

## Building Southmoor Together Task Force Meeting

December 8, 2009

5:30 – 8:30 PM

Southmoor Library

### Task Force Attendance:

Annie Leuthold, Parent: Present	Kelly Hisamoto, Parent: Present
Debbie Robinson, 3rd Grade: Present	Kent Burger, Principal: Present
Grace Hopley, 4/5 Grade (HGT) : Present	Kevin Ruskusky, 4th Grade: Present
Heidi Stone, Community Member: Present	Kristy Collins, 3rd Grade (HGT) : Present
Jen Fornstrom, Parent (HGT) : Present	Leane Poate, Parent: Present
Joseph Bazzanella, PE Teacher: Present	Michael Acosta, Parent (HGT) : Present
Karen Dworak, Paraprofessional : Present	Michael Adamson, Parent: Present

### Agenda

5:30 Light Dinner

6:00 Opening and Welcome

6:15 Team Development

- Effective communication norms
- Effective team practices
- Team development activity

7:30 Break

7:45 Building a Learning Community

- Learning community model presentation
- Discussion of results—what is this really about?
- Dialogue: what do we need to explore as a community?

8:20 Closing and Next Steps

8:30 Adjourn

### Facilitator's Summary Notes (*Bill Fulton, The Civic Canopy*)

In its first meeting, the Task Force went through a series of discussions and activities to build a strong foundation for working together as a team and for communicating effectively. They developed a set of guiding principles for their work together that include:

- Respect the views of all members: seek first to understand, then to be understood
- Be flexible and open to new ideas
- Be solution-oriented, not just position-oriented
- Build buy-in for the solutions we create
- Be accountable—follow through on what you say you will do

The Task Force then used these principles as they took part in a team development activity called Toxic Waste (adapted here as “Toxic Chicken ☺”). The group had to collaboratively solve a complicated task, with half of them blindfolded and half sighted. They successfully completed it, and drew these lessons from the experience that will likely apply to the planning process for Southmoor:

- We need a clear, shared picture of where we are heading—what a vision of success will look like for Southmoor
- We need to communicate with other constantly and clearly, reinforcing what needs to change as well as what we are doing well
- We need to trust that if our common goals are met, our individual needs will get met as well—but that if we only pursue our individual interests separately, no one will succeed

The Task Force then engaged in a dialogue about the importance of creating a learning community as the school pursues its strategic planning process (see graphic model below). That means creating a common vision for the school, a clear plan for achieving it together, and way to learn from the results along the way. As the dialogue continued about what that vision should be, everyone agreed that improving student achievement for “all of our kids” is at the heart of the vision. Less clear, however, is who “our kids” are—and indeed, who are “we” as a community at Southmoor. Many voiced the belief that everyone who attends the school is part of the “we.” Others noted that there are some voices in the community who might challenge that, and have different notions of who should be included as a member of the community. In the end, several questions emerged as central to this process:

- How can we become a more successful school, within the larger DPS system but in our unique way, given our restraints?
- Who is included in “our community?” Who do we consider to be a member?
- How can we use our resources to best meet the needs of all of our kids?
- In this process, how can we build an investment in Southmoor?

Individuals summarized the outcomes of the meeting on their own 3 x 5 index cards as a way to document the group’s ideas and to synthesize the process so far. Overall, people described the first step as a way to develop the Task Force as a team, and to establish the foundation as a learning community to work with each other and with the larger community in the planning process. Some members still felt unsure of what the Task Force will actually be doing, and what the clear outcome is. That will need to be refined and restated throughout the process.

The meeting ended with a discussion of how the group can best communicate with each other, and with the larger community. It was agreed that a website will be central to this process. Michael Acosta agreed to set one up for the group. He and Bill Fulton will coordinate efforts to get one up and running within the next few weeks.

**Next Meeting Date: Tuesday, January 19, 6:00 – 8:00 PM (5:30 Light Dinner)**

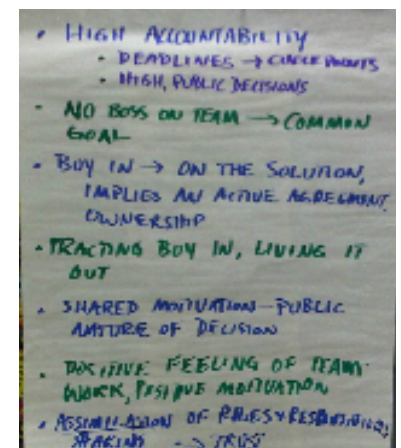
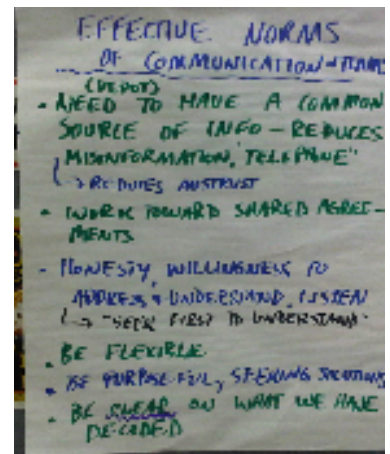
## Full Meeting Notes

### Building an Effective Team: Communication is Key

Team Dynamics	Helpful	Harmful
Expressing Complaints	Express Concern	Criticism
Regard for the Other	Validation	Contempt/Disrespect
Response to Feedback	Openness	Defensiveness
Taking Positions	Learning	Stonewalling

### **Other Keys to Success:**

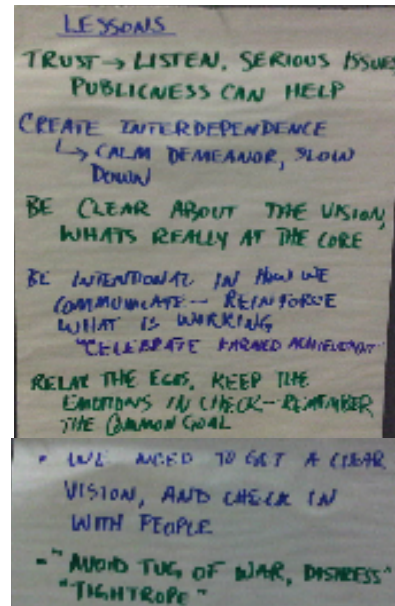
- We need a common place for shared information—and information depot—that is trusted, and which will help dispel misinformation rumors, and the “game of telephone” that can so easily happen
- We need to work toward shared agreements
- We need honesty, and a willingness to listen to other ideas: “seek first to understand”
- Be flexible
- Be purposeful, seek solutions
- Be clear on what we have decided
- We need high accountability: deadlines, checkpoints, and a sense of a high stakes public decision
- There is no boss on a team, just a common goal
- We need buy in, active agreement and ownership that we live out in practice
- There is motivation and a positive feeling of teamwork behind a shared decision
- We need to share roles and responsibilities, distributing leadership throughout the group



### Lessons from the “Toxic Chicken” Activity

- The importance of trust—relying on each other, listening, using the public nature of the decision to build a sense of urgency
- We have to create interdependence by staying calm, using a thoughtful demeanor
- We need a clear, shared vision of where we are going, and what is really at the core of this effort, and then check in with people along the way as we pursue it

- We need to be intentional about how we communicate about this, reinforcing what is working (e.g. Kristy and Joseph) so people know we are making progress (“Celebrating earned achievement”)
- We need to relax the egos, and keep our emotions in check, and remember the common goal
  - But, still acknowledge that these issues are emotional, and that there are ways to channel that emotion productively
- We need to avoid the tug of war between people, and remember to work together



### Creating A Learning Community



Organizations that get results —from Fortune 500 Companies, to schools, to military units, to athletic teams—tend to share a common trait: they become learning organizations.

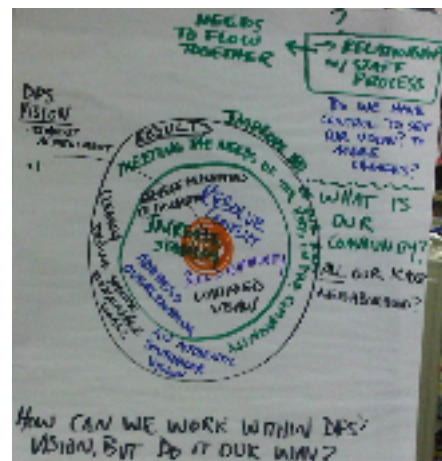
While different models can be used to explain the process, common elements include bringing diverse ideas to the table, effective dialogue, taking action, and learning from results to adapt practice.

Over time, what sustains those results is collaboration based on trust.

### What Results Do We Seek?

At our core, we seek achievement and success for all of our students, in keeping with the broader DPS vision. In addition, given where our community is in its journey, we also hope to:

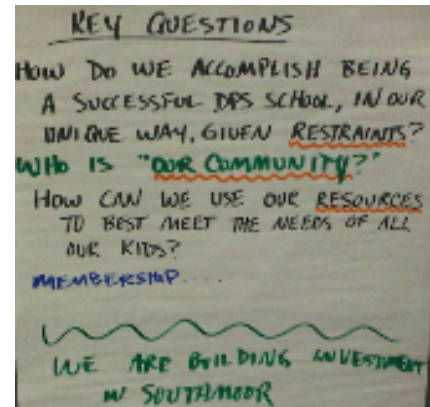
- Resolve conflicts
- Build community
- Develop a unified vision that is authentic to Southmoor with clear, measurable goals



- Address perceptions of favoritism
- Increase the stability of the school
- Address overcrowding

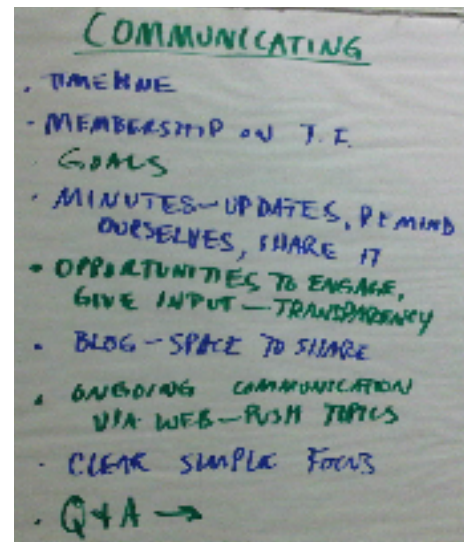
### Key Questions That This Process Needs to Help Us Address

- How can we become a more successful school, within the larger DPS system but in our unique way, given our restraints?
- How is “our community?” Who do we consider to be a member?
- How can we use our resources to best meet the needs of all of our kids?
- In this process, how can we build an investment in Southmoor?



### How and What Do We Need To Communicate to Each Other and With the Larger Community?

- Timeline of process
- Membership on the Task Force
- What the goals are
- Updates through meeting minutes
- Where and when people have opportunities to engage
- Use a blog or website to help people stay connected
- Keep a clear and simple focus
- A regular Q & A page to answer questions



### End of Meeting Summary Statements

- I feel we made some progress in clarifying the focus of the group. Healthy discussion about effective communication
- Very good meeting. I would summarize this as we have buy-in with the Task Force and are ready to move forward. Exciting process.
- I have a very hard time seeing the end product without the actual plan of action.
- Do we have a common goal? I’m still unclear about what we are doing.
- How we can apply learning community strategies to better our chances for successfully operating as a task force, setting goals and ultimately reaching them.
- Begin with the end in mind, the chicken is out of the toxic zone. How do we move it safely and communicate effectively? With all, for the benefit of all.
- Developed initial ideas on targets. Definition of “Southmoor Community.”

- We began the process of effectively developing a shared vision for Southmoor. We defined who our community is and need to begin addressing specific areas to help best meet the needs of our kids.
- We defined what the Southmoor “community” is. We laid the foundation for defining a vision for Southmoor. We saved the chicken from imminent danger. We defined effective ways of communicating within our group and looked at ways of communicating with the parent and staff community.
- “Touchy/feely” discussion/practice before we get to overriding tough issues of “Do we feel HGT should remain at or leave Southmoor?”
- This meeting was for the group to become better acquainted and to participate in some processes of group dynamics. I am still feeling a great deal of disequilibrium about what exactly this group is going to do!
- We began the process of zeroing in on what the issues are within a community that hopes to build a common vision for the “whole” community.
- Get to know each other better and learn to listen and trust one another. Brainstorm main concerns and try to understand what success would look like.

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