

## **Minutes of East High United meeting - September 13, 2007**

The inaugural East High United (EHU) meeting for the 2007-2008 school year started out with a welcome from Mr. Harris and a brief update of the value of the meetings from his perspective. He said that it was helpful to have feedback from parents on the issues of the day and particularly important that students, parents, teachers and administrators share a vision for the direction in which we want to see the school evolve.

Apropos of a shared vision, Mr. Harris gave a brief description of the Vision 2012 process that took place in 2005 in which parents, teachers and interested community members worked toward identifying goals for East over the next several years. Mr. Harris mentioned four goals for the school that emerged through this process. The first goal was engaging all of the East High community in a shared vision for the school. As Mr. Harris observed, we have a ways to go on this goal.

A second goal focused on academic achievement, particularly for students who ranked somewhere in the middle of the class and are not particularly engaged in their school work. Mr. Harris mentioned a couple of initiatives that have recently been instituted in part to address this goal. The first is AVID (Achievement Through Individual Achievement, see <http://www.avidonline.org/>) This is a national program designed for students who typically would be the first from their families to attend college. The intended participants in the program are incoming freshmen at East who have academic promise but whose achievement in middle school placed them in about the middle of the pack. AVID is a four year program that includes an elective class each year designed to enhance the study skills and work habits of the participants in the program. Of 40 applicants, 30 freshmen are enrolled in East's inaugural class this year. Eight East teachers have been trained in the program. The goal is for the students to be enrolled in TAG classes or their equivalent by their junior year and to be prepared to succeed in college after they graduate. A second initiative intended to enhance academic achievement is the Writing Center that has been started at East this year under the leadership of Beth Torrison. The center is available about three class periods a day to offer assistance on writing projects to students of all abilities.

A third Vision 2012 Goal focuses on fostering a safe and respectful climate within the school. Mr. Harris said that Assistant Principal Rick Rogness had accomplished a lot in this area. The school year has gotten off to a quiet start with no significant disruptions, which is always a good sign. Mr. Harris also commended the Madison police officer assigned to the school for interacting with students in a positive and informal way. The best early-warning system for behavior problems or safety issues is students who are willing to confide in teachers or others at the school when they are aware that something may be in the works, and Mr. Harris felt guardedly optimistic on this score, as teachers and staff seem to be connecting with the students more effectively.

The final Vision 2012 goal mentioned by Mr. Harris was improvements in the school's facilities. Talk of substandard facilities at East typically turns fairly quickly to the Margaret Williams Theatre and its distinctive seats reminiscent of 1960's bowling alleys. Mr. Harris noted that in January of 2006, an architect worked up a master plan for the facilities at East and West, and the theatre was part of the plan. Not for the first time, Mr. Harris stated that he intended over the next few months to begin to focus on the fund-raising and other efforts required to bring about extensive improvements to the theatre.

In other news, Mr. Harris described briefly November roll-out of Infinite Campus. Infinite Campus is an internet-based system operated by the school district that provides parents access to up-to-date information on their students' progress. Of most use, teachers list assignments and grades that parents can access. It is not entirely clear whether all teachers will be using the system, since it requires the use of a particular system for recording grades that not all teachers favor. The usefulness of the system will be directly proportional to the percentage of teachers who participate. Other information available on the site includes an attendance record and standard messages from the school similar to what is conveyed through automatic phone calls. The District's goal is to have the system up and running by the end of the first quarter of this year, though there are still some issues to work out. For example, the way the system is set up now, a parent has to come to the school during the school day to sign up for access to the system, which

can be quite inconvenient for the parent. Additional information on Infinite Campus, including a demonstration of the available information, will be provided at the October EHU meeting.

Mr. Harris also provided an update on the application for a Small Learning Communities grant that the District submitted to federal authorities this summer. The grant would provide funds to the four comprehensive high schools in the district and would mean about \$2.5 million over five years for East. While Mr. Harris was initially concerned the grant would tend to push East in a different direction than what the staff had been working towards, in the end the application was drafted in a way that would provide funds to East to support the programs that are already in the works, such as the Literacy/TAG coordinator (an East initiative that the other three schools ended up seeking as well). Ms. Baker of the English Department was East's point person in the application drafting process. The district should hear if its application was approved in about three months.

Jill Jokela, who would be president of EHU if the group had such offices, initiated a discussion of what topics those in attendance would like to see addressed in future meetings of EHU. Among the suggestions:

- The ongoing high school redesign process currently underway at the school district level.
- Traffic safety on East Washington
- Lunch hour timing and crowding
- School climate/discipline issues, perhaps including a presentation from students
- Developments in recent literature on educational issues
- The ongoing superintendent search at the district
- Impacts of technology on instruction and learning
- Ways the school could engage a broader range of parents in school activities
- Reasons why students can end up falling through the cracks at school and what might be done about it
- Curriculum issues, including the demise of the German program and why Madison high schools have such different course offerings
- Problem teachers – what should parents do?
- Effective ways for parents to improve communications with their high school students
- Community resources available to high school students and their families in crisis and otherwise

If you would particularly like to see any of these topics addressed in future EHU meetings, or you have other ideas for meetings, please let Jill Jokela know at [jjokela@sbcglobal.net](mailto:jjokela@sbcglobal.net)

One of the goals of Vision 2012 was to improve communications between the school and parents. Ed Hughes provided a brief summary of different ways the school communicates with families. The first is Infinite Campus, already described. A second means of communications is the automatic phone calls that go out to remind families of upcoming events or to report on bomb threats or other daily developments of note. The system has been improved so that calls now seem to go to only one phone number per family, rather than the multiple numbers that were called last year. A third means of communications is the school's website: [www.mmsd.org/east](http://www.mmsd.org/east). Among other information, the website lists all East's teachers and staff, with their email addresses and phone numbers. The website also includes a link to the school's daily announcements: <http://www.mmsd.org/east/announcements.htm>. Checking the announcements can be useful for learning about the reminders that the school is sending students, like when senior pictures are due at school (by September 21, hurry!), or announcements of meetings of afterschool groups and activities, or lists of college visits and scholarship opportunities for seniors. Fourth, the school mails the parent newsletter to students' homes every two months. The newsletter often has a surprising amount of information in it and is worth more than a quick shuffle through the pages. Finally, while it is not sponsored by the school, the listserv that has been established for the East community has been quiet recently, but is a good way for parents to communicate when issues arise.

A list of volunteer opportunities at East that was assembled by Ms. Chin was circulated to the attendees at the meeting and is available by request to anyone who might be interested.

**East will hold Back to School night on Monday evening, September 24.** Parents should make every effort to attend in order to get a flavor of each of their students' classes.

East's Homecoming is coming up. A pep rally and powderpuff football game will take place on the afternoon of Friday, October 5, in anticipation of the football game against Janesville Craig at Lussier Friday evening. (The powerhouse East girl's swimming team hosts a meet against Craig at 5 on Friday as well.) The Homecoming dance will be held Saturday, October 6. Additional information on homecoming festivities should be forthcoming.

Finally, some may have noticed that Madison Magazine recently took a break from its typical articles touting the area's best fusion stone massages and chocolate mousse body wraps to take a wild stab at ranking the high schools in Dane County. East did not fare well in this ranking, to put it mildly. Jill had copies of an analysis that, building on the Madison Magazine piece, ranked the county's high schools by their performance on the most recent ACT test results. How did East do on this ranking? Go here to see: [http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2007/08/dane\\_county\\_hig.php](http://www.schoolinfosystem.org/archives/2007/08/dane_county_hig.php)

Next EHU meeting: **Thursday, October 11**, at 7 pm in the LMC. See you there!