



School/City Liaison Committee Minutes



School/City Liaison Committee Meeting Thursday, April 10, 2003

Palo Alto Unified School District
District Office Room A
25 Churchill Avenue
Palo Alto

MINUTES

Representing the City of Palo Alto

Emily Harrison, Assistant City Manager
Jim Burch, Council Member
Yoriko Kishimoto, Council Member
Dawn Calvert, Superintendent, Recreation
Patrick Larkin, Recreation Services Manager

Representing Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD)

Mary Frances Callan, Superintendent
Robert Golton, Deputy Superintendent
John Barton, Liaison Chair & School Board Member
John Tuomy, School Board Member

The meeting was called to order by Chairperson Barton at 9:03 a.m.

1. Oral Communications

There were no oral communications.

2. Approval of Minutes – March 6, 2003

Mr. Burch moved to approve the minutes. They were approved without objection.

3. Youth Master Plan

Ms. Harrison introduced the facilitators of the Youth Master Plan: Dawn Calvert, Superintendent of Recreation, and Patrick Larkin, Recreation Services Manager.

Ms. Calvert said the Youth Master Plan originated from a joint study session held in March of 2000 between the City of Palo Alto Youth Council and the Palo Alto City Council. A "youth master plan" is defined as a process to develop a focused and organized approach to the delivery of programs and services for youth and families within our community. The planning process began with a steering committee of approximately 40 members representing the Palo Alto City Council, the Park and Recreation Commission, Community Services Department staff, Palo Alto Police Department, Youth Council, Youth Advisory Board, Palo Alto Unified School District administration and Palo Alto schools, PTA, Stanford University, along with all major youth-serving agencies, sports agencies, the business community, the faith community and healthcare agencies. In October of 2000, this committee began by defining the basic components of a youth master plan. They asked the following questions. How well are Palo Alto's youth doing? Are funds properly allocated for positive development of youth and teens in our community? The goal is to enhance their experiences and address youth opportunities. The purpose of the plan is to guide youth and teen programs within the City of Palo Alto, address youth opportunities, improve communication and awareness of youth programs, ensure ongoing collaborative partnerships that coordinate, support and monitor youth programs and services. It has been concluded that a youth master plan would benefit the city in the following areas: determining existing services and overlaps, identifying service gaps, addressing the needs of all youth in the community, and evaluating developmental assets and skills needed by youth to grow into healthy adults.

Mr. Larkin said he would be presenting what the Youth Council presented to the PAUSD School Board and the City Council. He then explained that the Youth Council is made up of 15 high school students from Palo Alto High School (Paly), Gunn High School (Gunn) and Castilleja who meet every Monday to discuss teen issues and how to address politics affecting the teen community. The Youth Council's vision is that all youth in Palo Alto will have safe, healthy and positive experiences that support them in the development of behaviors, skills, attitudes, knowledge and values necessary to realize their potential. The mission statement is: "To engage and support the Palo Alto community's middle and high school youth and their families." An objective of the group is to empower youth by providing opportunities for their participation in a program designed for and by them. Mr. Larkin continued by describing some of the action steps that have already been completed. The teen recreation staff created a Youth Drop-In Center at the Mitchell Park Community Center. Two years ago, shuttle service was coordinated for after-school programs at Gunn and Paly. "Teen Band Nights" were created and implemented. The Youth Council's short term action steps will include the completion of a documentary film called "Top Ten Fun Things for Teens to Do in Palo Alto" and evaluation by the City staff of a fee waiver program. In the long term, the Youth Council will develop marketing strategies to directly target teens.

Mr. Barton asked for elaboration on the fee waiver program.

Ms. Calvert said it is for community members who would not otherwise be able to participate in the City's programs. Guidelines and a policy are in place. There is a 75% reduction for all programs for those who fall within the economic guidelines.

Mr. Larkin said the Youth Council's second goal is to improve communication with youth and their families who are not aware of available programs due to language barriers. The Palo Alto Weekly and the Youth Council developed a website on Palo Alto Online that lists teen activities. He also said that youth members of the Youth Master Plan group have written articles for local newspapers recognizing their peers for their accomplishments. Another goal is to have Palo Alto youth appointed to commissions that deal with teen issues. A "Summer Survivor Camp" for middle school students has been implemented and a "Future Authors Camp" will be held for two weeks this summer for PAUSD middle school kids. At this camp, a teacher from the District would be responsible for the morning curriculum and a Recreation department staff person would run afternoon recreation. A teen forum focusing on stress-related health disorders is being provided in conjunction with PAUSD and the Lucille Packard Children's Hospital on May 15th in the Board Room at 25 Churchill Avenue. All of this information will be shared with about 200 other teens from other areas so they can learn how to present to their school boards and city councils.

Ms. Kiskimoto noted Girl Scouts, Boy Scouts and church groups were not mentioned.

Mr. Larkin said the list is still in development and one of the group's goals is to find out what the scout groups are doing. As more information comes in, the list will be adjusted as needed.

Ms. Kishimoto then asked how the Summer Survivor Camp went last year and if it would be repeated this year.

Mr. Larkin responded that last year it was full and it would be repeated this year.

Ms. Kishimoto noted that the sports program was huge and suggested considering theater, music and community service.

Ms. Calvert said that the teens had a specific list to choose from, and at the time they were not interested in those areas.

Mr. Barton asked what PAUSD could do to help participate and get information out. He said he did not believe any of the District's websites or the school websites had any information about this list of things to do.

Mr. Larkin said there is a link to Palo Alto Online.

Mr. Barton asked how a youth could find things to do in Palo Alto.

Mr. Larkin responded that he could go to Palo Alto's website, click on "Palo Alto On-Line", then click on "Teens". All the teen activities hosted by the School District and the City would be listed there.

Dr. Callan noted that the PAUSD website is being redesigned and that the link can also be placed on the new site so kids would have two ways to access the "Teens" page.

Mr. Barton said that as a parent, he thought the school website would be the place they would first direct their kids to look for things to do.

Dr. Callan suggested that the PTA Council review the Youth Master Plan, and that they might be able to help get the information out.

Mr. Larkin said the list of fun things to do has been published in the school newsletters too.

Dr. Callan said that was a great first step and that she was trying to figure out additional ways to get the information out.

Mr. Tuomy said he believed the PTA Council would probably have a great deal of constructive feedback.

Dr. Callan suggested the kids present the plan to the PTA.

Mr. Larkin said the plan is only a stepping stone to what comes next and that it will be built upon by next year's youth members.

Mr. Tuomy repeated that the PTA would be a great group to get involved, since they represent kids from kindergarten through high school.

Mr. Kishimoto added that this way, the Youth Council could stay with many of the same students and parents from the beginning of school, all the way through high school.

Mr. Barton said the list of activities was great, but noted that some activities, such as the Friday night movies at Gunn, were not listed and that may mean the kids at Paly, JLS and Terman are not aware of them.

Mr. Larkin said that activities at Spangenberg Theater would be mentioned in the documentary film the kids were making.

Dr. Callan suggested contacting Kate Hill, the District's PTA President.

Ms. Kishimoto asked about the budget for the teen center and how much income was expected from the rental of the old teen center site.

Ms. Calvert said the agreement was that additional funds could become available to the teen center from the leasing of the parking garage, which was the site of the original teen center.

Ms. Harrison said the financial situation has changed because the price for leasing properties in the area has gone down and that the final construction cost is still being worked on.

Mr. Tuomy asked how the group justified building the new teen center.

Mr. Larkin said the original building was small, in very poor condition, and in a bad location, and that it was really directed at middle school kids, since high school kids were not interested in a "teen center". As the original center was not located near a middle school, the move to Mitchell Park Community Center location was a wonderful change. Several kids come over after school directly from JLS and there is a shuttle from Jordan. The parents have been overjoyed with this.

Mr. Tuomy asked if the top ten list of things teens could do in Palo Alto would be submitted to Letterman.

Mr. Larkin replied that the list was supposed to be informative yet entertaining.

Mr. Tuomy asked if the kids found anything to place on the list.

Mr. Larkin said they have already comprised their top ten list and it includes items such as Spangenburg Theater and Pizza My Heart.

Mr. Tuomy then said it appeared the kids were putting items on the list that truly interested them, rather than just the activities that were pre-approved by parents.

Mr. Larkin confirmed that these were things that the kids really liked to do.

Dr. Callan said the adults in the community ought to have copies of this list.

Mr. Larkin said the kids had worked very hard on the list and that he was proud of them.

Dr. Callan asked Mr. Larkin what the kids felt they needed in the way of support.

Mr. Larkin said they feel they are overworked, too stressed and that they are not getting enough sleep. Many of them report getting up at 2 o'clock in the morning to study and work with their fellow students on-line in an attempt to finish homework and place well for AP testing. He said they need to be taught what to do to alleviate some of the stress and work more efficiently.

Dr. Callan suggested that the PTA be allowed to hear directly from students in order to determine what types of programs need to be developed. She predicted a tremendous spin-off from that presentation, since this would mean the kids are in effect telling their own parents what they need. She added that the District is trying to help by giving no homework over Spring Break, among other things, but it does not have control over the amount of sleep kids get. More needs to be done and parents must be involved.

Mr. Larkin agreed. He said the teen forum with the Children's Hospital is targeting teens only, not parents, so the kids will be directly addressed and have a better sense of control. This group is learning Chi Qong and self-massage and a person from Stanford who is doing a panel discussion on sleep disorders and stress.

Mr. Burch asked what percentage of kids are being helped by the youth program.

Mr. Larkin said all members of the youth council are being helped and that this group is very representative of the kids in the School District.

Mr. Barton said that once each year the Board has dinner with a group of high school students, but he felt this was not a representative sample. He asked if there were specific groups that were doing well and others that were struggling and not participating in City's recreation programs. He also asked how many African-Americans and Hispanics were involved in the programs.

Ms. Calvert said she believed the Recreation Department was managing to touch a wide range of local youth with at risk programs, community service groups, advisory groups for both middle and high school students, and a youth council. This helps the Recreation Department connect with many youth groups. The purpose of the Youth Council is that they need to represent and connect with all groups.

Dr. Callan said Paly and Gunn just finished their WASC accreditation visits and that one of the issues addressed in the Paly reports was student stress. This came out in the self-study by the teachers, as well as the self-study by a random sample of the students. (The random sample of students was comprised of kids the reviewers met as they walked across campus.) Many of the recommendations resulting from this study centered around how the District and the Staff planned to respond to the student stress.

Mr. Barton said there were also some mentions in the report by teachers at Gunn that there was too much homework. The WASC team commented on the stress level of the kids on a number of occasions. He also noted that eating disorders are increasing at an alarming rate.

Mr. Burch said this had to be looked at in a larger context.

Mr. Barton and Dr. Callan concurred.

Mr. Tuomy said a lot of the homework load has to do with the type of teaching that is done. He said that Elizabeth Falcon, the Paly Student Board Representative, believed that every second girl at Paly has some sort of eating disorder. He said that eating disorders can even be related to the type of teaching taking place, as they are sometimes the only way some kids feel they can take control of their lives. If they are more actively involved in learning in the classroom, rather than just sitting in lectures then taking home homework, they will feel more in control. He added that Paly is more lecture-oriented than Gunn. Giving kids a better feeling of control of their lives and their destinies every day may help cut down on these unhealthy situations. Mr. Tuomy said this is about all the District can do to help at this point. There is also a lot of parent pressure on kids, which can start at pre-school age.

Mr. Barton added that Lane Simmons, the Gunn Student Board Representative, had said she sees at least one girl with an eating disorder in every one of her classes every semester.

Mr. Tuomy said he wanted the schools to be sure the kids felt they had control of their lives every day. The District cannot do much more than is already being done, but it can help parents understand that they have an important role as well. He said he met with a group of Stanford business students during the previous evening and the subject of stress came up. One student said she knew of some parents who were very upset because their three year old had not yet learned to read. Her point was that this pressure to achieve starts very early and that she was concerned about raising her own children in Palo Alto. Mr. Tuomy said that because of this, waiting to deal with the stress situation with high school kids is way too late.

Dr. Callan said there was an article in the Weekly about a high school student who is now being treated at Stanford Children's Hospital for depression and an eating disorder. The students have simply had to say, "We can't take any more." Dr. Callan said she believed Paly has more work on this to do than Gunn does. The problem has been identified and the Principal (Sandra Pearson) has begun to work on it, though it will have to be tackled on many fronts. She added that the Dean of Admissions at Stanford, Robin Mamot, while speaking to the Foundation for College Education, said these kids do not need to take seven AP classes.

Mr. Tuomy said half the Ivy League schools were saying kids need all the AP courses and the other half said they do not. This is making it very difficult.

Mr. Burch said the situation in the high schools should be taken as an early warning. The colleges simply have not caught up yet and the existing system will soon collapse in one way or another.

Mr. Tuomy said he was concerned that all Palo Alto parents seem to believe that every Palo Alto kid must get into one of the top five colleges in the country. Since

they do not all end up going to one of these schools, they should not all be pressured to do so.

Mr. Barton added that the students receive mixed messages. Scott Laurence told him that of Gunn's graduating class of about 400, 33 of them (almost 10%) were accepted into Stanford University. This is quite impressive, but also very scary, because it sets the bar higher for the next graduating class.

Mr. Tuomy said it is very difficult for kids when they are expected to be in the top 10% of a class when it is comprised of National Merit Scholarship finalists.

Dr. Callan noted PAUSD is one of the top school districts in the country.

Mr. Barton said that at the last Board meeting, toward the end of the board operations section, several issues came up regarding kids and quality of life. He noted that the Recreation Department staff was able to look at this issue at a somewhat different angle than that of the Board members. He said he would like the Recreation Department to report back to the District on trends and issues they learn about.

Mr. Larkin said this was a great idea and that he works closely with Linda Lenoir, the District nurse. She is very involved in teen issues and is on the Human Relations Commission panel. He said he would be happy to work with anyone else the Board would like to recommend as well.

Ms. Harrison suggested scheduling periodic update meetings with PAUSD.

4. Future Meetings and Agenda Items

Mr. Tuomy suggested scheduling the next meeting on another day of the week, since Mr. Barton has scheduling conflicts on Thursday mornings.

Wednesday May 7th at 9 a.m. was agreed upon.

Mr. Tuomy said that the group is well suited to take on the following three items that have been emphasized at the School/City Liaison meetings and make sure they happen. He listed the items and discussed them as follows:

- 1. Traffic and safety for kids going to and from school*

Ms. Kishimoto suggested that Earth Day might be a good time for the City and District to do something together.

Mr. Tuomy said there were many things that could feed into that. There needs to be a focus on safety, considering the recent tragic events.

2. Playing fields for both kids and adults

He added that there must be a way to preserve the District's property and still provide the community with enough playing fields.

3. Community overemphasis on perceived success which is creating the pressure that is killing the kids

He said this third goal is also driven by tragedy, because Palo Alto's kids are literally killing themselves.

Ms. Kishimoto suggested this was due to the Palo Alto culture.

Mr. Tuomy said there are many good things about the Palo Alto culture as well, such as the community's ability to fix things that are not working. If the people of Palo Alto put their minds and hearts to things, a great deal can be accomplished. He believed a group such as the School/City Liaison Committee should be working on big issues, rather than small ones and suggested making the three topics he had just mentioned the three main goals of the group. He said he hoped planning could take place during the summer months and that implementation would begin by December. In this way, there should be a measurable outcome and at the end of his final term of community service in Palo Alto, something will have been accomplished.

Mr. Burch said the District has 12 years to help children grow into healthy adults and suggested that "healthy kids" needs to be redefined.

Mr. Tuomy suggested issuing a press release stating the Committee's three goals, adding that if these points are not brought out at the highest level, they cannot be achieved. If the City and PAUSD can work together on these three goals success may be achieved. He noted that all these issues have been discussed since he was a student at Paly in the 1960's and that he hoped this group would be able to actually accomplish positive changes. He then asked if anyone wanted to add any other goals.

Ms. Kishimoto suggested adding enrollment and land use issues.

Mr. Tuomy said there is currently enough room at the campuses and that enrollment is really a part of the traffic safety issue.

Ms. Kishimoto asked about impacts on pre-school, daycare and after school programs. She added that the Jewish Community Center (JCC) is shutting down some of its after school programs and that Peninsula Day Care may be closing.

Mr. Tuomy said that just because there is a list of three major goals, does not mean that other issues cannot be discussed at upcoming School/City Liaison meetings.

Mr. Burch mentioned the Charleston area corridor and said he thought it would pass at the next City Council meeting.

Ms. Harrison suggested that this discussion was not on the agenda, so it is subject to the Brown Act.

Mr. Burch said he had three grandchildren who recently went through the PAUSD schools successfully. He did not believe any of them had the huge stress issues, nor were they pressured to go to Ivy League schools. He hypothesized that much of the pressure on students is related to the values their parents hold.

Mr. Larkin said that he agreed that not every kid is suffering from the extreme stress that is being reported. It is important to listen to the kids who ARE having problems and make sure they know adults care and are listening. Kids will talk to adults if they believe they will listen.

Dr. Callan pointed out that sometimes parents are the last to hear about problems their kids are having and that seven out of ten kids at Paly are reporting high stress levels.

Mr. Tuomy said he did not know how much homework kids are supposed to have, but that his kids had five or six hours of homework every night in addition to their sports activities. Then he noted that many kids found that going to college was actually easier than high school.

Ms. Kishimoto pointed out that stress levels are at least partially connected with personality. Some kids handle stress better than others. She believed there were several reasons people found that college was more enjoyable than high school for most kids, including having more control of their lives and being away from their parents.

Dr. Callan said that people of her generation have fond memories of high school, and now something must be out of whack if kids prefer college to high school.

Ms. Kishimoto said she had preferred college to high school.

Dr. Callan said she attended a high-performing high school, with about 94% of kids going on to college, but they did not have five hours of homework each night. She suggested that the number of AP classes and activities students are required to participate in is now too high.

Mr. Tuomy reiterated that these kids all think they are going to go to one of the five big Ivy League schools.

Ms. Kishimoto said someone suggested to her that there was not really a place students could rent and arrange to have bands perform. In college Ms. Kishimoto had this type of thing, which required charging a facility fee, which gives students a better sense of control.

Mr. Larkin said he spoke to the same person who approached Ms. Kishimoto. He has arranged for them to help recruit bands for the Youth Council's band night. Mr. Larkin said his whole philosophy is that he lets the kids advise him about what they need provided to them. He feels the kids are very committed to the programs because of this, and they get a tremendous sense of accomplishment.

Ms. Kishimoto asked if the kids actually make the arrangements.

Mr. Larkin responded that the kids even created the Power Point presentation he had just given to the Committee. He felt that the kids got a feeling of empowerment from planning things on their own.

Ms. Kishimoto said the kids at Paly do not have much of a budget to work with and suggested a student activity fee for the high school.

Mr. Burch and Ms. Harrison mentioned an incident involving the naming of a softball team. The coaches said they would let the kids choose the name. The two choices were "Blue Lightening" or "Ice Blue Rubber Duckies". The kids wanted the latter, but the coaches wanted the former. Coaches and kids voted and came out with a tie. The coaches then said their votes were "bigger" than those of the kids, so the winning name was "Blue Lightening". The kids were totally disempowered.

Ms. Kishimoto suggested having the three main topics Mr. Tuomy mentioned as agenda items for upcoming meetings. She asked if parking restrictions would be on the next agenda.

Ms. Harrison said she hoped Terman traffic would be on the agenda.

Mr. Tuomy said he wanted to figure out a way to pull these all together and that there should be one more presentation left on playing fields. The future agenda items should focus on discerning how to implement these goals.

Ms. Harrison said she had planned to give the same playing fields presentation that was shown at the Board meeting, but had decided against it because it did not really address the issue anymore. The City wants to do something that does not impact the District's flexibility and cost, neither of which have been previously discussed internally. She said the City should be ready to present a new playing fields report at the next School/City meeting.

Mr. Tuomy said the School Board would like to know what the situation is with the Mayfield site.

Dr. Callan said the June meeting could focus on all three goals (traffic, youth master plan and playing fields) and how to proceed as a group in putting a plan together. And during the summer, one meeting could take place.

Mr. Tuomy said that during the summer meeting some measurable goals should be set. And in the November meeting, status reports could be given. He also suggested that next year's School/City Liaison Committee have at least one Board member and one Council member who attended this year's meetings for the sake of continuity. He then suggested waiting to do the press release until the plan had been finished and the outcome could be reported.

Ms. Kishimoto asked about day care, since that fell into the youth master plan.

Mr. Tuomy said that could potentially be on the June agenda.

Mr. Larkin said the Youth Master Plan addresses middle school and high school kids.

Ms. Harrison said the City would be ready to talk about fields at the May meeting. Then at the June meeting, they would plan to look at how to address the three key issues. She said she understood the group's mission statement to be to help Palo Alto youth grow into healthy adults.

Mr. Tuomy said there will also be a need for other issues as they arise.

Ms. Harrison said that additional agenda items could be added to future meetings.

Ms. Kishimoto said she did not know if anyone was focusing on the impact on daycare city wide.

Ms. Harrison said she did not believe childcare should be an issue for this group and said there is a group called the Childcare Advisory Taskforce which reports to the City Manager.

Dr. Golton said that Palo Alto Community Child Care (PACCC) is having money trouble because not enough kids are being signed up.

Ms. Harrison said the taskforce is not particularly active at this time. She hoped the PACCC's financial difficulties would reenergize the group. She also agreed with Dr. Golton that the financial outlook for all childcare groups in the community is not good.

Dr. Callan said the District has staff with childcare problems, such as cost, and that personnel could be lost because of this.

Mr. Tuomy asked how much time this item would take.

Ms. Harrison said it could take an entire meeting.

Dr. Callan agreed that it is a complicated item.

Ms. Harrison said the PACCC is raising its fees because it has to be able to pay its staff, many of whom commute from out of the area.

Mr. Tuomy asked if there should be a special meeting.

Ms. Harrison said she did not think so, because the District could not have any impact on the problem.

Dr. Golton said the PACCC has agreed to take over PAUSD's child care program, and they are asking the District for financial relief in the form of free rent.

Mr. Tuomy asked when this would be coming to the Board.

Dr. Golton responded that it would come to the Board in May.

Mr. Tuomy noted this meant it would have already been taken care of before the next School/City Liaison meeting.

Dr. Callan said daycare is a very multi-faceted issue. More parents are trying to stay home with their kids. There is financial pressure on many parents and she did not see child care pricing coming down in the near future. Until subsidizing staff for childcare expenses can be arranged, there is no point in pursuing this issue at the School/City meetings.

Mr. Tuomy said that rather than deal with this issue at the policy level, the whole community needs to be involved.

Ms. Kishimoto said that at a budget hearing a week or two ago, one of the items discussed was regarding subsidies going to PACCC.

Ms. Harrison pointed out that PACCC cannot even fill their subsidized slots, showing that the subsidy money can be made available, but people still cannot afford childcare.

Dr. Callan said that a starting teacher, even though the starting salaries at PAUSD are great, cannot afford \$1600 - \$1800 a month for childcare.

Ms. Harrison asked if the group wanted to put childcare on the next agenda.

Mr. Tuomy he believed the playing fields needed to be covered fairly soon.

Ms. Harrison said she had an assignment from the City Council to come back with short term and long term plans for the implementation of the playing fields projects. Nothing can be done with the school fields, however, until a discussion can take place with the District. There is also no money in the short term.

Dr. Callan said she agreed that discussing the fields now would not be productive as there is no money for improvements.

Mr. Tuomy said the playing fields are a community issue and the money needs to be raised. He does not expect the money to come from the District or the City. He added that none of these issues can be dealt with by government as they are community issues.

Mr. Burch said he thought there would be a major shakeup, because there are problems everywhere.

Mr. Tuomy confirmed with Ms. Harrison that he is not suggesting taking any money from any budget to do anything.

Ms. Harrison said she understood. She asked if the update on childcare issues should be prioritized before the playing fields discussion, adding that nothing will be happening with the fields in the next two months anyway.

Mr. Tuomy asked the converse: Would anything be solved by agendizing child care in May?

All answered in the negative.

Mr. Tuomy said he did not believe anyone can do anything, because no one has any money.

Ms. Harrison then said the Committee would keep playing fields as the May agenda item and review the overall goals in June.

Mr. Tuomy said he would like to get a playing fields plan out and start raising money.

Mr. Burch recommended turning the Elks property into playing fields.

Mr. Tuomy said the Elks property is a good opportunity.

Adjournment at 10:22 a.m.