



News

from the MNPS Public Information Office

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

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McGavock to become model community school

NASHVILLE, Tenn. (July 9, 2009) – Creating strong community schools was the focus of a roundtable discussion held this morning at McGavock High School. Local and state leaders, as well as several representatives of Metro Nashville Public Schools were present, discussing the future of McGavock High School and the schools that feed into it. Out of this discussion, a new study group was born that will examine the best direction for McGavock, as well as all schools in the McGavock cluster. The goal is for the McGavock cluster to serve as a model for community schools in the district.

“The backbone of public education is community schools,” said Director of Schools Dr. Jesse Register. “This is where we serve the majority of our students, so community schools must be a focal point of our work.”

Several key local and state leaders attended the meeting, including Representative Mike Turner; Metro Councilman Jim Gotto; Metro Councilman Phil Claiborne; Phil Ponder, who serves on Congressman Jim Cooper’s staff and formerly served on Metro Council; Chief of Police for Metro Nashville Airport Authority Steve Heim; Donelson Chamber of Commerce President Lori Weir; Donelson Chamber of Commerce Board Chair Wayne Tucker; John Taylor, who currently works in the Sheriff’s office; Metro Councilman Darren Jernigan; Metro School Board member Steve Glover; incoming McGavock principal Robbin Wall; and Dr. Jesse Register.

The strong support of these local and state officials was the reason McGavock was selected as the starting point for this initiative. According to Dr. Register, “This is the perfect place for us to create a community schools model that has a strong link to community leaders, businesses and parents.”

Topics of discussion at the meeting included the challenges McGavock faces as well as changes that are already happening at the school. The key challenge discussed was the sheer size of the McGavock Cluster, which is larger than most school districts in Tennessee.

“I’ve officially been on the job four days now,” said incoming principal Robbin Wall. “I’ve spent most of my time talking with teachers, faculty, and community members to learn their perception of McGavock and in which direction this school needs to go. What I’ve learned is that the perception of our faculty is completely different from the perception of the community. It’s our job to balance those perceptions, and there are two ways I

plan on doing that: by creating a safe learning environment for our students and by increasing the academic rigor. We need all of our students to be ready for college and career.”

Wall plans to make these changes by continuing the implementation of and expanding the scope of Smaller Learning Communities. All freshmen will be placed on one of four teams within the Freshman Academy. This Freshman Academy will pair between 150-175 students with six to eight teachers. This will create smaller, more personalized learning environments and ease the transition into high school. Student’s grades 10-12 will be able to join one of five Career Academies focusing on various careers. These academies will expose students to career choices and help them make more informed decisions after high school.

“We have more than 15 acres under one roof,” Wall said. “That’s huge. And when you’re dealing with nearly 3,000 students, Smaller Learning Communities just make sense. Through SLC’s, we can literally divide and conquer.”

The group plans to reconvene within the next two weeks, adding parents and teachers to the mix, to discuss the best direction for McGavock. Important topics the group will study include the actual layout of the building, increasing safety and academic rigor, changing the culture of the school, and changing the perception. The ultimate goal is to make McGavock a true community school, one that inspires a feeling of responsibility from parents, students, and business professionals.

In response to a question from one community leader about building modifications, Dr. Register responded, “If you ask us to actually build walls, we will build walls,” said Dr. Register. “You tell us what you want, and we will do what we can to make it happen.”

Metro Nashville Public Schools provide a range of educational opportunities to more than 75,000 students in Nashville and Davidson County. The governing body for MNPS is the Metropolitan Nashville and Davidson County Board of Public Education, a nine-member group elected by residents of Metropolitan Nashville. For more information, please visit www.mnps.org.

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