

Frederick Douglass Community Coalition
May 20, 2008 meeting -- 22 people in attendance

Reggie's report:

- Freshmen will remain in this building, not at Holy Cross
- Dual credit for both here and Delgado in EMS training
- Received call from RSD complaining about Ze's letter to Pastorek in terms of hostile tone
- Recommends pressure on Pastorek's office for local board for RSD here in New Orleans. If not we should push for folding RSD schools back into NOPS.
- Steering committee: principal, Major Jones (ROTC), Greta Gladney, Reggie Lawson, two students, two teachers (Nina Barre and Racquel Welsh), Kelly Barton (consultant from Philadelphia paid \$48,000 to chair the committee).

Christian:

- Vallas plans from about 6 months ago shows minimal funds for Douglass. So concern that funds for improvements be available and scrutinized.

Greta's report from steering committee:

- Says military has been added to scope of school vision
- Still planning to phase out existing school population.
- New Douglass will be 9th grade police, fire, EMS, and military. Other schools didn't want military so it has been recently added to scope of themed school for Douglass.
- Concerned that steering committee is not for input but for rubber stamping.
- Shared with steering committee work that had been done at this school over the years. It's clear that neither principal nor consultant has any idea of this history of work and have not made efforts to be informed about strengths of neighborhood, school, graduates.

Comments around the room (Each person had opportunity to speak in the circle. Each bullet represents a different person's question/comment):

- What formal agreement exists between RSD and Delgado now? Greta replies none.
- Concern with process to legitimize plans that have already been made rather than a real community input process. Sees this pattern particularly with Concordia planning process. Other concern is military and police tracking for low-income communities
- Seems strange to have 8th graders select career paths. Maybe we have voice in what theme school will be, not whether it has theme or not.
- Can this group have impact on what happens? Reggie says yes, but only if we take facts that were given and come to recommendations and write letters. Greta thinks we have no input and tells about principal making plans and then calling in for rubber stamp for community.
- Sounds as if we are not moving in a way that is comprehensive for all schools and students. Agrees about problems with UNOP plan and process.
- Understanding that new themes at schools will start at 9th grade—has concerns about making decisions about police, fire, military, EMS at that age. Can't buy a gun at that age, for instance. Experience from firing nail guns tells him about dangers of all this. Can see carpenter training before police and military training. Need confined space certification and can't give this to 9th/10th graders. 3rd generation builder and followed in footsteps of family elders. Need to understand that some of our students don't have that and so we need an educational system that provides that in a more comprehensive way.
- How much do we depend on RSD for our existence? When and how can we become independent from RSD. Recommends a pilot program that has us standing alone. Willing to have his private

job training school partner with Douglass and this coalition to develop own independent educational organization. Maybe something like a 50-50 funding.

- Question about support of consultant and principal for SAC and social justice.
- Strong objection to Philadelphia consultant to be funded and chair of this work. Concern about Walton money. Concerned about schools on closure list (Morris Jeff, for example) that have not even had this level of dialogue with RSD. Mentions Lance Hill planning to document meeting that after Parsons and Bingler signed contract Pastorek went to them and said that there needed to be a cap/profile of (70 schools with 500 students each). Called together Hill and Quant to ask what would happen if this plan was released. Quant said it'd be like throwing lit match on gasoline. Notes that in UNOP process schools and riverfront were to be off limits. Concerned about pre-determined outcomes and public bid laws.
- From Philadelphia and been in N. O. for five years. Recalls experiences with Vallas in Philadelphia. Has many FOI documents from Philadelphia relative to Vallas. Skepticism is warranted. Problem with themed schools of pitting different schools against each other. FOIA request... City of neighborhoods, and themed schools threaten neighborhood quality. Against RSD period. Cites salaries of Pastorek (400,000) Vallas (275,000), and consultants (1,000-2,000/day). FOIA for Parsons and Concordia contracts and has been stalled out for 2.5 months behind looking into the bid rigging issue relative to these two. Has requested Vallas' travel plan.
- Agrees with all that has been said. Wonders about processes for tearing down bureaucracy and that could take years. So wants to concentrate on steering committee and how we can influence through that. Suggests that Greta and Reggie write up some very clear demands coming from them as representatives of this group to the steering committee. Maybe ask for MOU on input into neighborhood school.
- 1) RSD has to go. 2) Maybe should mutiny against steering committee structure. 3) What would it take for us to get out from under NOPS.
- Noted importance of having broader based approach to themes and education that are more rooted in building/improving neighborhoods, not creating specialists in isolation. Need our entrepreneurs and artists and public safety and public health and... to study together with each other, not in isolation from each other. Noted way themes at this school prior to the storm were broader to accommodate wider range of interests and to concentrate on building neighborhood. Also that those broader themes were selected over one-year planning process that involved all students, faculty, parents, and community members—not a small inner circle selected by the principal and the consultant. Noted broader implications of trampling on democratic civic participation and questions whether RSD can really make this possible. Recommend return to NOPS.
- Need to work harder on raising public awareness about all this. Notes that this is going on around the city in all neighborhoods. Need to ensure that students and parents and community members have more and more input on schools.
- High schools have been places where people knew there were problems and smaller learning communities would be a solution. But in these schools, this is often not happening. What about certifications and enough teachers and enough electives so that what will happen is useful. One problem is money. Walton and Gates have jumped on and Vallas just wants funding from wherever and doesn't really care about the kids. It's clear that in this school we didn't have input from community, parents, students.
- Concerns about Vallas' values and motives. Need to shed light on him and then people won't support him. Maybe post bulletins or billboards sharing this information.
- Note budget for meetings of steering committee principal named for Douglass through Walton grant. \$48,000 line is Kelly Barton—consultant from Philadelphia who is in town for a couple of days twice a month; Kelly wants Johnson to be the principal in the \$80,000 slot. Seems like they are pushing each other to have these jobs with no clear, open process. Consultant claims there is no one other than Johnson who can be principal of school.
- Vallas cell phone number 5046554319. Call him.

- Carver High School was originally told they would be the Public Safety Academy; they organized against this and were able to get an arts designation. It seems the weakest school will get this program.

Action Steps:

1. Increase media contacts
2. Bring in legislators to discuss local governance issue.
3. Organize and mobilize parents, students, and residents to push on this.
4. Resolution of support for Greta's position that composition of steering committee is problematic.

Next Douglass steering committee chaired by consultant from Philadelphia is on Tuesday, June 3 and then Tuesday, June 17—both at 2:30 pm in office of school.

Julie and Amy will do flyer by early next week.

Jim will work on lining up some students, graduates to participate.

Reggie, Greta, Eli will assist with copies

Amy will put together alternative scope of work for school—Amy and crew will work on that.

Gloria will coordinate flyer distribution.

Neighborhood residents will line up meeting with local legislators.