

FNECC Newsletter

“All Means All”

September 1, 2010

**Reminder: Our next committee meeting will take place at Martin Luther King Jr. Early College on September 14<sup>th</sup> from 6-8:00 p.m. Please arrive early to get dinner and prepare. Review your data packet from the first meeting, and come prepared to work! We look forward to seeing you on the 14<sup>th</sup>.**

**Remember that all materials and data from the committee are available on [fneccschools.org](http://fneccschools.org). Please check there for both committee news and information from the FNE schools – new material posted from Rachel B. Noel Middle School!**

**Don't forget to consider signing up for a site visit to the new schools: Denver Center for International Studies, KIPP, and SOAR II. Transportation is provided.** To reserve your spot please call Amy Schwartz at 303-486-8565 by Friday, 9/16.

**Minutes 9/1/10 meeting:** Co-chair Landri Taylor called meeting to order; Co-chair Stacie Gilmore welcomed committee members back after the summer, and introduced Mrs. Mabelline Sanchez, a new committee member. Mrs. Sanchez is a grandparent at Barney Ford Elementary.

Stacie reminded committee members of the commitment that both A+ Denver and the FNECC co-chairs share – an honest, open Committee process which can provide members of both the committee and the community at large to understand the data on which the district staff make recommendations about changes in the region's schools, and provide community feedback on the options under consideration.

She reminded members of the need to respect different points of view and to represent the whole community in addition to members' own schools.

Landri acknowledged and thanked several elected officials who were present: RTD Board member Chris Martinez, BOE member Mary Seawell, Councilman Michael Hancock, and Senator Michael Johnston.

Superintendent Tom Boasberg's chief of staff, Amy Friedman, thanked members for attending the data briefings provided in August. She acknowledged that the informed feedback they had received from participants had pushed them to go further than they might have otherwise, in providing specifics for the committee to react to.

She reminded members that this would be an iterative process. At this first meeting, the committee will consider the options available for the lowest performing schools in the region: Montbello, Noel, McGlone, Green Valley Ranch, Oakland and Ford. (Northeast Academy is already in turnaround and is not among the schools being considered by the committee.)

Amy provided some updates on FNE: Green Valley Ranch, Oakland, and Ford have interim or bridge principals. New schools approved to open in FNE in 2011-12 include SOAR II Elementary, DCIS K12, Vista Academy, a multiple pathways center, KIPP 5-8, and an ECE Center. Envision schools will postpone opening a second school in FNE to 2012-13. Evie Dennis Campus opened, with SOAR I and DSST and the MLK 6<sup>th</sup> grade will move there later in September. Savings in the construction of projects provided for in the 2008 Bond election is being allocated under the oversight of the Bond Oversight Committee, which is responsible for prioritizing distribution of resources throughout the city, but several projects in FNE have benefited already. More information can be found on the bond projects at [http://bond.dpsk12.org/oversite\\_committee](http://bond.dpsk12.org/oversite_committee).

Amy introduced Allen Smith, principal at MLK Early College. He discussed recent history at MLK from their decision to become a 6-12 school, to the introduction of concurrent enrollment, to the graduation of 100% of their first class of seniors. Moreover, 100% of those seniors have been accepted to college. In the spring of 2010, MLK successfully applied for Innovation status under the Innovation Schools Act of 2008; he stressed the point that the school continued to look for ways to make the opportunities for their students as strong as possible.

This success has had side effects, however, including a much stronger than expected enrollment this fall. As a result, students of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade of MLK will move temporarily into shared quarters on the Green Valley Ranch Evie Garrett Dennis campus.

Michael Guinan, a national consultant on school turnarounds, provided a briefing based on his work in other cities. He described in particular a New York City high school at which he taught in the mid-nineties, Bushwick High School, which Newsweek magazine once called the worst school in the country. The state of New York took over Bushwick and put substantial resources into a transformation of Bushwick. The staff stayed in place, however, and the fundamental approach of the big comprehensive high school did not change. Under transformation, Bushwick achieved only a 1% increase in graduation rate – from 22 to 23%. In 2003, however, Bushwick underwent replacement, with several smaller, targeted programs available inside the school building. Between 2003-2007 four small schools replaced Bushwick;

the existing high school program became smaller and more focused under its phase-out, and all the schools' graduation rates improved by more than 40%.

Mike also reflected on the experience of Academy for Urban School Leadership in Chicago. Two AUSL schools have achieved more than 25% improvement in students meeting or exceeding standards from 2006- 2010 under a turnaround strategy. AUSL aligned assessments to instruction, implemented a positive culture, and replaced existing staff with teachers trained and certified under the AUSL system.

Antwan Wilson, Instructional Superintendent, presented on the spectrum of options available for addressing the needs of a particular school. Schools in the blue (Distinguished) or Green (Meets Expectations) range on the School Performance framework, or schools whose achievement growth rates show strength over time, are well served by Continuous Improvement or Transformation. Schools with persistent low growth ratings in the Yellow (Accredited on Watch) or Red (Accredited on Probation) range need more profound interventions, and the district staff is recommending either Turnaround or Replacement for these schools.

Montbello and Noel are in a special category because they are already in transformation, thanks to substantial federal grants that they were awarded in June. These grants have required that the school leadership and teams prepare plans for change for the 2010-2011 school year; the committee's work is to comment on the options for moving these schools from transformation into turnaround for the following year and beyond. Antwan stresses that Anthony Smith and Sylvia Bookhardt, the principals at these schools, have been chosen to lead the schools in this challenging work.

Tony Smith presented on some of the programs that Montbello would be able to take on under the terms of the grant plan – daycare and special training for existing teachers in particular. He stressed that Montbello has great kids and deserve the best chance possible, and acknowledged that he wanted the committee to “Think outside the building” to help them develop programs that will make Montbello a sought after options: “Be aggressive with your recommendations”, he said. The last graduating class produced 320 graduates out of 620 freshmen – the school needs better options to keep these kids on track.

Sylvia Bookhardt explained that the group planning for Noel took the whole summer to plan for transformation. She feels the academic structure, cultural structure in place in the school. She suggested that right-sizing different programs within the school – an arts magnet might be one option – would help provide opportunities for all children.

Scott Gilmore asked a question regarding the SPF ratings for MLK and Noel, suggesting that MLK's strong high school performance masked an underperformance in the middle school program. Antwan acknowledged that MLK's middle school program continued to struggle, and that this is why their innovation plan asked that the middle school program be downsized so that they can address these issues more effectively

Ken Snyder of Place Matters and Mike Guinan introduce the exercise. The committee was assigned to six tables: two elementary, two middle schools and two high schools. Within each table, committee members were given a worksheet that provided columns to record the benefits and challenges of turnaround or replacement/collocation for each school, and an opportunity to weigh the relative importance of each. Senior district staff sat at each table and provided information when needed.

Halfway through the allotted time, the committee voted to continue working rather than to stop at the originally assigned end-point because they wanted to have more time for group discussion. Ken promised that the outcomes of their work on the worksheets would be recorded, compiled and sent to committee members before the next meeting.

Ken pointed out the FAQ docs, which described the committee process, and encouraged members to take copies for their next PTA or community meeting to assist them in representing the FNECC.

Amy Friedman asked members to review the data packet before the next meeting.

A show of hands indicated that most committee members would like to stay at their current tables.

Committee member Fay Alexander stated that she felt that for the first time, she felt that she understood the full implications of the potential for turnaround at Montbello after Antwan's presentation.

A community member who is a parent in Montbello area and a teacher at Noel stated that she is very excited about the changes going on in FNE schools in the past three to five years.

Antwan described a topic that had been discussed at Montbello table, the possibility of a vocational/technical school option possibility as a "small school" program within the school, an Early college model in which students would be encouraged to stay for a fifth year and received their Associates' degree.

Isabella Allen stated that she had been in the community for many years participating in these conversations and asked for extra effort to reach out and talk about the exciting possibilities.

John V. Smith, president FNE neighbors, offered access to his regional newspaper.

Stacie reminded members to look at their data packets, talk to your school communities, and come early next time so we can get right to work. The meeting adjourned shortly after 8:00 p.m.