

Edison Forum Notes
Tuesday, June 7, 2011
North High School Cafeteria

Purpose of Forum

- Include all members of the community—teachers, parents, DPS administrators, community members—in an effort to build a common vision for Edison;
- Establish ground rules that make it safe for everyone to share their ideas;
- Surface and name the most pressing issues to resolve; and
- Determine how best to address the issues we raise.

Annotated Agenda

6:00 Opening and Welcome

- Set purpose
 - This forum is a response to Edison parents' request to the DPS Board for mediation
 - Review purpose statements
 - Generally, we want to focus on issues we can influence, but want to honor where people are coming from
 - We will maintain a focus on Edison itself, but we recognize that its set into a larger DPS context
- Preview the agenda—it was created with input from parents and staff at the coffee meeting and from survey items
- Brief introductions around the room (65 people, mostly parents, but teachers, administrators, DPS central admin staff, and one member from the DPS Board of Education)

6:15 Setting Ground Rules

- There was a clear request from the community to re-establish ground rules
- Acknowledgement that it is often best to design ground rules with a group, but for the sake of efficiency, we will use a tried-and-true set based on research and experience, and that seem in keeping with the community's requested list:
 - Listen to understand
 - Respect the views of others
 - Suspend judgment
 - Speak for yourself in service of the group

6:30 Defining Ideals and Naming Issues

- The group numbered off and sat in groups of 6 at tables. In pairs, they shared what they feel is the ideal for Edison. Groups shared their thoughts, and the following highlights were captured on chart paper:

- A quality education for all kids, where high expectations raise the bar for everyone
 - Celebrating learning and growth at all levels
 - All parents are happy about their child's education
 - We understand each other's views
 - A safe learning environment
 - Project-based learning, less teaching to the test, and more out-of-the-box teaching and learning
 - Safe work environment, and a place where all teachers and parents feel welcome
 - Progress is easily seen, and we continue to build on the past momentum of the school
- The group then moved to the process of naming the issues that are currently preventing this ideal from being realized to the fullest at Edison. It was stressed that the discussion should focus on naming issues at this point, not diving into them, or trying to persuade others to one side or the other of an issue. Problem-solving will come at a later stage. For the purposes of the forum, the goal is to agree on what issues need to be addressed going forward. In the interest of time, a list of issues was culled from previous meetings and from the online survey as a starting point, and groups were asked to review and build on the list:
 - List of Issues that have been identified through
 - The small groups were given instructions to:
 - Remember to use the ground rules in the discussion
 - To frame issues in an inclusive way that does not already take sides on the issue
 - To see what other issues might be in need of attention, and to clarify whether they represent a truly new issue, or an example of one from the list
 - Small groups discussed the topic for 25 minutes and shared out their thinking. In the end, one additional issue (safety) was added to the list, issues were reframed in broader and less biased terms (issue 1 and 2), and details were added to flush out what the discussion of each issue is likely to involve. Further, it was clear that across all issue areas, there was a need to share more information (including information about relevant district and state policies and parameters), and a need to build relationships and establish trust in the process. The group agreed on the following final list of broader issue areas and items they may contain:
 - (1) Ensuring that all students in all programs at Edison--Traditional Ed, HGT, Special Ed, Autism—all thrive under one roof at Edison.
 - (a) Sharing information about the learning needs of all students in the different programs, and the details of each
 - (b) Defining what each program means
 - (c) Exploring what models are out there for the HGT program, and which is the best fit for Edison (while acknowledging the reality that the location of any programs in DPS is contingent on the school community wanting it there)
 - (d) Building trust along the way

- (2) Improving the quality of communication between teachers, administrators, and parents at Edison
 - (a) Improving the process of communication among parents, teachers, and administrators
 - (b) Ensuring the important content around decisions and vision is shared between members of the community
 - (c) Making data more transparent
 - (d) Building relationships and trust amongst all parties
 - (e) Strengthening the values and ground rules of the community (e.g. using a “person-first” approach, not speaking in general categories of people)
- (3) Building school-wide buy in for a shared vision, not factions and competing agendas
 - (a) Making the vision of Edison is inclusive, but not letting it become “mushy” in the process, and being comfortable with the fact that it might not be for everyone
 - (b) Finding ways to build on the existing programs and pieces of Edison to build toward a common vision
 - (c) Building trust in the way the vision is carried out
- (4) Ensuring teachers and administrators are supported to deliver a high quality education to all students at Edison
 - (a) Making sure the environment at Edison helps teachers and administrators thrive
 - (b) Holding everyone to high standards of quality that everyone is clear about
 - (c) Building trust
- (5) Safety
 - (a) Defining what safety means to different people and in different contexts
 - (b) Understanding and discussing policies related to safety issues
 - (c) Making sure the learning and working environment at Edison promotes safety for everyone

7:30 *Next Steps*

- After discussing the issues, and clarifying what they meant, the group then prioritized their top three issues using keypad voting. Results for the group were:
 - Building school-wide buy in for a shared vision, not factions and competing agendas
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- Everyone was then invited to take part in the next steps of the process, which include having a planning group sift through the information generated at this forum issues, research the best ways to address each issue, and then present those suggestions for consideration at the next community forum on July 26. At that time, the broader community would consider them, revise or add to them, and seek agreement on the best way to move forward on each issue over the course of the coming year. Sixteen people offered to serve on the planning team.
- Participants filled out note cards with final thoughts and feedback on the process:

- Well facilitated! Thank you! It's a good start.
- Good starting point. Still want to know how this process is supported by the district. Is real change possible beyond cultural perception?
- Reconfirmed the issues. Disappointed next meeting is so far away. Wanted more resolutions. Wanted more defined topics.
- This is an interesting process and hope that as so many are managed, that the real issues get addressed very specifically in plain and workable language and steps
- Good session! Need to keep in mind implementation timeframes, i.e. not all is do-able S. T., might need to be lumped in other long range efforts.
- I like the plan. I need to know where we are going.
- Nice facilitation from Bill. Ground rules were important and respected. Was my voice heard? I don't know. Small groups still have "dynamics." Are there other ways to anonymously or privately add to the discussions? Safety and trust remain issues. I like the plan. I need to know where we are going.
- Nicely done. Good job getting issues on the table in a safe way.
- Great facilitating. Thank you!
- I think this is a productive and constructive 1st step. This does not stop here—we need continued and consistent assistance with this process.
- I thought the meeting was too controlled. I was expecting to really hear other parents concerns. Leadership is a huge problem at this school and needs to be addressed. This is the first year that I have not been happy with my child's education at Edison in 4 years. Is that a coincidence?
- Some things to acknowledge: Everybody's "high bar" is different. You cannot differentiate for each student and make everything the same for everyone. Many, many terms need to be defined. We need a glossary and probably to vote on those, sorry, but true. We need a definition of "teacher quality." My son's teacher can't spell or write grammatically correct English—is she a good teacher?
- Concerns regarding mediation issues: not specific enough, moving specific facts into "buckets."
- Good start. I guess we'll see.
- Very useful to start with and build on the initial points. Revealed shared concerns and also items I didn't necessarily consider issues. Mostly came to a grip on what what's happening and get "in the loop" and you helped very much with that.
- How do we celebrate and honor our children at Edison?
- Good job. Would have liked it to be longer. I did feel like the agenda was set by the "coffee group," and if you missed that, your voice wasn't in the agenda. Cory has a yearly all day "summit" involving all parents and teachers and administration to develop a mission for next two years. Idea for Edison?
- Major need to discuss models. Not "if" they (HGT) stay, rather how they stay. Leadership needs to be addressed across the board.
- Very well facilitated. Whatever process needs to have some type of clear accountability and follow up for the eventual outcome. Leadership team to have role?

- I greatly appreciated the active facilitation and structure of the forum. I do think it will be important to revisit the parameters of the HGT/Traditional conversation. It was beginning to feel at first that the topic of which programs are at Edison is a closed topic. On the other hand, it is fair for the group that is working on that domain to visit early on the district, state, etc. parameters. The more that can authentically be on the table, the more authentic this process and outcomes will be.
- Artful work tonight.
- I thought everything I cared about was covered. Optimistic about outcomes. Don't flinch from tough conversations—advice for the future.
- Thank you!!!
- I appreciated the lack of drama although I felt it went a little slow. I'd like to take part in future sessions and I'm excited for more of a diverse group. Inclusive!
- We should set a calendar of meetings for the rest of the year. We should send out snail mail about the next meeting.
- As an HGT parent, I'd love a chance to explain my special needs children. We are not an elite family out to alienate, boast, or gloat. We want leadership that understands how our children are different. We want all kids to thrive. We all parents empowered.