

ANCS Reflection Task Force Executive Summary – Fall 2018 Pledge Incident

The Governing Board of the Atlanta Neighborhood Charter School appointed a Reflection Task Force to review the events and communications leading up to the decision by Faculty and Staff to make a change to the Agenda for the Elementary Campus' daily Morning Meeting at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. The announcement of the change in the Courier on Wednesday, August 8, 2018, attracted media attention, which in turn drew hostile public commentary. The Reflection Task Force was charged with developing a clear understanding of how and why the change was made; who participated in the decision to make the change; and the applicability of the School's existing policies to the change. The Board retained the Atlanta law firm of McFadden Davis LLC to assist the Reflection Task Force with the Review.

McFadden Davis commenced review of relevant documents in November 2018, and conducted interviews of individuals with knowledge in November and December 2018. Individuals interviewed included multiple ANCS faculty and staff members, as well as the school's counsel, and representatives of the Georgia Department of Education (DOE) and Atlanta Public Schools (APS).

The results of the McFadden Davis review, completed in March 2019, are summarized in pertinent part, as follows:

- ANCS Guiding Policy requires input from appropriate constituents, including, but not limited to, the Governing Board and external stakeholders such as DOE and APS, when implementing changes that will have a school-wide impact.
- On July 31, 2018, the elementary campus faculty voted during a regularly-scheduled pre-planning meeting to move the Pledge of Allegiance from the daily all-campus Morning Meeting agenda to the individual classroom setting.
- An email communication from the elementary Principal to the faculty and staff on Sunday, August 5th, acknowledged that a final plan had not been developed, but also instructed that students must be given an opportunity to say the Pledge each school day, and requested that each teacher find a way to incorporate the Pledge into the classroom schedule in the interim.
- The ANCS Executive Director had advised the Elementary Principal that the Board would be consulted regarding the change to the Morning Meeting Agenda; however, this did not occur.
- The Executive Director did consult representatives of APS and DOE in advance of the announcement of the change. The APS representative understood that the Pledge would be said in another part of the school day, and expressed no concerns. The DOE representative also expressed no concerns, but stated that he wanted to check with others at DOE. He reported that he had not checked with his colleagues by the time the change was announced at ANCS.
- There was no malicious or inappropriate intention in moving the Pledge from Morning Meeting; rather, it appears that it was the intention of school leadership prior to

announcement of the change that students would be given the opportunity to say the Pledge in their classrooms each day.

- Implementing the change prior to development of a specific alternative plan resulted in confusion as to the intent behind the decision.
- Misinformation and negative media attention can be minimized in the future by adhering to existing policies requiring the School to seek input from affected constituencies when considering changes with school-wide or campus-wide impact, and by consulting the Board and/or the school's legal counsel when addressing issues which require interpretation of Georgia law.

Joyce Gist Lewis
Chair, Reflection Task Force