

SEAC Board Presentation for March 2, 2010

Good Evening Board Members,

Thank you for allowing us this time to speak to you about what the Special Education Advisory Committee has accomplished since we last spoke to you.

In January 2010, the SEAC got together and prepared our goals for 2010. Copies of those goals were given to you at the last meeting.

Goal # 5 – Make presentation at Principal’s Meeting

On February 23, 2010, Marcia Eichelberger and I attended the principal’s meeting. We spoke about the SEAC and its members, emphasizing that we were here as a resource for the principals to collaborate with them and their parents and staff. We passed out the brochure that you have in your package tonight and gave them an overview of how we could assist them. We spoke about “Disability Awareness Day” and again offered our assistance as helpers, volunteers and planners. Marcia spoke specifically about the membership aspect of SEAC. She presented our offer to come into the schools and hold breakfast meetings or evening pizza nights for the parents to come and find out about the SEAC. She also spoke about our Latino parents, who are very excited about the possibility of meeting other parents and collaborating with them. We emphasized that these parents might need us the most. We ended by asking the principals to fill out a short questionnaire about their schools and how we could assist them. A graph of those responses is enclosed in your packet. All in all, we felt well received, and we can only hope that we will indeed get referrals and calls from these principals. You might notice that some schools are not represented on the graph, which means those principals either were not in attendance at the meeting or didn’t fill out the form.

SEAC Community Meeting

SEAC held a community meeting on February 16th which was attended by Dr. Mills and President Heron. We thank both of them for being there. The meeting was only moderately attended due, in part, to the fact that the meeting was held the day after a long weekend. We believe attendance will change in the next few months due to the upcoming work of our Membership Co-Chairs. Our next community meeting is scheduled for March 16th, 2010 here at the District Office. A flyer about the meeting is enclosed and has been provided to you via email. We encourage you to spread the word to families and community groups about SEAC and our upcoming meeting.

Stakeholders Meeting

There has been much talk about the Stakeholders Group and the spending of the ARRA funds. Some of our group convened and put together the report that you have in your packet marked Preliminary Action Plan and Fiscal Applications. There is a consensus among the parents that some of the committees have gotten derailed from their original purpose and we need to get that back on track. Feedback SEAC is receiving is that parents are pleased with many of the staff

changes and are especially appreciative of the Program Specialist positions. However, there is still much to be done and despite the changes that have been made, systemically we still continue to have major challenges. Unfortunately, intra-departmental communication continues to plague this district. We are aware that in more than a handful of instances the Special Education District Office Administrators have attempted to get some of their work done and have been unable to do so due to communication breakdown in other departments or other departments dropping the ball. The FCMAT report highlighted communication as a primary weakness, and sadly, communication is not yet perfected in any department in the district.

Leadership, organization, communication, and accountability are the key elements which the parents of this District believe still need a tremendous amount of work. They would like to see ARRA funds used for technology based systems that will ensure our compliance and offer strategies for easy communication within the district, sites and parents. There is no better way to spend that money to ensure that the full benefit is derived, than to use those funds to invest in technology that will benefit us for years to come. What we need now is someone to follow through on the purchase, installation, training, and implementation of these systems. Technology is successful when used with fidelity, incorporating all the necessary components, and measuring for accuracy.

Kudos

Finally, the SEAC would like to commend the professionals who genuinely serve our children; who put the needs of students ahead of their own professional prestige, status, or comfort; who are willing to risk ostracism and retaliation, as well as professional opportunity and advancement, in order to do what is right, both legally and ethically. We urge the Board and District Administration to create an environment where our staff feels that they are encouraged to bring attention to errors that are made. Parents would like to see these issues dealt with at the District level so that staff and parents would feel supported enough and supplementary legal actions could be prevented. We all expect our children to tell the truth, to take responsibility for their mistakes – whether intentional or not – and to make needed changes in their behavior, no matter how inconvenient or embarrassing. No child should fear personal repercussions when standing up for the rights of another. And no principal or teacher, aide, psychologist, speech therapist, occupational therapist, counselor, or administrative staff member should, either.

Let me end with a quote from Aristotle

We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence therefore is not an act, but a habit.

Let's begin some habits....

Respectfully Submitted: Catherine Abarca; President Special Education Advisory Committee