

Minutes from DSA CSC Retreat 2011 Thursday, September 22, 2011

Present were Bill Kohut, Mike Johnson, David Posner, Jennifer Castillo, Lynn Davies, Deb Rosenbaum, Chip Galaty, Brandon Becker, Sue Borgos, Sue Lawson Gonzales, Deronn Turner, Amanda Brockbank and Nicole Williams.

Intro: What is the CSC?

We opened the meeting with a brief discussion on the authority of the CSC. CSC is an advisory group for the school. Based on the DPS Web site, the CSC exists to work on the Unified School Improvement Plan and the Budget. As a group, there have been other things we have looked at, based on what we feel is important. Figuring out what those items are is what the retreat is about. Other groups exist to deal with other issues. For example, the School Leadership Team (SLT) is a group of faculty that works on making decisions about teachers and curriculum related to the negotiated agreement between DSA and DPS.

Dave described the CSC's function as being primarily driven by what the principal's needs are. Bill says we can't be a body that makes decisions not centered on the UIP and budget because if we impact teachers, that violates their agreements. That is why we don't deal with staffing issues in any way. Dave added that the school has a lot of messy issues and this group becomes an advisory to deal with cross-constituency issues based on what Bill wants and in part, what this group decides we believe are important as long as Bill is in agreement and we don't cross any of the other lines. Some of these items would be things like the optional fee for books - we collected \$8000 as a result. That sort of thing aligns with the Uniform School Improvement Plan (UIP.) Healthy eating for students also aligns with the UIP. We don't typically deal with personnel issues, but we can deal with the general issues regarding direct placement and the way we can hire.

Deb Rosenbaum and Sue Gonzales have been looking at various leadership organizations in other schools as part of what they have been doing to revamp the Friends of DSA Board into a new Foundation. Some of the things we have been discussing as a CSC are addressed at other schools by different groups, within a leadership council or PTSO or subsidiaries of PTSO.

This discussion led to the question of whether with regard to the Foundation, does CSC need to be involved? Right now we get information about what is happening with the Foundation because Deb and Sue G. are both on the transitional board. Deb says that at the Duke Ellington School there are people from different boards involved in CSC and perhaps someone from CSC should also sit on the Board. These are questions that will be dealt with by the Foundation and we will hear more about this once there is more structure in that group.

Some of us had questions about the phasing out of the Stagecraft program for middle school. Bill outlined that based on what he and the faculty members had seen at other arts schools and based on the concerns they have had about middle schoolers not being able to handle some of the jobs that are needed to be filled, they wanted to increase the number of older students and eliminate the middle school program. Existing Stagecraft majors will not be affected by the

change. However, we won't be admitting new 6th graders this coming year and no new 6th or 7th graders next year with no new middle schoolers at all in that department in the third year. Deb asked how that would impact the numbers of the other majors, i.e. would there be more slots elsewhere to compensate. The change only affects 10 sixth graders for next year and since the school wants fewer 6th graders, that shouldn't be an issue.

The discussion then turned to an outline for how to proceed for the rest of the day. The original plan, and the one we are basically sticking with is to discuss priorities in the morning and the ~~SIP~~ /UIP in the afternoon. The UIP is pretty much pre-determined by the state. The goals are ones they dictate. If we want to set up additional goals for improvement, this body can do that. However, they will not be part of the UIP. This morning we need to look at what is important to us as a CSC and determine how we will spend our time. Other items that we need to briefly discuss are fund-raising and a travel policy.

We then discussed if there was a plan set up with a vision for where the school will be in 5 years, 10 years, 20 years. Bill said there is an administrative plan, but there isn't necessarily an overarching plan. We all agreed that there probably should be a more overarching plan and we agreed to look at that to see how it fits in with the items we want to discuss.

Fundraising

As a warm up for the remaining discussions, Mike decided we needed to get fundraising out of the way. The question is, "How does DSA as a school enter a more ambitious broad community fund-raising effort?" There has been a group "The Friends of DSA" which has been in place for over a decade that was instrumental in funding and supporting the startup of the school in its current location and was extremely active in fund-raising to make that possible. In recent years their focus has been more narrow, but there has been no far reaching effort to tap resources that might be available to DSA. Starting last year there has been a process to re-establish the whole non-profit fundraising aspect of DSA. They have engaged the "Friends" and are now working on a re-organization to develop a group that can take on this ambition to tap all the resources we can tap. The Friends Board is embracing this concept and they are talking about how to transition - hire staff, do fund-raisers, etc. Sue G. and Deb are part of the transitional team and they want to have a new Board in place by the end of December. The first challenge will be how to get enough money to staff this in a professional manner. All present agreed that it seems like there is a thoughtful committed effort to get this in place and we encourage the efforts of the transitional team.

The next issue raised was if the fund-raising will impact our budget discussions. The determination was that it might not, but, in times when our budget gets decreased, we may need to take the fundraising into consideration. However, the new fund-raising organization will be a 501(c)(3) charitable organization and as such, it must remain a sovereign entity, separate from the school. Therefore any decision to use funds has to be separately made, but presumably in alignment with the goals of the school. It was agreed that whoever is the principal of the school must be a voting member of the Board.

The previous history of "The Friends", was that they originally worked to fund the school to get

it off the ground. In the past few years, they just funded the guest artists program - but even that is not fully funded by the Friends. Each department supplements for what they feel they need. When Bill came on board as principal, one of the things he stressed is that we are not functioning as a school, but a bunch of departments. We weren't focusing on things that the school needs as a whole. Bill found a way to fund a development person for three months. Our development person found that due to the separate fund-raising, we didn't have the tools we needed to apply for grants. PTSO last year tried to take on the consolidation issue to solve this problem, but didn't want to continue this. That was how the redevelopment of "The Friends" got started. Janet Meredith and Meg Schomp are old members of "The Friends" that will stay on the transition team. Janet has students here, Meg wants to protect the Schomp family's investment and goals in the school. Sue G., Deb and Bill are the other members of the transition team. The goal is to have a permanent Board in place by the end of the year. Members of the Board need to be people with money who have contacts in the community. From what Deb has found out only 10-15% of funding for non-profits seems to come from grants. They have spoken with folks from the Duke Ellington school to get some ideas about grants and fund-raising. The folks there have ties to different community organizations and they have a legal agreement with the school district that allows them to vary from the rest of the school district. It was asked as to whether any of this could bring us into conflict with DPS. There was a conflict at one time because there was a big money donor who wanted to give a substantial grant of several million dollars, but he was offering it on the condition that the school would become private and DPS said no. So long as we don't try to use the funds to break away from DPS, there shouldn't be conflict with DPS.

There was a brief discussion about ways to further expedite the process of getting "The Friends" fully functional, but the transition committee was only approved by "The Friends" in July. So, making the January 1 goal is going to be tough enough. Some discussion was had about what we are looking for on "The Friends" Board. Lawyers, accountants, marketing folks, people with money and/or connections with organizations that can be supportive are all good candidates. One possibility is to look at people who have cycled out of other arts type boards. Deb and Sue G. would love to get ideas from other folks, keeping these criteria in mind.

Travel

Some departments do a lot of travel, some do just a little, some departments do fancy banquets and there has been some pushback. Mike says it's really taxing for the kids to do the fundraising. Amanda says the problem for her is that you have to go out and fundraise in addition to fundraise for your department and for other things and you are pulling from the same pool over and over again and it makes things very difficult. She says that she enjoyed all the trips that she took, but it bothered her that a chunk of what she raised benefited others and there wasn't very much give back. Roni spoke about doing unified fundraising.

One question that came up was why is it important to go to Scotland for a Fringe festival when there is one in Boulder? Amanda says that having gone to both, the festival in Scotland is more political and she saw things she had never seen anywhere else. For example she saw a performance from a Czech group that blamed global warming on America. All of what she saw she said was very eye-opening.

Bill is bringing the travel issue to the forefront because a parent went to the District and complained that one daughter had three potential trips that she wanted to take and her vocal music daughter had two trips pending - the grand total for this school year was a potential \$12,000. She wanted to know why the school is asking parents to do this?

There were discussions had about the necessity of the trips, the need for such great expense on some of the trips and the timing as well as the idea of limiting the departments to fewer trips. With regard to the cost, some suggestions that were made were 1) if you have a small group and you have a parent who can plan for you it can be less expensive. 2) A lot of these trips are done with tour companies who provide incentives for teachers, like free trips and teachers get benefits for bringing more students, for that reason, elimination of the tour companies might be something to consider.

With regard to the concern that these trips take students out of class for extended periods of time, a brief discussion was had that a) some of the events are competitions or similar type events that are scheduled for us and we have no say b) parents have been resistant to their children traveling with the school during Winter or Spring breaks and c) in some cases we do things in collaboration for other schools, so things have to happen when they are in session.

There was some concern expressed for the need for one department to have five trips in a single school year, as well as the need for any department to do more than one trip outside the state more than once every few years. Having such frequent trips requires extensive amounts of fundraising. This takes a toll on the teachers and students. Further, if everyone is required to go and you have to fund-raise for everyone, that isn't necessarily fair. It's also not fair for some kids to always pay while others are getting a free ride. The point was raised that perhaps before any trips are planned outside the state, local options should be looked at. We could be servicing a particular need in Colorado. In the past there used to be a travel program for the departments where one year was city travel, going to places in Denver, one year was regional and one year was national. That changed because of competitions in the arts which occur nationally and all over the country and that pretty much obliterated the policy. We do want our students to have national exposure and many of these events are directly related to scholarships and some of the events improve the reputation of our school as well.

Brandon spoke about the Theater trips. The Thespian Convention - you have to go to the Colorado Convention to qualify for the National Convention. Kids get scholarships from participating in these things. The same concerns exist for the Dance department. Theater was trying to alternate but some of the trips just don't make sense to do in alternate years. For example, the Juniors go to NY every year. While it is a good bonding experience, perhaps more importantly, it provides an opportunity to visit 6 or 7 colleges in one fell swoop as well as to experience NY Theater. Scotland is not a mandatory trip.

The real issue is that all of the arts teachers could most likely make a good case for why their trips exist. But school-wide, the trips add up and create a problem that needs to be addressed. The academics teachers would also like to see some academic component to the arts trips. Perhaps arts teachers can invite academics teachers to talk about the area and interesting aspects of the place they are visiting and potentially add an academic component to the arts experience.

The decision of the group was that we need to come up with written guidelines for travel. Bill, in conjunction with SLT, will put together a committee composed of at least one arts teacher, one academic teacher and parent and student representatives to create these guidelines. There can be exceptions to the guidelines, but there needs to be a process put in place for approving travel. The guidelines need to address things like the focus of the trip, the cost of the trip and other criteria, established by the committee, to determine additional items that need to be evaluated, as well as criteria for evaluating exceptions.

What do we want to do as a CSC this year?

1. Community Interaction - survival of an arts program depends on interaction with the community. We often underutilize our resources in the community. Many folks in Stapleton, our own neighborhood, don't even know we exist. If we can reach out to the community, we may find other sources for support.

The other possibility for community interaction is outreach, to go to under-represented areas of the city to get more diverse students into our fold. "Inside Art's Place", a proposed arts evening showcasing DSA talent in all of the arts areas, if advertised correctly, could be a way to bring people into the school.

2. More internal pride - Many Seniors are ready to leave the school behind by their Senior year. We'd like to keep the students from burning out. We'd like to see more school spirit and esprit de corps. We'd also like to keep alumni involved in the community. We need to figure out how to continue the awe that starts in 6th grade. Jen said that she had gone to an arts school for high school. The culture there was one where there was a spirit week, competitions between majors, and a much more collaborative environment between the major departments. If we can succeed in getting more collaboration going between the departments, that may help things here. We all agreed that it would be nice to see more collaboration between the arts and the academics as well.

3. Diversity - We don't see a lot of diversity in the school - both from a socioeconomic standpoint and from a racial one. What can be done? This sort of ties in with outreach. We need to help prepare prospective parents and students with the process of how to get accepted to the school. We also need to find a way to show minorities that there are others that participate in the arts that look like them. We need time more than money. We need to send people out as ambassadors for the school. DSA has developed somewhat of an elitist reputation and some potential students avoid it for that reason. We need to let more parents know that the school exists. Our arts faculty are working with DPS arts teachers to help them know more about the school, the requirements for getting in and our deadlines and processes. However, there are many schools without arts programs and we need to find a way to get this information to other types of teachers as well. There is also the issue that a lot of the arts require some amount of affluence to pursue. For example, dance (costumes) and music (instruments and lessons) can be very costly. Bill added that out of the minority students who were offered admission last year, only 22% accepted. There were a variety of reasons for that, but we agreed that we need to look into this further and see what we can do to eliminate some of the concerns. Some of the reasons we are aware of concern transportation, financial concerns and a community perspective. For

example, a lot of the kids have to work to support their families so can't afford the extra time. For some there are hour and a half bus rides, and, in the Hispanic communities, it seems like they would like to keep their children closer to home.

One concern that was raised was whether the number of students we accept from out of district is causing us to take fewer local students who may be less advantaged. Bill explained that the original premise was for a Colorado School of the Arts. But, regardless, because we are a school of choice, we can't turn anyone away for being out of District and that is not a factor we look at in the auditioning process.

In terms of what we can do, suggestions were made to have students go out and visit schools. Another was to perhaps combine some of that with some community service expectations schoolwide. For example, students could teach an art or could go to an elementary school for middle school night.

4. Academics issues

a. how do we address lack of textbooks? Bill gave out a textbook request list since we now have \$8,000 to buy books. Only one department came back with a request for books. Lynn explained that some of the departments didn't want to order books because they don't like the books that the district mandates or, because the textbooks are so old that the edition they are working from isn't readily available and we're not able to update everyone to a new edition. Bill is going to follow up on this.

b. Writing skills. Teachers work on writing in a coordinated way in 6th-12th grades. Two criteria on CSAPs in which our students did not do well were ability to write on different genres and paragraph structure.

c. Quality of curriculum. There was a general discussion about the quality of the curriculum. There are a few subjects where the faculty is not happy with the district mandated curriculum. Amanda and Nichole indicated that the students aren't happy with some areas either. This may be an area where we might want to either have innovation status or see what we can do with the District's requirements to change things. Apparently we have been able to change some of the curriculum, but part of the question is how far can we push it and do we want to?

5. Testing - It would be worth hearing from the departments as to whether the testing situation has improved and if not, what we need to do about it.

6. Travel - We need to follow up with the committee and make sure that whatever is agreed upon addresses things like who can go on a trip. Do we want students who are getting an F to be able to go? Also, it needs to be stressed that when there is a pullout for travel, the students still have to get their work handed in on time. However, that's probably more of an SLT issue.

7. Respect of the space, school, property and one another. This is a concern about trash, use of space and issues like bullying. While we don't have very many problems in these regards, there

are some things that could be improved upon.

8. We need to work on a long range plan for the school.
9. We need to address goals for the library.
10. We need to address how to better utilize the space we have and where we may need to add new space.
11. Is there some status where we can get some autonomy without doing Innovation Status? We need to focus on specifically where we'd like to vary and determine what can be done.
12. Length of day issues - flexibility of structure of the school day
13. We need to discuss District requirements on teacher placement and see how we can get an exemption from the general requirements.

Organizing Topics For Future Discussion (along with determination of Priority and whether it is handled by CSC or a subcommittee)

1. Space and Vision - lunch, library? Vision sort of meshes with the space issues **Priority**
2. Community Service & Outreach - Arts outreach to low income schools, presentations, work in soup kitchens, go to schools to help with the application process
3. Curriculum, Testing, Teacher Placement - District issues that we need to address **Priority**
4. Flexibility in Schedule - does this bleed together with 3?
5. Physical education requirement? Should there be one and if so, how do we accomplish it?
6. Travel Policy **Committee**
7. School Pride/ Inreach - trash, bullying issues, get alumni to stay connected, coordination across departments
8. Writing - CSC or SLT? CSC cares about it but maybe this is meant for a faculty discussion.
9. Diversity - What is the school going to do about this? Is this the role of the CSC? Issues clearly revolve around both keeping students, getting students, and having students we select be able to come here? We need this to be a committee, but it also needs to be a priority item discussed by CSC at least to get any such committee rolling.

Now that we have a list of the issues, how do we want to lay out our meetings for the year?

It was suggested that all of the items in the list have to do with a vision. Everything is part of the question, “where do we want to be?” Space, District Waivers, Scheduling, Diversity, Outreach, Testing - all are part of our vision.

Maybe the goal is to have a plan that ties everything together at the end of the year. Some things we need to start implementing now, others are for later. We need to develop a tangible goal and have a written plan that indicates what the vision is - who are we today, what do we envision for 10 years from now, how do we get there? It was asked if there is already some kind of vision statement. It seems that there hasn't been anything done in a long time.

Suggestions for the meetings:

October Meeting - start with the overall components of the vision and then start with how it relates to space. Deb is offering to poll the teachers to see what they envision for space requirements. Is there enough time for a full discussion about vision. It was suggested that maybe everyone should write up a proposal for what the vision is. Sue G. says she has seen a historical document where the faculty met to plan this school and the way they planned the space, which reflects how the departments are currently organized. Do we want to look at this and expand on it?

Part of what ties into the planning of space has to do with Bill's vision of using Phillips as a feeder school to DSA. Should Phillips be a K-8 and we share facilities and staff or should Phillips be a K-6 and start here at 7th? We could create a 40% preference for free and reduced lunch like DSST.

Maybe Student Council should take over the Student Pride issue.

November - The suggestion was made to blend Diversity, Recruitment and Outreach together in one meeting in November, when we will know more about the summer program. Bill also wants the teacher placement issue addressed in November. Perhaps the best way to deal with this is to do teacher placement and then start on the Diversity issue with the Diversity committee to report back in March.

Where does Physical Education fit in? Amanda says maybe it's a Student Council thing. We'd like to encourage it, but part of the issue involves money and part of it involves spatial demands. Some of the issue is perception. Maybe this should be a joint project between Student Council and CSC. Make it a committee with parents and students.

December - There is no meeting scheduled for December.

January - Community Service and Outreach. Could we do another retreat the first week we're back? Call it a Vision Retreat - Set for January 6

February - Budget discussions.

March - Diversity Report

April - Report on Writing and Research from SLT

May - Principal evaluation and anything that's leftover

Mike will put together a more complete list with a month by month breakdown and send it out for review before the next meeting. The final list will be attached as an addendum to this document.

UIP

For the last part of the meeting, we looked over the Universal Improvement Plan. First, we looked at the School Satisfaction Survey. We had a much greater response this year than in previous years. Most of the categories look really good. The ones where Agree and Strongly Agree are less than 70% combined are few. Of those, two of them are related to ELA, which doesn't really apply to this school as we have no ELA program. One of the questions mentioned PE and since we don't have a PE program, that may have driven the result down, The last few questions are college bound questions and may not have been given to the middle schoolers.

Next we looked at CSAP results. The High School showed more improvement than any other High School in the city. Middle School improvement was not as great.

For the UIP we are keeping the same goals as last year - to increase the number of students scoring proficient and advanced in writing by 5% and to improve math scores by the same amount.

The District wants us to develop a parent engagement goal. The idea is to find ways to get parents more engaged with the school. We discussed other things parents can do besides just helping in the arts departments that could perhaps add to the overall school experience, such as incorporating some of parents' skills with helping in both the arts and academic curricula. However, it was raised that this presents it's own issues and, for the moment, it seems like it would be a difficult thing to measure for purposes of the District's request. Something that is more easily measured might be parental involvement with the departments. We could send out a survey to the arts departments to get a baseline for the committee, to determine what percentage of parents are already volunteering to help and look to see if that percentage is improved over the course of the year. The goal would be to increase parent participation by 10%. However, this seems like it might be tough to monitor. Bill indicated that perhaps the better way to deal with this is to use the last PTSO community meeting as a benchmark and then try to increase attendance at these meetings by 10%. Because getting a good measure of parental participation in the arts departments could take a while and presents some difficulties going forward and the District needs a plan by next week, it was decided that we should look to the PTSO community meetings as a means of measuring.

Just as an aside, it was discussed that Challenge Day was a great forum for safe parent and student discussions in the weeks that led up to Challenge Day. Unfortunately, Challenge Day isn't happening due to the expiration of the original grant and a lack of funding to continue. It would be nice to find something to replace that with.

The meeting was concluded with a general plan in place for moving forward with the meetings for the rest of the year. Mike will formalize that plan and send it out for review prior to the October meeting.