

## **Dunwoody Parents Concerned About Quality Education(DPCAQE) Town Hall Meeting Minutes**

April 28th, 2013 at 5pm  
Dunwoody United Methodist, Fellowship Hall

Dunwoody Parents Steering Committee Members in Attendance: Allegra Johnson, Heyward Wescott, Robert Wittenstein, Donna Cannady Nall, Rick Otness

Special Guests in Attendance: GA Representative Tom Taylor, GA Senator Fran Millar, Councilman Terry Nall, Councilwoman Lynn Deutsch, Councilman Doug Thompson, Pam Tallmadge, Jim Redovian

### **Welcome and Overview of Meeting** (Presented by Allegra)

Acknowledges and thanks elected officials in attendance.

- Thanks to DUMC for the use of the room and setting up for this event.
- This is the second Town Hall meeting held to discuss Dunwoody school option.
- History of how the group came about:
- Tom Taylor reached out to various members on the steering committee to help organize a community group to discuss Dunwoody school improvement opportunities. From that point, this group was organized to act as community liaisons. Each of the steering committee members comes with unique experiences within the local educational environment.
- The group has reached out to the Dunwoody school councils to have them select a representative to join the group's steering committee. These members will act as direct liaisons to their schools. School site councils are in the middle of elections right now, so expect more on this after May 10th.
- Volunteer sheets (or committees for various areas) will be available to review and sign up for in the back at the end.

### **Accreditation** (Presented by Terry Nall)

- Since the DeKalb County School District was placed on probation and loss of accreditation became a serious concern, the possibility of dual accreditation was raised.
- Currently SACS is the regional agency that provides a system wide accreditation to DeKalb. This accreditation is given as a whole and can only be lost as a whole.
- SACS is one of six accreditation agencies recognized by the US Department of Education.
- Many colleges require that potential students come from high schools that have accreditation intact.
- The GA State Legislature has gone on to protect current high school students' HOPE scholarships through swift legislative action. That does not protect students' enrollment opportunities.
- The GAC (Georgia Accrediting Agency) can (for the cost of \$2,000 to \$3,000 for a three year accreditation) provide a secondary accreditation for DeKalb high schools.
- While SACS has indicated that at this juncture DeKalb will likely not lose accreditation, it is not a 100% guarantee. Nor does it protect against future struggles with system wide accreditation.
- Because of the above, Terry Nall has been working on a two pronged approach to secure accreditation.

- One – Discussions with Superintendent Michael Thurmond. Despite several conversations with Mr. Thurmond, this avenue has reached a dead end.
- Two – DeKalb Board of Education. Through out conversations with Mr. Thurmond, Terry Nall has also kept several members of the DeKalb BOE in the loop. Currently, Terry Nall is working with Marshall Orson and John Coleman to help bring this issue to the BOE’s plate. There are two possible avenues to having the board adopt a dual accreditation for high school’s.
  - Board Resolution – This is a legislative act by the board that could result in approval for dual accreditation on May 6th. This could possibly allow for dual accreditation through GAC by fall of 2013.
  - Board Policy – This is a formalized process that lasts about two months with public input. This could possibly allow dual accreditation through GAC by early 2014.
- How to Help:
  - Write your DeKalb BOE members supporting dual accreditation.
  - Encourage people outside of Dunwoody and within DeKalb boundaries to write to the BOE to support dual accreditation.
  - Let Terry Nall know if you would be able to help contribute to the \$2,000-\$3,000 cost for a 3 year accreditation through GAC. Cell Phone: (404) 915-6693; Terry.nall@dunwoodyga.gov

**Current State of Legislation for New City School Systems** (Presented by Robert Wittenstein)

- Currently our GA state constitution does not allow for the creation of school districts.
- This year Tom Taylor dropped legislation in the Georgia House to allow for certain cities to create new school districts.
- The first subcommittee meeting was ten days before the legislature went on break. Several members of the Dunwoody Parents Group were in attendance at this meeting and allowed to testify.
- In January these subcommittee meetings will reconvene.
- Slide on timeline for constitutional amendment presented. Presented as “best case scenario”.
- Steps to be ready for legislative discussion;
- Feasibility Study for Dunwoody School System
- City council has agreed to pay for this study.
- Feasibility study begins now (contract was either signed on Friday, or it will be signed this week.)
- The goal is to have the feasibility completed by October well before the legislature reconvenes committee meetings in January.
- The feasibility study will cover things such as
  - Monetary capabilities of Dunwoody
  - Impact to DeKalb
  - Student enrollment
  - Enrichment opportunities for a Dunwoody school system
  - Capabilities for Dunwoody to adjust class size and improve teacher salaries.

**Charter Cluster Opportunity** (Presented by Pam Tallmadge and Allegra Johnson)

- This spring Pam Tallmadge and Jim Redovian visited schools that would be part of the cluster to present and encourage them to sign a Letter of Intent (LOI) for a charter cluster.
- Through this process, it became clear that more education on what a charter cluster is, was needed.
- Presented a Charter School 101 (See Slides)

- Explained differences between different charters, between charters and private schools, between charter and traditional public schools, and between charters and theme/magnet schools.
- To proceed with the charter option, involvement from parents, teachers, administrators, and even students will be needed.
- Discussions on the following needs to be had:
  - Classroom innovations
  - Governance issues
  - Accountabilities
  - Compensation
  - Resource Allocation
- We can start to write a petition, but we don't have to submit it.
- The petition carries a lot of the same groundwork and discussions that will be needed in the discussion of becoming a local school system.
- There are many more questions than answers right now, and those can be answered as we go through the discovery process. (Examples: do we need more funding, can we decrease class size, would we hire a management company?)
- If the legislation for creating local school districts does not pass, a Charter Cluster could provide us some amount of local control.
- The LOI was not signed by all of the schools.
- Dunwoody Parents could have submitted the LOI without all schools signing off, but DPCAQE chose not to.
- The next opportunity to submit an LOI will be in February of 2014.

**Question and Answer** (Moderated by Heyward Wescott)

**Comment:** (By Fran Millar) Druid Hills is likely submitting their petition this August. They are quite ahead of us in this process and show strong organization. Their moving first on this option is a good thing for Dunwoody, as it provides an opportunity to learn more.

**Question:** How is the charter cluster and a Dunwoody School System related?

**Answer:** The charter cluster path is an opportunity to have some measure of independence. We should pursue both because the constitutional change is a steep hill to climb. It was noted that in the subcommittee meeting at the state legislature, a house member questioned why Dunwoody had not sought a charter cluster as a means to increased independence. By pursuing a charter cluster, we can show the legislature we have taken this step.

It was also pointed out that Druid Hills is far ahead of us in this process. And that all of their schools have been highly supportive of the process of a cluster option and it was never a second thought about signing the LOI. Their group gets along very well and works well together. This is not the same in Dunwoody, where a lot of animosity exists between schools in our community.

**Question:** Will the feasibility study account for students in private schools returning to their local public schools?

**Answer:** Yes, it will.

**Question:** Currently there is SPLOST money dedicated to rebuild Austin Elementary. Will this money still be available if we become an independent school system? A charter cluster?

**Answer:** If we become our own school system before Austin is rebuilt, we cannot count on that money being available to rebuild the school. If we become a charter cluster, that money will remain, as we will remain a part of the DeKalb County School System.

Discussion on SPLOST funding continued. Current and past approved SPLOST funding will remain with DeKalb County School District and will be applied to DeKalb county schools based on the approved projects list. Should Dunwoody become an independent school district, future approved SPLOST funds would be split between the county and city school systems. The feasibility study should address some of these issues."

**Question:** Are there any current charter clusters in Georgia?

**Answer:** No, there are not. This is a brand new type of system.

**Question:** What happens when all of the students from DeKalb's magnet, theme, and private schools return?

**Answer:** This will be addressed in the feasibility study.

**Comment:** Page Olson encouraged parents to pay close attention to innovation in education. That education today is no longer teachers just standing in front of twenty children and teaching them. She suggested following a website called "Education Nuts", as it is a valuable resource for innovation in education (things that are highly successful, and then not so much.)

**Comment:** Concern over painting Dunwoody parents and schools as being unwilling to work together, simply sign LOI. Pointed out that Druid Hills began their discussion and found common ground on a desire for a charter cluster before presenting a LOI to the schools. The LOI was presented to Dunwoody schools without this same due process or discovery time.

**Question:** Will (and how and when will) the Dunwoody Parents Group pass over control of the Charter Cluster organizing committee to a group of elected persons from each school (with equal representation from each school?)

**Answer:** There are sign up sheets in the back, people who volunteer in the committees in the back will elect a chair of each committee area to report back to DPCAQE. DPCAQE has already requested that each school site council appoint one council member to sit on their steering committee, to allow that member to carry information back to their school and act as a liaison. As for a charter organizing committee – no defined answer, but the DPCAQE does not see themselves acting as the Charter Cluster Group.

#### **Meeting Adjourned at 6:40pm**

Attendees moved to back of room to sign up for various committees offered

Minutes respectfully submitted by Erika Harris