

DORCHESTER COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Board Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment

Minutes

March 29, 2018

Present: Katie Holbrook, teacher; Donna Payne, parent; Zulieka Horsey, pupil services; Wendell Meekins, Jr., parent; Dr. Casey Scott, Health Department; Pastor Craig Mathies, Larry Windsor, parent; Erin Hill, parent; Shamonie Gaines, C-SDHS student; Melissa Coleman, teacher; Greg Meekins, NAACP; Lt. Shane Hinson, Cambridge City Police; Lesley Jackson, parent; Alexis Spriggs, C-SDHS student; Morgan Wright, NDHS Student; Katie Tolley, parent; Clare Spillane, Social Services; Phil Rice, Chairperson, Laura Layton, Co-Chairperson.

Absent: Justus Smith, NDHS Student; Sheriff Jimmy Phillip.

Introductions were made.

Mr. Rice explained the process of the Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment (CAC). He stated that these meetings will be open to the public and clarified that this is not a Board meeting and will not be run by Board rules. Members of the community who attend these meetings will not have the opportunity to interact or speak. They can contact members of this CAC with concerns or suggestions, and they will report back to the CAC; and then he and Mrs. Layton will report to the Board. He conveyed that the CAC is here to solve problems, not to point fingers. If you have anything to say about an individual problem, that will be referred to the Superintendent of Schools, she will review it. If you have a problem with the superintendent, that will be sent to the Board president for review. This is not about personalities, we are here to deal with issues, to solve problems. The Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment also includes discipline along with many other things. We will expand things as we go along.

Mr. Rice explained that meeting on the 2nd Thursday of each month allows him to report at the Board meeting the following week. He asked if 5:30 p.m. is an appropriate time to meet, and would they like to alternate meeting in different parts of the county. It was agreed that the meetings will be held at 5:30 p.m. in the Board Room at the Central Office. He noted that there are four student members but only one student from each school can attend, the other is backup if one can't attend. When an item needs to be voted on, the CAC members have the votes, Mr. Rice and Mrs. Layton are non-voting members of this committee. If there is a tie it stays a tie. Mr. Rice and Mrs. Layton will have the final vote when it is sent to the Board.

Mrs. Layton spoke about communication from school to parent, communication between parents, and communication in all respects. There have been complaints that parents were not notified during the lock-down at C-SDHS. She explained that it is not possible for the administration to stop what they are doing during a crisis to email, tweet, or place on Facebook

what is going on, plus the investigation is not complete to convey accurately what happened. It is very important that communication be correct, factual, and communication be compliant with Federal regulations. We cannot report any information on student. Mrs. Layton asked the committee to inform their subcommittees and friends that instant communication is not possible. In the past month, Facebook has had some incredibility negative post about DCPS, and negativity feeds negatively. The negative posts make the school system look bad and it feeds into fear. Mrs. Layton stated that she feels very strongly that if you have a positive reaction on Facebook this will be the response – positive brings positive, and negative brings negative. It was expressed that this will not happen overnight it will depend on the work that CAC does to give parents the feeling that the school system has created a culture of accountability. The CAC has the opportunity to be the liaison to get accurate information to the community. Mrs. Layton stated that there are so many rumors in the community that are not accurate, and she feels that Facebook has been a part of this problem. If you continue to spread rumors and negative ideas, we are not going to get anywhere with the CAC.

Mr. Rice presented and explained to the CAC that a page for the Board Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment has been provided on the DCPS website, www.dcps.k12.md.us. There is an email link to contact the CAC, dcpscac@dcpsmd.org. Mr. Rice conveyed that this site can be used as a resource that will contain pertinent information for use by the CAC and the community. The contact information for the membership of the Board Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment is included on this site. This will also allow the community can contact each member with regards to subcommittees.

Mr. Rice stated that the purpose of the CAC is to open the lines of communication between the stakeholders and the Board. Mr. Rice remarked that one thing parents have been saying is that there must be appropriate consequences for a person's actions. Mr. Rice stated that you must keep in mind that there are different appropriate consequences for different ages (16-year-old vs 7-year-old) even if it is the same action.

General discussion followed including questions and concerns:

Shamonie Gaines stated that she understands what Mr. Rice is saying about consequences and responsibilities, but the problem at C-SDHS is that students are not learning. As an example, if you have a student who hits a teacher in the face, the student gets charged with assault, and the student gets suspension, but then the student comes back and does the same thing and gets an expulsion. The students see everything on social media and it scares them, they don't feel safe.

Mr. Rice stated that DCPS is limited with what can be done per COMAR. We need to come up with programs for interventions and long-term programs.

Zulieka Horsey stated that it is very important to understand that a lot of things that have been mentioned are set by the State, fair or unfair. She explained that several years ago DCPS was faced with a situation called AC vs Dorchester County, that was the catalyst with everything that changed with COMAR and the Maryland Regulations. Basically, what happened was DCPS suspended a student and the student didn't have school work. MSDE said you can't have this long-term suspension and not give a child an education while they're out. This sparked MSDE

looking at each local school system and deciding what they are going to do about it. Mrs. Horsey noted that we are coming full circle and some of CAC the situations could lead us right back there. Mrs. Horsey stated that the DCPS Calendar Handbook is a good resource to explain what DCPS can do. She encourages committee members and subcommittees to read and use the DCPS Calendar Handbook for insight and a resource.

Mr. Meekins stated that elementary students in alternative settings are not dumb, they are in survival mode. They see what the media is saying and what their parents are saying and doing. If we are going to be effective, we need to be more positive and learn from our past. We all want to see students be successful, but you have to understand they all develop at different levels. We need relationship building with students.

Rev. Mathis stated that the community is going to look at CAC as representatives of Dorchester County and we need to show a united front. He conveyed that we will not always agree on everything but if the vast majority agrees, you will have to learn how to be agreeable. The common goal should be to help equip these young individuals to the best of our ability and give them a learning environment that will help them succeed in life. We need to present a sincere united front on the decisions that are made.

Mr. Windsor felt that the CAC has an opportunity to revolutionize DCPS and we need to stay positive.

Donna Payne stated that she is on the advisory council as a parent, but she is also a school nurse and has the opportunity to talk with many of the students. She has asked the students what is “your biggest thing” right now, and they stated that when the school has their announcements and they say “be college and career ready” that offends them; they feel it should say “life ready.”

Mr. Rice asked the student members were asked to form a subcommittee at their schools, and they could ask an administrator, guidance counselor, or teacher to help them facilitate this.

What is different now than four weeks ago?

- The Board Citizens Advisory Council on School Environment
- New procedures for school entry
- Adding more cameras at C-SDHS

Mr. Rice explained that he and Mr. Hull are on the Board Policy Committee and they meet each month. They will be looking at all the discipline policies.

It is realized that the security measures require funding. It was stated that this community has made a statement that the safety of our children is of utmost importance. Mr. Rice stated that the DCPS budget request this year for security is \$700,000, which he feels we will not be receiving.

Questions:

- Where does the funding come from for SROs? What role does law enforcement play in several aspects of our schools? The funding for SROs comes from the Sheriff's Department (grant). There are SROs at both high schools (go between middle schools). SROs in the schools was initially a community policing program and evolved into other things. The SROs are not there to enforce policy, the administration is for that. The SROs handle any violation of the law. They also teach classes which allows them to establish a rapport between the Sheriff's Department and the community.

Concerns:

- Monitoring doors at C-SDSH (IT solution?)
- Need SRO's in all schools
- Students can read on grade level, become frustrated
- Need testing sooner. Takes so long for meeting to be scheduled
- Special Education guidelines is mandated
- Parent needs to be directed to resources
- Students don't have any outlets in school
- Students can sense are administrators and teachers feel about them
- Students don't have learning problems, they have behavior problems
- Supplement with mentors for students to connect with

Morgan Wright conveyed that there was a student who made racial remarks to a teacher and was disrespectful. The teacher sent the student out to the office and the student comes right back. It was noted that this happens in every school. Teachers have no authority, students have become empowered. Need to find a way to reach students at an early age and correct these issues.

In preparation for the next meeting:

- Review Board Policies
- Look at COMAR - Discipline
- MSDE Mandates (will be posted)
- Come back with thoughts
- Form your subcommittees

The next Board Citizens Advisory Council for School Environment will be held Thursday, April 12, 2018, at 5:30 p.m., in the Board Room at the Central Office.

Recorder: Chris Dayton, Administrative Assistant