

Meeting Notes: Discussion of AIM (Articulated Instruction Module) Program submitted by Jean Suda, PTSA member Dulaney High School

The following summary represents my personal impressions of Dr. Hairston's comments. I am sharing them to inform fellow PTSA members of Dulaney of important developments regarding the AIM controversy.

The PTA Council of Baltimore County met on February 4, 2010 and featured a dialogue with Superintendent Hairston. The 90-minute segment with Dr. Hairston was enlightening with respect to his feelings about the AIM issue. In fact, most importantly, at the end of the discussion, the Superintendent revealed that he intends to implement AIM this spring. Dr. Hairston claimed to be blind-sided by the vociferous reaction to implementing AIM. He wants to reestablish a positive tone. "Negativity" should not be what BCPS is about. He believes that the AIM "crisis" was manufactured, that there is another agenda behind it. He kept emphasizing that the implementation suffered from poor communication, but that he is addressing that. He believes that the teachers should be grateful for the fact that there have been no furloughs, and a 3.4% pay increase. He seemed unable to understand why there would be such criticism from them to a program that he believes is necessary. The superintendent compared the resistance to the AIM system to the resistance of the BCPS staff to his decision to switch from Apple to PC computers. Dr. Hairston said, "We're moving forward. When the mandate comes down---they'll have to do it." I believe the "mandate" in this case refers to the performance information that the State or Feds will require. I had the distinct impression that Dr. Hairston believes he was chosen to keep the BCPS focused on its mission of ever improving performance. Dr. Hairston compared himself to the head of a \$1.7 billion "business". He intends to stay the course he has set. Dr. Hairston indicated that his perspective is unique, since there is only one superintendent...that he sees what others cannot. He seems to view any critique of his sense of how to achieve his goals as stemming from a lack of understanding of the overall system. I think he believes the system stakeholders should defer to his judgment when it comes to operating issues. I am impressed by the fact that Dr. Hairston makes the time to engage in dialogue with members of the PTA. However, I left the meeting with the impression of having watched an old episode of "Father Knows Best". He was there to hear us, but not to listen in a way that might lead to any modification of his thinking. He wanted to convince us of how reasonable and necessary his directions are. I believe Dr. Hairston is motivated by a desire to make the BCPS the best school system in the state, the country, probably the world...however he is a bit tone deaf. If we don't agree with him, there must be something wrong with us.

Parents and teachers and local PTA's must continue to make their concerns known to the Superintendent, the Board of Education, and the political bodies that fund our excellent school system. Given the current economic climate and fiscal crisis at all levels of government, any new system implementation must reflect a careful evaluation of the costs to achieve a given benefit. Dr. Hairston did not point to any studies that would support the cost-effectiveness of the AIM system. He did not refer to any pilot-test results of the proposed system which would be implemented in every Baltimore county school. What has happened in the past month to warrant full implementation this spring?