

43rd District Democrats Monthly Meeting
University Baptist Church, Seattle
March 20, 2007

Hillary Madsen, Chair, called the meeting to order at 7:32pm.

Julian Wheeler, Vice Chair for Programs, introduced the Seattle schools superintendent search panel – David Della (City Council education chair), Cheryl Chow (president of school board), Sherry Carr (president of Seattle Council PTSA).

In her opening remarks, Chow reported that the deadline for applications was March 13, and that over 30 resumes were received. A search firm is now going through those materials, doing reference checks, etc., and is expected to present the pool to the Board by March 27. At that time, the Board will go into executive session (personnel matters) and select a number of semifinalists. Chow expects to be able to name a new superintendent by April. She also noted that the District has turned things around financially.

Della pointed out that City Council doesn't have a direct effect on the schools, but of course they know that education is vital to the city. Council is well aware of disparities with children of color and other structural problems in the school system. He wants to focus on closing the "achievement gap" in the schools. His primary question for the search -- what do we want in a superintendent? His criteria are: 1) articulate a vision of what learning means for the city, 2) commitment to high standards in the schools, 3) dedication to closing the achievement gap, 4) ability to collaborate with stakeholders throughout the city on a unified plan. Della expressed concern about low WASL scores.

Carr represents about 12,000 PTSA members in the separate, individual PTSAs in each school. She sees their role as support for the school system. During the run-up to the superintendent search, she consistently heard the same refrain throughout the community at large – they seek vision, leadership, an understanding of diversity, financial savvy, and community engagement.

The panelists addressed a number of questions from the floor:

- *Does closing the achievement gap really mean lowering the top rather than raising the bottom?* Chow replied that everyone wants the best possible education for all of Seattle's students, and that financial inequity should be addressed by funding agencies such as the state and the city. Della noted that the city supports collective responsibility by all parties, the best way to get resources where they are most needed.
- *Recently, it seems that there is evidence that promotion from within can be a positive step for large organizations. Has that been considered by the Seattle schools?* Chow reiterated that the Board is most interested in finding a new superintendent with a background in education, and because the search is being handled by an outside firm she doesn't yet know whether any internal personnel have applied.
- *In light of the history of less-than-excellent principals being shuffled around the system, are they seeking a superintendent who can build excellence with teachers, principals, and staff?* Chow answered by pointing out that the newly-appointed Chief Academic Officer will take responsibility for building and maintaining the strength of academic leaders.

- *So far, only Della has talked about standards for students, and that has only been in relation to development of job skills. What of standards for developing students into responsible citizens? Also, it hasn't been made at all clear what the superintendent will be expected to advocate for.* Della insisted that building students' job skills is the paramount concern, though of course citizenship is important. Carr reported that a consultant recently indicated that Seattle's math/science curriculum is better focused than the WASL requires. Chow said that Seattle has emphasized student "choices", but that has been at the expense of raising class sizes. There will always be that sort of budgetary tradeoff in the system, as well as the evident community differences in financial resources.
- *How many schools will have to be closed by the superintendent? And why can't we really raise our standards to actually educate our kids?* Chow stated that she knows of no numerical or timeline quotas on the next set of school closings. She also insisted that she doesn't believe Seattle's academic status is low, citing comparisons with other areas (both nationally and regionally). Carr replied that she understands parents' frustration with the schools, but she feels positive outcomes can be achieved by working hard together ... that it takes the whole community rolling up its sleeves.
- *Residents of south Seattle don't feel like they're getting what they deserve from the Seattle school district. What can be done?* Chow, who deals extensively with the 23 schools in southeast Seattle, pointed out that all but one of those schools has high levels of subsidized lunches, meaning low-income families. NEA grants have helped, and there has been good work with the ESL program. In addition, a private foundation has been investing in K-8, and there is increased evidence that lowering class sizes appears to help in improving test scores. Della's reply was that the city's Families & Education levy (recently renewed by the voters) is funding programs to help improve the poorest schools. For Carr, it was important that the legislature's finance committees have been looking into changing the budgeting process, which could help with solutions. She reiterated that the entire community needs to work together to raise the quality of the city's schools.
- *Is the Board looking for a superintendent with his/her own vision, or merely for someone to carry out the Board's vision?* Chow repeated that the Chief Academic Officer will be responsible for building the district's academic vision. By implication, then, the new superintendent will carry out the Board's and the system's vision. However, Chow and the rest of the Board insist that the superintendent must come with a solid academic background, to enhance and facilitate working with the Chief Academic Officer.

Closing out the panel, the Chair informed the membership that additional questions on the superintendent search can be relayed to the panel through her. Send an email to the Chair, and she'll try to get answers for you.

Continuing with the Chair's report, upcoming events on the calendar for the next month were reviewed. In particular, there will be a reception for PCOs (and prospective PCOs), hosted by the Chair, on April 1. In addition, interested members of the organization are welcome to participate in a budget meeting on April 8, and a meeting to develop policies and procedures for creating resolutions for the organization's consideration on April 16.

Officer reports:

- Kirk Shirley (Vice Chair for Events) announced that the 43rd's spring event will be held Saturday, May 19, at the Burke Museum. We will have the run of the museum, so there

will be lots of intriguing exhibits to see. He is looking for items to be used for an auction fundraiser during the event. Although refreshments will be provided, members are encouraged to add goodies of their own (possibly to offset the price of attending the event). He also asked members for their good ideas about future fundraising activities.

- Stephanie Pure (Vice Chair for Membership) is looking for new PCOs, either to be appointed in their own precinct if the post is not currently held or as an acting PCO in another precinct. The WSDCC's *PCO Handbook* is available for those interested in volunteering for such a position. Even if you're not (yet) a PCO, you're more than welcome to go to the April 1 PCO event to learn more about it.

Candidates for office were invited to offer brief remarks:

Lisa Stuebing, candidate for School Board position #2. As a former Chair of the 43rd, she seeks our backing. Although no one else has yet filed for the position she seeks, Lisa believes there will be "privatization" candidates for all School Board seats ... knowing how deeply the 43rd District Democrats oppose such efforts, she will let us know who they are when they emerge.

Sally Clark, City Council position #9. Appointed last year, elected to fill out the remainder of the term in November 2006, she is now running for the full term. She brought an important near-future issue to the organization's attention – developing zoning regulations in the vicinity of the new light-rail stations, particularly in the Rainier Valley. Possible approaches are incentive zoning and inclusion zoning.

Resolutions (published in the last newsletter and shown on the meeting agenda):

- Linda Clifton offered a resolution of thanks to the state Senators who passed SB5336, this year's domestic partnership bill. Another resolution (support domestic partnership) was subsumed into this one as a friendly amendment. After being seconded, the resolution passed unanimously.
- Charlie Bendock offered a resolution in support of SJM8016 (Senator Oemig's bill to encourage action on impeachment of President Bush and Vice President Cheney). It was moved and seconded to amend the resolution by changing the first "Whereas" clause in the resolution to substitute "impeachable offenses" for "potential legal offenses". After brief pro and con speeches, the question was called on the amendment. Moving the question was passed on a voice vote. The amendment was then voted on, and it also passed on a voice vote. The amended resolution was then debated by the membership, with three speakers for and three against the resolution. Following debate, the amended resolution passed on a voice vote.
- The proposed resolution to support the secure health care campaign was tabled, because the person proposing this resolution was not in attendance.

There were no additional GOTO announcements, and the meeting was adjourned at 9:08pm.

Respectfully submitted, March 20, 2007,

Neal Traven
Interim Secretary