

Notes from the East High United Meeting on May 14, 2009

Principal's report Alan Harris began his report with the announcement that a teacher will be coming to East from Egypt to **support Arabic as a native speaker for the Facilitated Language Study (FLS) pilot** for the 2009/2010 school year. This was a very competitive process, and Claudine Clark and Monica Severa of East's World Languages Department deserve kudos for writing the grants that will bring this teacher to East. (For more information, see Randi Kubek's article on p.4 of the June 2009 East parent newsletter.) Mr. Harris noted that the FLS pilot class will be held in the Multicultural Center.

Other points in the report: this is the time of year when East is "**gearing up to wind down.**" The Leadership team realized that **teachers want to be more collaborative with their departmental colleagues**, but this is difficult when departments have classrooms on different floors of the building. Over the summer, there will be **25-30 room changes**, with the upshot that in the fall the Math Department rooms will all be on the 3rd floor, and the World Languages Department on the 1st floor. The **English Department** is working on essential learning goals for 9th and 10th grade. Several English Department staff went to a state Advanced Placement conference. One AP English class will be added next year, one to two more after that. And, after 30 plus years at East, Assistant Principal **Rick Rogness is transferring to LaFollette High School**, so that he has a chance to experience something other than East before he retires. Candidates, drawn from the MMSD high school assistant principal pool, were to be interviewed in the week after the EHU meeting. (MMSD maintains a high school assistant principal pool; following an open application process, administrators including retired principals do a blind read of all applications, and then the top eight candidates are interviewed by principals from the four MMSD high schools.) Depending on his/her strengths, the new hire will probably fill Mr. Rogness's role at East. Mr. Harris emphasized the importance of hiring someone who is a good fit; he will wait to hire if necessary.

A question about **issues with scheduling for next year** led to a lengthy discussion of the scheduling process at East. Mr. Harris first reiterated his three guiding principles: that East will be a high performing school, that classrooms will look as diverse as the student body, and that student success should not be predicted by race or socioeconomic status. He then explained that Infinite Campus allows Randi Kubek and department chairs to run many scenarios when building the master schedule, and that **the goal for this year was to have the highest possible percentage of students with a full schedule**, i.e. all have their first choices. As of the time of the meeting, about 80% of students had their first choices. For those students with scheduling conflicts, they will weigh the possibilities and decide what changes benefit the most students. In the past, the master schedule was built around the "high end" students, who would typically get all of their first choices, while other students often would not; this year, looked at the needs of *all* students. There are **fewer conflicts across the board, but conflicts for higher end students increased** (significantly, a parent commented.) It was noted that TAG-type students and their parents tend to be more vocal about not getting the classes they want.

Q: if offering curriculum, but it isn't actually available to students, what does this say? Mr. Harris responded that administrators and department chairs worked very hard to create the best possible scenarios; they will look at improving chances for students in honors curriculum in the future.

Most of the rest of the meeting was devoted to a **discussion of the parent leadership structure for next year**. Mr. Harris referred to Vision 2012, and briefly outlined the plan for East's organizational structure that was discussed at the February East High United meeting. The ultimate aim is to create a **school site team** or council, comprised of Mr. Harris, two teachers, two students, and two parents, each pair—of teachers, students, parents—from their respective leadership teams. The council, which would "hold the core values of East", would meet quarterly, and would get feedback and guide the administration about the priorities of the East High School community. The **teacher leadership team is in place, and the student group will be by fall; EHU is a parent group, but East High United doesn't represent East**. East's Hmong, Latino, and African-American families are not well represented, nor are students living in group/foster homes. For a few years, unsuccessful efforts—offering transportation, holding meetings in community centers—have been made to boost attendance among these under-represented groups. So, East leadership decided to go in the direction of getting voice, and worked to form several new parent groups. Responding to a comment that the new structure seems like it is fragmenting the East community farther, Mr. Harris said that research shows that it is often necessary to start

with exclusivity when reaching out to populations that are disenfranchised from school; may eventually build to a single more diverse group. He added that while it would be easiest to continue with East High United as East's parent group, EHU is not representative of East. Mr. Harris stressed that the **parent leadership team would be made up of leaders from the various parent groups**, two from each of the newly formed and previously under-represented parent groups, one each from East High United and the Booster Club. Mr. Harris would meet with the parent leadership team every four to six weeks; the members of that team would share with their various groups, and bring feedback back to the leadership team. Mr. Harris would visit one parent group each month, but not necessarily East High United. Mr. Harris would like to evolve away from "what the heck are you doing" meetings; he wants **feedback on how issues, policies, etc. at East affect people**, and the groups will gather that feedback. Are we here tonight to discuss a proposed structure, or to see how we fit into the new structure? **At present, East High United is about parent voice, not parent leadership.** Mr. Harris is looking for leaders. What would parent leadership look like? EHU parent leaders would help define the primary issues for this group and would bring this information, as would the other groups, to the leadership team. There was considerable discussion, including comments from several people that parents may not want to be leaders, and do not come to meetings to take on a leadership role. The feeling voiced by most people at the meeting was that **parents who attend EHU meetings typically come to learn about what is going on at East, to dialog with the principal, and/or to talk about issues that matter to them and their children**; EHU is an information exchange. Changing the group's name from East High United to something like "East High Dialog" was suggested. People at the meeting also had a hard time with the idea of being representatives; of whom? If the other parent groups are as small as East High United, how **can any parent group be said to be representative**? Mr. Harris: the Latino group, for example, will be charged with getting the voice of East's Latino community. Only a few people may attend the group meetings, but they will seek voice from their community. Mr. Harris asked a number of times for people to think about what is valuable about EHU now, and how this can be preserved. East High United was started—by current school board member Lucy Mathiak among others—as a way for the East High School community to share concerns. In the early days, meetings had topics, but they were often general (drugs, for instance), rather than being specifically related to East. East High United for next year: most people felt that there need to be meetings scheduled throughout the year to meet with the principal and dialog, and that all meetings, whether the principal is present at them or not, should have a topic or topics. Mr. Harris concluded by saying that communities move forward by proactively having dialog, and that he will continue to try to get the voice of the community "into the room", but won't lose the strength(s) of East High United.

A few additional questions:

Q: the vibe is that **East staff are handpicking kids to represent students**; this feels exclusive, when what is intended is inclusiveness. Mr. Harris: staff did handpick some students, to ensure voice, but the opportunity to get involved was offered to all students at class meetings. Formerly, the TAG/Advanced and sports students were the ones who were the student leaders, but they don't represent all students. He added that the student leadership group surveyed students and teachers to learn what students want to happen. Down the road, there will be dialog with students about what they decided and how well it works.

Q: **If students have been "empowered to effect change"**—did they, and what was it? What would this mean for parents? Mr. Harris gave three examples from the CLASS group of students: they went to sophomore math classes to educate students about harassment; they are exploring the idea of mentoring, e.g. upper classmen mentoring freshmen; and they initiated the change in student government.

Final notes: a **Post-prom Party planning meeting** is scheduled with Bea Bonet and Pam Herman (former East AODA coordinator, who was involved with previous post-proms) to work on a mechanism to make post-prom sustainable. The annual **teacher appreciation breakfast** will take place the Tuesday of finals week.

**At the September EHU meeting (September 10th, at 7 pm),
there will be a discussion of topics and the schedule of meetings for the 2009/2010 school year.**