



**BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE  
MEETING MINUTES  
MONDAY, MAY 12, 2008**

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, May 12, 2008, at 6:00 p.m. in the Education Center's Dining Room. Present were Curriculum Committee Members Mary M. Katona, assistant to the superintendent for curriculum and instruction, and Richard Agretto, director of special education; and Board Members: Michele Cann, Judith Dexter, Irene Follweiler, Dr. Craig Haytmanek, Charlene Koch, Loretta Leeson, Eugene McKeon, and Benjamin Tenaglia. Also in attendance were: Dr. Joseph A. Lewis, superintendent of schools; Robert Gross, associate superintendent; Robin Lutchter, director of information technologies; Stanley J. Majewski, Jr., assistant to the superintendent for finance and administration; Thomas Washington, director of student services; Frank Arbushites, coordinator of academic computing; Dr. Dean M. Donaher, director of special programs and athletics; Dr. Joanne LoFaso, coordinator of Literacy/ELA, Eric Smith, Supervisor of Science; Julie Victory, supervisor of mathematics; and representatives of the press.

Mrs. Dexter called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mrs. Dexter asked the board members if they had any objection to having an additional Courtesy of the Floor at the beginning of the meeting. They all agreed.

**COURTESY OF THE FLOOR**

Mr. Bryan Callahan, teacher at Freedom High School, spoke regarding the subject of physical education credit for participation in sports. He talked about sufficient time, planned instruction, and Chapter 4 regulations. He pointed out that waivers are not permissible for physical activity outside of class. Instruction must align with standards, there must be an assessment, and a Highly Qualified Teacher must deliver instruction. Mr. Callahan suggested that we should promote more physical activity for students rather than diminishing it. He suggested that students need to learn how to continue to be physically active after their high school athletic days are over.

**ACTION PLAN UPDATE/LEARNING WALK UPDATE**

Mrs. Katona discussed the updated Action Plan, noting that all updates are in red.

Mrs. Katona noted that all members of the curriculum office, along with administrators and teachers, have been involved with site-based learning walks, with a focus on literacy. All schools have conducted their learning walks, and a few have even conducted a second learning walk. Information gathered from these learning walks will be used with principals during the administrative retreat in June. She also noted that we are coming to the end of the first year during which the new English/Critical Literacy course has been implemented for grade nine students who need additional support in reading and writing. In the updates, she noted that Mrs. Bast has been visiting classes, observing teachers of these classes, and offering support. Mrs. Bast has also been tracking students' reading levels through the Degrees of Reading Power (DRP) Assessment to provide teachers with necessary information.

Mrs. Katona explained that members of the special education and curriculum offices have been meeting monthly to identify ways to support schools in their efforts to bring about more inclusionary practices, and to plan for the 2008 Inclusion/Literacy Academy. Several inservice offerings have been focused on the topic of inclusion, and the administration will continue to work together to meet the needs of teachers and students in this area.

Mrs. Leeson noted that on page 3 it states that the administration has continued to work on addressing eligible content in mathematics and reading well in advance of PSSA administration, specifically through in-servicing teachers on booklets containing information related to all areas tested through PSSA. A part of the Content Literacy Toolkit survey asks teachers to identify their comfort level in terms of being prepared to administer the PSSA, as well as to identify specific supports they need to be prepared for next year's PSSA. Sixty-five percent of the survey respondents reported feeling adequately or very well prepared to prepare their students for the reading PSSA. Mrs. Leeson asked how the administration is planning to reach one hundred percent.

Mrs. Katona responded that at the Inclusion Literacy Academy this topic would be one of the sessions offered. Teacher needs in this area will also continue to be addressed through inservices and through discussions with department chairpersons.

Mrs. Leeson then asked if we know who the thirty-five percent are who do not feel prepared or was the survey anonymous. Mrs. Katona responded that it was anonymous.

Mrs. Leeson asked for a list of topics, in addition to information gathered from the learning walks, that would be discussed at the administrative retreat in June. Dr. Lewis mentioned the topics of diversity, bullying, and minority affairs, and said he would send a list to the board in their next mail out.

Mrs. Leeson noted that an Employee Integrity Protocol was developed for the district. The training presentation was videotaped and placed onto the BASD Web site, and DVD's are available for offline viewing. She asked that the board be allowed to view this presentation. Dr. Lewis asked Mrs. Lutchter to make the presentation available to the board.

Mrs. Dexter asked if there would be a Diversity Committee next year. Dr. Lewis replied that there would be one next year. He noted that, as a result of recent activities in the district, Mr.

Washington and Mrs. Cintron will co-chair the committee. He noted that the board will be invited to the meetings.

Mrs. Koch stated that she would like to see the Diversity Committee called something else, possibly "Sensitivity Training," because it is more than just different race issues. She stated that training is needed on a host of topics.

Mrs. Leeson asked Dr. Lewis if he is going to work on closing the achievement gap. Dr. Lewis replied that he has been working on this all along. He noted that all areas need to be addressed, including expectations for all children, including special education, etc.

Mrs. Dexter asked what evidence we have that teaching to the same standards helps to close the gap. Dr. Lewis responded that children who have disabilities/language disadvantages will never excel without additional time and support. We need to increase the opportunities for all students, which means also offering more honors and AP courses. He noted that Mrs. Victory is already working with principals on developing criteria for advanced math courses.

Mrs. Dexter stated that she has reviewed the tutoring chart that Mr. Majewski sent to the board, which reviews the intervention money. She noted that the numbers show that students are not using interventions. She asked how we can get students at the high school level to take advantage of these interventions. Dr. Lewis responded that Project 720 could be the district's best hope for achieving this goal.

Mr. LaPorta noted that Freedom High School has only used one-half of its allocation. He noted that timing is essential in the success of interventions. If tutoring is too early in the year, you lose the students before the PSSA testing.

Mrs. Leeson stated that she and Dr. Lewis have been talking to the administration at Johnstown where they have had terrific gains in their PSSA scores. She noted that they claim that the two things that have helped them are in-school tutoring and incentives that the students have developed.

Mr. LaPorta stated that Freedom High School has hired a substitute teacher to tutor students during the school day using a program entitled "Study Island". Students can access this program from home as well as in the classroom. Dr. Lewis noted that Johnstown is also using "Study Island" to assist with tutoring.

## **CLASSROOMS FOR THE FUTURE UPDATE**

Mrs. Lutchter gave an update of the Classrooms for the Future (CFF) for year two. She stated that the district received \$1,237,006 during the 2007-2008 school year as part of the CFF grant. This funding was used to equip each of the 30 high school classrooms with an interactive white board, computer cart, 30 student computers, one teacher computer, one projector, one printer, one digital still camera, one digital video camera, and one set of speakers. Additional teacher computers were supplied for teachers who share a classroom. The previous school year, the district received \$415,146 from the CFF grant, and ten classrooms were equipped with CFF

technology. Currently, 40 classrooms, 20 at each high school, are set up as CFF classrooms. She noted that the goals of the CFF initiative are:

- Improve teaching and learning in English, mathematics, science, and social studies
- Change classroom practice.
- Change student-teacher relationships.
- Increase student engagement.
- Students responsible for learning.
- Students developing 21st century skills.
- Increase academic achievement.

Mrs. Lutcher noted that her memorandum also included a link to the 21st Century Skills Web site.

Mrs. Lutcher reminded the board of the “Flip the Switch” event that will be held in Room 150, in the IT Lab Center at Freedom High School, Friday, May 16, 2008.

### **GIFTED AND TALENTED TASK FORCE UPDATE**

Mr. Agretto explained to the board that the State Board of Education has revised Chapter 16 of the Pennsylvania code, dealing with special education services and programs, effective July 1, 2008. He noted that schools need to revisit their special education policies and procedures to ensure compliance with new requirements and timeframes. He discussed the following topics:

- Presentation of goals
- Identification and assessment
- Aptitude vs. achievement
- Alternatives to acceleration
- Types of acceleration
  - Subject-based acceleration
  - Grade-based acceleration
  - Mathematics acceleration
- ESOL students
- Gifted and disabled students

Mr. Agretto explained that Mrs. Victory has submitted a proposal for acceleration in middle school mathematics.

Mrs. Victory explained that it is essential that students not be placed in mathematics courses in which they will be unchallenged. Mrs. Victory stated that her proposal is aimed at the highly motivated and mathematically able students.

Mrs. Victory told the board that she thought they would be interested in seeing how the numbers might work out for the current sixth grade classes. She explained that there were 481 sixth grade students who scored advanced on PSSA 5 Mathematics; twelve of these students left the district; 469 remained: at East Hills there are 191; at Broughal there are 37; at Nitschmann there are 153; at Northeast there are 88.

Mrs. Victory noted that also of interest is the fact that, of the 73 identified gifted students currently in sixth grade, 69 of them would screen into accelerated mathematics, using only PSSA 5 as a criterion.

Mrs. Victory also noted that in a grant that is being written, she is proposing funding for staff development. Regardless of grant funding, Mrs. Victory stated that she will still inservice the teachers.

Mrs. Leeson commented that maybe we should wait until the following year to implement the proposal to give sixth grade mathematics teachers time to be trained for the acceleration program. She is also concerned about students missing out on basic skills. Mrs. Dexter then polled the board members. Of the seven board members present at that time, six stated that Mrs. Victory should proceed and one was not sure if it would be better for her to wait until the following year to proceed.

Mrs. Victory also explained that she has two district-wide mathematic specialists, one of whom is assigned to the middle schools. Her middle school person will focus on advanced classes and will also be working with students who may be struggling.

Mrs. Dexter stated that middle schools have Math Clubs which provide additional assistance to students using a different point of view from their regular mathematics teacher.

## **GROUPING FOR ACHIEVEMENT**

Mrs. Katona stated that the rationale for discontinuing the practice of tracking in favor of placing students into classes by “ranges” was presented to the board on February 11, 2008. As a follow-up to that information, she presented information on identifying how the ranges are determined, how this is different from the practice of tracking students, and how it differs from simply placing students into courses without consideration for the support they need to be successful. Mrs. Katona stated that she and Mr. Washington have met with principals, department chairs, and guidance counselors at both high schools to review the expectations for ranging students.

Mrs. Dexter stated that regarding grouping for achievement, most of the teachers worry about mixing students too much, and behavior in the classrooms. She added that teachers are concerned that the administration is not following through on discipline of students. Mrs. Katona replied that she has also heard these same concerns as placement in classes is done at this time. The ranging allows us to structure placement in a way that will be more beneficial to students and teachers.

Mrs. Cann asked if the guide for placing students is the main responsibility of guidance counselors or the computer. Mr. LaPorta replied that, at Freedom High School, schedules are done by a random assignment by the computer and then the administration reviews the assignments and group within ability ranges. Mrs. Durante stated that at Liberty High School, it is done in the reverse, teachers make an evaluation, and then there is a random computer assignment.

Mrs. Leeson noted that Mrs. Katona's information states that in tracking, students are taught according to the level at which they perform, as opposed to being taught to achieve a higher level of learning. The track is set early on, and there is little opportunity for the students to advance beyond it. When students are placed in "lower tracks", there is often a curriculum that is inferior to the regular curriculum. Expectations for these students, and even for students in a regular college preparatory curriculum, are lower than they are for students in honors and AP courses. Ranging students within courses using the same curriculum provides the opportunity for all students to work at achieving higher levels of learning. Because ranging allows for more ease in differentiating instruction, students on the higher end of the range continue to advance as well. Mrs. Leeson further stated that tracking has been proven to be helpful for higher achieving students. Mrs. Leeson also stated that she feels that not all tracking is inflexible; this is not tracking at its best. She added that there is a model available to raise the bar and still have tracking. She noted that Mrs. Katona's information showed practices of tracking, not a definition. Mrs. Katona pointed out that it is the practice that we should be concerned with.

Dr. Lewis disagreed with Mrs. Leeson, saying that we should be looking at the group as a whole. Teaching to a broader range of students doesn't guarantee students at the lower end of the group will learn the same as the students at the upper end of the group.

Dr. Lewis also explained to the board that the principal at Lincoln Elementary School is using a new technique called "Data Wall", which she used as a principal in New York. The wall contains color-coded tracking information obtained from testing. He feels it is a very helpful way of viewing data.

Mrs. Dexter stated that she has received phone calls from parents stating that teachers are telling eighth grades students not to take more than two honors classes during their first year in high school so they leave time for other high school activities. She asked the administration to ask the teachers not to hold back students from taking additional honors courses. Dr. Lewis replied that he has already made a note to speak to this matter.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION UPDATE**

Mrs. Katona stated that, per the request from board members at the April Board Curriculum Committee Meeting, Dr. Donaher has consulted with the health/physical education chairpeople and with the athletic directors to investigate what would need to be in place in order to give physical education credit for athletics, while still maintaining the guidelines from the state. She also provided the board with a letter from Craig Zieger, president of BEA, as well as the information previously provided by Ms. Shirley Black, health and physical education advisor for the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Mrs. Katona stated that, in light of these documents, and the additional information that would be associated with implementing this program, the administration does not recommend alternative PE credit acquisition.

Mrs. Dexter stated that she believes that if our district were really motivated to do this, they would find a way to work it out. She also wanted to note that some information was not true, specifically, the information that only varsity athletes who have earned at least one varsity letter in the previous year, and who have a satisfactory Citizenship grade, would be considered for this

alternative program; all other student athletes would be required to take the traditional physical education class during the school day. She also referenced the part where a hall monitor must be present when all physical education classes are being conducted. She stated that no hall monitors are present in the evening for band or play practices, etc.

Mrs. Follweiler stated that this request came from parents; it is not a budget cut. She stated that students who are heavily involved in athletics are asking for more time during the day for academic subjects.

The board agreed that the district has too much on its plate right now to look at how to make this program work, but agreed that it is something that should be looked at in the future.

### **RIGOR FOR ALL (HONORS)**

Mrs. Katona stated that the board had requested more information regarding students who originally did not make honors classes but were later allowed to take them. She stated that several steps have been taken in order to allow more students to have access to more rigorous curriculum. One such way to do this is by not omitting students from honors placement based solely on the test score they earn on the placement test. The administration sees this test as being useful information for teachers, rather than for the purpose of prohibiting students from enrolling in the honors courses. Last spring parents were notified that if their children had not been placed into honors because they did not meet the benchmark on the placement test, the opportunity still existed for them to enroll in the course(s). The high school principals have provided information regarding students who did not meet the benchmark on the honors test, and were placed in the honors courses:

#### Freedom High School:

##### English –

- Originally denied honors – 33
- Placed into honors – 27
- Refused honors placement – 6
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 6

##### Social Studies –

There were no students denied honors

##### Mathematics –

- Originally denied honors – 46
- Placed into honors – 23
- Refused honors placement – 23
- Students placed into honors and withdrew - 3
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 13

##### Science –

- Originally denied honors – 26
- Placed into honors – 23
- Refused honors placement – 1
- Students placed into honors and withdrew - 2
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 0

Liberty High School:

(Note: all students remained in the honors classes once placed)

English –

- Originally denied honors – 85
- Placed into honors – 25
- Refused honors placement – 60
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 0

Social Studies –

- Originally denied honors – 16
- Placed into honors – 9
- Refused honors placement – 7
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 0

Mathematics –

Only one student who initially had not applied was brought into honors after the start of the school year.

Science –

- Originally denied honors – 13
- Placed into honors – 7
- Refused honors placement – 6
- Students placed into honors and withdrew - 0
- Moved from honors back into academic after the semester – 0

Mrs. Katona noted that for the 2008-2009 school year, students will immediately be given the option of being enrolled in the honors courses, even if they did not meet the placement test benchmarks.

Mrs. Leeson asked if anyone knows if the students from this school year will continue in honor courses next school year? Mrs. Katona replied that it is a mixture of some will, and some will not.

Cathy Caporaso, English department chairperson from Freedom High School, stated that she believes in student self-selections.

Natalie Chickey, English department chairperson from Liberty High School, stated that Liberty is in the process of sending out letters to parents explaining why students in honors courses may be getting a lower grade.

Mr. Agretto then explained that the curriculum and instruction department also put together information on “Expanded Rigor in Curriculum,” which is being presented to the board for their information.

Mrs. Cann noted that she is glad to see the addition of AP English.

Mrs. Dexter stated that she would like to see the district pursue obtaining grants to help with the costs of AP testing in 11th grade.

## **NINTH GRADE BIOLOGY**

Mr. Smith explained that, after discussions with members of the high school science departments, parents, administrators, university professors, and other school districts, modifications to the high school science sequence are being recommended.

Mr. Smith explained that, as many school districts in our area have done, the administration is recommending that the district accelerate its current honors science sequence to biology in grade nine, chemistry in grade ten, and physics in grade eleven. This would allow the district to offer three new AP science programs in biology, chemistry and environmental science, as well as move its physics program to the AP Physics C curriculum. He also recommends a review of the ninth grade curriculum to include more inquiry and environmental topics. This is partially in response to the state requirements for the Science PSSA test.

Regarding the revision of existing courses, the administration is recommending a revision of all other existing courses to better align its instruction with state standards and fit its assessments better with Science PSSA requirements.

Mr. Smith then presented a ninth grade biology update. He explained that the proposed shift in honors would include:

- Freshman – from Honors ICP to Honors Bio
- Sophomore – from Honors Bio to Honors Chem
- Junior – from Honors Chem to Honors Physics
- Senior – from AP Physics to New AP Courses (AP Biology, AP Chemistry, AP Environmental Science, AP Physics C)

Mr. Smith explained that the benefits to students would include:

- Access to more advanced placement courses.
- Increased opportunities for science.
- More competitive balance with other districts.
- Continued support for options to take AP exam, potential for grants for students with financial hardships.
- Streamlining of scheduling with eliminations of extensions.

Systemic changes would include:

- Follows changes to the elementary and middle school curriculum.
- FOSS – elementary program designed to improve students' conceptual understanding and process skills.
- Middle schools – continuing growth in process skills and concept developments.

Staff development would include:

- AP course training for new AP offerings.
- Curriculum development through Project 720
- Expanded collaboration across courses and high schools
- Integration of STEM program with sequence

Mr. Smith noted that other districts with similar programs include Council Rock, Central Bucks, Parkland, Allentown, Nazareth, Palisades, Downingtown, and West Chester.

Mr. Smith also explained that other things to take into consideration would be:

- Alterations to other levels of high school science.
- Ninth grade program – expanding upon current ninth grade course to reach other topics not traditionally covered for Science PSSA.
- Focus on student process skills and research.
- Budget for lab supplies.

Mrs. Leeson thanked Mr. Smith and noted that she has been asking for the last eight years for a proposal for the 21st Century Skills for mathematics and science.

Mrs. Dexter inquired as to why AP biology will not be available in the fall. Mr. Smith replied that the district is sending a teacher this summer to view information. Also, new textbooks, etc., will be needed. He noted that money will also be a definite factor for lab equipment and equipment components.

Mrs. Dexter stated that Mr. Smith should remind the board prior to next year's budget as to what will be needed so they can add it to the budget to make this program work.

#### **AGENDA ITEMS FOR MAY 19, 2008**

The board reviewed the following agenda items and agreed to place them on the agenda for the May 19, 2008, Regular Board Meeting:

- English Pilot for Grades 11-12
- Project 720 Grant
- Science, It's Elementary Grant

#### **COURTESY OF THE FLOOR**

Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem, spoke stating that he was disturbed and upset over the recent article in the Morning Call regarding a letter that was sent to Dr. Lewis from six board members. He felt it was handled poorly and felt that nothing would have been lost by giving the entire board a chance to review the letter and sign it before it was sent. He noted that the solicitor was not advised on what occurred and inquired if the solicitor had an opinion regarding this matter.

The solicitor replied that since the board is his client and not everyone on the board has had a chance to read his response, he declined to respond at this time.

Mrs. Robin Lutchter, director of information technologies, stated that she would like to celebrate some wonderful things that have been happening in the district. She noted that Freedom High School just celebrated their prom at which 660 students attended. She wanted to acknowledge

that it was a delightful occasion, enjoyed by all. She also wanted to acknowledge the BASD student winners of the Digital Innovations Contest for 2008:

**Grade 7 -**

1st Place: "You Take Drugs..."

East Hills Middle School

Student Team: Ricky Castro, Bill Leeson, Davyd Sharp, Chevon Williams

Teacher: Adam Carpenter

2nd Place: "Positivity"

East Hills Middle School

Student Team: Lex Donatelli, Andrea Miller, Bethania Viana

Teacher: Adam Carpenter

3rd Place: "No Bullies Allowed"

East Hills Middle School

Student Team: Dakotah Biggs, Isrrael Gonzalez, Cherrielyn Oronos, James Polk

Teacher: Adam Carpenter

**Grade 6 -**

1st Place: "Child Abuse: Children Around the World are in Danger"

Northeast Middle School

Student Team: Alyssa Patterson, Emma Illick-Frank, Kyeema Isaac, Kathy Espinal, Ryan Sheevan

Teacher: Sheri Majczan

2nd Place: "Underage Drinking"

Northeast Middle School

Student Team: Alyssa Craig, Carmilla Kauer, Peter Facchiano, Amber Kitchens, PJ Fitzgerald

Teacher: Sheri Majczan

3rd Place: "School Bullying"

Northeast Middle School

Student Team: Hannah Michael, Sara Thorpe, Chanaya Williams, Alexis Cooper

Teacher: Sheri Majczan

**OPEN FORUM**

Mr. McKeon stated that he is not willing to submit the solicitor's letter to the newspaper until all board members have the opportunity to review the solicitor's comments. He would like to review it at the May 19, 2008, Regular Board Meeting.

Mrs. Leeson stated that some of the information listed in the Morning Call was incorrect. Mrs. Leeson and Mrs. Dexter both stated that no secret executive meeting was held. They asked all the board members who signed the letter if they had attended a secret executive meeting and all agreed they had not. Mrs. Leeson and Mrs. Dexter apologized to the three board members who

were not asked to sign the letter. They stated that they did not intend to exclude any board members, but only the board members who attended the budget hearing and later discussed the situation signed the letter.

Mrs. Dexter stated that it was a shame that a copy of a confidential letter from board members to Dr. Lewis reached the press. She also noted that Dr. Lewis was very responsive to the letter and she feels that good came out of it.

Mrs. Koch noted that the letter was on school district letterhead and stated that, as far as she was concerned, since the letter was a personal letter from certain board members it should not have been on letterhead. She stated that only letters sent from the administration office should be on school district letterhead.

Dr. Haytmanek asked how a letter was generated if no executive session was held. He stated that he felt the board was trying to function as a team and then a letter of reprimand was sent by six board members. He noted that this is driving a wedge between board members.

Board members then voted five “yes” and three “no” to release the opinions of the solicitor to the public. The solicitor then advised the board that it would be advisable to release this information at the May 19, 2008, Regular Board Meeting.

Mr. McKeon then thanked Mrs. Lutcher for announcing the winners of the Digital Innovations Contest for 2008. He asked Dr. Lewis if he could possibly bring these students to a Regular Board Meeting to acknowledge their accomplishments.

Mrs. Dexter also noted that the Liberty High School Awards Ceremony will be held on May 13, 2008, at Northeast Middle School, and the Freedom High School Awards Ceremony will be held on May 15, 2008, at Freedom High School.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:

Charlotte L. Zimmerman  
Administrative Assistant to the Assistant to the Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction