



Community Action Network Community Council 02/18/10 Meeting Minutes

Attendees: Sylvia Blanco, Rebecca Cobos, Terry Cowan, Jason Earle, Nancy Gilliam, Kirsha Haverlah, Gloria Mejuia, Stefan Molina, Jim Reed, Esther Reyes, Helen Watkins, Marquis Williams, Willie Williams

CAN Staff: Chantel Bottoms, Mary Dodd, and Vanessa Sarria

Unable to Attend: Michelle Casanova, Kevin Coleman, James Cornish, Anne H. Harutunian, Shawn Lemieux, Penny Lichenstein, Jacinda Johnson, Linda Kokemor, Mary Moran, Lesley Ramsey, Ruby Roa, Clint Smith, Kelsey Stutzman, Amy Wong Mok

Call to Order: Marquis Williams, chair, called the meeting to order at 3:35 p.m. He called for a moment of silence in recognition of the criminal plane crash that destroyed a building and resulted in the death of an innocent citizen.

Citizen's Communication: Patricia Dabbert spoke on behalf of the Citizen's Task Force for the Comprehensive Plan. She invited the community to visit the city's website to fill out a survey and give input on the City's comprehensive plan (<http://www.ci.austin.tx.us/compplan/survey.htm>). The City needs all input for this part of the plan by the end of February. The vision process of the plan will begin in March. Those without access to the website can call 512-974-7630.

Introductions and Announcements: New members introduced themselves. Esther Reyes announced that the Promise Neighborhoods initiative is being led by Southwest Key in the Govalle neighborhood. She provided pamphlets with more information. Read the pamphlet here: http://www.swkey.org/PDF_links/East_Austin_Childrens_Promise.pdf. Southwest Key is looking for partners and supporters for this initiative. Marquis Williams announced that the Community Council would like to present certificates of appreciation to outgoing Community Council members: Kathie Tovo, Patricia Dabbert, Barbara Anderson, Linda Murphy, and Eric Blumberg. Kathie Tovo thanked the Community Council for the acknowledgement. She stated that the experience on the council the past two years has opened her eyes to the critical needs in the community. Patricia Dabbert thanked the Community Council for providing an abundance of information about gaps in services and needs in the City. She stated that she has been able to pass on what she learned to her network and that she appreciates the work of the Community Council. Barbara Anderson thanked the Community Council for the learning she has experienced over the years. She stated that she feels like a better part of the community after working with so many great people on the council. She promised to keep sending graduate students to observe the Community Council meetings. Linda Murphy said that it has been her greatest honor to be on the Community Council since 1994. She stated that the Community Council has been an important part of her life as a public health nurse. She will continue teaching students about CAN and use the CAN reports as reference sources for students. She welcomed the Community Council to call her if she could provide assistance in any way. Eric Blumberg was unable to attend but all present gave him and the other former Council members a round of applause.

Approval of Minutes from January 11, 2010: Minutes were reviewed and approved as presented.

CAN Community Dashboard: Forum on Education Indicators

Where do we Stand: Dashboard Steering Committee member Bob Rutishauser gave a brief overview of the education indicators from the CAN Community Dashboard. He noted that there are two community dashboards. The CAN dashboard covers all ages while the Ready by 21 dashboard focuses on children and youth. There are common indicators on both dashboards.

- **Children enter kindergarten ready to learn.** – This indicator is an important measurement that has implications for dropouts later in life. In the past there has not been a clear definition of what school readiness is. He said that Susan Dawson with the E³ Alliance would discuss more about this effort later in the presentation.

- **% who graduate high school in four years** – Rutishauser noted that the downward trends depicted in the graphs of four year graduation trends reflect, to some extent, a tightening of definitions by the Texas Education Agency (who reports the data). He added that the most recent data is from 2008, so any improvements that may have occurred in recent time would not be reflected. Rutishauser noted that African American and Hispanic students are lagging behind White students in four year graduation. There is also a gap between the graduation rates of economically disadvantaged students compared to the general student population. Students with limited English proficiency have the largest gap in graduation rates.
- **% high school graduates who are “college ready”** – College readiness trends have gone up over the last couple of years in all five of the largest school districts in the Austin-Round Rock Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA). There are large disparities between college readiness rates among different racial/ethnic groups. This indicator is important because it reflects not only college readiness, but career readiness as well. College readiness trends also show a gap between the general student population and the economically disadvantaged student population. Many efforts by school districts and partner agencies, such as the Austin Chamber of Commerce and Austin Partners in Education, have focused on assisting these low-income populations to prepare for the SAT, ACT, and state tests, which help students prepare for college. College readiness rates for students with limited English proficiency are extremely low.

What is being done? Who is working to move these indicators in the right direction:

- **Austin ISD Strategic Plan 2010-2015: Focusing Resources to Achieve District Goals** – Edmund Oropez, AISD Director of High School Operations, and Barbara Huffman, Director of Student Operations shared copies of the Austin Independent School District’s strategic plan with Community Council members. The plan is based on four key goals: 1) Provide a high-quality, well-rounded educational experience to all students that is rigorous, culturally relevant, healthful, and engaging. 2) Build strong relationships with students, families, and the community to increase trust and shared responsibility. 3) Ensure that every classroom has a high-quality, effective educator, supported by high-quality, effective administrators and support staff. 4) Align resources to accomplish priorities within a balanced budget. All of these goals include specific measurable outcomes and tactics to achieve the outcomes. On the AISD strategic plan scorecard there are measurable outcomes and targets. One of the goals on the scorecard is, “All students will graduate ready for college, career, and life in a globally competitive economy.” This goal is measured by six indicators, two of which are on the CAN Community Dashboard (four year graduation rate and college readiness). There are large inequities in campus performance on these indicators. Austin ISD works with Austin Community College through their College Connection program which helps students complete college applications, gives them the opportunity to talk about financial aid, and helps to bridge the gap between the senior year of high school and the freshman year of college. There is also the Early College Start program for students who have demonstrated college readiness as freshmen on the TAKS tests. Students in this program can take up to two college classes a semester and can graduate with up to 30 college credits. Advisors play an integral role in facilitating these programs. Austin Partners in Education tutoring is essential for those who are “on the bubble” (passed the TAKS test but did not meet college readiness standards). The tutoring helps prepare these students for their ACT or SAT tests. AISD committees on college enrollment and financial aid work with the Chamber of Commerce on financial aid Saturdays that work to promote college application processes. As a result the school district has seen application rates increase. Skillpoint Alliance provides students with a career fair each fall. Within schools, counselors may be overburdened and unable to closely serve students. Developing advisories in high schools and middle schools that would work to establish relationship on campuses between advisors and students could help to compensate when counselors are overburdened. There is a Faith in Education collaboration with churches in the area to promote a college-going culture through church programming. Barbara Huffman stated that there are many other collaborations providing services to students, but that the ones mentioned above are the ones that she works most closely with.
- **Local collaboration to improve the education indicators** – Susan Dawson stated that the E³ Alliance’s Blueprint for Educational Change is the Central Texas Strategic Plan to build the strongest education pipeline in the country. The plan contains three overarching goals: 1) Children enter kindergarten school ready. 2) Central Texas eliminates achievement gaps while

improving overall student performance. 3) Students graduate college-and-career ready and prepared for a lifetime of learning. These goals correspond well with the CAN indicators. Income distribution maps show that school districts with large percentages of economically disadvantaged students have been increasing in the Central Texas region. When discussing school readiness, one of the most important indicators is related to the mother's level of educational attainment. Almost one in three Central Texas children are born to mothers without high school diplomas. Data maps show that areas in our region with high concentrations of poverty lack accredited early childhood education centers. Basically our community has an increasing population of poor children, few and scattered resources, and there are national estimates that up to 40% of kindergartners are 18 months or more behind. E3 Alliance and Region XIII have brought together more than 70 participants from school districts, who built off of the work of other local organizations, government guidelines, and the best available research, to develop a school readiness standard. This standard includes measures related to numeracy, literacy, bilingualism, social/emotional factors, and science and social studies skills. There should be strong baseline data available by next fall. In other news, San Marcos is working to launch a "Success by Six" program. Childcare funding often comes through Workforce Solutions, but the funding is not always delivered to the highest quality childcare programs. Children that do not enter kindergarten school ready may become dropouts. A conservative estimate of the cost of a single class year of dropouts in Central Texas is \$435 million. We could buy five Long Centers every year at the cost of one class of dropouts. The Central Texas four year graduation rate is dropping, which is mostly driven by the graduation rates in Austin ISD and Hays County. The National Center for Education Statistics has adopted standards that are more strict in counting dropouts. Who's working to move these indicators? – Who's not? There are institutional efforts such as high school redesign in AISD and wall-to-wall academies in Round Rock. There are community efforts, often in coordination with the Ready by 21 Coalition. Speaking to college and career preparedness, an estimated 47% of seniors in Central Texas are college ready. Only 43% of college students earn any degree. There are State college and career readiness standards that have been adopted. Local organizations that work on college/career readiness include the Austin College Access Network, the Greater Austin Chamber of Commerce, Austin Partners in Education, Communicard (through Feria para Aprender) and the local school districts. Austin ISD is critical in efforts to move education indicators, but it is also important to look at the issues regionally.

- **Truancy Plus Update** – Linelle Clark Brown of AISD and Stephanie Hayden of the City of Austin spoke. They gave an update on the Truancy Plus initiative which is part of Austin/Travis County/AISD subcommittee to improve attendance and address truancy. The group first agreed on definitions to be used for truancy and dropouts. A dropout is a student who attends Grade 7-12 in a public school in a particular school year, does not return the following fall, is not expelled, and does not: graduate, receive a GED, continue school outside of the public school system, begin college, or die. Truancy is any unexcused absence from school as defined by state attendance laws. The desired outcome is to improve attendance, reduce unexcused absences, and reengage students before they get 10 unexcused absences, at which time a truancy case is filed with the courts. The courts however should never be a starting place for intervening with these children. Best practices that the Truancy Plus initiative follows are: 1) utilize data systems, 2) assign adult advocates to students, 3) provide academic support and enrichment, 4) implement programs to improve students' classroom behavior and social skills, 5) personalize the learning environment and instructional process, and 6) provide rigorous and relevant instruction. The recommendations for moving truancy and dropout indicators that have come out of the initiative are: 1) start early with parents when children are young with proactive identification of children "at-risk" for truancy, 2) make the IMPACT team responsible for enforcing recommendations, 3) develop individualized programs to address causes of truancy, 4) conduct joint analysis of data across school and justice systems, 5) establish/define a leadership council and working partnership group supported by staff, and 6) educate the public and engage the community. The next steps for the initiative are to bring aboard new partners.

Discussion: What more needs to be done? – Chris King, head of the Ray Marshall Center, and Dashboard Steering Committee member facilitated. He stated that he works with the Student Futures

Project which looks at postsecondary enrollment and the employment process. The project tracks students longitudinally.

Discussion: There are other indicators to look at related to these issues such as childhood obesity. Panelists were asked whether it is important to look at variances in data among ethnic and racial groups, or whether these gaps in performance could be explained by differences in income. Dawson replied that there is a high correlation between ethnicity and income levels, but when the data is disaggregated, income does not explain all of the differences. For example low-income White students are more likely to graduate than high-income students in other racial and ethnic categories. Dawson said this implies that cultural differences and other issues may be impacting student performance. She added that ethnic students are retained at much higher rates than white students regardless of income. Campuses take varying approaches to helping students with college/financial aid applications and increasing volunteerism. Most students surveyed by the Student Futures Project plan to go to college upon graduation, but there is a big gap between how many students actually do go. Council members asked if more vocational programs could encourage students to stay school. Leander, for example has a strong program on college prep and tech prep that seems to make a big difference on outcomes. There has been a push to increase academic rigor of vocational courses. Requirements, passed by the State legislature, limit the number of electives students are able to take and limits students' ability to take vocational courses. Dropouts are often behind in core academic areas and so don't have time in their schedule to take vocational courses. Dawson said it is important to connect with leaders to improve college readiness because this affects our regional workforce. Other surrounding counties don't have the large number of support services that we have in Travis County. The E³ Alliance has tracked cohorts of students in Central Texas and found that between 5th and 6th grade the percentage of students with serious disciplinary referrals more than doubles. Dawson applauded efforts such as the FERIA para Aprender to build capacity for diversity training in our community. The capacity of Spanish speakers on staffs of local organizations has skyrocketed recently. The school district is sensitive to the need to provide diversity training to community partners. The panel discussed the importance of engaging students in the conversations in planning for school improvements. Adults need to speak with students about why they are having issues with school, what has worked for them, and what hasn't. Linelle Clark-Brown said there is a need to provide better support for teen moms in school, and some policies need to change. As an example, she noted that moms who stay home with a sick child do not get an excused absence from school. Another issue is that pre-kindergarten is still not mandatory. Panelists said it is important to identify common measures and indicators so that the community can speak as a unified voice to legislators. A Council member asked why educational data was so old. Panelists explained that data is reported by the districts to the Texas Education Agency which analyzes the data and this adds a bureaucratic layer that causes the data to be delayed. The data reporting system needs to be analyzed to identify bottlenecks and determine what we can do better to get our data faster. The Austin Chamber is working with school districts on this. The new superintendant is launching a new data warehouse to be launched this summer for internal AISD employees to circulate to the community. Community members can get involved in moving these indicators by joining the Truancy Plus initiative (contact Stephanie Hayden at Stephanie.hayden@ci.austin.tx.us) or by visiting the AISD website and following the pledge process that is included as part of their strategic plan (http://www.austinisd.org/inside/initiatives/strategic_plan/powerofus/). Community Council representatives expressed concern that kids are being pulled out of school to go to court for truancy charges. Representatives from the Truancy Plus initiative agreed to discuss these concerns when they talk about the court process. Community Council members recommended that the community work to increase the capacity of FERIA para Aprender and provide more opportunities for families to learn about importance of college and college readiness. Panelists said two other conferences that are important for our community to support are the Hispanic Futures Conference and the African American Men and Boys Conference.

Other Business: Community Council members were provided with a handout that discusses CAN's work related to advocacy and policy. Members were encouraged to look over the document and share comments with CAN staff. Community Council members were also provided with a handout which gave an overview of stimulus money that has come into Austin and Travis County.

Meeting adjourned at 5:57 p.m. Next Community Council meeting: March meeting is cancelled. Next meeting will be on April 19, 2010. Presentations and other information from Community Council meetings are available online at: <http://caction.org/Councils/CommunityCouncil/index.htm>