



**BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 3, 2008**

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, November 3, 2008, at 7:00 p.m. in the Superintendent's Conference Room at the Education Center. Present were Curriculum Committee Member Mary M. Katona, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction; and Board Members: Rosario Amato, Michele Cann, Judith Dexter, Irene Follweiler, Charlene Koch, Loretta Leeson, Eugene McKeon, and Benjamin Tenaglia. Also in attendance were: Dr. Joseph A. Lewis, superintendent of schools; Stanley J. Majewski, Jr., assistant to the superintendent for finance and administration; Thomas Washington, assistant superintendent for human resources; Frank Arbushites, acting director of technology; Kathy Bast, coordinator of literacy/ELA K-12; Doris Correll, coordinator of English acquisition; Eric Smith, supervisor of science; Julie Victory, supervisor of mathematics; and representatives of the press.

Mrs. Dexter called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

Prior to courtesy of the floor, Dr. Lewis read a joint statement on behalf of the administration of the Bethlehem Area School District and the administrations of Freedom and Liberty High Schools regarding inappropriate incidents that occurred before, during, and after the game on Saturday afternoon. He stated this behavior is never to be condoned and will not be tolerated by the Bethlehem Area School District. The result of this behavior impacts the safety and welfare of our students and members of the community. The Bethlehem Area School District is continuing the investigation into specific incidents which occurred. He stated that individuals identified will be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law, and if determined to be BASD students, will also face the severest consequences within the Student Code of Conduct. He concluded with the statement that the students, staff, and administration are united in their efforts to keep this rivalry the safest and the best in the valley.

1. Mike Stauffer, 909 Cayuga Street, Bethlehem, spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. He stated that when he originally read the article in the Morning Call, he was strongly against the proposal, but after finding out more information regarding the alternate provisions that would be in place, he has changed his opinion. He asked that the administration include the words "regular diploma" in the proposal so that

special education students, etc., would receive a “regular diploma” at graduation. Mr. Stauffer also thanked everyone in the administration who took the time to answer his e-mail questions.

2. Beth Guarriello, 4713 Kathi Drive, Bethlehem, spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. Ms. Guarriello noted that the BASD is one of the few schools in the Lehigh Valley that does not have this requirement in place. She asked that the administration consider scheduling tutoring during the day when students are already in school.
3. Natalie Chickey, 1619 West Broad Street, Bethlehem, also spoke on the subject of PSSA Requirement for Graduation. She agreed that students do not see the value of the PSSA test, and do not take it seriously. She stated that the test is not going away, and she urged the board to emphasize the importance of the test so that the students do take it seriously. Ms. Chickey also spoke regarding night school and summer school. She stated that students can fail a class during the school year with the attitude that they can just go to night school or summer school as an easy way out. Dr. Lewis replied that the board would soon be receiving information on revamping the summer school and night school programs.
4. Justin Amann, a junior at Liberty High School, spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. He stated that he and his friends are sick of hearing that they must pass the test. They are tired of having the good things taken away from them, such as placing limits on Spirit Week. He stated that students need more excitement, not less enthusiasm to help them pass the test.
5. Kevin Peterman, a Liberty High School student, also spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. He stated that he originally was opposed to the proposal, but has recently changed his opinion. He feels students need to take the test seriously and need to be held accountable.
6. Jane Prodes, 28 West Elizabeth Avenue, Bethlehem, spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. She stated that we need to instill pride in our community and our schools. She feels the students need to be held accountable and need a purpose to pass the test.
7. Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem, spoke regarding fundamentals in educating our children. He stated that it is the responsibility of the school district to produce productive people who will give back to the community, not burden it. He stated that regarding mathematics, the United States is one of the lowest countries in the world.
8. Amy Negron, 11 West Second Street, #136, Bethlehem, stated that the PSSA scores for Liberty High School are embarrassing, but in no way represent the students of Liberty High School. She stated that some of the students believe that if they do not do well, all their teachers will be fired, and some of them do not feel that this is a threat. She also stated that summer school needs to be changed. Some students who do not like their teachers during the

regular school year, just believe they do not have to pass the class, because they can just go to summer school and breeze through a class in just a couple of weeks.

9. Bonnie Sutter, 4900 Wagner Drive, Bethlehem, spoke regarding the proposal for PSSA Requirement for Graduation. She stated that she has two daughters at Freedom High School who are both special needs students with IEPs. She stated that they are faced with a lot of daily challenges, but she does not want them to stop trying just because they have IEPs. She wants them to always be able to do the best they can.

Mrs. Dexter reminded parents that they can go online to see their child's previous PSSA and 4Sight scores.

INFORMATION ITEMS –

1. Small Learning Communities

Mrs. Katona asked Mrs. Durante and Mr. LaPorta to explain the implementation of Small Learning Communities (SLCs) in their high schools for the 2009-2010 school year. She explained that teachers at each school have been very involved with the discussions surrounding SLCs, and have provided many ideas on how they believe the SLCs should be designed at each school.

Mrs. Durante noted that, as construction ends at Liberty High School, they will see the return of the ESL program, with the population projected around 3,100 students. Over the next five years, the major goal at Liberty High School is to enjoy the diversity of the large high school, yet maintain the personal touch of a small learning environment, and in doing so, decrease the drop out rate, increase the graduation rate, and increase achievement. Within the first phase of the program they will divide the ninth grade class into approximately five small learning communities. These heterogeneous groups would contain 120-150 students. This goal will help to facilitate a small-school atmosphere. Each group would offer all core offerings for the ninth grade and specific electives that only apply to the ninth grade class (for example, computer technology, health/physical education). Flexible scheduling will prevail so that successful students can continue to be enrolled in the most rigorous courses. Courses that are offered to all grades would be offered parallel to the communities. The structure will be set up to provide a close relationship among students, staff, and families with the purpose of improved student performance. A special component within the community is career exploration and mentoring. Teachers will be afforded common planning time. Collaboration amongst the inclusion teachers will increase and there will be more opportunities for co-teaching environments. The second phase of the five-year plan includes a revision of the Business House Certificate Program to a Business, Finance, and Technology Academy. Other thematic areas would include a Vocational-Technical Certificate Program, Mathematics and Science Academy, and the Performing Arts Academy. Mrs. Durante noted that these academies would be application based.

Mr. LaPorta stated that Freedom High School is taking a different approach; they are focusing on rigor, relevance, and relationships as they plan to develop thematic programs for their SLCs. He stated that they have already begun laying the foundation necessary to ensure the success of all

students at Freedom High School. For the past year, literacy coaches have been working with teachers to ensure that reading strategies are taught across all content areas. Students are learning that good readers use a variety of strategies to access difficult text, and teachers are learning new ways to help students master content-specific reading. In addition to working with the literacy coaches, teachers are also expanding their repertoire and learning from one another by participating in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and learning walks. They have also dramatically increased the number of inclusion classes offered. Mr. LaPorta stated that by including all students in an academic learning environment, the rigor in his school has strengthened. Along with increasing the rigor for his special education students, he has also expanded the AP offerings, with more courses to be offered next year. Finally, they have begun a formalized mentoring program to connect struggling students with adults in the building. Mr. LaPorta stated that they have three areas of focus for the continued school improvement: addressing the transition between middle school and high school, developing thematic-based Small Learning Communities, and designing courses of study based on Career Pathways.

Mrs. Leeson asked Mrs. Durante if the ninth grade programs only include ninth grade classes. Mrs. Durante responded that schedules could be mixed. Students can run parallel scheduling; teaming and block scheduling can be run at the same time.

Mrs. Leeson asked if there is any documented research at the high school level on thematic-based programs. Both principals stated that such information was presented to them at the conferences they attended this summer, they would research it, and get back to the board.

Mrs. Cann asked if it is possible that some students will choose a theme that has already been filled up and will then get assigned to another theme that they are not interested in. Mr. LaPorta replied that students will have to plan in advance because some courses will be limited.

Mrs. Dexter asked if students will easily be able to switch courses if they decide they are not in the course they want to be in and will they still be able to graduate on time. Mrs. Katona replied that this should not be a problem, since all curriculum will be core-curriculum.

2. PSSA Requirement for Graduation

Mrs. Katona stated that, after hearing all the comments and feedback from the community, the first response is that all that is being seen is the PSSA test. She stated that everyone should not lose sight of the alternative measures that will also be put in place for special needs students. She also noted that we would not be changing the rules in mid-stream, as students have four and one-half months till they take the test and another year until graduation. She stated that if the board approved the proposal, the administration would start immediately to develop a rubric for alternative measures such as the portfolio assessment. She noted that this should not be looked at as a punishment, but as an opportunity to show proficiency, especially as high schools across the country are frequently targeted for graduating students who have not demonstrated necessary reading and mathematical skills. Additionally, this requirement will help students adjust to more rigorous standards as they look toward the Graduation Competency Assessments (GCAs) in 2014.

Mr. Tenaglia suggested that the administration consider changing the title of the proposal. Dr. Lewis responded that the administration is already looking at this option.

Mrs. Leeson asked what other school districts are doing as requirements. Mrs. Katona responded that Allentown has been giving alternate tests and also look at combined SAT scores in reading and mathematics. Mrs. Leeson asked if the administration would look at what other districts are doing.

Mrs. Cann stated that she supports the proposal. She stated that students need emphasis on buying into it. She also feels that students need to be given the tools to take the test. She stated that maybe the administration needs to take a look at teachers whose students are not passing. She also stated that we do not need to punish students by taking away from fun activities, such as Spirit Week.

Mr. Amato stated that he also supports the PSSA requirement proposal. Students need to be aware of the fact that they need to be held accountable in the real world. Mr. Amato noted that he has recently become a mentor at the school where he works and the program is working.

Mrs. Durante noted that the plan Liberty High School has put together would provide a remediation course prior to the test and another course prior to taking the second test. The proposal would have each course count as a full-credit course.

The board agreed to place this agenda item on the agenda for the November Regular Board Meeting. Mrs. Leeson agreed, but stated that she would like to see some changes added to the alternatives.

3. LHS Theatre Fundraiser “Sponsor a Chair”

This item has been pulled from the agenda.

AGENDA ITEM FOR THE NOVEMBER 10, 2008, SPECIAL BOARD MEETING

1. Approval of the School Improvement Plans for Donegan Elementary School, Fountain Hill Elementary School, East Hills Middle School, Freedom High School, Liberty High School, and District (Donegan Elementary School’s and Liberty High School’s plans to be discussed at tonight’s meeting)

Ms. Quigney commented that Donegan Elementary School has made AYP in Safe Harbor. She stated that her school is working with PATTAN on reading interventions, which gives all students additional reading classes.

Mrs. Koch asked Ms. Quigney her opinion of the Welcome Classrooms and what the impact would be at her school if it was eliminated. Ms. Quigney responded that she was part of the original committee to put Welcome Classrooms in place. She stated that the Welcome Classroom has the ability to get the necessary paperwork on students completed prior to their being placed into classrooms. It also provides the ability to test new students in reading and mathematics,

review the Code of Conduct with them, and provides the opportunity to check if they have IEPs, to enable the administration to place them in the correct classrooms.

Mrs. Leeson asked if most students have competency in mathematics when they enter high school. Mrs. Durante replied that she will get back to the board with data on this subject, but claimed that over 200 students came to Liberty last year with basic or below basic scores. Dr. Lewis noted that it is not clear as to how many Special Education or ELL students are in those totals. He also reiterated that the Secretary of Education has commented on how well our middle schools do and how they are defying the odds.

Mrs. Leeson asked if the district is looking at any other assessments for benchmarks. Mrs. Victory replied that, as far as the state is concerned for Project 720, we must give the American Diploma Project Algebra II End-of-Course Exam, which is extremely difficult, and we also give common district math finals, which are aligned with PSSA anchors for grade eleven.

Mr. Tenaglia referred to page 16 of the Liberty High School Action Plan, which states that, “In concert with a district-wide effort, Liberty High School plans to offer a PSSA Preparatory class for the eleventh graders. This course would be required for all basic and below basic students based on their 4Sight test score, **pending school board approval.**” He asked how soon we could implement this. Mrs. Durante responded that, once approved, it could be implemented right away with staff changes and possible student schedule changes.

The board agreed to place these action plans on the agenda for the November 10, 2008, Special Board Meeting.

AGENDA ITEMS FOR THE NOVEMBER 17, 2008, REGULAR BOARD MEETING

The board discussed and agreed to place the following agenda items on the agenda for the November 17, 2008, Regular Board Meeting:

1. Approval of PSSA Requirement for Graduation
2. Learn and Serve America Grant – Intermediate Curriculum Integration
3. Community Service Agency
 - a. Hurricane Basketball Club
4. Algebra 3/Trigonometry Course

OPEN FORUM

1. Mr. Tenaglia asked when the fall 4Sight results would be placed on the Parent Portal. Mr. Arbushites responded that we have the information and it will be placed on the Parent Portal shortly. He will get back to the board with an exact date.
2. SAT/AP Testing Results – This item was moved to the January Board Curriculum Committee Meeting.

3. The request from the Distinguished Educators to have a discussion meeting has been set for November 24, 2008, beginning at 6:00 p.m.
4. Mr. Tenaglia noted that he still has some open requests, which he will forward to Dr. Lewis.
5. Mrs. Leeson asked the following questions:
 - a. Regarding substitute training, she did not see Code of Conduct training. Mr. Washington will look into this request.
 - b. She asked what a substitute should do if there is no Substitute Plan in a building. Mr. Washington replied that they should fill out a sheet and give it to the principal.
 - c. She stated that she heard that there would not be a Mock Trial this year because no funding was available. Dr. Lewis and Mrs. Katona replied that nothing has been received in their offices yet. They noted that the Northampton Bar Association might fund the event.
 - d. She asked about the Algebra 3/Trigonometry course, and whether it should be called something different. Mrs. Victory explained the purpose of the course and what would be contained within it.
6. Mrs. Koch noted that at a conference she attended, they spoke about the Middle States Program and asked why we do not participate in it any more. Dr. Lewis replied that it is no longer a major program, and that we now look at students' growth.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Minutes Prepared By:

Charlotte L. Zimmerman
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