

Report # 16-02

June 28, 2016

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
REPORT TO COUNCIL**

SUBJECT: ACE Student and Educator Awards

BACKGROUND: The ACE Student Awards, held on Monday, May 23, 2016, were once again a successful celebration of student achievement by the best of Greenbelt students. ACE appreciates the continued support of Council in both our Student and Educator Awards programs. In the spirit of further strengthening our program, we will be examining five issues, four of which we encountered with this year's Student Awards. Some of these issues are also reflected in the Educator Awards and so some solutions may apply to both programs.

FINDINGS:

1. **Length and timing of awards.** The student awards presentation has expanded in length with the addition of Dora Kennedy French Immersion School as well as lengthy write-ups that we receive from several of the schools. As a result, the event goes later into the evening than we would like. Also, this year our presentation was later on Council's agenda than it has been previously. Our youngest honorees are approximately 10 or 11 years old, and many of our families bring younger siblings, which suggests that completing the program as late as 10:00 pm as happened this year is too late. ACE will consider possible solutions to this issue for the 2016 – 2017 school year including the following:

- a. Examine ways to reduce the length of the ceremony, perhaps by shortening the citations or modifying the presentation.
- b. Investigate whether the awards ceremonies should be moved outside of the City Council meeting. One possibility would be to hold the awards at 7:00 pm immediately prior to a City Council meeting. Another possibility would be to hold the awards on a different day, perhaps then combining the Student and the Educator Awards into a single event.
- c. Request that the awards be the first item on the City Council agenda.

2. **Not enough seating.** There was a severe shortage of chairs at this year's student awards event. Rosalind Ceasar requested two extra flats of chairs on our behalf, but we were only given one flat. As a result, parents, school administrators, and many other people were forced to stand for nearly two

hours. Student honorees were given reserved seating, but thus were not able to sit with their families, which may have been detrimental to the celebration. We normally expect 60 to 80 supporters and family members, so seating for the event is always tight, but this year was extraordinarily uncomfortable. In response, ACE will examine the following:

- a. Determine what sequence of events resulted in a shortage of chairs so that we can prevent it in the future. It is not acceptable to have such a large number of people standing for the event, even assuming that we are successful in shortening the length of the presentation.
- b. In keeping with item 1b above, if the event were held separate from the City Council meeting, hold it in a room that has adequate seating for the event.

3. **Late nominations.** Some schools are perennially late in submitting their nominations for the Student and Educator awards. Although five schools responded to our nomination deadline for the Student awards on time, two schools provided their nominations less than one week prior to the awards ceremony, and only after repeated requests and school visits by ACE liaisons as well as pressure from the PTA presidents. The late nominations required last-minute heroics on the part of Rosalind Ceasar to produce an update to the script and obtain certificates from the various elected officials. As a result of these late nominations, it was difficult to confirm if all of the students would actually be able to attend the ceremony.

- a. ACE will discuss this issue at our meetings with the school Principals and with the PTA presidents to determine a more effective approach.
- b. ACE gives the schools a deadline, but we have not enforced it because it could preclude a worthy student or educator from receiving a well-deserved award. ACE will consider strictly enforcing the nomination deadline, although we recognize that this could result in one or more schools not receiving the awards.

4. **Residence Eligibility.** According to ACE's rules, only residents of Greenbelt are eligible for the ACE student awards. However, all ACE core schools except GES and SHLES include substantial numbers of students from outside Greenbelt. As a Charter school, TPA is at a particular disadvantage and had no student nominees this year because there were no Greenbelt residents in its oldest grade. Although the schools are given the responsibility to check residency requirements, this year one student who is a resident of Bowie received an ACE award: ACE learned of this only after the award was given and did not rescind the award. Privacy rules prevent the schools from providing a student's home address to ACE and we learn it when the student signs in at the award ceremony. We are considering ways to address this issue:

- a. One possibility is to require the student to fill in a separate application form themselves, which would be submitted by the school with the school's nomination form. This application form, since it would be filled in by the student themselves, could include a home address and contact information. ACE recognizes that this would make it even more difficult for some schools to meet the deadline.
- b. Another possibility, given sufficient time between the nomination deadline and the awards ceremony, would be to require a student RSVP before finalizing the award. This

year, some of the student RSVPs for attending the ceremony didn't come until the day of the awards. Again, enforcing deadlines could mean that some students would not get the awards.

- c. A final possibility is to change the rules and no longer require that ACE student winners be Greenbelt residents, thus removing the issue.

5. **Gender identity.** The ACE awards are traditionally given to a boy and a girl in the oldest grade at each school. The ACE charter lists a variety of activities that ACE can engage in, including "*recognizing two students [one male and one female] from each school as 'ACE outstanding students,'*" but goes on to say that "*ACE is not limited to or bound to these examples.*" ACE is aware that there are an increasing number of identified transgender, gender questioning, non-binary or gender fluid students in today's schools, particularly at the High School level. ACE is concerned that continuing to specify the gender of the students that can be nominated for the student awards could result in a school discriminating on the basis of gender identity when selecting the students to be nominated. ACE is also concerned that if a student were nominated for a gender-specific award that does not match their gender identity, that it could result in the student refusing to accept the award to which they are entitled.

- a. One possibility would be to remove the requirement that the schools nominate a boy and a girl and simply allow each school to nominate two students of any gender identity. If ACE makes this change, then ACE could monitor the apparent gender of the nominees to see if there are inequities or undesirable trends.
- b. ACE intends to consult with the schools' administrations on this issue. ACE is also considering the possibility of asking for input from the Gay-Straight Alliance at ERHS and/or the Greenbelt Youth Advisory Committee.
- c. At a minimum, ACE could remove explicit (i.e. non-pronoun) references to the gender of the student winners from the script.

RECOMMENDATION: This Report is intended to inform Council about these issues, which ACE will continue to discuss over the next several meetings. ACE is not specifically requesting Council action at this time although we would welcome any comments or opinions from Council to consider in our deliberations.

Approved by ACE on 6/28/2016 with a vote of 6-0 with three members absent.