



BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
2309 TULARE STREET
BOARD ROOM, 2nd FLOOR
FRESNO, CA 93721
board.fresnounified.org

MINUTES – BOARD OF EDUCATION WORKSHOP

Fresno, California

April 20, 2023

Fresno Unified School District, 2309 Tulare Street, Fresno, CA 93722.

At a Workshop of the Board of Education of Fresno Unified School District, held on April 20, 2023, there were present Board Members Cazares, Davis, Jonasson Rosas, Levine, Thomas, Wittrup, Student Member Aquino, and Board President Islas. Superintendent Dr. Nelson was also present.

Board President Islas CONVENED the Board Workshop at 5:06 p.m.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Teresa Morales-Young led the Flag Salute.

BOARD WORKSHOP AGENDA ITEM

PRESENT and DISCUSS an Overview of the Fresno Unified Literacy Initiative

Staff presented an overview of the district's new literacy initiative which will include the establishment of a literacy task force and campaign. In August 2023, Fresno Unified will launch a literacy initiative with an emphasis on reading on grade level by the end of first grade. Staff shared background, literacy practices, and key events leading to the launch.

Superintendent Dr. Nelson: Thanked everyone for being present. Expressed the importance of rallying the community and connecting around one topic of primary interest to everyone and how the literacy of students is fundamental to everything they will do from this point forward in their lives. Thanked the team that produced this work. Commented today's presentation is a high-level view as to why this is a priority and to stress the importance of all students, teachers, families, and community understanding this is a focus and commitment Fresno Unified is working to attain. The effort to change chronic economical difficulty starts with literacy at foundational ages. That is the purpose of why we are here today.

Dr. Natasha Baker welcomed everyone to the Literacy Board Workshop. Dr. Baker provided an overview of the presentation goals. Commented Literacy is a

fundamental skill that has the power to transform lives and communities. It is crucial we work together to improve literacy rates and promote a culture of reading and learning. Commented throughout the workshop opportunities would be provided to share ideas, learn from one another, and hear of current and upcoming strategic planning to launch a Literacy Campaign in August of 2023.

After the presentation, Board members had an opportunity to provide comments or ask questions. A summary is as follows:

Member Levine: Thanked staff for the presentation. Glad to be tackling this important topic and being transparent in how far we have to go and how far we are behind. Requested clarity as to how many Transitional Kindergarten (TK) classes have been added this year. Commented the expansion is great for the pre-kindergarten (PreK) side. Member Levine shared concern heard from some TK teachers of TK and PreK increasingly being treated as one-and-the same, not entirely but more than should. They are distinct, essentially TK is a two-year kindergarten program, so whether around assessments or especially learning materials, what I have heard is we are going backwards to PreK rather than upwards to kindergarten. Heard in the past using Wonders and now moving away from Wonders in direction of PreK so would like clarity if program is intentional about TK curriculum. Course materials wise online and in print have they been changed in the recent past and if so, what is the reason. Stepping into new initiative whether around concrete numbers what does success look like? As a Board how do we hold the district accountable?

Member Thomas: Are we using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) now, is it only used with special education students, how is the district implementing UDL. Is the district using UDL across all grades. Is it a goal to have all teachers trained in UDL? Asked how the district is going to help students with penmanship. What is the district's family engagement plan, and how will it be tracked?

Clerk Wittrup: Shared excitement for this work. Shared from perspective of being the first literacy coach in the district. Commented literacy/reading is a passion for her because kids that can read can do anything, it is the most important thing to be taught, the foundational part of reading and the love of reading.

Commented on visits to classrooms where teachers were teaching reading and understood how to teach reading. Commented, unfortunately, that is not what is seen the most in visits where purpose is to observe reading instruction and reading interventions. What we say and do here at the high-level view all sounds good, the district response to questions asked is good and valid but there is a disconnect between what is said at the Board workshop and what is actually happening in our classrooms. Commented on having seen it first-hand.

Commented on what is seen more often during visits to classrooms is a mismatch of ineffective practices, many coloring pages, many worksheets, and

misunderstanding of how to teach reading instruction. From one school to the next interventions are voluntary or chaotic or archaic with no way to measure effectiveness. Commented the district needs to be much more explicit in what it is doing to help students catch up to grade level. While the district is returning to pre-pandemic levels is great, it is not where to stop would like to see goals tied to outcomes. Clerk Wittrup asked when will the district be in the top 50, because that is the expectation.

Commented on providing names of excellent teachers ready to retire and would like them on the Taskforce. Requested to see Horton-Gillingham in interventions, and leveled readers beyond Wonders. Shared example of decodable readers used at Malloch Elementary School to supplement the Wonders curriculum. Commented the district must have the very best reading instruction the first time, to be assessed regularly, with progress monitored; if teachers are not monitoring for progress and adjusting instruction it is a waste. Commented classroom visitations are missing from what was presented. Requested to see classroom visits by top administration with purpose to look at reading instruction. Commented does not want to see student referrals to special education because there are no interventions at the school site, which happens often. Effective interventions need to be in place. The information today is good for a high-level view, but needs to be nailed down, teachers need to be involved, this is not voluntary because the district's results stink and our kids deserve better. Expressed appreciation for everybody's effort in this work. Asked staff again, can you put Fresno Unified in the top 50 and when can it be done.

Member Davis: Requested clarity on Desired Results Developmental Profile (DRDP); specifically, when teacher discovers a student does not know what they should, what are the immediate interventions. How quickly are interventions in place. Commented on looking forward to the literacy planning team. Asked staff not to be afraid of the results or the commitments being asked of the parents and the community.

Member Cazares: Added to DRDP conversation, shared as a parent of students in elementary grades did not know what the red, green, yellow status on test results meant. Asked how parents are to interpret and understand what those assessments mean for their child's future. Commented as a parent of the district for 23 years would like to be on the taskforce to be part of planning and not just receive a finished product. Asked how enrollment is aligning to projected enrollment. Asked if the district met last year's projected enrollment? Asked if the Taskforce planned to have a reading specific instructional teacher assigned to PreK and TK grades as a support, since the focus for those grades is to be taught reading, a love of reading and education, and school. Asked what is being done for secondary students and how they are supported in reaching grade level.

Commented personally values more a student enjoying reading and understanding what is read and what reading for education is rather than perfect penmanship.

Shared a student missed two hours of English instruction due to being pulled from the classroom for what was viewed as a minor infraction, and as a result the student's grade fell. Commented the district should analyze when students are pulled from reading and math classes; if a student is pulled from class during reading and math, they are then not in front of a teacher being taught the skills the district says it prioritizes.

Board President Islas: Thanked staff for a great orientation on how the district plans to move forward in this initiative. Responded to comment by colleague of not being able to sit on the Taskforce and offered the possibility of meeting summaries being provided, or smaller meeting debriefs for Board members similar to budget debrief meetings. Reminded colleagues not all Board members were able to sit on the English Language Master Plan Taskforce.

Asked how the district is engaging parents. Commented the district has an incredibly diverse community, some families where written language is new to their culture, some families did not have many opportunities for education in their countries of origin, and we are again talking about opportunities of empowering parents earlier on so they can help us in their child's educational journey. Expressed appreciation for slide no. 7 specifically investing in family empowerment and what that means and looks like. Commented the district has tools and needs to think about how to better deploy and engage.

Commented the district has an Adult School and asked if there is an opportunity to think of programming to help parents fully understand how they can build literacy, and what the district's expectations are of how they can support their children in earlier grades. Commented the district has a Parent University which does some of this already and asked how the district connects what is already being done to intentionally being about literacy.

Commented Parent University could be an excellent place to provide parents with technology, helping them orient to systems online. Commented the district has spent time on teaching parents how to login and connect to Wi-Fi, and pointed out it is entirely different when parents see the applications available and how they can access and utilize them and how they can incorporate them before or after school as opportunities in early education. Commented the district has tremendous resources through English Language Learners Advisory Committees (ELAC) and the District English Learner Advisory Committee (DELAC) to help advise in terms of how to support parents to support their children. Commented would like to see the district do parent engagement in a way as to learn from parents directly. Commented there are situations people do not consider because they are not in someone else's shoes; there may be a grandmother who needs glasses but cannot afford glasses, how does the district connect the grandmother to resources to receive the devices and supports needed to be better able to support the grandchildren in the grandmother's care.

Expressed appreciation for call out in presentation of community partnerships. Commented there are exceptional community-based organizations and how can the district with intention involve them in this campaign. Referenced the Jakarta Movement that has specific inroads to the Punjabi community, FIRM and their engagement into the Hmong and Lao communities, and the Center for New Americans. Arabic and Syrian are served by FIRM some of the smaller language populations, there might be a way to partner with community organizations to help the district engage with non-English speaking parents. Commented the Mexican Consulate will help Mexican immigrants complete their education. The more the district can connect parents to resources within the community and at the same time support the district's work is of tremendous value.

Commented sometimes non-profits have the manpower but not the space and if there is an opportunity to work with non-profits it may be another way the district can support this effort. Commented would like staff to work at that level. Commented knows there is so much to do and knows there is a feeling that the district is behind and needs to catch up, believes if the district is intentional that we can make traction, recover, make progress. We have a community of parents that want better outcomes for their children.

Member Jonasson Rosas: Pointed out the need to focus on the younger grades and shared as a teacher at Fresno State there are often students that cannot put a sentence together properly. Requested to see the draft of the literacy plan and asked what the plan looks like in the classroom? Requested clarity as to what the district is doing to encourage our community to send their 3 and 4 years old to school.

Asked how the district is getting other education institutions on board. Requested the district get more slots for enrollment and to think creatively for smaller facilities specifically designated for early learning. From a resource allocation and concentration perspective, when the district finishes the first iteration of a goal the process should be to reallocate from the programs that do not work to the programs that do work, if we keep funding in the same manner across the grade-levels it will be a plan that does not succeed because there will be no resource alignment.

Member Thomas: Referenced the 66% mentioned in the presentation and asked if the district is hiring reading specialist to support the students, will there be free and in person tutoring for struggling students, can summer/winter sessions for literacy be expanded, and does the district plan to expand small group instructions.

Clerk Wittrup: Recommended the Taskforce start by fearlessly describing and assessing what is actually happening right now; fearlessly because sometimes it is not pretty, not what we are supposed to be doing, not what our policy says, but what is actually on the ground happening for kids right now. Fearlessly look at it unveil it, do not get shamed and blamed about it just take it where it is because that it what we have to do to dig out of it and we have to look at what is really

happening. The patterns seen during site visits are the same at every school, kindergarten test scores are mostly in the green at grade level, some yellow; by first grade approximately 15% of students are in the red, and 30% of students are in the red by second grade. Commented on how this is good to see because it tells the district where work is needed, it also demonstrates where kids start falling when the district does not intervene. This work is specialized, it goes beyond what a classroom teacher will do in class. Commented on the need for a literacy coach at every elementary school, to run this work, monitor progress and target intervention, coach teachers and help teachers in the classroom; it is a full-time job if it is done well.

Commented the district needs to stop doing good things and do the best; drop practices that do not provide a positive return, need to begin pruning. Commented the district cannot do everything, staff plan to do a lot of things, but need to be intentional and prune it down to the best practices; pruning what is not giving a good return in terms of student achievement. What is the district's goal? If the district is approaching pre-pandemic levels, what is the goal in terms of students proficient or at grade level?

Student Member Aquino: Thanked staff for presentation. Expressed appreciation for women in leadership roles. Requested clarity as this felt more like an assignment rather than a group effort. Commented secondary students should be considered for the literacy plan as well. Advocated for senior staff and board members to visit schools and classrooms and not only use test scores as a basis for decisions.

Member Jonasson Rosas: Suggested district to provide parents with at home activities to help with parent engagement.

OPPORTUNITY for Public Comment on Agenda Item

For the record, the Board received one (1) request to address the Board on this item. The individual's name along with a summary of topic is as follows:

1. Manuel Bonilla: Mr. Bonilla provided a handout to Board members. Commented the district owes it to students and community to get this right. Commented this work begins with a philosophical framework, the way literacy is viewed. Expressed hope to be seen as a partner. Mr. Bonilla stated some comments may look like critiques and asked people to look past that and just listen.

Commented too many times district initiatives are started and are not co-designed. Commented there is talk of accountability but there is no shared responsibility; shared responsibility starts with co-design from the beginning. Stated a person cannot be held responsible for something they did not have any agency in helping to build.

Commented on outcomes the College Board listed as skills needed in students in order for there to be an equitable playing field for students going to college; it all began with reading and writing. Asked the group to see things from a holistic point of view, start with philosophical framework, and look to see how it will be done in the classroom. Commented, often the system sacrifices reading instruction so kids can pass tests.

Commented on community partnership and suggested an easy activity to message to parents is to please read to your child fifteen minutes tonight. Referenced analogy from handout and asked how the district will leverage the strengths of the students' different background experiences in a way that will keep the students engaged.

OPPORTUNITY FOR UNSCHEDULED ORAL COMMUNICATIONS

For the record, the Board received zero requests to address the Board during Unscheduled Oral Communications.

Member Levine: Shared reminder for IdeaFest at Fresno City College, Saturday April 22, 2023.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Board President Islas ADJOURNED the workshop at 6:55 p.m.