

Illinois School for the Deaf Advisory Council

Meeting Summary

March 9, 2018 8:30 am - 1:00 pm

ISD Main Building First Floor Conference Room

Members Present:

Sheri Cook, Gwenn Eyer, Michelle Brown, Paula Chance, Corey Axelrod, Susan Dramin-Weiss, Deb Gossrow, John Miller, Karla Giese, Julee Nist, Cassie Laird (for Quinetta Wade) and Shavon Tate.

Members Absent:

Others Present:

Kathryn Surbeck, Karen Garrett, Angela Leavell, Laci Kennedy, Ed Hoyt, Angie Kuhn, Jill Bruington, Kitty Aubry, Jonathan Bordean, Christine Good-Deal, Sheila Stephens, Deloris Summers, Elaine Cady, Eloise Brewer, Glenn Eyer, Craig Kuhn, Tamara Hogue, Michael Hogue, Linda Kuhn, Joe Estep, Jamal Garner, Chazz Middlebrook, Janet Lambert, Tonya Bogener, Melvin Long, Charlene Hicks, Curt Kuhn, and Officer Joshua Radliff.

Welcome, Roll Call and Introduction of Visitors:

Sheri called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. She asked that everyone be respectful of each other and let each person speak when it's their turn. She explained that there would be a time limit for comments and that those who are not respectful would be asked to leave.

Sheri introduced new advisory council member Karla Giese. Gwenn pointed out that Karla is filling the remainder of Deb Beranek's term. Sheri went over the role of council members according to the by-laws and explained the attendance requirements to Karla.

Sheri reminded the council of the themes for ISD and DHS/DRS. ISD's theme is Our Time to Shine and the theme for DHS/DRS is Community and Accountability.

Roll call and introductions were completed.

Reading and Approval of December 8, 2017 Meeting Minutes:

Paula made a motion to approve the minutes with the correction that Karla is filling the remainder of Deb's term. Susan seconded the motion. The December 8, 2017 meeting minutes were approved with the correction.

Student Body Government Presentation:

SBG was not available to present. The presentation will be held until the next meeting.

Reports:

Membership Report: Updated List

Gwenn reported that she reviewed minutes from past meetings to determine the term start dates for current council members. She concluded that some members are currently sitting in terms that expired last May. She announced that if the members with expired terms wanted to be reappointed, they would need to request reappointment to another 3 year term and then a vote would be taken to approve the reappointments.

Sheri reported that the council currently has two (2) members that represent a person with a disability. Susan said she received a letter from April Maman stating that she would need to decline the offer to join the council because of her current job schedule.

Sheri announced that Susan, Corey and John all had expired terms and that the terms for Deb and herself would expire this coming May. She stated that Michelle Brown replaced Juan Bernal and that term has also expired.

Gwenn made a motion to use the expired terms as the first year of a reappointment if the member in the expired term wanted to request reappointment. Corey seconded the motion.

John disagreed with the motion, stating his understanding was that Corey, Susan and Paula wanted to remove him from the council and he suggested this discussion go to closed session. Gwenn responded that because Corey, Susan and John are sitting in expired terms, a closed session would not be effective.

Paula stated that she thought John was a member based on his professional status and that if he wanted to stay on the council he would need to ask to be moved to the position of a person with a disability. Gwenn stated that John was serving as an expert in the field relating to deafness and not because of his position with IDHHC.

Sheri reminded the council that there was a motion on the table and asked that the discussion be closed. She then asked for a vote to allow the members with expired terms to ask to be reappointed. The motion passed by majority vote.

Michelle asked to continue serving as a parent, John asked to serve as a person with a disability and not an expert in the field, Corey asked to continue serving as a person with a disability, and Susan asked to continue serving as a person with a disability.

A discussion was held debating rather to vote by a show of hands or on paper. The council asked Tonya Bogener for clarification of the rules and she informed the council that according to the Open Meetings Act, all votes are open and they could not hold a secret vote.

By a show of hands, Michelle, Corey and Susan were all reinstated as council members. John was reinstated too, but as a member of a person with a disability. All four will continue with their current terms.

John made a motion to close the membership report. Susan seconded the motion.

Paula questioned still having two (2) vacancies on the council. Susan said she had new applicants, but that there were three (3) members in each category. Paula stated that they could have up to 12 members on the council if there are more applicants. It was decided that there were not enough new applicants to equally fill each category.

A vote was held on the motion to close the membership part of the meeting. The motion passed by majority vote.

Questions, if any, on Departmental Reports

Paula questioned the number of students on the Admissions and Records Report. She wanted to know how many of the students are residential and how many are day students. Paula then realized that the information was provided in her folder and she apologized for not realizing that.

There were no other questions regarding the departmental reports.

Community Engagement Report

Corey reviewed the results from a community survey conducted by IAD members. Corey reported that the survey highlighted the community's concerns regarding bilingualism and culture. He said the survey shows that the majority of deaf people feel that oppression and audism need to stop. Corey stated that it is important to continue seeking the thoughts and feelings from the deaf community to help prepare deaf children to succeed in the real world.

John asked rather the people completing the survey were deaf, hard of hearing, cued speech users, etc. Corey reported that they didn't poll the people surveyed, but some people did self-identify.

John asked if the survey tracked cuing in school and then transitioning to ASL in social settings. Corey stated that that was not included in the survey.

Corey reported that 600 people were provided the survey and that over 100 people responded. He explained that the survey did not ask people what school they attended, but did ask their highest level of education.

Sheri asked that a copy of report be sent to all council members. She asked Corey to compile a list of specific recommendations and bring them to the next meeting. Gwenn stated that she would like to see actionable items on the list.

Presentation:

Parent's Perspective about ISD

Gwenn shared a comment from an ISD parent who feels it would be a shame if she would have to remove her student from ISD. The parent reports that the home school district refuses to pay transportation and she drives many miles each week to pick up and drop off her student because she feels ISD is the best educational choice for him.

Gwenn reported that she and her child do not feel safe in the current environment. She stated that she and her husband are the sole decision makers for their daughter and that she feels her daughter's educational rights are being threatened by those saying that ISD should be ASL only. She pointed out that her daughter comes from a hearing family and is raised by a hearing family, and for her to function in the real world would be difficult in an ASL only environment.

Deb discussed her son's experiences at his home school district and how his issues with anxiety diminished after transferring to ISD. She stated that the parents should be the ones who determine what is in the best interested of each child, not the community. She pointed out that if a parent is not aware of available educational options, they should be given unbiased information so that they can make informed decisions for their student.

Corey thanked Deb and Gwenn for sharing their thoughts and for being involved parents in the education of their students. He also stated a concern that some parents don't know their rights. He commented that these are not new issues and that they have been happening at ISD for a long time. He stated that many students have left ISD to attend other state schools. He said that a parent recently reached out to IAD asking what is happening at ISD.

Discussions:

Addressing the IAD/ISD Conflict and Other Community Concerns

Corey said he realizes that the IAD letter was a strong one. He said he sees a lot of fingers pointed at him and he doesn't feel that is appropriate because the entire board was involved in writing the letter.

There was a lengthy discussion regarding IAD's part in the recent social media comments and posts, with Gwenn stating that IAD and ISDAA are organizations that are influential in the deaf community and that they could be reaching out to people and encouraging them to become involved parents.

Michelle stated that she lives in fear that the actions that have recently taken place will cause her children's school to close and she worries about the education they will receive if they have to be mainstreamed into a public school program. She also pointed out that people are pointing fingers at Corey because he is the president of IAD and ultimately responsible for what happens there. She stated that there needs to be an acceptance of various languages and the fact that different modes of communication are needed for different children in order for them to succeed.

Paula stated that there would be a town hall meeting called “Let the Healing Begin” hosted by the Jacksonville Chapter of IAD. The meeting was scheduled for that evening at 5:00 pm. Gwenn stated that there was a previous town hall that was advertised as being open to the public, but was actually a closed meeting. She stated that her perspective of what happened is that a list of recommendations were made at the first meeting and will be discussed at the second meeting. She said that if she were to show up at the second meeting, she doubts that she would be allowed to express her opinions.

Corey pointed out that the governance of ISD has been talked about for a long time. He feels this should be addressed as a priority. He said the fight has become about cued speech and ASL and that is not the issue.

Deb stated that the issue is the manner and the conduct that has occurred. Deb read from copies of the IAD Facebook page including posts that IAD made and the comments to those posts. She described some of them as negative and disturbing. She stated that people are scared about what is being posted and she asked Corey to have the person in charge of IAD’s Facebook page remove the posts.

Corey responded that there are concerns on both sides and that cued speech is being used as oppression and that is causing parents to remove their students from ISD. He said that it took the letter from IAD to wake people up to these issues.

John mentioned that he also does not feel safe. He said that IAD has a reputation for attacking people and organizations.

Michelle asked Corey to reach out and call for support. She stated that everyone is concerned for the safety of the students and that threats to individuals who work at the school puts the students at risk.

Corey said that DHS is not qualified to run a school for the deaf and the governance of the school needs to change. He stated that people who are experts in deafness are in the minority when it comes to running the school. Corey asked everyone to let him know if they see negative comments on the IAD website and he will have them removed.

Sheri stated that belittling the educators and administrators at ISD, who are trained in the field of deaf education is disrespectful and that as a deaf person she is ashamed at what is happening. She stated that she sees other deaf schools having some of the same issues but she sees better collaboration at those schools. Sheri suggested that IAD’s Facebook page may not be the outlet for Corey to express his concerns if he has no control over the organization’s social media.

Julee stated that DHS gave her the authority to lead the school and that she trust her staff to run it. She said that her focus is on ISD and the education of the students here. She said the deaf community and the school need to support each other. She stated that the fighting and negative social media needs to stop because it impacts the staff and students.

John made a motion to extend the meeting to 1:00 p.m. Susan seconded the motion. The motion passed by majority vote.

Corey amended the motion to extend the meeting to 1:00 p.m. and to strike the closed session off the meeting agenda. Gwenn seconded the motion. The motion passed by majority vote.

ISD Communication Policy

John stated that he looked over the communication policy and suggested a sub-committee be created to evaluate it. He said that with technology changing he would like to make sure that the policy is current and meets the needs of all students.

John made a motion to create a sub-committee to evaluate the current communication policy. Susan seconded the motion.

John gave a quick review of the policy.

Corey expressed fear that they would continue to perpetuate the division and oppression by changing the policy. Michelle stated that if the council was going to look over the communication policy then they need to make sure to address the communication needs of all students.

Sheri asked for a vote on the motion to create a sub-committee to review the communication policy. The motion passed by majority vote.

Sheri asked who was interested in serving on the committee to evaluate the communication policy. John, Corey, Paula, Deb, Michelle, and Karla all expressed interest.

After some discussion and questions regarding the Open Meetings Act (OMA) and subcommittees, the council asked Tonya for her expert opinion and she stated that it was not a violation to form a committee, but anytime you have a majority of your membership together discussing business than it needs to be an open meeting.

It was determined that the six members would have an agenda posted 48 hours in advance of the meeting. Sheri appointed John as the committee chair and he declined. Sheri then appointed Karla as the committee chair and she accepted the appointment.

A discussion was held regarding when and where to hold the committee meeting. When asked about video conferencing, Tonya pointed out that video conferencing would only be allowed if the public could attend as well. The committee decided to meet immediately following the next Advisory Council meeting. The sub-committee meeting will take place on May 4th at 1:30 p.m.

Zero Tolerance Policy

John expressed safety concerns following the recent school shooting in Florida. He asked what ISD has done to protect the staff and students. He stated that the recent threat to blow up one of the schools at ISD should be taken very seriously.

Julee informed the council that ISD staff and students have been trained this year on an active shooter as well as a mass evacuation. She stated that all threats to the school are taken seriously and that the Jacksonville Police Department and the State Police were called and they conducted an investigation.

Officer Joshua Radliff informed the council that two of the public schools in Jacksonville have full-time officers assigned to them. He explained that the schools help fund the expenses of those assignments. He said that day shift officers are assigned to the other schools and that he is the officer assigned to ISD. He said that he was here for the active shooter training and stated that he has not seen other schools trained to the extent that ISD was trained.

John asked about after schools hours and during activities such as sporting events. Julee explained that each shift and each area of the school were trained so that everyone knows what to do during any time of the day or night.

Corey asked about dorm parents and their modes of communication. He wondered how staff members communicate with the students who are new to ASL. Christine explained that there are staff members who are willing to voice and sign and that they also utilized pictures for non-verbal use. She also explained that ISD has a grab and go policy in the event of an emergency situation.

Paula asked if canines were still used on a periodic basis. Officer Radliff explained that canines are not used on a regular basis, but can be utilized if requested.

Paula asked if students and staff were provided with training on the topics of bullying and sexual harassment. Christine explained that all staff members are required to have these trainings annually. She also explained that the school uses the “Bullies to Buddies” program and it is presented to all students.

Membership Issues

The closed session was removed from the agenda following an earlier motion.

Selection of New Council Member(s)

Susan has three (3) applications for the position of a deaf person and one (1) of them could fill the role of a deaf expert.

Sheri stated that the council already had one-third membership in each category and that if they voted to fill a position for one category they would need to fill another position in each of the remaining categories.

Gwenn made a motion to leave the council as it is with one-third membership in each category. Michelle seconded the motion. The motion carried.

Public Comments:

Deloris Summers commented that she has seen some of the negativity that has been posted on social media and that she can understand points made by both sides. She stated that there needs to be a bridge that goes both ways and that after today everyone needs to think about the students and move on in a positive way.

Charlene Hicks commented that IAD needs to stop targeting individuals, specifically Angie Kuhn. She stated that she has known Angie to be a good teacher who puts the students and their education first. She said that she attended a cued speech workshop and she suggested that everyone visit a classroom and see how it works.

Ed thanked the ISDAA for their monetary donation to the athletic fund. He stated it has been a struggle in the past to pay officials and their donation was very much appreciated.

Julee reported that ISDAA gave ISD a deaf union flag and also provided pictures of the flag for the students to color. She said that the flag is currently flying in the middle of campus so that the students can all see it, and it will later be moved to the front of the campus.

Corey asked if the school is recognizing Deaf President Now (DPN) and Craig Kuhn responded that the school recognized it in class the previous week. Michelle suggested DPN information and information about the deaf union flag be posted on the PTSO website. Craig asked that anyone let him know if there is an event that the students and school could recognize.

Sheri reported that she is currently assisting Sheila Stephens with improving the deaf culture curriculum at ISD.

Paula thanked ISD for updating their website.

Susan reported that the alumni newsletter would be sent out next week and to let her know if you have information that could be added to it.

It was also reported that ISD will have its 180th celebration in 2019 and that everyone should mark their calendars for July 5th and 6th.

Adjourn:

Susan made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Deb seconded the motion. The motion passed and the meeting adjourned at 12:48 p.m.