

Notes from the East High United meeting on February 12, 2009

The meeting began with around the room introductions from the 12 or so people who were there.

Principal's report

Alan Harris began his report by explaining **how the snow/cold days will be made up at East**. As at all MMSD schools, February 27th will be a regular school day—rather than a day without school to allow teachers to attend the SWEIO conference, as originally scheduled—and March 16th will also be a full school day, rather than an early release day for staff development. Due to the nature of the bell schedule at East, East has more time to make up than some schools, and so East will also add two minutes at the beginning and at the end of each school day. Mr. Harris also mentioned that several players and the coach (!) from **East's 1958 boys basketball team**—East's only state championship basketball team—will present their (refurbished) trophy at halftime of the February 19th East vs. LaFollette game. Players and coach will receive plaques featuring their team picture from the 1958 East yearbook. The class of 1958 directed the money raised at their 50th class reunion last summer to East's theater renovation project.

East High Vision

The next part of the meeting centered on information-sharing and discussion related to the East High Vision. As listed in the agenda, the components to be discussed included the **Leadership Team Vision Statement**, the recent **Dean of Students/Assistant Principals realignment**, and improving **Student voice/student leadership**. A handout* was distributed which included the **vision statement** crafted by East's Leadership Team on one side, and **"Our Vision"**, a spoken word piece by East senior Dominic Dharam, on the reverse. Both had been shared with East staff and students earlier in the week. (Mr. Harris noted that when sharing the vision statement with staff, no one walked out, and no fruit was thrown.) Underlying the vision statement is the importance of the student-teacher relationship, and of student achievement, especially around credit acquisition. As Departments get a sense of their visions, they will "bounce" their Departmental visions against the written vision statement. A second handout*, a chart of **East's administrative organizational structure**, included the shifts made in that structure recently. Mr. Harris walked through the chart, answering questions. The most immediately noticeable change to East's structure, other than the personnel shifts (Bea Bonet is now Assistant Principal for Student Activities, David Krause is now Dean of Students, and Martha Olsen is now Assistant Principal for Academics and Transitions) is that Student Academics for all grade levels are now grouped in one office, Rm. 152, with two assistant principals—Randi Kubek (Assistant Principal for Core Academic and Services) and Martha Olsen. Now all teachers will be under two principals (rather than four, as before), both of whom are in the same office. At the top of the organizational structure chart is the Teacher/Student Relationship, which is in a sense the "why" of everything below; everything else on the chart supports this piece. Next, the three leadership groups: Student/Leadership/Community, with "leadership" here referring to the teachers. As was discussed at the January EHU meeting, representing all of East's diverse community is a challenge; the hope is to get information from, and share information with, East's broader community, specifically as regards a shared vision for East, but once the lines of communication with the community are open, maintaining and strengthening those lines. Over the next four weeks, the CLASS (Creating Leaders and Supporting Students) Student Group will work with an intern, and also with Bea Bonet and Erica Kruger, on ideas for the redevelopment and redesign of student governance, and on getting the student voice. By May, there will be information available on how students can get involved, and by August the student group will have created a shared vision statement. Mr. Harris stressed the importance of figuring out how to get kids involved; now that student behavior is more or less stabilized, need to get student ownership! Parents were encouraged to read Student Congress Representative Hilary Schroeder's article in the February newsletter about student voice. Other parts of the chart that might need explanation: the "School Site Council" doesn't exist yet, but will consist of two students, two parents, two teachers, and Mr. Harris; the council will meet approximately quarterly to look at East's goals and vision. The intention is for it to be a stable force, the "keepers of the vision." SSIT, Student Support Intervention Team (under Academics & Transitions, the Student Academics Office), is the next level up from the Purple or Gold Team for students who are having academic or behavioral struggles. Student congress (under Student Activities Office), will change to a tiered system, including a core group of student leaders who can meet with Mr. Harris regularly.

**Both the Vision Statement and the Organizational Structure handout are available to download on the EHU website.*

Moving from discussion of the chart to more general comments on structure and vision, Mr. Harris reiterated **East's commitment to reflective practice**; meaning, among other things, that teachers feel comfortable using measures of student performance to inform their teaching. Reflective practice is a tough thing to ask people to do. Now is the time to work on giving staff the skills to be able to do reflective practice; they will really start doing it in the fall. Asked if all **department chairs are supportive of the shift in the role of department chairs** (to instructional leaders who are able to talk about instructional practice) that began back in August, Mr. Harris stated that the fall was spent explaining what the department chair role would become. After winter break, Mr. Harris met with department chairs individually to check in with them; as this is not what they signed on for when they agreed to serve as chairs. Most are okay, some are not. Mr. Harris is seeking feedback from teachers on what he is doing; a survey, mostly on Mr. Harris's leadership, was distributed to staff. He will start going to department meetings and reacting to feedback from the staff survey. He wants to provide a clear vision, and especially support: "facilitating the how". Mr. Harris shared the **three principles**—the ideals for which he strives—**that guide him as a leader**:

1) That East will be a high performing school. (East, unlike many schools, is a true reflection of its community. Schools in general are more segregated now than they were in the 1980's, but not East. East has 49% students of color, 49% students eligible to receive free and reduced lunch, 16% English Language Learners, 20% special education, and also 20% of students have two parents with a master's degree or higher.) Mr. Harris wants people to compare East to *all* schools, not just to look at East's demographics and automatically compare it only to schools with similar demographics.

2) That classrooms should look as diverse as the student body.

3) That student success should not be predicted by race or socioeconomic status.

In response to a question if there might be a **student survey on staff**, Mr. Harris indicated that he thought this information might be better collected through **focus group work with students**, as part of the student voice piece. It is necessary to consider how to constructively do a survey, why it is being done, and what will happen with the surveys and the information they collect. Want kids to feel like they can effect some change if things aren't right, that they can be creative problem solvers.

Touching base on **advanced programming at East**, Mr. Harris noted that Anne Von Bank has been hired to fill the Honors/AP position vacated when Annie Potter moved into the Literacy Coach position. Ms. Von Bank has most recently been in Teaching and Learning at the district level; previously, she taught AP English in North Dakota, and she has a background in Talented and Gifted work. She will come to the April or May EHU meeting. Mr. Harris also said that for the 2010-2011 school year, classes will be called "Honors", not TAG, as a reflection of the desire to define *learning*, not the child. Work will also be done to create access opportunities to advanced programming.

A copy of the "**Who Do You Call?**" page from East's newsletters, updated to reflect the administrative realignment, was handed out for input on how to improve the page. Suggestions about moving some subheads were made, and it was also suggested that it might be useful to include a facing "**Frequently Asked Questions**" page, with examples such as "If you need to get a message to a student during the day, for instance that their doctor's appointment has changed..." or "If you need to know when for example show choir is practicing...". A parent also recommended including a copy of the daily bell schedule (class times) in every newsletter. Other suggestions for newsletter articles: attendance, and Service E.

Other topics

Ed Hughes noted that he is the BOE liaison to East. He is also seeking recent (since 2000) **MMSD graduates**, especially those who have gone on to college, to take a few minutes and **fill out an online survey** he has created on how well their MMSD high school experience prepared them for college. The survey may be found at http://qtrial.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_1FHypLftNUMfnmY&SVID=Prod (or email him at edhughes9@gmail.com and ask for a link to the survey); graduates and their families are encouraged to share it with others. Ed reported that he has received 100 survey responses in five days. The survey should provide good feedback for East and other MMSD high schools.

Jill Jokela reported briefly on the **district's strategic planning process**, in which she participated as a parent representative. The initial two and a half days of meetings, involving some 60 people, felt like a good, representative process, resulting in a mission statement and a statement of the district's strategic priorities.

Action teams are forming, and public information sessions will be planned. Documents relating to strategic planning may be found on the District's website at <http://drupal.madison.k12.wi.us/node/2246>.

In response to a question about the size of the **incoming 9th grade class** (projected to be about 400 students, which would be a relatively small class, although this projection may be too low, as last year's was), Mr. Harris mentioned the **9th grade orientation night**, which was well-attended, and filled with positive energy. A parent suggested that for many parents this is their first time inside East, and they might like to have a parent tour. Mr. Harris welcomes these and other ideas (contact Martha Olsen's office with suggestions), and noted that it was because of the suggestion of a parent and a student that the popular scavenger hunt for the students was added to the orientation night.

A few final notes: is **Mr. DuVair likely to retire?** Probably after I do, said Mr. Harris. Claudine Clark and Monica Severa will return to an East High United meeting to talk more about the **Facilitated Language Study pilot**; parents have been contacted about serving on a parent committee to give input and become involved with implementation of the class. Mr. Harris mentioned that they are getting really close to having an update on **theater renovation**; in six weeks or so, there should be something that people will be able to sink their teeth into: "just know that it is exciting." And finally, the **2009/2010 course handbook is now available online**: <http://eastweb.madison.k12.wi.us/node/3169>

**Next meeting:
Thursday, March 12, 2009
7 pm**