



BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES MONDAY, OCTOBER 12, 2009

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, October 12, 2009, at 6:00 p.m. in the Education Center's Dining Room. Present were Curriculum Committee Members Mary M. Katona, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction, Richard Agretto, director of special education; and Board Members: Rosario Amato, Michele Cann, Judith Dexter, Dr. Craig Haytmanek, Irene Follweiler, Loretta Leeson, and Benjamin Tenaglia. Also in attendance were: Dr. Thomas Persing, interim superintendent; Stanley J. Majewski, Jr., assistant to the superintendent for finance and administration; Thomas Washington, assistant superintendent for human resources; Dr. Dean Donaher, director of student services; Frank Arbushites, acting director of technology; Kathleen Bast, coordinator of literacy/ELA K-12; Julie Victory, supervisor of mathematics K-12; Doris Correll, coordinator of English acquisition; and representatives of the press.

Mrs. Dexter called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. She asked for a moment of silence for all Bethlehem Area School District staff and family members losses. Her thoughts and prayers are with them during this hard time.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

1. Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem, spoke that the public has become aware of the critical state of the Bethlehem Area School District. Mr. Antalics feels the leadership is clearly at fault. He has asked Dr. Persing to dismiss all cabinet members and begin with a clean slate. He feels administration at the district schools can handle all issues.

Mrs. Dexter noted it was asked if we could begin with Agenda Item 3: PSSA Final Summary: no one objected.

PSSA FINAL SUMMARY

Mary Katona began her presentation by introducing the four Distinguished Educators (DE) working with our school district and inviting them to speak on the district's behalf.

Carolyn Paige, the newest DE assigned to the Bethlehem Area School District (BASD), began by saying, based on seven days working in BASD, she can see we have a good district. She noted the district is growing, and as a DE, part of her job is delivering services to schools. The DEs go

into failing schools and become mentors to the principals. They are trained at looking at data and helping principals see the data. They look at the staff and see where the weaknesses are. They look at curriculum alignment, making sure that what we think we are teaching we are really teaching, because sometimes we have a feeling we are teaching something that we are not teaching. So part of the DE program is to help the principals help their schools. DEs do not go into the school and run the school; that is not their job. Their job is to be there as support to the principals, mentor principals, and work with leadership teams to help the schools do better. They come from a wide variety of experiences. Generally, most have been administrators, assistant principals, principals or administrative assistance where they worked in schools over a very long period of time. They look for the positives and build on the negatives to help those negatives become positives. Although Dr. Paige had only been in two BASD schools, she has met with principals and with a couple of leadership teams, and she is confident we can move the district forward. She said, “Sometimes in conversations you hear people say it is those ELL students, it is those special education students. The truth of the matter is all across the country there are ELL students, there are special education students and we are charged with seeing to it that they get an adequate education and I hope that we do exactly that.”

John Stoudt, a DE assigned to the Bethlehem Area School District also spoke. He said, “It is good to be back in Bethlehem. I was away for a year for a couple of reasons. Just as a little bit of a background I spent 38 years in public education. This is my fourth year as a DE: I spent 2 years here, 1 year in Chester, and I have been reassigned back to Bethlehem.” He explained that in any district where DEs have been assigned or any district where children are being educated the effort is about maximizing the academic potential of every child – all children, which is different than the way it was a number of years ago when kids were leaving school or when kids were not doing well in school. He said it is our charge as educators to maximize the academic potential in every child. That it is about deciding what we want all children to learn, knowing when they learned it, and knowing what to do about it if they haven’t. That means that every district’s curriculum in all subjects should align with either the state or national standards and that all instructional materials should be carefully selected so that they align with the district’s curriculum. He also talked about the need for appropriate professional development in the district, which builds the capacity of the teachers to do the kinds of things they need to do with the children in this standards aligned system. That the assessments that the district uses whether they be a benchmark assessment or they be a classroom assessment aligns with the things that have been defined as those things you want to endure. All children must learn, suggests that we must do business differently as educators. The research shows that a lot of kids just need a little bit more time to learn the materials. That through the regular pace they might not be getting it but being provided with a little enrichment time, a little remedial time, whatever it maybe that you can provide them with, they are going to get it. The teachers have to have the skill set in order to deliver vary academic needs of the children in their care. Dr. Stoudt also noted another difference today in education is the building leaders had become or need to become instructional leaders. That is different than just managing a building. He said this is an area of focus for the DEs— trying to build the capacity of the building leaders into becoming instructional leaders; to walk into a classroom, to know what to look for, and whether the right kinds of things are happening with the kids. Not necessarily to do it for 45 minutes to an hour but in 5 minutes to walk-in and know they are observing the right kind of instruction, and whether they are seeing

kids learn. He said this is about the shift in how schools do business. We are seeing a lot of these things mentioned occurring in Bethlehem.

Midge Barilla, a DE assigned to the Bethlehem Area School District also spoke, noting it is her fourth year working in BASD. She is from the Lehigh Valley so she has been familiar with Bethlehem. She focused on the successes and positives the DEs have seen within the schools in the district. She made general statements rather than highlighting specific schools so her statements referenced things that are happening in at least one school and in some cases many of them are happening in almost all the schools in which the DEs have been engaged. Dr. Barilla has worked primarily with schools that have not made Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP). She has also been an executive coach to the principals who need someone to bounce ideas off of or to share their thoughts with so she works from time to time with buildings across the district that have made AYP and are quite successful. She said she wanted to share success stories with which Board members are probably aware, but sometimes it helps to hear them one more time to affirm that you are doing some really good things.

The first thing is the collaboration between the two high school department chairs. On a monthly basis the department chairs from both buildings meet together as a unified team and share focal points determined by the two building principals. The building principals share the leadership of that team. It is very effective and has really encouraged communication curricularly across the district between the two schools. Data has become a very important point for all principals and all principals focus all conversations on data. Not only Pennsylvania of System School Assessment (PSSA) data but other data they may be collecting in their schools. The Getting Results or school improvement plans are being required at all buildings, and all buildings are actively engaged in developing these plans. Dr. Barilla has been working with a lot of the principals in getting their plans developed. Again, they are focusing on data to build these plans, to build on success they have had because one of the greatest things they can do is build on their strengths. Professional development on both the building level and district level is being driven by strengths and concerns as identified by the data. Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) which have been mentioned quite a bit in the past couple years are in several of the schools. What each of the principals has done has tailored the designed of the PLC's to the needs of their school and Dr. Barilla commended them for that. They have looked at the research and they haven't taken a one size fits all model. They have said for our building this is what we need, for our structure this is what need, and we are going to grow with this. Their support nets, tutoring sessions before school, after school, extended classes are being offered for students who may need additional support. Each building again, has established a process that works for them so you are not going to see a one size fits all across the district, but what you are going to see is that the concern of focus on the needs of all kids. The Learning Walks that are coordinated by the curriculum office focus on the literacy happening in all the buildings. The walkthrough (this walkthrough has several different names – 5 by 5, 4 by 4, management by walking around, etc.), also has principals getting into the classrooms on a regular basis for a short period of time. This does not replace supervision but it is getting principals that sense of being in the classrooms. Principals have reported the significant decrease in discipline referrals as a result of doing these walkthroughs. The final thing Dr. Barilla pointed out is how the buildings are using what is called job embedded staff development. They are building the staff building within their school day. They might be having team meetings on the middle level where they have specific team

meeting that is devoted to instructional or curricular issues. Their faculty meetings are focused on specific needs of the buildings. They are taking their time and using it wisely to create staff development programs in addition to what the district provides that is very tailored to their specific needs and interests of their particular building. This year the DEs will continue to expand these practices, build on the practices, and make them even stronger.

Tom Paternosto, a fourth DE assigned to the Bethlehem Area School District spoke, saying, “It has been a pleasure to return to Bethlehem. I was here a couple years ago. I joined this initiative for one purpose. I taught my first class in 1964. In that time since then, 19+ years was superintendent, principal for 14 years, and a mix of other things in the middle. But all were centering on one-thing make children our highest priority. Since 1964, all the silver bullets that have come out of the federal/state government and there are so many of them we can issue at least a 10 page report from all the initiatives. If we fail to focus on making children are highest and only priority, the rest of them just disappear. So how do you do that in a school situation?” He noted the importance of finding the best teachers and the best leaders; that’s how you make children your highest priority. Dr. Paternosto spent a significant part of the last 20 years attending meetings, listening to all the people who came up with all the solutions that would change the face of public education, and the data still remains basically where it is. “If you find where it changes, you find that you have put teaching as the highest priority with children.” Dr. Paternosto put together his experiences in a little non-published piece of research called “When the Classroom Door Clicks”. It demonstrates how you can have all these events take place, you can have all the things you have just heard about and when that teacher walks in the classroom and clicks the door if it doesn’t happen there you have nothing. He said when he is told in Harrisburg that everything has to be researched-based, he says he has been conducting his own research for the last 45 years. He noted that teachers are the highest priority coupled with top leveled administrators/instructional leaders. We make these kinds of things happen through people and keeping people committed to marking the children as our highest priority.

Loretta Leeson thanked the DE’s for being here and for their honest and positive assessment of our district. She said it is very refreshing to hear from an outsider’s viewpoint.

Michele Cann had a question for Dr. Barrilla. She noted that the board is often asked to approve or disapprove of professional learning opportunities for teachers and administrators and often times have nothing to go on other than cost, location, and title. Dr. Barilla had said she was suggesting things to teachers and what would be a good professional development opportunity. Mrs. Cann asked if the board could presume that when those things are presented that they are recommended by the DEs. Dr. Barrilla explained they do not get involved in the recommendation; this goes through Mary Katona’s office. One of the guidelines as a DE is they cannot spend district money. Rather, they work with the sources the district has and build a capacity within those resources. Mrs. Katona explained most of the things that Dr. Barrilla recommends are those things that are coming through the state, such as from PaTTAN or the IU, and the cost is usually only related to mileage.

Judith Dexter thanked the DE’s for beginning the meeting and invited them to be an integral part of the work that the board does.

Mary Katona asked Dr. Barilla to present the Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment (PVAAS) portion of the PSSA Final Report, noting that she does a lot of work focusing in on the PVAAS results, which shows our students growth.

Dr. Barilla gave the board an overview of what PVAAS is all about so everyone could better understand the information that Mrs. Katona gave (PSSA #3). She offered to the board that if they would like the DE's to work with them to go through the data more intensively a workshop could be scheduled.

Dr. Barilla explained the PVAAS system is looking back and is looking forward at the students. She shared some of the reports from the PSSA #3 packet, how you read them, how you interpret them, and how they can be used for us to predict. Looking backwards, ask if the students are growing as they should grow. PVAAS brings to the table the growth the schools have made even if they didn't make AYP. This is the first year PDE had it approved by the federal government to be able to use as an indicator of making AYP.

Mary Katona continued the PSSA Final Report presentation with reviewing the information given to the board. PSSA #1: Adequate Yearly Progress Report; PSSA #2: Pennsylvania District PSSA Report; PSSA #3: PVAAS report; PSSA #4: PSSA Results and PSSA #5: BASD District PSSA Overview.

She also presented a Powerpoint on Bethlehem Area School District PSSA Results 2008-2009 Final Summary. This summary gave a review of the 2009 results. It also showed the three-year trend for schools that didn't make AYP and the status of non-AYP schools. This summary also viewed results through PVAAS and showed BASD PVAAS observations.

Mrs. Katona included notable reading/mathematics increases/decreases from academic achievement report 2008 and 2009 percentages. Mrs. Bast stated she wants to celebrate the increases in reading and address the decreases. A couple of things we are doing to address the decrease in reading this year is increasing professional development on strategic teaching, and helping teachers to identify ways to reach those particular groups on which we need to focus. Mrs. Bast has in place morning literacy meetings, and the district has expanded Read 180/System 44 used primarily by these groups of students. Mrs. Correll stated along with Mrs. Bast we have targeted areas of needs with second language learners and one of the things we have been working together with all students is the academic language. We are also doing a lot with inclusive practices. Our ESOL teachers are going into classrooms and modeling strategies that have been proven to be successful with our second language learners. The other thing is the literacy framework, having all the teachers plan together strategically, and they are specifically looking at what it is that our students need and how to reach them. Mrs. Victory addressed some of the efforts made in mathematics. We are doing formative assessments and using the formative assessments to plan for what comes next. We also have summative assessments: in grades 1-8 there are three common performance assessments; at the high school level there are common finals. She is working to make sure that teachers are following the scope and sequence, available for all grades K-8 and all high school math courses, which is aligned to the academic standards and eligible content and lays out what needs to be taught both prior to PSSA and afterward. We are working on enabling teachers to devote more time to instruction by reducing the length of

warm-ups to 5-10 minutes and watching the amount of time used to review homework so that the homework does not become the lesson for the day. Elementary and middle school special education students having been using the regular education students' mathematics curriculum and scope and sequence for several years. At the high school level, students in an inclusive setting also receive the regular education mathematics curriculum; we are continuing to work to make sure that students who are not in an inclusive setting receive the regular education curriculum as well. Mrs. Victory has also been working to have teachers trained in Reading Apprenticeship because all teachers teach reading.

Mrs. Katona, Mrs. Bast, Mrs. Correll, and Mrs. Victory reviewed the specific areas of focus, what has been working for the district and what areas need increased efforts in their summaries. They noted areas such as measurement and finding missing factors in math, and analyzing and interpreting, particularly in non-fiction, in reading.

Mrs. Leeson complimented the curriculum department on the wonderful job they did in giving a comprehensive presentation. She stated the district had their challenges but is making the turn.

Mrs. Dexter stated that she has continuously heard that the gap between honors and academic courses is still too large, and asked what we can do reduce that perception. She also invited anyone with additional questions or comments to get to the administration.

SUMMER SCHOOL REPORT – DR. DEAN DONAHER

Dr. Donaher reviewed the High School Summer School Report prepared by Michael Wagner who facilitated this program. He thanked Mr. Wagner and the high schools for a job well done.

Mrs. Leeson feels this is a wonderful and a great start to the revised high school summer school program.

Mr. Tenaglia asked about the impact the new system had on grades. Dr. Donaher replied that some students failed, but they were fewer in number than in previous years. There were also fewer students who withdrew.

Mrs. Follweiler asked Dr. Donaher if he believes the serious tone of summer school was helpful. He said he thought it was and noted that the night school program will mimic this. Mrs. Follweiler also noted a typo in two dates given in the summer school information.

ILLICK'S MILL CURRICULUM

Mrs. Dolan addressed questions with the Illick's Mill curriculum for grades 11 and 12. She explained this curriculum is aligned with the newest English curriculum that is on-line and state standards. There are some slight differences in activities and in the formative and summative assessments, as students have to produce pieces that are geared specifically to the Mill and, in some cases, must be publishable.

Irene Follweiller serves on the board for the Illick's Mill Partnership and spoke on behalf of the Illick Mill curriculum. She commended the public speaking piece of the curriculum. She also asked if the district was planning Illick's Mill curriculum in history. Mrs. Katona stated we wanted to make sure the English Illick's Mill curriculum was aligned before we moved to the history curriculum.

Mrs. Dexter found the Literature pieces selected in the curriculum exciting and thinks Mrs. Dolan did a great job. She asked if there were any objections to placing the curriculum on the agenda for the regular Board meeting. No one objected.

ESTABLISHING ADDITIONAL READING SUPPORTS

Mary Katona explained the process of the reading design from school year 2008-2009 to where it is now. Richard Agretto presented that there are funds available from IDEIA (stimulus) to be utilized to restore 3.5 reading teachers. A distribution and restoration reading support chart was provided for the board to review. We are looking to put back a .5 position at seven elementary schools that lost reading position(s). Mrs. Roeder and Mr. Smith spoke on behalf of elementary schools whose reading positions were reduced and noted their current struggles with meeting all student's needs.

Mr. Tenaglia requested a report as to what additional funding was received by the district from the June budget meeting to date in Title 1 and IDEIA (stimulus). Also, after entitlement allocations were made after the 6 FTE teachers were cut in August, (we went from 36.8 in June to 30.8 after cuts in August...then adjusted to 32.8 after entitlements were added). He asked how that occurred and who they were. He asked if the amount of reading support teachers (36.8) reflect what the budget showed in June, and whether 32.8 reflects what is currently in the budget after entitlements were added and after 6 FTE's were cut.

Mr. Washington was asked to check on staffing information.

Answers to these questions and continued discussion will be at the Board Finance Committee Meeting next week.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

1. Mr. Stephen Antalics, 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem, spoke regarding information he heard on the national public radio that 30 or more students in a class is unacceptable and will pull the test scores down. He would like information on the district class sizes, which Mr. Washington will provide for him. He also suggested, after interviewing high school students that the administration should greet students on the way into school in order to get to know their students. Mr. Washington assured Mr. Antalics this is currently happening at most schools.
2. Mrs. Reinert, 5206 Cheryl Drive, Bethlehem, spoke regarding the importance of restoring the reading positions in the schools today. She expressed her concern about test scores dropping without the reading positions in place.

OPEN FORUM

1. Mrs. Leeson thanked the board members for coming to the Liberty High School PSSA celebration. She also stated somewhere along the way we need to set aside money for these celebrations. She stated we have money for sport celebrations and need to do the same for academic celebrations.
2. Mrs. Dexter would like to see in the near future a program or agenda for college and planning. She also would like information presented on what we are doing for students who were in the accelerated math program in 6th grade and did not move up to algebra 1 in 7th grade. She has heard that they are bored during class.
3. Mrs. Dexter inquired about the Model United Nation program that was cut, and asked if there is a possibility of having a volunteer advisor in March. It is a two-day event. She knows of one or two Lehigh professors who would volunteer to be the advisor, but Mrs. Dexter was not sure if this would become a union issue.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.

Minutes prepared by: Amy Howey