

**Thomas Edison Charter Schools
Governing Board Meeting
December 2, 2015**

5:32 pm

In attendance: Adam Burris, Tirzah Anderson, Danae Pruden, Emma Bullock, Holly Gunther Absent - Nick Jackson

Welcome/Conducting: Tirzah Anderson

Pledge of Allegiance: Emma Bullock

Charter Highlight: Nick Jackson - by Tirzah The portion of the charter about special education teachers was highlighted. It talks about obeying the laws and working with parents to address the needs of their children.

Adoption of Agenda: The agenda item regarding real estate purchase was removed.

Motion to adopt the agenda as currently written: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Adam Burris

Unanimous

Public Comment: Duane Miles, grandparent, former parent and board member spoke about being prepared for an active shooter by having trained personnel in the school. In the past few years there have been more shootings. In Ohio, they make sure that teachers are trained with concealed weapons to reduce the amount of time an active shooter would have in a facility. Private armed citizens shoot the wrong person half as often as the police.

He handed out some information about it a company that helps train school personnel and encouraged the school to look into it.

Cynthia Mikesell - Read the attached letter into the minutes.

Approval of Minutes:

September - tabled again.

Motion to approve the minutes of October 2015: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Holly Gunther

Unanimous

Motion to approve the November minutes: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Holly Gunther

Unanimous

Achievement Report - Scott/Melani: Scott looked at the SAGE interim results. The committee needs to look at them. There were some mixed reviews. It was hard on the students to take the tests. It tested on end of year type of standards at the beginning of the year. It is hard to tell if it is going to give them any advantage on SAGE summative. Having additional technology is important as it allows more practice for the students. Melani is turning in a grant application tomorrow to H-wire for a set of 30 Chromebooks, a cart and licenses.

Melani handed out results from the USU continuous improvement class. The class was working on 107% enrollment. They conducted an analysis using an online Qualtrics survey to find out why parents choose a school. They asked for the top three, so only the top three choices are accurate.

Most chose schools because of district boundaries. The next highest elementary reasons are transportation, friends and social. The next highest for grades six through eight are sports, friends and social.

It appears that parents in Cache Valley are not aware of TECS as a choice. The group proposed that the schools contact Huntsman marketing association for a specific plan.

There was discussion on how to make the public aware of the school. Reaching out to the newspaper was suggested for things like the students donating to the food bank.

Scott explained a breakdown of SAGE results by new and returning students for the 14-15 summative for both schools. For those students who were here over three years they were 9% more proficient in ELA, 6% in math and 14% in science. This is a significant discrepancy.

There was an influx of IEP students last year. 10% of students opted out of SAGE summative at Edison South and 7% at Edison North. He also had a graph showing the years of experience teaching in TECS and other schools.

Special Education Policies & Procedures Manual - Louise Hoth: Louise was not in attendance, so Tirzah went through changes to the manual. Tirzah wants to make a few typographical changes and add "direct instruction" instead of "child centered teaching." The subcommittee recommends its approval with the minor changes.

Motion to approve the manual: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Danae Pruden

Unanimous

Employee Benefits Policy Revision - Tirzah Anderson: This includes a revision that was requested recently. This will be a revision to the teacher handbook and the policy.

Motion to approve as constituted: Adam Burris

Second: Emma Bullock

Unanimous

Effective Teaching Standards Policy - Tirzah Anderson: Tabled

2016-2017 Calendar Approval - Melani/Scott: The calendar is very similar to Cache and Logan districts.

Motion to approve the calendar for 2016-17: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Danae Pruden

Unanimous

Personnel Requests - Melani/Scott:

Melani - Austin Johnson as a special education aide, moved Carmen Peapealalo from RTI into special education and replaced her with Kristine Blankman. Holli Christensen is a licensed special education teacher. She was hired as an aide, but might be needed next year as a special education teacher. Mandi Jenkins was hired part time in the library.

Motion to approve personnel requests: Adam Burris

Second: Tirzah Anderson

Unanimous

Vendor/Contractor Approvals - Scott/Melani: None

Strategic Plan Review - Tirzah Anderson:

The idea of a strategic plan came from a policy in August of 2009. The discussion was started then and the goals were completed in 2014. They reference the mission statement, the philosophy and purpose from the charter. Each has a rationale/mission and philosophical alignment.

Tirzah asked Melani and Scott for their thoughts on goal #1 (85% proficiency on national assessments and a top 20% ranking with comparable schools on state assessments). Scott said this one was tough. The question is if by 2020 it is reasonable to assume we will be there. State and national assessments are a moving target. This is something to shoot for, but is it something that we really embrace? Administration is beginning more and more to question that. Melani Kirk agreed. Shem said that when this was talked about we had the CRT and were about 85% proficient. With SAGE, 50% would be good.

Tirzah - There is a document in Scott's office that shows at that time when charter was originally developed the state was not requiring specific outcomes like they are now. However, in one of early charter renewals there is a goal of 90% proficiency.

Cynthia Mikesell happened to be discussing SAGE with a person who attended a training seminar where the person who put SAGE together, Steve Leinwand, was speaking. He said that SAGE was not designed to be a diagnostic test. He stressed that schools need to use good data on which to base assessments. Sage is broad level data not to be used in this manner. Schools need to use class tests and formative assessments.

Scott replied that this a good point, but unfortunately SAGE has become high stakes. Schools are graded on not only proficiency, but how well they have grown. The original purpose of large group testing was to see overall trends.

Melani Kirk - The schools will not make this goal. From where we are now, even if the trend is good, it will not get to 85%. Tirzah mentioned that when this goal was made, the scores from the first SAGE test had not been received.

Jim asked that given what is known now vs. what was known then, if it would be worth going back and reworking that goal. Maybe 85% makes sense for some tests. For SAGE, maybe a goal of growth would be better. In a few years SAGE might be replaced.

Emma and Melani want to compare the schools to some standard. Emma wants to wait a year or two to adjust the percentages. There was not a lot of baseline data when the goal was made.

Scott mentioned that the schools are not tied to SAGE Interim. He would like some type of assessment to give predictive measures. Scott doesn't want growth to be measured only once per year.

Tirzah Anderson left the meeting.

Adam stated that there will be some tweaks to the outcomes every year. He read the rest of the outcomes. Melani Kirk is not satisfied with the post high school training. We can't control student's goals. We want them college and career ready, but don't think we didn't do our job if they don't want to go?

Finance Report - Jim Peterson: Jim received actual health insurance premiums. It made a significant difference at Edison South. Both schools saved money. He showed the net result to cash surplus as \$24,124.38 for south, \$465.60 at north.

Both schools are on a pretty good path. Edison South is about \$3000 per month under the projected amount. Edison North is about \$335 per month in the black.

Principal Reports - Melani/Scott:

The reports were sent to the board previously. Edison North's enrollment is now the highest it has ever been.

Subcommittee Reports - Emma, Adam, Tirzah:

This was discussed in the business meeting.

Board Training Objectives: GRAMA, open meetings, Brian Carpenter, Creating Effective Charter School Governing Boards

Motion to adjourn: Adam Burris

December 2, 2015,

To the Thomas Edison Charter School Board,

I appreciate the opportunity to share my thoughts with you regarding the recent emphasis on state testing scores at the November board meeting. I felt that some of my comments and those of others were dismissed by some and challenged by other members of the board as being faulty or unsubstantiated by the charter that the school was initially founded upon. I have dedicated myself to researching and re-familiarizing myself with the school Charter, Parent handbook, board minutes, and other school communication to check myself and make certain that I was not basing my view on traditions rather than fact. I hope that you will read my comments here with an open mind and not dismiss them.

In November 2012 Eldon Budge, former principal for Edison South, wrote a letter to parents addressing state assessments. Within that letter he states, "At Thomas Edison, we feel that testing is a byproduct of our instructional program rather than our focus. We do not teach to tests, including state tests. While other schools are pressured by state tests and borrow from curriculum in other subjects to prepare for them, Thomas Edison operates instead on the basis of high expectations. We do not pressure our teachers or students to treat state tests any differently than our weekly and monthly assessments. We feel such a practice, which has existed in this program for more than two decades, provides a more realistic rather than inflated measure of student performance." He continues, "We are not in competition with anyone other than ourselves." It is made clear in Mr. Budge's letter that TECS has a broad focus on education vs. the narrow focus that occurs when an extreme emphasis is put on state test scores. I embrace this statement and what it stands for and many others are at this school because of this philosophy.

The challenge was issued at the board meeting that the school philosophy is simply composed of traditions and ideas that should be discarded because it was never intended to be a part of the charter or expected atmosphere of the school. I would propose that traditions are synonymous with the school culture that has been carefully fostered over the years and that culture is the very meaning of the charter. If you have questions about the original intention behind the charter that the school was founded on I believe that Jim Peterson, who was also at the November board meeting, was the author of the charter and the school founder. Who better to be able to address the real intent of the charter? Shouldn't the board be listening to the concerns that he and others have raised?

As a parent, I chose for my students to attend this school for a variety of reasons, including the curriculum offered, the atmosphere at the school and the quality of teachers employed. Another determining factor for me was the welcoming atmosphere toward having parent

volunteers. Traditions and the culture of the school are why I and others come to our school, not the high test scores.

In a letter dated November 2013 from the Governing Board and Administration to Parents it states, "We resist political and social pressures which place inflated reputation above the success of our children. TECS will continue to assess performance based on multiple measures; it will continue to provide a learning environment free from unnecessary high stakes / high pressure testing; it will continue to maximize every minute of academic time, avoiding unnecessary CRT preparation diversions. We applaud our parents, teachers, and students for their daily efforts which lead to the accomplishment of our primary goal, student success."

. I urge you to carefully consider the serious effects that the SAGE Interim has on the process of learning.

- SAGE is an external testing source that has questionable validity.
- It takes time from teaching curriculum.
- It is only a snapshot of the student's effort on that day and not an indication of real learning.
- Many students are deflated when the proctor cannot offer any help on manipulating the test tools.

I would invite you to visit the schools, or the SAGE website, and take one of the practice tests. Much of what the students are being tested on is their ability to manipulate this one specific program in combination with the subject knowledge. I have found it to be frustrating when a student has calculated the correct answer on paper and yet they cannot properly manipulate the SAGE program to input the answer they have calculated.

In reviewing the board minutes, the emphasis on state test scores seem to originate at the August 2014 board meeting when the board voted to implement strategic goals. I submit for your consideration that a focus and emphasis on achieving strategic goals via higher SAGE test scores is this board's interpretation of what the charter is about rather than considering the intent of the document as a whole. I urge you to reevaluate the role of state testing in light of the intent behind the founding charter and reconsider the mandate from the board for SAGE scores to be raised.

Sincerely,

Cynthia Mikesell
15 East 1400 South Place
Logan, UT 84321

