

Minutes from September 21, 2016 Meeting of the Fernbank Elementary School Council
Prepared by School Council Secretary Brad Strawn

The Fernbank Elementary School Council met on September 21, 2016, from 4:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m., in the administration conference room at the school. All scheduled Council meetings are open to the public. Attendees at the meeting were: Kortni Boyd; Amy Howell; Jennifer Knapp; Steve Langdon; Principal Joan Ray; Carol Reed; Odette Diaz Schuler and Brad Strawn. Council members Charlie Rogers and John Blackmon were unable to attend due to work conflicts.

The meeting began by addressing officer positions within the Council, noting that the former Secretary is no longer on the Council. Brad Strawn agreed to serve as and was elected the new Secretary for the Council. Thereafter a discussion was held about whether the Council Chair and Vice Chair positions, currently held by Charlie Rogers and Odette Schuler respectively, are required to rotate on an annual basis. That discussion concluded with a decision to further consider the issue.

Teacher removals and reassignments were then discussed. It was noted that about 100 former Montclair Elementary School Students who were expected to enroll at Fernbank following this summer's redistricting did not enroll. In order to support the estimated student census and initial teacher allocation derived from it, Fernbank administration opened up additional International Baccalaureate ("IB") school choice seats. About 75 additional students enrolled through IB school choice to help offset the lower than expected enrollment from Montclair Elementary. Meeting attendees recognized the importance of maintaining student diversity in Fernbank's program, and noted that opening opportunities for out of area students to attend Fernbank through school choice supports IB program diversity.

Fernbank does not expect to have any more of its teachers reassigned out of the school by the County this 2016-2017 school year. Principal Ray noted that the County has lifted the hiring freeze for homeroom teachers. Fernbank currently has four ESOL teachers, and the school is adding one more. Fernbank administration is keeping class sizes large enough to support funding for the teachers while working to keep the teacher student ratio as favorable as possible. The early student census count for funding was to occur October 4, 2016. That count determines the majority of the funding allocated from the County for the school year. The second allocation census will occur in early March 2017 and affect 20 percent of the school year funding. At this time, Fernbank is positioned to have a census in January 2017 necessary to maintain current funding from the County through the second half of the 2016-2017 school year, including supporting the current seven kindergarten classes.

The discussion turned to the uncertainty regarding what will happen with the Terraces at Brookhaven apartment complex in which many former Montclair elementary and current Fernbank students live. Apparently the owner is not renewing many of the leases for families at the complex. The owner's plans for the community are uncertain. There is concern that given the refusal to renew long-term leases, the complex's owner may intend to redevelop the property. At this time, despite Fernbank efforts to obtain information from the complex's residents, associates of the owner, and Brookhaven City officials, it is not clear whether current Fernbank students from the complex will be able to reside there through the end of this school year and

into the next school year. Council meeting attendees expressed their desire to keep all current students through this school year and into next year without having the students displaced to other residences and required to attend another school. If the complex is going to be redeveloped, attendees agreed that communications with the County Board of Education should occur to explore allowing displaced students to continue to attend Fernbank. Further, a dialogue with the owner should occur to try to convince the owner not to displace families prior to the end of the school year. Meeting attendees agreed to try to obtain additional information regarding the intentions of the apartment complex's owner. It was noted that Dan Drake and Joshua Williams from the County were reaching out to County Commissioners and Board Member Marshal Orson was reaching out to City of Brookhaven officials to try to obtain additional information. Brad Strawn will reach out to a commercial real estate attorney he knows who may be able to gain some insight into the developer's intentions.

The next issue discussed was whether the School Council will take a position on Emory University's possible annexation into the City of Atlanta. All attendees agreed that the Council should not and will not take a formal position on the possible annexation, and noted the Council's and PTA's history of not taking formal positions on possible annexations.

The Council also discussed whether to take a position on Opportunity School District Amendment 1 to the State Constitution on the November 8, 2016 election ballot. All attendees agreed that the Council would not take a formal position on the so-called School Take Over Amendment (the Amendment was defeated in the election).

On the topic of obtaining bi-lingual translation and communication resources, Principal Ray advised that Lupe McMurray is an English and Spanish bi-lingual professional who is present at the school on Tuesdays and available throughout the week, both often at school and remotely, to assist with translating conversations and school related documents. She also assists other schools, and her compensation is funded by the County. She has been a tremendous asset for Fernbank. Further, Principal Ray announced the addition of Anne Ferreira to the school's faculty effective September 26, 2016. Ms. Ferreira is fluent in English and Spanish, and will serve as a paraprofessional, assist with special education, and can assist in translation. She is a full-time employee of Fernbank, and she has two daughters at the school as well.

Related to efforts to facilitate bi-lingual communication and further inclusion of school parents who are primary Spanish speakers, attendees discussed the fact that many community members communicate through text messages instead of email. Amy Gallagher led an effort to explore having Fernbank use either "What's App" or "Remind." Both are text message applications that help facilitate broad communication. Fernbank decided to use "Remind" as another communication channel, and it will be heavily used by the school's PTA to communicate with the parent community. In a further effort for cultural inclusion, it was noted that Spotify was recently downloaded and used to play Hispanic music during certain periods of the school day, such as during lunch. An entire month of Hispanic community themed activities are planned.

Attendees discussed the expiration of the school's one-year warranty on my aspects of the building's construction and infrastructure. Principal Ray noted that contractor R.K. Redding has been cooperative on working through a punch list of items. The 11-month warranty walk was to

occur in late October 2016. If there issues identified then, Administration will work with the contractor to have them addressed. A discussion about whether WiFi access can be expanded and improved in the school building also was held, and attendees agreed to look into the matter.

Finally, the recently completed MAP testing was discussed. All grades participated in MAP testing, and feedback from teachers was that it was well-organized and went very well.

The meeting was then adjourned.