

## **TASK FORCE MEETING SUMMARY**

### **Maynard Holbrook Jackson Cluster Task Force Meeting: Middle Grades Education Thursday, March 15, 2014, 6 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.**

On Thursday, March 15, 2014, Superintendent Erroll B. Davis, Jr. hosted a Jackson Cluster Task Force Meeting on middle grades education. School and community leaders from each of the schools in the Jackson cluster were invited to the meeting, including, traditional and charter school principals and representatives from the Parent Teacher Associations, Local School Councils and community partners. The meeting was facilitated by Associate Superintendent Steve Smith.

#### **Background**

As the district explored the viability of a K-8 pilot in the Jackson High School cluster, many concerns were raised about the quality of our traditional middle schools – by parents, principals, community leaders and board members. These concerns, and the fact that none of the K-8 proposals provided a resolution to the entire cluster issue, led to the superintendent's recommendation to table the K-8 pilot proposal to explore quickly and intensely what it would take to secure buy-in for improved middle grades education within this cluster.

Coan has a current population of 260 students in a building that is designed to hold 1,025 students. King has a population of 460 students in a building that is designed to hold 1,000 students. Both schools are underutilized in a school system where staff and other critical resources are tied to student enrollment.

Atlanta Public Schools will host at least one, if not two task force meetings, with elected and appointed school and community leaders. Two community meetings will be held - one at each of the two middle schools - for the Jackson cluster community. The purpose of these meetings will be to define what it will take to obtain the entire cluster's commitment to middle grades education, particularly in the eastern part of the cluster, where enrollment at Coan is approximately half the enrollment of King, in the western part of the cluster. Viable options are encouraged to help inform the superintendent's recommendations to the board at the April meeting of the Atlanta Board of Education.

#### **Preliminary Options**

Several ideas were proposed at the March 13 task force meeting to start the list of options that will be collected, catalogued and reviewed by the superintendent prior to the April board meeting. It is important to note that the district is not advocating for any one option at this point in the discussion. Additional options will be added for consideration following each of the planned cluster meetings.

1. Refurbish extensively both the Coan and King buildings. Introduce a quality and rigorous IB platform into both schools and designate each of the schools as clusterwide magnets, one with a focus on STEM and another with a focus on arts and literacy.
2. Close one building and refurbish the other building. Introduce a quality and rigorous IB platform into one school and designate the school a magnet with one focus.

3. Close one of the two middle schools and use the other for a career academy with local preference for the children within the cluster. (Planning has already taken place for a career academy and the next step is, in fact, to find an appropriate location). One school would be extensively refurbished, a rigorous IB platform would be introduced, and it would serve as the sole middle school for the entire cluster.
4. Create a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy within the existing buildings to further prepare students for the transition from elementary to middle school. Both buildings could be refurbished to include a 6<sup>th</sup> grade academy in the architectural plans. Separate school leaders would be designated for each of the academies.
5. Refurbish the Coan building and create a 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy. Students in the cluster would matriculate to King for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade. The focus would be on preparing students for the transition to middle school.
6. Make one of the schools a Lab school with a teaching program for students in the surrounding colleges and universities. This partnership would increase rigor, enhance culture, and provide a three-year transition plan to attract quality teachers to the district.
7. Establish one designated middle school for the entire Jackson cluster. Resources would be combined to refurbish one facility and to create one middle school with a focus that would be supported by the cluster.
8. Create a 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy within one of the existing buildings. Sixth graders would remain at their existing elementary schools for an additional year. **(Note: Plan for sixth graders was not completed during the discussion.)**
9. Create a 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Grade Academy within one of the existing buildings. The other building would serve as the sole middle school for the cluster. **(Note: Plan for middle school was not completed during the discussion.)**

### **Other Considerations**

In addition to these options, there was group consensus that there is a sense of urgency for the cluster, particularly for the fifth-graders whose families are evaluating middle school options for the next school year. The group also listed the following for consideration by the district:

1. The imposing physical structure of the two existing middle schools. Neither school in its current condition is desirable for parents within the cluster.
2. A plan for enhancing school culture and perception and accountability, and a clear vision for the middle schools.
3. A 3-5 year data-driven plan and an active plan to ensure a smooth transition for students from elementary to middle school.
4. Improve the quality of teachers through professional development.
5. Greater control over school budgets at the school level and more understanding/empowerment for school governance and middle schools.

6. Job-based learning to include courses such as home economics, theater, wood shop, farm-school programs.
8. Advanced or remedial support for all students.
9. Full pathway development for the cluster in the areas of information technology, information support services, STEMS and engineering, drafting and design.

## Next Steps

Again, the district is not advocating for any one option at this point in the discussion. Additional options will be added for consideration following each of the planned cluster meetings for the larger community. The meetings will be held on March 18 at the permanent location for Coan Middle School and on March 24 at King Middle School. These meetings will be structured to include some words and welcome by the middle school principals, a presentation on the district's current work around middle grades education, a representative from our operations division, a frequently-asked-questions handout for the audience, and a moderated Q&A. A representative from the communications and external affairs division will be present to capture the feedback.

## Timeline

- March 13: first task force meeting
- March 26 – April 2: Post draft proposal online and give community an opportunity to offer feedback.
- April 3: second taskforce meeting, if necessary.
- Week of April 7: Spring Break
- April 14: Superintendent presents his recommendations at the Atlanta Board of Education Meeting

## Task Force Attendees

Vonda McKeever, Principal, Benteen ES; Jason Paggett, Teacher of the Year, Benteen, ES; Robin Robbins, Principal, Burgess-Peterson ES; Carolyn Reese, Teacher of the Year, Burgess-Peterson ES; Lewis Cartee, Local School Council, Burgess-Peterson ES; Charlene Salter-Legend, PTA, Burgess-Peterson ES; Dr. Betsy Bockman, Principal, Coan MS; Charles Turner, Local School Council, Coan MS; Karen Brown-Collier, Principal, Dunbar ES; Keith Tennyson, Teacher of the Year, Dunbar ES; Stephanie Flowers, Local School Council, Dunbar ES; Nicole Evans Jones, Principal, Toomer ES; **Paul Brown, King MS; Jacquelyn Hutchinson, King MS;** Falicia Gibbs, Teacher of the Year, Toomer ES; Neil Rollins, Local School Council, Toomer ES; Stacey Martin, PTA, Toomer ES; Tim Foster, Principal, Whitefoord ES; Mileeka Frank, Teacher of Year, Whitefoord ES; Angela Fowler-Allen, Local School Council, Whitefoord ES; Deundra Thomas, PTA, Whitefoord ES; Elizabeth Hearn, Principal, Atlanta Neighborhood Charter; Don Doran, Drew Charter; Atiba Mbiwan, Ziest Foundation; Richard Quartarone, SEACS; David White, Executive Director - East Region; Mikkal Hart Murunga, Executive Director, Communications and External Affairs; Leslie Grant, Board Member; Matt Westmoreland, Board Member; Cynthia Brisco-Brown, Board Member; Courtney English, Board Chair

**Revised: 03/19/14**