

SAM ZURIER

November 7, 2011

Dear Fellow East Siders:

This past Tuesday, Superintendent Lusi visited Nathan Bishop Middle School in a meeting co-sponsored by the East Side Public Education Coalition and the PTO's at Gregorian, King and Bishop. She will be visiting Hope High School tomorrow night, **November 8, 2011 at 6:30 p.m.** Please consider joining us if you can.

After Dr. Lusi introduced herself, she answered questions that generally covered two categories, namely teacher quality and resources. On the former subject, the Superintendent stated that the School Department has had a chronic inability to deal with ineffective teachers due to what she called a lack of evaluation "data." She said she has asked principals and other building administrators to increase their observation and evaluation of teachers to develop properly documented files will be sustained under "due process" review.

The parents asked several questions related to resources. The King School has grown to more than 600 students, but it does not have an assistant principal. In addition to affecting the school's daily operations, this shortage limits the ability to evaluate teachers. A new principal at Gregorian has effectively canceled recess because the school day barely accommodates the State's minimum required 5½ hours of instruction time plus 30 minutes for lunch. Also, there are numerous facilities issues across the District due to a longstanding practice to short-change maintenance when tight budgets would otherwise resulting in canceling programs. There may be even more difficult resource issues in the future, as the State mandates additional programs "persistently low achieving" schools with only partial funding in the form of additional grants.

These comments reached a crescendo when a father challenged Superintendent Luis to justify his decision to entrust his child to the public schools. She acknowledged there is no easy answer, and with two of my own children in the public schools, I can relate to these concerns. It is too bad that the Mayor could not achieve the full savings he targeted in negotiating the teachers' contract – the additional \$5 million in savings he originally sought could have solved some of the problems the parents identified. With that said, we have no choice but to try to improve our schools without the additional money that would make the task so much easier. For example, I had an interesting meeting the other day with the director of the East Side Y. She is open to the concept of making her staff available at schools to help supervise recess, which may allow us to restore this activity without increasing the teacher work day, which is set by contract.

In the longer run, there are reasons for hope. Teacher quality may improve as evaluation data accumulates. The District will gain some additional state aid from the new funding formula, and there will be opportunities to advocate to improve that aid further. Finally, our economic development director, James Bennett, is bullish on our City's future, as he meets with business people every day who are interested in the cost advantages our City presents compared to other, larger alternatives. None of these omens can (or should) satisfy the father of this year's student, but I believe Superintendent Lusi is committed to doing the best she can for now, and aiming for serious long-term improvement, two goals that I support and share.

Sincerely,

www.samzurier.com