

Governing Board Meeting
Thomas Edison Charter Schools
October 7, 2015

In attendance: Tirzah Anderson, Emma Bullock, Holly Gunther, Adam Burris, Nick Jackson, Denae Pruden

Welcome/Conducting: Tirzah Anderson

Pledge of Allegiance: Emma Bullock

Charter Highlight: Tirzah Anderson - The governing board has five major responsibilities: legal, TECS mission, hiring administrators and directors of instruction, policies and school budget.

Adoption of Agenda:

Motion to adopt agenda as currently stated: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Nick Jackson

Unanimous

Public Comment: Nathan Cureton

Nathan Cureton, teacher and former administrator read the following statement:

I'm pleased with the school's increased use of data. I have long worked for and desired a more data-driven school culture, and it appears we're making positive strides in that direction. And in regards to data and testing, I have one concern and two suggestions – as both a teacher and Thomas Edison parent - for your consideration.

I have served for many years and in many capacities at Thomas Edison. Having played an integral role in the creation and revision of core documents such as the charter, teacher and parent handbooks, and the policy and procedures manual, I believe I am qualified to speak on the subject. Furthermore, I have followed the proper channels and spoken with administrators regarding my concern. And though I present my opinions as my own, I can assure you that, despite best efforts of our administrative staff, there is considerable yet professional discontent among staff and parents that are currently in the know. Again, I present my opinions as my own, and bring them to you in the most professional, respectful, yet straight-forward manner I know how.

I am concerned with a change in core school philosophy and practices related to state-wide testing. (PASS OUT DOCS) I'll first read this paragraph from page 62 of the governing board approved Teacher Handbook. (READ DOC) The second is our school's position statement on statewide assessments made public by the governing board November 2012 and again September 2013. I'll not read that in detail tonight.

The school is asking teachers to focus on SAGE to a much larger degree than ever before, as evidenced by in-service trainings, test-prep assignments for PLCs, and the recent addition of SAGE formative.

I openly acknowledge the benefits of working to increase our SAGE results. It will, no doubt, help the school's image and increase PR opportunities, thus helping enrollment and school funding. However, I also wish to acknowledge many significant drawbacks from this change in philosophy and practice.

1. The SAGE formative alone will cost students up to a week in lost instructional time. With an advanced and rigorous curriculum, students must sacrifice crucial and irreplaceable learning opportunities.
2. The increased pressure felt by staff and subsequently students will clearly detract from Thomas Edison's primary mission, goals, philosophy and purpose.
3. It engenders a narrow-minded view of success. A statistician's first rule of thumb is multiple measures of assessment. Do we use multiple measures? Certainly. Is there one that takes precedent over the others? It appears so.
4. I am not pleased with my squirrely eight year old third grader sitting hours at a time in front of a computerized test where instead he could be interacting and engaging in learning.

I have visited numerous schools and sat in trainings with countless teachers from outside this program where their primary focus is SAGE. SAGE is the by all, end all, be all – the finish line. And I have seen the negative repercussions, all ending with students. Thomas Edison's view of success has never been a single test administered at a single point in time. We have always strived to "provide all students the fundamental knowledge, tools, and discipline to become successful, reputable citizens in our country and to become high achievers in our ever evolving, demanding, and complex society."

I thus present two suggestions for your consideration. First, one of the primary responsibilities of the board is to defend and promote the TECS mission, including its core philosophies and practices, and ensure we are distinct and an actual choice in education from all the rest. I have associated with you for years. You are volunteers. You have lives, and jobs and families of your own. Despite this, the board has performed wonderfully over its history in this regard. I have always enjoyed our progress together.

Thus, I invite you to do so again in relation to SAGE testing. I invite you to spend sufficient time in our classrooms to see for yourselves the quality of our instruction and the value of each and every instructional minute. I invite you to reconsider both your purpose and your path on this issue.

If the board opts to continue its present course, I invite you to take full ownership and call a spade a spade. We cannot serve two masters. Either we must be us, or we must be like everyone else. So, tell the school stakeholders that you are changing a core philosophy for the primary intent of image, PR and enrollment. Remove our position statement on statewide assessments from our website. Change the board approved core documents of the teacher and parent handbooks. Communicate with our stakeholders your intentions and purposes without a coat of sugar. Then, with all cards on the table, our school community will more quickly adjust to our new way of life.

I've been blessed for a decade to be at Thomas Edison Charter School. My children have been blessed immensely to have been taught here. My family thanks God regularly for the immense blessing this school has been to us. We're the best school in this valley, if not the state – of which I boldly proclaim loudly and often. It is our unique philosophies and practices that empower our culture of success. I hope, as the governing body entrusted to defend our identity, you'll eagerly fulfill that duty in this vital endeavor.

Tirzah said that it is in no way the intention of the board to focus solely on SAGE results. The board expressed a desire to take a look at the program and use the data.

Multiple measures are crucial. The importance of qualitative and quantitative data cannot be overstated. SAGE has been a point of conversation because the results are new. She reiterated that everyone on the board did not advocate a change in philosophy or a singular focus on SAGE data. If the school is as awesome as we know it is, it would show up on a comparable objective measures.

The school needs to make a distinction between process vs. outcome. The program is wonderfully awesome, but the board is particularly concerned with outcomes. No matter how wonderful the processes are, they cannot be the achievement. They are the means to achievement.

The point is not a singular focus on SAGE by any stretch. The board speaks by vote. They have adopted the strategic plan and are sticking to it. They would like the schools in the top 20% of SAGE testing, and hope it has not been overemphasized by the board.

Nathan offered to speak with the board at another time to address his concerns.

Approval of Minutes:

Motion to accept minutes of July 1st training: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Holly Gunther

Yes: Tirzah Anderson, Holly Gunther, Nick Jackson, Denae Pruden

Abstain: Emma Bullock, Adam Burris

Motion to approve the August 5th minutes: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Emma Bullock

Unanimous

The approval of minutes for the September meeting was tabled.

Achievement Report - Scott/Melani:

Scott reviewed the results of testing: SAGE, monthly testing, SRI and SMI. Edison students are doing really well, but are average on SAGE. Standardized testing is made for looking at large groups. The schools have instituted a few things to help students compose behind a computer and understand how to take the test. They are most concerned about the cut point students.

The interim testing will begin. In the state of Utah all districts and 60 charter schools take the interim. The 3rd grades will have finished their crash course on keyboarding. The student level data should give teachers some idea of what holes they need to plug.

Jamie mentioned that two people she spoke to from different districts were surprised that Edison schools did not do the interim. They thought the students would not know how to use the tools for answering the questions on the summative.

We are getting push back from parents already for administering the interim. It takes each student about 11 class periods for each interim test.

Melani stated that the teachers are very excited about Angela's position as a data specialist. By taking the interim she will have more data.

DIBELS - In the fall, DIBELS tests letter name and frequency, which we don't do at the school. The program does not give us the score for this, but uses the calculation to figure the composite score. The cut points students are being looked at to see what it takes to get them to move them up.

Tirzah commented that the schools are performing with the state in most things, but writing is below. Carolyn Larsen replied that several teachers have signed up for the Utah Compose training. This correlates with how well students do on the SAGE writing.

Utah Consolidated Application - Scott Jackson:

The figures are lower this year because the special education figures follow a year instead of using current figures. Writing is still one of the major topics. Scott redid the goals, strategies and action steps.

Motion to accept the UCA: Emma Bullock

Second: Adam Burris

Unanimous

Personnel Requests - Melani/Scott:

Melani Kirk:

Madison Kemp has been hired as a special education aide.

Motion to approve personnel requests as listed: Tirzah Anderson

Second: Denaë Pruden

Unanimous

Vendor/Contractor Approvals - Scott/Melani:

None

Finance Report - Jim Peterson:

Jim mentioned items that will impact the budget the board is looking at today. There is an increase on the liability insurance, staffing changes in the last month, medical insurance costs, IDEA funds and changes in the rates for revenue.

The staffing item with the biggest impact was the data specialist. Edison North added \$8,000 additional expense. There was no net increase at Edison South.

Edison South is so far south is operating well below anticipated budget. Edison North is on a trajectory upward. They are approximately \$,3000 below the average.

Principal Reports - Melani/Scott:

Due to time constraints, Melani Kirk asked the board to look over her written report.

Scott talked about the goal in the library to have 100% of books read by parents. Right now a total of 45% of books have been ready by parents. Young adult fiction books have had 87% read.

Subcommittee Reports - Adam & Nick/Tirzah/Emma:

Nick reported his finding of Title 1 funding. The subcommittee feels there is no real need to pursue this. There is too much red tape for any funds used for a teacher. It is out of the question. If a funding issue arises, there is much less red tape for technology.

Nick talked to people who were using Title 1. Most bigger schools said not to touch it as long as you can avoid it. Some took it only because they had to have the money.

Adam thanked Nick for doing the research. It allows the school to defend the decisions they have made.

Nick reviewed the 401k, disability, life and health. The life and health is very efficient. He wanted a consensus on 401k. The plan looks good, but he would like to bring in a different advisor. There have been complaints about the current advisor. He asked the administrators to find out if there are additional problems.

Tirzah Anderson attended a presentation with options to increase stakeholders. They presented to the administrators just previous to this meeting.

Emma reported that she had a fantastic committee meeting. The group talked about outcomes and multiple data points. It was very productive.

Motion to move into closed session pursuant to Utah Code 52-4-205-1(d) (Real Estate): Tirzah Anderson

Second: Adam Burris

Adam Burris: Yes

Holly Gunther: Yes

Tirzah Anderson: Yes

Emma Bullock: Yes

Nick Jackson: Yes

Denae Pruden: Yes

Closed Session: Pursuant to Utah Code 52-4-205-1(d):

Reconvene Open Meeting, 6:28 pm

Any Necessary Action (s) From Closed Session - Adam Burris:

Motion to pursue the purchase of the 1.16 acre lot pending due diligence: Adam Burris

Second: Nick Jackson

Unanimous

Board Training Objectives - Tirzah Anderson: tabled

Motion to adjourn: Tirzah Anderson