

ACCESS Academy PTA

Minutes of General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, October 11, 2016, at 7 p.m. in the library, Rose City Park School, 2334 NE 57th Avenue, Portland, Oregon

Meeting called to order by President Jennifer Ellis at 7:00 p.m.

Attendance: 23 people signed the attendance list; of these, 16 were members for 2016–17. 6 members constitute a quorum for a General Membership Meeting.

Approval of Minutes: The minutes of the 9/13/16 General Membership Meeting, which were available for review, were accepted.

Officers' Reports

Treasurer Colin Cunningham gave a financial report.

The PTA bank-account balance in August was about \$25,000–26,000 with little activity (about \$1,000 of outstanding checks were cashed).

About \$10,000–11,000 was added in September. (President Jennifer Ellis observed that the PTA is up to 101 members and that the “Give Campaign” is about 2/3 way to full-year goal of \$9,000.) There was spending of about \$2,600 and about \$4,000 in outstanding checks. At the end of the month, the balance was about \$34,000.

During the 2015–16 academic year, the PTA “nest egg” grew from \$15,000 (surplus at school-year end in 2015) to \$25,000 (surplus at school-year end in 2016). Failure to spend funds is the main reason for this surplus (e.g., teachers have spent only a fraction of the funds that they were allotted).

Another major source of income — apple sales — will come in October. That seems to be on target for about \$1,500 in net income. The organizer of the apple sales clarified that \$1,400 may be more likely.

The checkbooks have balanced each month and the PTA seems generally to be in sound financial shape.

Other Presentations

Following the meeting (from 7:20pm to 8:35pm), there was a presentation by and discussion with Karl Logan, the PPS Senior Director for the Grant and Jefferson Clusters (including ACCESS Academy). Notes on these appear in an addendum.

Old Business

President Jennifer Ellis presented a proposed amendment to the Budget for the 2016 Financial Year. In that Budget, teachers are allocated \$500 per full-time equivalent

(FTE). Since the Budget was first drafted, a new special-education teacher, Christy LeeWehage, joined the staff as 0.5 FTE. The proposed amendment was to create a new Teacher Classroom Expense line item at \$250, for Ms. LeeWehage. There was no discussion. There was a motion from the floor to approve the amendment (below), and this was seconded. The motion was approved with no opposition. The amendment to the Budget for the 2016 Financial Year was approved.

Approved Budget Amendment: The Budget for the 2016 Financial Year is amended as follows: a new Teacher Classroom Expense is added for new Special-Education teacher Christy LeeWehage at \$250.

President Jennifer Ellis presented a proposed amendment to the Budget for the 2016 Financial Year. That Budget includes a \$1,000 expense line item for Building Needs. Although funds from this line item were used in the past to purchase lockers a few years ago, no funds for this line item were spent last year.

Mr. Wood explained that a growing number of students are using ChromeBooks to facilitate writing. This is especially important for some students with 504 plans that specify technology to help with writing. This year, classes are larger (e.g., 34 in 7th grade language arts; another class is at 35). When those classes are fully engaged, there is a shortage of ChromeBooks.

Mr. Wood is proposing that the school and PTA collectively purchase 8-10 additional ChromeBooks for students who need them for writing (especially those with 504 plans). It should be possible to get the ChromeBooks in the building in about two weeks. Mr. Wood is asking the PTA to fund half of the purchase; funds from the school's consolidated budget will be used for the other half. He is asking the PTA to allocate \$800 for the PTA half of this purchase.

There is a twofold proposal: (1) reduce the Building Needs expense line item from \$1,000 to \$200; and (2) to create new expense line item for Technology in the amount of \$800.

There was some discussion at this point:

- A parent asked whether the school receives for students with 504 plans any assistance from the district that could be used to purchase ChromeBooks. Mr. Wood said that he does not receive any funding for that. Students with IEP's may get such a ChromeBook, but those with a 504 do not get special-ed funding.
- A parent asked why ChromeBooks instead of some other technology. The answer was that ChromeBooks are inexpensive and work well with the Google Apps the school uses.
- A parent asked whether there might be discounts or grants available to reduce cost of the desired technology (perhaps of a platform other than ChromeBooks). The answer was that this may be possible but identifying and securing such a discount or grant might delay getting the equipment, which is needed right now. In addition, such an effort might be more appropriate for purchase of an entire classroom set. It

was noted that the school is not Title I and this thus not eligible for some of these grants.

- A parent asked whether Mr. Wood could foresee any upcoming building needs that might use funds from the Building Needs line item. The PTA has sponsored drinking water in the past, but that is not an issue this year. Depending on what the PPS Board does around a new building, there could be other opportunities for such funds. But Mr. Wood believes that the need for these ChromeBooks is sufficiently urgent to motivate this budget change. He might come back in the future to ask for other funds to be moved into Building Needs, especially if a move to a new building is planned. President Jennifer Ellis noted the PTA budget does have some savings and that the PTA could thus consider in the future allocation of new building expenses.

Following this discussion, there was a motion from the floor to approve the amendment (below), and this was seconded. The motion was approved with no opposition. The amendment to the Budget for the 2016 Financial Year was approved.

Approved Budget Amendment: The Budget for the 2016 Financial Year is amended as follows: (1) expense "Building Needs" is reduced from \$1,000 to \$200; and (2) new expense "Technology" is added at \$800.

New Business

There was an announcement that scrip orders are due on Monday, October 17th. Apples should arrive tomorrow (October 12th).

Thanks to Mr. Wood, every student got a pocket copy of the U.S. Constitution this week.

Parents who have not yet supplied a comfort kit for emergency preparedness should do so.

There is a drive to collect hats, mittens, gloves, and scarves for Syrian refugees. There are boxes around the school for donations of those items.

Next General Membership Meeting is 11/15/16 at 7 p.m. at Rose City Park School.

Meeting adjourned at 7:19 p.m.

Minutes compiled by Gilbert Neiger, Secretary



11/20/2016

ACCESS Academy PTA Notes from General Membership Meeting

Tuesday, October 11, 2016

PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

Following the meeting, there was a presentation by and discussion with Karl Logan, the PPS Senior Director for the Grant and Jefferson Clusters.

On 15 September, Mr. Logan had proposed to the District Superintendent changes to the admissions process for ACCESS Academy. These changes were proposed in response to a recent complaint and appear in a letter that can be accessed using this link: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B0-WmEGpYApnUjZfTnp5OUZzVERHTFVqQncwc1dNZDdPSThR/>

Currently, ACCESS admissions are site-based: decisions are made by the Principal and a committee of teachers. Alliance and MLC are the only other schools with site-based admissions.

Mr. Logan's original proposal was to transition ACCESS admissions to no longer be site-based and for its administration to go back to PPS Enrollment and Transfer Center (E&T). Recommendations from teachers and counselors at the neighborhood school would go directly to E&T (rather than the current system, by which parents need to arrange for these recommendations to go to ACCESS).

Prior to the PTA meeting, Mr. Logan met with ACCESS parents on 7 October and then with ACCESS staff on 11 October. He reported that he received good feedback at both meetings and that it was consistent.

While Mr. Logan's original proposal is current under review by the superintendent, Mr. Logan is now recommending a revised proposal. The admissions process would remain site-based (i.e., at ACCESS), with E&T providing administrative and technical support. Student applications arriving at ACCESS would carry no special-ed or 504 identification from PPS. (Parents' narrative and story in an application might communicate or suggest that there is a 504 identification or an IEP.) The admissions process would also be supported by the PPS Department of Talented and Gifted Education (TAG). Applicants identified positively by the site-based admissions team at ACCESS would be entered into a lottery for admission as administered by E&T.

Mr. Logan believes that, in the long term, TAG support at neighborhood schools should be involved in the process. For next year, two neighborhood schools (to be selected by Andrew Johnson, Program Director of TAG) will employ TAG teams at those schools, while all other schools will use the current method.

Mr. Logan plans to submit his revised proposal to the Superintendent by October 12 or 13.

Following Mr. Logan's presentation, there was a discussion. The following notes organize the discussion by topic. The notes convey the substance of the discussion rather than every individual question and response.

CHANGES TO THE ADMISSIONS PROCESS

Much of discussion focused on the proposed changes to the admissions process. Most of this regarded the following items: qualification and selection; the lottery; and the role of neighborhood schools.

Qualification and Selection

A parent asked what is meant by "selection and qualification." Mr. Logan explained that, for ACCESS, qualification is determined by a score of 99% on a TAG test. Why is "qualification" not a moving target? Other parents explained that the TAG test that most students take is not grade-level dependent but rather seeks to measure innate cognitive ability.

A parent asked whether the qualification target for ACCESS could be redefined so as to avoid lawsuits and increase equity. Does the 99% criterion identify those who most need an alternative program? What about a student who is in the 98th percentile but struggles socially? Alternatively, why not raise the criterion to something like 99.5% if that would reduce the pool of qualified students? Doing so might achieve equity without resorting to a lottery. Mr. Wood explained that PPS Board has defined the 99% target and that ACCESS cannot change it unilaterally.

Mr. Logan said that equity issues need to be addressed at the neighborhood schools. He believes that that is best practice and it will bring about equity if done well. He accepts that the neighborhood schools are not yet ready to do this and that we cannot expect to turn that around in a matter of months. Nevertheless, he feels that we need to lean in more on neighborhood schools to get them to serve and provide equity. If we do a good job at the neighborhood schools, will have more equity at ACCESS.

A parent asked if might make sense to focus on qualification rather than on selection. Another parent responded, cautioning that the tests are "blunt instruments" and sometimes apply in superficial ways. It is hard to find tests that do not tend to favor children from better socioeconomic backgrounds. To achieve equity, it may be necessary to pay less attention to the tests, not more. Other parents clarified that qualification does not rely solely on testing (and, as Mr. Wood said, it is no longer something that ACCESS decides).

A parent reported being told that TAG testing is mandated at second grade across the district. Shouldn't there be a database of who is qualified for ACCESS, without requiring input from the neighborhood school? Another parent clarified that this testing has been done only for one year and is done only in second grade.

Lottery

Mr. Logan believes that a lottery is needed because the space currently allocated to ACCESS is insufficient for the number of qualified students and is likely to remain so next year (see below). A lottery avoids the need to make choices between different students based on “alt-ed” criteria, which can be very difficult.

One parent said that, at some other schools, people felt that lottery weighting was not done well. Could the ACCESS goal of admitting more students who are eligible to receive free or reduced lunch (for example) be put into lottery weighting? Mr. Logan responded that various factors such as these can be used (to the extent that they are legal) as “levers” for the lottery so as to support ACCESS’s mission.

Another parent wondered how weighted lotteries work. Mr. Wood explained that a weighted lottery is more of a prioritization. For example, the PPS Board considered once a proposal for focus options (not ACCESS) to prioritize first siblings and then free/reduced lunch. Under that proposal, admission would be offered first to otherwise qualified applicants with co-enrolled siblings. Following this would be students qualified for free/reduced lunch. Each such prioritization could be associated with a percentage (e.g., accept students in a certain priority class up to 45% of available slots).

Mr. Wood emphasized that ACCESS is not bound by the specific weightings that were adopted for focus options. Thus, ACCESS could decide to prioritize students qualified for free/reduced lunch over those with co-enrolled siblings. ACCESS could use a percentage other than 45% for certain priority classes.

A parent asked whether race can be factor in lottery weighting. Another suggested that entering all qualified students into a lottery fails to take into account which students have special needs that can be addressed best at ACCESS.

Mr. Wood said that race cannot be used to weight a lottery, but that socioeconomic status can be used, and it is often a proxy for race. The school can also try to diversify in other ways — for example, by favoring applicants from specific schools. While it is not possible to prioritize students with an IEP or with a 504 identification, there are related approaches that are permissible and which might identify special-needs students.

A parent wondered whether a student who is determined to be qualified but who is not admitted through the lottery has confirmation that he or she has needs not being met by the District. Would this approach be more likely to result in complaints and lawsuits?

Another parent observed that removing information about IEPs and 504 identifications from information coming into the admissions process would address the issues in the recent lawsuits. Mr. Logan said that believe that using a lottery also addresses the issue of lawsuits. Something like a lottery will be needed as long as space is limited. He reiterated that it is very difficult to weigh alt-ed criteria fairly.

Role of Neighborhood School

About the proposed new system, a parent asked how students would be identified (especially those who cannot attend a neighborhood school) and how would recommendations enter the process.

Mr. Wood explained that the current process requires one teacher recommendation and one counselor recommendation. He still thinks that best practice is for school-based teams (parents, teachers, specialists) to provide input as a team and make a recommendation for ACCESS as a team. It is hoped that, in the future, there will be a more robust process for the local team to make a team-based recommendation (as now for other accelerations). The new application process will provide better opportunities for a team to document what has been tried and what results have been obtained — leading to a confirmation that a transfer of the student to ACCESS is the solution.

A parent suggested that moving to this kind of reliance on the neighborhood school may not be realistic at this time; the necessary support might not exist in any form at some schools. If the process relies on neighborhood schools that cannot support it, families will need to “game the system” to gain admission to ACCESS, and this need may present more of a roadblock to underserved families than to others.

Following on this, other parents worried whether relying on neighborhood schools would be equitable. There were concerns about the lack of advocacy. In some cases, parents are main advocates for a child transferring to ACCESS. There were concerns that we may never get to the point at which we can rely on the neighborhood schools to advocate for these transfers equitably.

Mr. Logan emphasized that, for now, he is envisioning to begin by using two schools as a pilot. He will work with Andrew Johnson (Program Director of TAG) to pilot those schools to develop individual TAG plans along the lines of IEPs. He believes that this is best practice and would be best for students, parents, and schools. He agrees the schools generally are not yet at the point where they can provide this support, but he thinks that it would be best to attempt to reach that point. He hopes that we can improve the admissions process at ACCESS and use that as a springboard to support neighborhood schools. In seeking to identify two schools that might be up for this kind of participation, he will endeavor to determine whether a school principal’s “mental model” is one that would support TAG, they have had the appropriate training, etc.

A parent reflected that, with either the current waiting-list process or a future lottery, a student may need to apply to ACCESS many times. How will PPS assist students who have to remain in neighborhood schools (rather than simply asking them to wait another year and apply to ACCESS again)?

Mr. Logan responded that, after a student enters the ACCESS lottery but is not admitted, there would be a trigger to the TAG office and the neighborhood school for the

student. The neighborhood school would be expected to set up a TAG plan for the student (if there had not been one already).

Students Not in a Public School

A parent pointed out that some children are home schooled or in private school. Their applications to ACCESS cannot easily be facilitated by a neighborhood school. Mr. Wood said that the new system would have the flexibility to accommodate these children. In general, the admissions process wants, for each applicant, input from the professional best able to assess the child and to make a recommendation. It is already the case that recommendations vary quite widely with respect to their quality, and the admissions committee must often to make telephone calls to get better quality information. They are looking for some mechanism that could simplify that task.

Sibling Preference

A parent asked how the new system would deal with sibling preferences; at other schools, sibling relationships are used in lottery weighting. Mr. Logan said that, under the new system, sibling preference would be addressed on a case-by-case basis (rather than being a factory in lottery weighting).

Outreach

A parent asked whether E&T would assist in outreach under the new system. Mr. Logan confirmed that it would. Another parent felt that outreach should be to parents. Mr. Logan said that he thinks that the outreach will be to neighborhood schools, but he needs to confirm this. Mr. Wood suggested that outreach should go to parents, but that best practices are to go specialists at the neighborhood schools.

THE FUTURE

Some of the discussion regarded the likely impact of changes on ACCESS and how the District as a whole might serve students better in the future.

Consequences for ACCESS

A parent observed that, if applications will no longer convey information about IEPs or 504 identifications, the population of twice-exceptional students at ACCESS may tend to grow, meaning that more students at ACCESS will need extra support. How will the district support ACCESS with regard to increased enrollment of twice-exceptional students?

Mr. Logan said that he does not currently have an answer as to how to get more or better special-ed support at ACCESS. He will be meeting with the special-ed committee next week to discuss ACCESS. He did say that, with regard to admissions, special-ed comes in after a decision is made and spot is offered. If a student with an IEP comes to ACCESS, there will then be an IEP-transition meeting and related processes.

Another parent pointed out that sometimes the need for special-ed support is not discovered until students arrive. In some cases, such a need for support becomes

evident only after a student's academic needs are met (as may be the case after a transfer to ACCESS). Sometimes this may be months after the student arrives.

Mr. Wood said that students are reassessed each October. This year, the school knew which students were coming at the end of June 30, but an additional half-time special-ed teacher was not assigned until the first week of October. He is grateful that the PPS special-ed director has indicated that PPS will be basing special-ed staffing on the need indicated and weighted by IEPs (rather than solely on a count of students). Such an approach is appropriate because, for example, it doesn't always make sense to combine special-ed kids in a single special class (as one might, for example, with students off grade level).

Capacity Issues and a Possible Move

For some time, DBRAC has considered the possibility of relocating ACCESS to the old Humboldt building.

Mr. Logan has talked to the Board and to DBRAC about ACCESS and the Beverly Cleary School (currently co-located with ACCESS). The night before the PTA meeting, he talked with two Board members who confirmed that a move to Humboldt is still being considered. If this occurs, it would be for the fall of 2017.

A move to Humboldt would allow room for 70–80 more students. Mr. Logan acknowledged that this would still be far short of the 700–800 capacity that would be necessary to avoid a lottery. (A parent suggested that supporting the needs of additional incoming special-ed students might require additional space and limit the amount of growth that Humboldt might otherwise allow.)

A parent asked whether the district is considering locations other than Humboldt, given the fact that it does not provide adequate space. Are Board members considering the possibility of keeping ACCESS at Rose City Park (RCP), occupying the entire building, while shifting the boundaries of the Beverly Cleary School so that it does not need space at RCP?

Mr. Logan confirmed that that possibility has been discussed. It was acknowledged that ACCESS needs even more space than its RCP portion offers now.

Another parent understood the issues around advocating strongly on the space issue. For ACCESS to stay at RCP (for example), boundaries for some neighborhood schools would need to shift. While the Board's Teaching and Learning Committee has recommended that ACCESS be allocated sufficient space, decisions made for the west side suggests that the Board is reluctant to make changes that are resisted locally. Mr. Logan indicated that he has spoken with Sarah Singer and Melissa Niiya in Education Options Committee.

Another parent asked whether there was a specific proposal to the Board to increase capacity. Mr. Logan indicated that he is not planning to make such a proposal. The

challenge is there are not many buildings in which ACCESS could be located and achieve the necessary growth. Only the Superintendent and the Board have authority to do things like opening a new building.

A parent asked whether Mr. Logan would be comfortable letting the Superintendent and the Board know that ACCESS should grow beyond what can be accommodated at Humboldt. Mr. Logan responded that he has shared his agreement with that point with Board and with DBRAC — but not yet with new Superintendent. Two parents encouraged him to speak with the new Superintendent.

Another parent urged Logan to emphasize to the Board in writing that there is a need for more space for ACCESS — even if such space is not currently available.

A parent observed that the law requires neighborhood schools to serve those qualified students for whom there is insufficient space at ACCESS. This is different from focus options.

District-Wide Changes

There was some discussion of how neighborhood schools might change to accommodate better those students who might otherwise need to go to ACCESS.

One parents observed that “single-subject acceleration” at neighborhood schools remains an ideal that doesn’t exist at some neighborhood schools. Schools may need to make changes to support this.

As an example, ACCESS serves students’ math needs (some go up 3 grades) with a “walk-to-math” program under which all math classes are taught at a limited number of periods.

The parent asked whether there has been a conversation with the 13 principals in Mr. Logan’s area about how they might accommodate students requiring single-subject acceleration (e.g., by similarly limiting when a subject like math is taught).

Mr. Logan responded that he has been working with Andrew Johnson at TAG; conversations have already started. He acknowledged that support for departments (especially math) needs to get stronger and that there needs to be better alignment throughout the district. It remains quite possible that some students will not be able to take math (for example) at their neighborhood school. Long ago, accelerated BCS students would work across the street to Grant High School. (High-school schedules no longer support this.) It may make sense to look at something like this again.

It was agreed that there should be a systemic solution across the District (e.g., to support algebra for a 5th grader in a K–5 school where even the neighborhood middle school doesn’t offer algebra).

Mr. Logan was asked whether, in his portion of District, there was consistency in the time of day at which math is taught. He responded that currently there is no such consistency, but that they are working on it. He said that there have been discussions of the possibility of all schools doing literacy, math, etc. all at the same time — which may be a common approach in other cities. He reflected that this kind of coordination is challenged by traditions within PPS for independent operation at individual schools. This tradition has made it harder for the District to explore the many changes in education that are possible.

One parent observed that, in some schools, there is no support at all for students who might apply to ACCESS; a cultural shift would be required for the end point that Mr. Logan envisions. Andrew Johnson has lamented that he cannot make principals do things to accommodate these students, even in meeting legal mandates. It was suggested that, at some point, PPS leadership needs to impact the larger culture in the District.

Mr. Logan believes that we are on the right track. He believes that a systemic shift of the entire system would help assure that schools don't do "one off" accommodations. He recalls that once there had been communication from PPS leadership not to do math acceleration. Even then, some principals accelerated and others didn't. There is still at least one principal from those days who won't do acceleration. This is an old practice, and Mr. Logan thinks that it's time to do away with it.

One parent stated that their child was not identified at the neighborhood school (Winterhaven) despite being twice-exceptional with ADHD and dyslexia. If teachers have a conventional mental model of "highly gifted kids," it will remain the case that twice-exceptional children are not properly identified. If teachers at the neighborhood schools are limited in this area, how can those schools address these issues?

Another parent said that the people making these decisions need to be trained in gifted education. Someone else amplified that preparation should include support for highly gifted children requiring special-ed services.

Mr. Logan thinks that, once everyone at the district office is on same page, it will be easier to make these improvements. Such changes need to be across the District; otherwise, the system will break down and neighborhoods schools on their own won't know what to do with these students.

With regard to other cities such as Seattle or Beaverton (SUMMA), a parent asked whether PPS has looked at other districts to see what policies have led to problems and to learn about experiences in making policies across district (like walk-to-math). Mr. Logan said that he has not done so himself.

A parent suggested that single-subject acceleration is not sufficient for most ACCESS students; many of them need acceleration in all subjects.