



## **BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES MONDAY, JUNE 16, 2008**

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, June 16, 2008, at 6:00 p.m. in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the Education Center. 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: Rosario Amato, 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; Stanley J. Majewski, Jr., assistant to the superintendent for finance and administration; Thomas Washington, director of student services; Kathleen Bast, coordinator of Literacy/ELA 6-12; Dr. Dean M. Donaher, director of special programs and athletics; Dr. Joanne LoFaso, coordinator of Literacy/ELA K-8; Eric Smith, supervisor of science; Julie Victory, supervisor of mathematics; and representatives of the press.

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

### **HANDWRITING PROGRAM**

Mrs. Katona explained to the board that Mrs. Hogan, elementary supervisor of Special Education, has investigated the issue of formal handwriting instruction due to the significant increase of occupational therapy evaluations and services. Mrs. Katona noted that all primary teachers have received a questionnaire regarding handwriting instruction at each grade level. Mrs. Katona then explained that the next steps would include:

1. Developing a handwriting curriculum guide for kindergarten through second grade teachers.
2. Provide inservice training to develop fine motor skills and handwriting instruction by CUI-20 occupational therapists.
3. Develop a curriculum guide by a handwriting committee comprised of kindergarten through second grade teachers.
4. After the primary handwriting guide is developed, practices for the intermediate level will be examined.

Mrs. Leeson requested that Mrs. Katona report to the board at the end of the summer with results.

Mrs. Dexter asked if there would be any financial impact to using the CUI-20. Mr. Agretto responded that it would be just a corrective action through using occupational therapists. He noted that this would not be for special education students only.

Mrs. Leeson remarked that she read that students with good handwriting skills do better on PSSA tests and are also better students.

## **PROJECT 720 UPDATE**

Mrs. Katona explained that the purpose of her presentation was to identify more specifically the ways in which our high schools have begun and continue to work toward restructuring, designed to lead to greater student achievement. While we are provided funding through Project 720 to accomplish goals, it is important to note that, even without the state funded Project 720, we would need to consider ways to restructure our high schools. Within the presentation, Mrs. Katona noted that she did not specifically label amounts of funding with items; however, she wanted to provide a basis for what is covered under the district's funding.

Mrs. Katona presented a PowerPoint presentation that broke down into three sections. The first section identified the goals of Project 720. The second section provided details that the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) has outlined for the types of items and activities that the district should be considering within each of the goals. The last section pointed out specific ideas that have been developed in the Bethlehem Area School District (BASD) from the 2008-2009 grant, to which both high schools provided input.

Mrs. Katona then explained the four goals of Project 720:

1. Implement a rigorous college and career preparation curriculum for all students.
2. Evaluate school district policies and systems to strengthen the academic infrastructure and increase student achievement.
3. Implement a highly personalized environment that provides consistent advising, mentoring, and a development of individual plans to guide the high school experience.
4. Provide continuous professional development to build or establish a community for staff and partners.

Mrs. Katona reminded the board that we need to be aware that, as we increase the number of test-takers, we may initially see a decrease in the mean score. This is why it is important to look at achievement overall, as opposed to any single set of scores. As we increase the numbers of students taking honors and advanced placement (AP) courses, we will see a rise in the mean scores, but we will probably not see this for two to three years. She also noted that middle school initiative and progress would impact our high schools.

Mrs. Katona explained that we need to consider modifications and accommodations provided for ELL students, poverty impacted students, and students with disabilities so that all may successfully enter and complete colleges and careers. This is accomplished through interventions

and supports, inclusion, and participation in dual enrollment. She also stated that we will be looking at the CollegeBoard's AP Potential site to identify students who could be successful in AP courses.

Mrs. Katona noted that we recognize that effective instructional programs that increase student achievement are driven by varied data sources: PSSA, 4Sight, student attendance, student retention, dual enrollment, discipline referrals, teacher attendance, AP enrollment and scores, PSAT enrollment and scores, student enrollment in honors and AP courses, and graduation rate, among others.

Mrs. Katona explained that Small Learning Communities indicate a way of breaking down a larger school into clusters or houses in which teacher teams create small, personalized learning environments. These smaller environments may take such forms as houses, teams, or academies, and their success goes far beyond their structure and is grounded in the ways in which teachers work together within them. The bell schedule will not be the defining factor in their success; however, building some flexibility into the schedule might be appropriate for teachers to work together and to accommodate students' curricular needs. Regarding schedules, Mrs. Katona explained that the daily bell schedule should support Small Learning Communities (SLC). The schedule should allow for before, during, and after school tutoring schedules for students below grade level in reading and math.

Mr. LaPorta said that at Freedom, they have brought in retired teachers to provide tutoring to students during study hall time. Mrs. Leeson asked how many students in study hall are below basic. Mr. LaPorta responded that at Freedom High School they try to catch students who have not selected an elective and are placed into a study hall instead. They also review all student data looking for students who select non-core electives.

Mrs. Durante explained that at Liberty High School they do not have a lot of students in study halls. She also explained that their tutoring plan was developed by students, parents, and administration and is held after school.

Mrs. Katona then went on to explain specific actions already in place in the BASD. She noted that *Breaking Ranks* books have been ordered for all high school teachers and administrators, as the books provide the foundation for high school restructuring, and Project 720. She explained that those attending conferences this summer have already received copies of this book, with instructions on particular pages to begin with. Mrs. Katona and Dr. Barilla are putting together an outline for principals regarding how they will be able to use the books with all staff. She noted that final plans for developing the 2008-2009 goals will be a result of the summer work.

Mrs. Katona explained that many of the items listed under "Infrastructure and Achievement" also refer back to rigor. The district needs to make sure that the scope and sequence for our core courses and the curriculum that is written keeps our students on track for meeting the GCA requirements. Mrs. Katona noted that all our schools, whether they were required by the state or not, went through the process of completing the Getting Results document, and will continue to do so. Many of our schools will also be involved with school improvement workshops offered by the CUI-20 at the end of June. She also explained that the district will emphasize teacher training

at the district's Inclusion/Literacy Academy. Teachers and principals will complete action plans at the conclusion of the Inclusion/Literacy Academy. Reading Apprenticeship training will continue, and we are working to get all secondary teachers trained in the methods.

Mrs. Katona explained that the advisory and mentoring program is something that will be focused on at the summer conferences. She noted that both high schools began their planning, and anticipate having a model in place for the upcoming school year.

Mrs. Durante noted that Liberty High School piloted a mentoring program at the freshman campus. Student choices, teacher choices, and/or athletic coaches determined PSSA proctors this year, and the system seemed to work well. In a similar way, as Liberty staff looks ahead to mentoring, students who are moving into 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grades have been asked to identify teachers they would most like to be placed with for homeroom. Administrators are scheduling students accordingly.

Mr. LaPorta stated that he is looking into placing students into homerooms by grade, with students staying in the same homeroom for their entire four years, creating a sense of the teachers getting to know a student for their entire high school experience.

Mr. McKeon asked what is needed for parent buy-in to get students to attend tutoring sessions. Mrs. Durante replied that she has met with juniors and their parents, but it was too little too late for this year. She stated that she then opened sessions to sophomores for June, but only eleven showed up. She stated that there were enough volunteers, but she is not sure families understood enough to participate fully in the program. She also remarked that tutoring can only benefit the students who attend the program.

Mrs. Leeson noted that the tutoring aspect at the high school level reached a point where maybe students need counseling to explain how tutoring will help them in more ways than just improving their grades. It will also help students achieve their personal goals, not the BASD's goals.

Mr. Tenaglia remarked that middle school teachers work in teams. He asked why high school teachers do not use the same technique. Dr. Lewis remarked that he had already planned on presenting the topic of Small Learning Communities (SLC) as part of his program at this week's Administrative/Supervisory Meetings. Mrs. Dexter asked how and when we will evaluate SLC, and who would be doing the evaluating. Mrs. Katona replied that we need to develop a rubric to see the progress. Also, the Student Performance Task Force group will continue to evaluate, whether we are meeting Project 720 goals. Mrs. Katona also replied that at the conferences this summer, we will come away with timelines and expectations. Mrs. Dexter requested the information be available by October or November so principals can do their scheduling by November or December.

Mrs. Leeson asked that, regarding objectives for mentoring, how are we going to measure what is working and what is not. She requested this information by August or September.

Mrs. Durante asked if the board would be willing to give its blessing on a small pilot for teaming for students who are slow learners. Mrs. Dexter stated that she would like to see such a proposal. Dr. Lewis asked Mrs. Durante to work through Mrs. Katona by sharing the proposal with her first, and then he would want to see it before sending anything to the board.

Mrs. Cann noted that the presentation indicated we would do away with the applied track, but that Mrs. Katona did not mention anything about ranging. Mrs. Cann wanted to be sure that we do not simply drop the applied track without the ranging. Mrs. Katona agreed that it was not mentioned, but was implied.

Mrs. Leeson also stated that, regarding the mentoring program, mentors should encourage their students to also participate in extra-curricular activities. Mrs. Dexter agreed that not all students join extra-curricular activities without a push in that direction.

Mrs. Koch remarked that a few years ago, a professor from the community college presented a program for students just entering college regarding learning how to study, which could also be applied to students just entering high school who are struggling. She feels the need is still there and was wondering if such a course could be offered to our students.

Mrs. Leeson asked if we are using our college contacts in counseling to inform students about what they will need in college. Mrs. Katona responded that a key piece in Career Pathways is exploring with the CIU-20 as to what we can do. Mr. LaPorta stated that he also brings in the dean of admissions from the community college and admission counselors to interact with his students regarding courses they should take upon entering college. Mrs. Leeson then stated that this is not what she meant. She questioned whether we are using our college connections to work to develop our courses so they match courses needed to attend college. She asked what we can do to better achieve a natural connection. Mrs. Durante mentioned several ways in which Liberty uses connections with counselors at different schools to come in and meet with students regarding college expectations.

Mrs. Dexter asked if it would be possible to hire professionals to come in to speak to students and parents regarding what to expect when getting ready for college, such as how to choose an essay, who will review their essay, when registration fees can be dropped, and whether visitations to schools should be a day visit or an overnight visit.

Mrs. Katona reported that the district is seeing success with schools that have instituted the PBIS or modifications of it. Through support from Mr. Washington, the district is working on ensuring more consistent counseling activities. She also noted that both high schools have been working on development and follow-through for Professional Learning Communities (PLC). Mrs. Bast began these last year with the ninth grade teachers who had begun to teach the English/Literacy course and is looking forward to rolling this into tenth grade this year.

Mrs. Katona explained that the administration will continue to investigate schools that have shown success in reaching the goals of Project 720, and hopes to make additional visits to these sites. She noted that our schools will continue to hold student achievement task force meetings,

which will include teachers, students, parents, and community members. We will also have as many literacy and math coaches as we are able to, according to grants.

Mrs. Katona agreed to keep the board updated on all summer conferences.

## **READING REDESIGN**

Before the explanation of the reading redesign, Mrs. Dexter asked for an explanation of Reading Apprenticeship (RA). Mrs. Katona stated that RA is a system used in grades 6-12, while the reading redesign refers to Reading Recovery®, which has implications for primary students. Mrs. Bast explained that RA is a way of promoting strategies to teach comprehension in content areas through literacy strategies. Dr. Lewis clarified further, stating that RA originally grew out of the Bay Area Writing Project in the 1970's. He gave an example from science of how teachers might use the strategies to help students in making predictions in order to comprehend science text.

Mrs. Katona explained that she provided the board with two items regarding reading redesign. One was a draft of an action plan for reaching more students through Reading Recovery® and Reading Recovery strategies, as well as through other methods. The other item contained information to help guide principals in using their Reading Recovery trained teachers. She explained that the goals of the action plan are identified, and clearly delineate our intention to strengthen interventions and supports for our elementary students. This plan is being built as a result of the following:

1. Three meetings with a committee comprised of representation from the office of curriculum and instruction, building principals, Reading Recovery teachers, first grade teachers, and reading specialists.
2. Individual discussions with every elementary principal.
3. An examination of the longitudinal data on students who have been served through Reading Recovery.
4. Projections from kindergarten teachers regarding numbers of students who may be recommended for Reading Recovery.
5. Discussions concerning redeployment of five Reading Recovery teachers.

Mrs. Katona stated that, based on estimations from current kindergarten teachers, a total of 333 students may be recommended for Reading Recovery in 2008-2009. She noted that obviously, this number could increase or decrease depending upon outcomes of the Observation Survey Test, as well as upon students who may enter our district after this year. Nonetheless, even with removing five Reading Recovery teachers as recommended through budget discussions, the district would be able to support our neediest students through Reading Recovery. She stated that the district would be able to continue to do this through 1:1 Reading Recovery, and through implementing instruction within small literacy groups using Reading Recovery strategies. The key to this redesign is in the professional development that will be provided for classroom teachers in order to provide ongoing support, whether students have been discontinued from Reading Recovery, or if they have been recommended. She stated that specifically, the focus will not stop with first grade teachers, but will be expanded to second and even third grades as well.

Mrs. Katona also noted that the district has been able to identify reassignments for the five Reading Recovery teachers.

Mr. Tenaglia asked what the Wilkes Course is. Dr. LoFaso explained that the district has designed a course, which, if approved, will be a credited course BASD teachers can enroll in to receive training to strengthen their ability to teach reading. The course will be offered to all BASD elementary teachers.

Mr. Tenaglia also asked what System 44 is. Mrs. Bast explained that System 44 is an intervention for Read 180 students with a Lexile level of between 0-400, and provides specific interventions in the areas of phonics and decoding, while teaching vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Mrs. Koch asked if the district is working with new students on vocabulary and pronunciation. Mrs. Katona responded that students receive testing from reading specialists who will then work with students who require help. Mrs. Koch then asked if vision testing is also being done. Mr. Washington replied that it is part of their health screening testing.

Mrs. Leeson then stated that she was concerned about changes to the Reading Recovery program and the fact that we will only have 31 half-time teachers. Dr. Lewis replied that not all students will need 1:1, some will be placed in small groups. Mrs. Leeson then asked why we don't have a benchmark to decide which students will be 1:1 rather than having principals making the decision. Dr. Lewis responded that there are other factors involved rather than just a number on a test. Dr. LoFaso elaborated on the system that is used through the Observation Survey test, which does provide guidance for deciding which students receive 1:1 interventions.

Mrs. Leeson asked if we have heard anything from the state regarding money to cover Reading Recovery. Dr. Lewis responded that he has heard positive comments from the state, but nothing solid.

Mr. Amato asked why did we dilute the Reading Recovery program? He stated that if we cut back on teachers, how can we service all students who need help.

Mrs. Dexter asked how long it would take to know if the redesign was working. Mrs. Katona said it would have to be at least two years, as the current first grade students would have to be tested on the second grade DRA before we could begin to identify progress.

Mr. McKeon asked, if it takes two years to find out results from our changes, would it take three to four years to find out if we made the right choice. He stated that if it takes that long, we will have missed a whole group of children.

## **AGENDA ITEMS FOR JUNE 23, 2008**

The board reviewed and discussed the following agenda items which will be placed on the agenda for the June 23, 2008, Regular Board Meeting:

1. Pregnant and Parenting Teen Grant
2. The Pennsylvania Pact (PA-Pact) Grant
3. Community Service Agencies

## **COURTESY OF THE FLOOR**

Mrs. Ann Goldberg, Montgomery Street, Bethlehem, a retired district reading specialist, spoke regarding the changes to the Reading Recovery program and the fact that not all students who need 1:1 attention would receive it if the recommended changes are made.

## **OPEN FORUM**

Mrs. Leeson asked if the words “Information Only” on the agenda could be changed to “Discussion Items”.

Mrs. Leeson asked if the results are available on the PSSA testing. Dr. Lewis replied that only individual scores are available, but the total results should be available by the end of June.

Mrs. Leeson stated that she and other members of the board have met with PAC members and one idea that has surfaced is to develop a “Think Tank,” and she would like to know if it would be possible to explore this idea. Mrs. Koch stated that she also thought it was a good idea and would like to extend it to the administration and teachers.

Mrs. Dexter inquired as to what is happening and what the timeline is concerning the discussion on the International Baccalaureate (IB) curriculum. Mrs. Katona responded that she has started to investigate this, but has not had enough time to look at it more closely, but will be doing so in the near future.

Mrs. Dexter asked about the “Goal Setting” and where we are in that process. Dr. Lewis said that cabinet is continuing to examine the goals following the recent public meeting, and that we could discuss it again at a committee meeting this summer.

Mrs. Dexter asked the status of the science curriculum for Broughal Middle School. Mr. Smith responded that they are currently writing the curriculum using the “Understanding by Design” model, which will be in three stages: outlining essential questions, designing instruction, and outlining evidence of student understanding. Stage one is complete, and stages two and three will be completed this summer and fall. Mrs. Dexter also stated that she has heard direct instruction is more meaningful than is inquiry learning for students on the science PSSA. Mr. Smith responded that there will be a balance of hands-on inquiry learning and other types of instruction. He stated that the PSSA in science is an even split between “Nature of Science” questions, that are best served through an inquiry approach and content questions. He also stated that content can also be taught through hands-on science.

Mrs. Dexter inquired about the IMAX Theater that is being installed at Broughal Middle School. Dr. Lewis replied that the district is currently working on a sponsor for the \$300,000 piece of equipment, but noted that it is not an IMAX theatre, but a functioning Planetarium with a curved dome. Mrs. Dexter asked when the board approved the IMAX, she thought it would only be considered if they had found a sponsor. Mr. Majewski responded that it was built into the project as part of the design. Mrs. Dexter and Mrs. Leeson asked that this information be confirmed.

Mrs. Leeson stated that, after hearing from Mrs. Goldberg, maybe the board needs to rethink the redesigning of the Reading Recovery program.

Mr. Tenaglia asked the solicitor to check into two items for him. One was concerning the wording on information sent to the board about a Note that was being purchased by the BASD and the second was that he is requesting a copy of an e-mail sent from Mr. Reed to Mr. Majewski.

Mrs. Follweiler noted that the final budget would be approved at the June 23, 2008, Regular Board Meeting and asked if the board felt they should meet once more to discuss the budget before this final date. Dr. Lewis reminded the board that once the budget is finalized, they still have the option to change line items, as long as they do not change the final total.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:

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