The Lay Advisory Committee (LAC)

To The Henrico County School Board

To bring about better communication between the School Board and the patrons of Henrico County Public Schools

Meeting Minutes November 11, 2013 7:00pm Moody Middle School

Attendance: Mary Schanger (Hungry Creek MS and Glen Allen HS); Cathleen Jacobson (Springfield Park ES); Nancy Godfrey; Hank Chambers (Pemberton ES); Cheryl Bemis (Shady Grove ES); Jack Armstrong; Nick Mares; Hilary Martin (Godwin HS); Tony Pham (Gayton ES); Laura O'Brien (Moody MS);

There were 10 people in attendance. 8 schools were represented, 4 ES's, 2 MS's, 2HS's. There were also two students from Deep Run HS.

**Call to Order:** Chairman Hank Chambers called the meeting to order at 7:04 p.m.

**Welcome and Introduction:** Hank welcomed everyone. As we generally have a new face or two for each meeting, Hank started by having all present introduce themselves.

**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes from the last meeting (October 7, 2013) were passed out for those who had not seen the emailed minutes. There was a motion and second to approve the minutes. Minutes stood as written.

**Old Business/New Business/Open Discussion:**

Hank opened the meeting with discussion regarding the newly passed meals tax. Cathleen reported on a local museum that was in a hiring "freeze" until the meals tax passed. The museum had been told that funding would decrease if the tax did not pass. Laura brought up the issue of budget versus actual when it comes to the school budget. The budgeted expenses may not necessarily be the actual expenses for a give fund within the school budget. Tony suggested that one of our community meeting forums could be a presentation by the county of its intended use for the additional revenue. There was a suggestion that the LAC invite the school board chairwoman to a meeting to discuss how the money will be used. The LAC will ask for actuals.

**SOLs/Common Core/testing:**

Nancy and John Ballsrud are continuing to work on Common Core. Commons Core is a U.S. initiative on education that seeks to fold the individual state curricula into alignment by following a standards-based education reform. It has been sponsored by the National Governors Association and is to be monitored by the federal government. There has been a lot of opposition to common core because it is an assessment driven curriculum similar to our current SOL's. Many feel the math and English are not as rigorous as what our students have been learning. There has also been opposition from the standpoint that there are federal statutes that prohibit a nationalized education curriculum and many argue that this initiative does just that. Currently Virginia is one of five states that has not signed on but many feel the SOL's have been aligned to the standards. Nancy also brought up the "Eye on Virginia" website and its presentation on Agenda 21. This alignment is one reason for an increased rigor in the SOL's that the students were not prepared for and as a result, test scores dropped. Many people, including the Legislature, are not happy about the drop in scores.

**Math Readiness:**

Ann Slough was not present but brought up the idea via e-mail of Lay Advisory partnering with Freeman HS on a math readiness meeting. As PTA president, Ann hears from parents and teachers and there is a continuing concern regarding math and math tutors.

There was have also been meeting at Tuckahoe about the math classes. There has been some restructuring of the classes based on those meetings.

There was discussion that the students are not getting the basics, but are still moved up to higher math. Once there, they are struggling. The students attending, Nick and Jack, concur with this assessment. Another issue to overcome is the stigma of remedial math. Kids are being pushed too far too fast, but then they do not want to take a step back because of the stigma attached with taking that move.

**Laptops/Bad Teachers/School Board Member Election** :

Our student visitors, Jack and Nick gave an enlightening viewpoint of laptops and teachers. For many of us, this stems to the heart of what our committee should be doing - working for our kids. Both Jack and Nick indicated that in many cases laptops have replaced actual teaching in the classroom. Teachers are sometimes more interested in technology then the lesson at hand. Students are many times more interested in their own web browsing then the lesson at hand. The original point of the laptops was so that every student would have access. This, however, has been lost in translation, and now it's more about that everyone has the technology, regardless as to whether it is a need or not. When the laptop contract was up for renewal, Dr. Russo had said that it wasn't a question of whether or not we would be keeping the program, it was just who we would contract with.

Both students also said that they have had teachers who were not competent to teach their subject matter thus leading them to seek help from other teachers or elsewhere. For example, it was pointed out that in four years, they have had 28 teachers. They would only state that 5 or 6 were considered wonderful. It seems that the county is spending time on checking to see if the teachers can teach, but are not making sure that they are competent in their field of study. It is also very hard to get rid of bad teachers. In a lot of cases, if something is even done, they are just transferred.

An overview of the election/appointment process for the school board slot vacated by Diana Winston was presented. It was not necessarily a transparent and democratic process. Laura mentioned that there was not really a way to "vet" the candidates by asking questions on issues. One suggestion was to being in the media if you want answers. You need to be indignant, but respectful, in order to get any answers.

**Wrap Up:**

Hank wound down the meeting by suggesting that one of us try to attend the School Board meetings (upcoming Thursday 11/14). We could also listen to Board Docs on the Henrico website. It was pointed out that the audio is posted, but there is no transcript of the meeting. What is the reason for that?

We need to collect data. Jack and Nick agreed to try a survey at Deep Run HS on laptop usage (yeah or nay) by the students and math tutoring. Information coming directly from the students could then be used to address these topics. They will work with Laura on this. If this pilot survey works well, then there is thought to expand this survey to the other schools.

Also, Hank wants us to think about our remaining meetings. Who do we want to have come in and present? There are 6 more meetings for this year. We could ask 2 or 3 people to come in. Think about what topics we want to focus on: meals tax, budget, SOL's, etc. Bring your idea to the next meeting.

**Adjourn:** Hank adjourned the meeting at 8:30pm

Information:

LAC Meetings :

December 9, 2013 January 13, 2013 February 10, 2014

March 10, 2014 April 7, 2014 May 12, 2014

All meetings will take place at 7:00pm at the Moody Middle School library.

LAY ADVISORY COMMITTEE CHARGE:

There shall be a Lay Advisory Committee composed of parents and/or community members who represent the various schools within the County. This committee shall be organized in accordance with its own constitution and bylaws and shall advise the School Board on educational matters of general interest or concern to the community.

Respectfully submitted, Cathleen Jacobson and Mary Schlanger, co-secretaries