

ISC JOINT GENERAL AND PRESIDENTS MEETING  
DECEMBER 8, 2009  
ACADEMY BUILDING  
MINUTES

Attendees: List available upon request from Juli Gruber-May, ISC Secretary

Welcome

1. Beth Johnson, ISC co-president, welcomed the group and read winter poems written by students from Cynwyd Elementary School.
2. Beth thanked Welsh Valley Middle School for providing refreshments for the meeting.

NEW BUSINESS

Speaker: Dr. Christopher McGinley, Superintendent, and Dr. Deitra Spence, Special Assistant to the Superintendent

Topic: Presentation on Closing the Achievement Gap

Summary: A presentation on initiatives to close the achievement gap among students in Lower Merion School District.

Information covered in the discussion:

Dr. McGinley explained that the achievement gap between African-American and Caucasian students is narrow in the elementary grades, but grows during middle and high school. The problem shows up most acutely in math, with the greatest disparity between groups in 11<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr. McGinley said that Lower Merion School District (LMSD) is fully committed to eliminating the achievement gap. The school district has launched a variety of programs aimed at providing support to students, and reducing barriers to learning across the grades from kindergarten through high school.

Research and experience show that several factors are key to closing the achievement gap in public schools:

- Strong commitment by school district leaders
- A curriculum that is carefully aligned so that all children can achieve at the highest possible level from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade
- Effective use of data
- Cultural proficiency on the part of school personnel
- Feedback to teachers about performance
- Feedback to parents.

LMSD has plans, or programs already underway, to focus on many of these areas. Dr. McGinley and Dr. Spence highlighted the following:

- Dedicated administration. Dr. McGinley has been working on the achievement gap for more than a decade in his prior positions in Philadelphia and Cheltenham school districts, as well as currently in Lower Merion. Dr. Deitra Spence is working full-time on the issue to accelerate LMSD efforts.
- Aligned curriculum. LMSD is working to align the K-12 curriculum so that it is more coherent and consistent across the system.
- Smart data use. LMSD assesses students routinely, but is looking at ways to detect problems more quickly. The district can now monitor trends by several variables, including race/ethnicity and gender, and will target services to those most in need.
- Cultural proficiency training for staff.
- Communication with parents through the CARE committee and other channels. The Committee to Address Race in Education (CARE) has been in existence for over a decade, and is a forum for parents and the school district to share information and ideas. Meetings take place monthly and are open to any parent. The group would like a representative from each school to report back to the HSA. The next meeting will take place on Tuesday, January 26<sup>th</sup> from 4 to 6 p.m. Email Dr. Spence if you would like to attend.
- Mentoring programs for students in grades 7 through 12. Teachers volunteer to serve as mentors – they monitor student progress and act as advocates. Also, the district has programs where older students mentor younger ones and help them anticipate the road ahead. Students involved in mentoring programs take field trips and visit colleges.
- Achievement team. Achievement teams led by the principal in each school meet regularly and use similar methods and documentation to track students at risk of poor academic performance. The team tries to intervene early because it can be hard for students to catch up once they fall behind.
- Roadmap. Dr. Spence has been working with faculty to prepare a brochure that provides a roadmap through the LMSD K to 12 curriculum. The roadmap shows course offerings at every level and helps families plan the progression of classes so that students can attain their educational goals and prepare for college or other post-high school options. Dr. Spence invited parents to review and provide feedback on the draft. In the new year, every LMSD family will receive a roadmap and have an opportunity to attend presentations that explain how to use it.
- After-school support. LMSD supports Bethel Academy and the BCMS homework club.
- Strengthen 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition. LMSD has enhanced the orientation for students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and is looking at additional ways to smooth the transition

so that students do not feel lost as they move into a bigger school environment. The school district is considering forming teams for 9<sup>th</sup> graders to provide a better sense of cohesion for students and their teachers.

- Participation in Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium. Twenty-eight school districts, including LMSD, are part of this collaborative which works to enhance the achievement and wellbeing of all students, and seeks to measurably reduce the disparities in achievement and school engagement of African-American students and their Caucasian and Asian peers.

## ISC BUSINESS

### ISC Committee Report on Guidance in Secondary Schools

The ISC report on guidance services in LMSD middle and high schools is available online. Go the LMSD website, click on "Community", and then ISC. You'll find a link to the report there. The committee will present its report at the ISC meeting to be held on Tuesday, January 12<sup>th</sup> at the Academy Building. Please review the report before attending the session.

### Upcoming Meetings

- School board business meeting – Monday, December 14<sup>th</sup>, 2009
- School board education meeting – Monday, January 11, 2010 in LMHS library
- ISC general meeting – Tuesday, January 12, 2010, Academy Building, committee report on ISC study of guidance services. Dr. McGinley will be present to respond to questions.
- ISC presidents meeting – Tuesday, January 19, 2010, Harriton High School