

HAMMOND URBAN ACADEMY, INC.
School Board Meeting Minutes Noted

March 19, 2014

In Attendance:

Board Members:

Kris Sakelaris (Board President)
Mark McLaughlin (Board Member)
Owana Miller (Board Member)
Heather Cook (Board Member)
Janet Venecz (Board Member)
Tom Dabertin (Board Member)

School Representatives

Dr. Sean Egan (School Leader)
Mahdee Iqbal (Business Manager)
LaTysha Sanders (Vice Business Manager)
Mira Projovic (Staff Member)
Bill Hutton

Not in Attendance:

Sheldon Cutler (Board Member)
Dave Ryan (Board Member)
Howard Cohen (Board Member)
Jerry Gomez (Board Member)
Kris Kantar (Board Member)
Rick Calinski (Board Member)
Kevin Smith (Attorney)

Board meeting was called to order at 4:08 p.m by Board president Kris Sakelaris.

Motions Approved by School Board

- *Motion to approve February 19th, 2014 meeting minutes-* Owana Miller motioned; seconded by Tom Dabertin. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to approve Robert Lendi as a member of the HAST school board-* Mark McLaughlin motioned; seconded by Tom Dabertin. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to approve finance report-* Tom Dabertin motioned; seconded by Owana Miller. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to approve election of officers for HAST Board of Directors-* Tom Dabertin motioned; seconded by Heather Cook. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to approve adjusted calendar days-* Janet Venecz motioned; seconded by Tom Dabertin. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to approve Principal Assurance of Effective Leadership-* Owana Miller motioned; seconded by Heather Cook. All in favor motion approved 6-0.
- *Motion to enter statements read aloud by Janet Venecz and Mira Projovic into record-* Tom Dabertin motioned; seconded by Mark McLaughlin. All in favor motion approved 6-0.

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- *Motion to adjourn meeting-* Tom Dabertin motioned; seconded by Owana Miller. All in favor motion approved 6-0.

New Correspondence

- Correspondence received from Mrs. Gray regarding Black History Month. They have been placed on file.
- Correspondence received from Mayor McDermott appointing Bobby Lendi to the HAST Board of Directors. Appointment was approved by the board.
- Heather Cook received a correspondence just before the meeting which she will forward to Dr. Egan & the other members.

School Leader Report
HAST Board Meeting

Discussion Notes

- The board met in an executive session at 3pm with members present: Janet Venecz, Kris Sakelaris, Heather Cook & Mark McLaughlin.
- Indiana Superintendent of Schools Glenda Ritz will be visiting HAST March 27th. She is speaking at a breakfast at Purdue University Calumet on literacy in the morning & will visit in the afternoon.

Board Financial Inquires

- In response to questions at the last meeting regarding the unemployment compensation, Mahdee Iqbal made changes to the financial reports. Specifically, he was including unemployment contributions as part of the employer payroll taxes, which was actually being double counted. He has gone back & made these changes to all reports. Mahdee says this correction makes our financial reports look slightly better.

New Business

- Election of new officers for HAST Board of Directors. Current officers are President Kris Sakelaris, Secretary Owana Miller & Treasurer Sheldon Cutler. Tom Dabertin motioned to re-elect the existing officers.
- HAST calendar is adjusted for the weather related closings earlier in the year. The state has approved the 6 extended Fridays.
- HAST middle school & high school Science Olympiad teams will compete at the state championship March 22th at IU Bloomington. This is the 3rd year for the middle school & first year for the high school.
- The April board meeting will be changed from April 16th to April 9th to accommodate Spring Break. The Board will return to its usual schedule in May where meetings are held every 3rd Thursday of the month.
- Janet Venecz went over graduation details. The ceremony will be broadcast over Go Hammond website. There are still a few students without a cap & gown. Kris Sakelaris inquired whether

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the reason for this was monetary. Janet will investigate & if there are financial hardships for any of these, the Board would be willing to pick up the cost.

Public Comment

- Kevin Botma from Faith Church spoke about their continued support for HAST & their partnering with the school to bring Faith Church in. They have tentatively marked their calendars for the middle of May to begin moving into the space. They are asking that any new information be sent to them to adjust this if needed.
- Janet Venecz read aloud her reply to the emails Mrs. Gray sent regarding HAST & Black History Month. *Letter submitted & attached in minutes.*
- Mrs. Projovic, teacher at HAST, read aloud her reply to the emails Mrs. Gray sent regarding HAST & Black History Month. *Letter submitted & attached in minutes.*
- Mrs. Kitten Gray followed up on the emails she sent previously in the month to board members, Dr. Egan & various HAST teachers regarding Black History Month. She asked for a formal reply from Board Members on her claims that the observance was largely ignored by the school.

Meeting Adjourned at 4:48 p.m.

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Mrs. Projovic's Response to Mrs. Kittien Gray's emails

The email Mrs. Gray sent to the staff & school board accusing HAST and its teachers of a lack of participation in Black History Month not only angered me but, as one of her daughter's teachers, insulted me personally as well.

Last semester I taught Government here at HAST. This semester I teach Economics. Regardless of what class, month, day or hour it is, I teach equality, tolerance, civil rights and civil liberty. These are the underlying standards that I incorporate into all of my lessons. And I use countless examples of inequalities & the mistreatments of the past as resources.

Last semester alone we covered:

- The road to equality for African-Americans from the beginning of suffrage in 1800, to the Emancipation Proclamation, to the 14th amendment, through the Jim Crow Laws, to the formation of the NAACP to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964.
- Students watched videos on:
 - [[the effect Uncle Tom's Cabin had on black & white society
 - [[Little Rock Nine
 - [[Formation of the SCLC
 - [[MLK's March on Washington
 - [[Rosa Parks & the Montgomery Bus Boycott
- They read:
 - Malcolm X's "The Ballot or the Bullet"
 - MLK's "I Have a Dream"
 - Zora Neal Hurston's article on school segregation
- They analyzed the following court cases:
 - *Dred Scott v. Sanford*
 - *Plessy v. Ferguson*
 - *Brown v. Board of Education*
 - *Regents of California v. Bakke*
- Students analyzed photos taken during the protests in Birmingham, AL
- They watched a week long Documentary "Freedom Riders"
- I also organized an extra credit field trip to the U of Chicago for a panel discussion "From Birmingham to Barack".

As a teacher, I refuse to be shamed or bullied into "Black History Month". I have a teaching degree as well as a history degree and I am more than capable of creating effective curriculum for my students. I teach Black history all the time. To save it for February and February alone is a slap in the face to the black community, my current students and especially those who have suffered in the past.

Displays that are carted out every February 1st and then taken down at the stroke of midnight Feb 28th, are not honoring black history. I'm sure there are some schools that need to do this. I assume they're doing so because that's the only time they're going to teach the subject. I along with my fellow colleagues teach Black History as well as tolerance and diversity daily. Just look into our classrooms

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and hallways. Or better yet ask our students. I compare Black History Month to Valentine's Day. If you need a man-made holiday to remind you of something you should already do (like tell your significant other that you love them) than I guess they serve a good purpose. Thankfully in our case we don't need reminders. HAST doesn't need reminders. We do what's right everyday.

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Janet Venecz's Response to Mrs. Kittien Gray's emails

I have been on the HAST School Board over two years. Each year Mrs Gray comes before the School Board voicing her outrage with the school's lack of observance of Black History Month. HAST, nor the School City of Hammond, has a designated celebration for Black History Month. There are no school wide assemblies or displays related to any observances or holidays. If a teacher or student or club, wish to acknowledge a holiday or observance they organize the observance and enroll those who wish to participate.

From the Office for Equity and Diversity website I found the following monthly observances:

January

Diversity in the Workforce Month
Crime Stopper Month
National Blood donor Month

February

Black History Month
American Heart Month

March

National Women's History Month
Irish American Heritage Month
Greek American Heritage Month
American Red Cross Month

April

Holocaust Remembrance Month
Celebrate Diversity Month
National Autism Awareness Month

May

Asian-Pacific American Heritage Month
Judaism American Heritage Month
National Cancer Research Month

June

Gay & Lesbian Pride Month
Caribbean American Heritage Month
National Safety Month

July

Celebrate Freedom Month
Mental Illness Awareness Month

August

Equal Opportunity Month
National Immunization Awareness Month

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September

Hispanic Heritage Month
Ovarian Cancer Awareness Month
National Preparedness Month

October

German American Heritage Month
Italian American Heritage Month
Polish American Heritage Month
Filipino American History Month
National Breast Cancer Awareness Month

November

National American Indian Heritage Month
Alaska Native Heritage Month
National Alzheimer's Disease Month

December

World AIDS Awareness Month
National Drunk & Drugged Driving Prevention Month

These are just a few of the observances celebrated in one way or another in our country, state, city or home. Each one of these observances touches each and every one of us in one way or another. Most of us choose to celebrate or acknowledge these observances in our own way.

As an American of German descent, with a husband of Hungarian descent whose family came through Ellis Island, a Puerto Rican son-in-law, German/Puerto Rican grandchildren, children with an African American stepmother and a gay cousin, I can speak to the celebration of diversity in my own family.

While Mrs Gray's pride in her heritage is commendable, I do believe her attempt to bully the School Board and threaten us with communication to Ball State is a disgrace.

As a Councilwoman for the City of Hammond, I am all over the city.

The only events I've seen Mrs Gray attend are public meetings where she again attempts to bully to get her way – to the point that she was escorted out of a meeting by the Hammond Police. Never once have I heard Mrs Gray utter a compliment - Thank you to the City of Hammond for College Bound – Thank you to the teachers for their dedication - Thank you to HAST for the outstanding education my child is receiving.

Our city and schools and country, for that matter, are diverse. Most of us coexist with one another in a respectful and dignified way. I was told that our teachers and students at HAST say it best: "We don't have to take one day or one month to celebrate specific peoples, because

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we do it every day at HAST, through our curriculum and our environment of respect, dignity and value of all individuals”.

We ARE being the change.

Janet Venecz