

Board of Education
Study Session Minutes
Balas Building Main Conference Room
April 27, 2010

Vice President Patalan called the Executive Session to order at 5:37 pm.

Present: Susan Baskett, Simone Lightfoot, Glenn Nelson, Irene Patalan, Christine Stead (via speaker phone); Todd Roberts (Supt.) and many other district teachers and other staff; Glenn Singleton (Pacific Educational Group); other citizens.

No one contributed public commentary.

Patalan introduced Singleton who reviewed the agenda for the evening. Singleton noted Roberts would lead and facilitate the first portion of the agenda.

Roberts provided an overview of student achievement in the AAPS, with comparisons to state averages. He emphasized averages for racial-ethnic groups and for groups defined by eligibility for free or reduced-price lunch. This review was a reminder of the continuing differences in average achievement by different racial-ethnic groups. It served as a reminder of the importance of the equity work of the AAPS with help from the Pacific Educational Group (PEG). Roberts used a PowerPoint presentation that consisted of selected slides from the more detailed presentation planned for the regular meeting of the Board on April 28, 2010. The detailed presentation of April 28 is available from the District. Roberts's presentation prompted many questions and comments and considerable discussion. Participants restrained themselves somewhat because they wanted to preserve ample time for the discussion with Singleton and because they were aware the regular Board meeting on April 28 would provide the opportunity for a detailed discussion. Roberts noted Singleton would lead the next portion of the session.

Singleton began by noting some of the many positive developments in the AAPS since his first visit in 2003. He observed the district is "completely different" in a positive sense. The following are some of the things he noted.

- The "culture of equity" at Skyline High School was wonderful to observe. His experience on his visit gave him the best morning of his professional life in the last several years.
- The sustained effort of the AAPS community was, and is, critical to progress in improving the educational climate for, and success of, black and Latino students.
- AAPS is very much aware of differences in average achievement between racial-ethnic groups. Most districts are not and thus not even taking the first step towards constructive solutions.
- People in the AAPS community are able to talk about racial-ethnic gaps in achievement – and do talk about it. In many districts that have awareness (see preceding bullet) these differences are the "elephant in the living room" (my words – not Singleton's) that no one talks about because they are too embarrassing and too hard to deal with.
- People in the AAPS community are empowered to act on what they observe. While not everyone acts, there is growing recognition that constructive critiques of problems and positive reinforcements of helpful actions are components of the AAPS climate.

- The belief that we members of the AAPS community can improve achievement of black and Latino students is much more pervasive than in the past.
- The commitment of leaders in central administration and of principals is critical to success. In particular, the sustained, visible commitment of Roberts is a key factor.
- The commitment and work of a critical mass of teachers is also crucial. A teacher is more likely influenced by another teacher than by anyone else.

Singleton noted he is worried about the potential loss of young, dedicated, diverse teachers due to lay offs forced by budget constraints. He often encountered teachers with these characteristics and in this situation.

Singleton noted much work remains to be done to close the achievement gap.

Singleton's observations led to much discussion. He made use of a PowerPoint presentation to help explain points. Singleton stated he wanted the teams from Thurston and Burns Park to share their work and experiences in order to add to trustees' understanding of the ongoing work in the District and to add their substance to the discussion.

The teams from Thurston and Burns Park made excellent presentations. Trustees asked many questions and offered many comments. Trustees expressed their appreciation for the excellent work and noted the work was inspiring.

The discussion continued during and after the Thurston and Burns Park presentations. The following appeared to be elements that most, or all, discussants agreed should be given greater emphasis in future work.

- The educational climate for Latinos in the AAPS warrants more emphasis. Their absolute and relative numbers are increasing. They are too often ignored or misunderstood, e.g., the Census questionnaire is a good example at the national level.
- Trustees and the administration, with the aid of PEG, should develop a more effective manner of articulating the equity work that has been done and is ongoing. They should also develop improved strategies for articulating the importance of this work. Many in the community appear to have little or no appreciation for what has been accomplished and for the importance for all students and the entire community of continued progress.
- Greater participation of parents of students of color would make an important contribution to greater student achievement. Trustees and employees of the AAPS should be more proactive in promoting greater participation.

Trustees expressed their thanks and appreciation to the team members from Thurston and Burns Park and to Singleton.

Patalan adjourned the Study Session at 8:26 pm.

Glenn Nelson
Secretary