrate the students together in addition to working with the parents. The liaison will often go into the community and find out where the children live and see what the child is experiencing in their daily lives.

Discussion

Comment:

The parent’s responsibility of educating their children needs to start at a much earlier age than elementary school. The education needs be a joint effort with the parents and the schools. Programs to promote parent involvement start as early as 3 years of age.

Comment:

The schools need to work more with the immigrant population to learn more about their beliefs and cultures.

There is a need for more bilingual school administration and faculty to effectively communicate with the students and families.

There is a need to give parents a road map for the paths that are needed for their child to advance to the next level.

Atmosphere is very important in communicating. The spoken language may not be the same but non - verbal language can send powerful messages.

Question: How does a PTA get started in a new school?

Answer: There needs to be a strong leadership in the school and communication efforts to invite parents into the school community. It is also important to have people willing to be the liaisons in the school to interact with the school community. This must be funded in a way that the liaisons are able to effectively reach out to their language communities.

The Fairfax County PTA Council will assist the new school with a new leadership and provide free leadership training.

Comment:

Fees to participate in school activities need to be abolished for the children who are living in poverty.

Possible reasons the membership in the PTA is lower could be attributed to concerns over how the money that is raised by the PTA is being spent. Some members do not see the benefits in the PTA and dislike the politics that are involved.

Comment:

Each school should conduct a parent survey. There needs to be a way to show effectiveness with the funds throughout the year. More funds could be raised through the booster clubs. There is a need for some schools to earn between \$4,000 and \$7,000 through fund raising activities.

Comment:

The Parent Handbook needs to be re-evaluated and available in other languages.

Comment:

What is wanted from the parent survey and what exactly is the goal?

Answer: The focus would be on the relationships between the family and school and would like to have more parental involvement in the school. We need to be sure that the goal is clear before completing the parent survey for the school system.

The meeting ended at 9:40