



**BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE
MEETING MINUTES
MONDAY, APRIL 11, 2011**

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, April 11, 2011, in the Dining Room at the Education Center. The following Board Members were in attendance: Rosario Amato, William Burkhardt, Michele Cann, Michael Faccinetto, Irene Follweiler, Loretta Leeson, Eugene McKeon, Aurea Ortiz, and Benjamin Tenaglia. Also in attendance were Dr. Joseph Roy, superintendent of schools; Dr. Jack Silva, assistant superintendent for education; Dr. Dean Donaher, acting director of human resources; Richard Agretto, director of special education; Frank Arbushites, director of technology; Janet Tate, supervisor of grants; Vivian Robledo-Shorey, supervisor of minority affairs and governmental programs; principals, teachers, and representatives of the press.

Director Burkhardt called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

1. Mr. Stephen Antalics – 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem
Mr. Antalics shared information he heard about the elimination of preschool classes due to lack of government funding. He said the children were enrolled in alternate childcare programs. He noted the students who performed poorly were the ones from the lower income families because the quality of their chosen programs was inferior. He commented that it was detrimental to eliminate preschool education because it prepared the students for elementary school and beyond.

2. Mrs. JoAnn Durante – Principal – Liberty High School, Bethlehem
Mrs. Durante spoke of decreasing enrollment within the past two years and also noted the elimination of study hall blocks in the master scheduling. She said their mission statement was being adversely affected because of the governor's statement related to the lack of funding. She commented about the consideration of a delayed start or early dismissal of students from the school with the proposed scheduling. She expressed concern about the dual enrollment program and if it were eliminated, the alternative option would be concurrent enrollment, which required parents to pay for the courses.

Mrs. Durante also commented about the lunch privilege being eliminated and reflected that the early dismissal of students would result in the same problems they experienced when the students were allowed to participate in the lunch privilege option. Mrs. Durante noted that if study halls were increased, it would also increase their student referrals. She said the AP courses and core subjects were not affected but the students that were in most need would be the most affected. Part of their mission was to restore the school district to the “glory days,” which were built on great bands, choirs, theater programs, co-curricular state and national competitions in science, business and other areas. She expressed concern that seniors would not be present to participate in the club or co-curricular activities nor be present for the excellent role models so they could finish their vision at Liberty High School which was “success for all students.” She was concerned about the financially challenged students at both pre-kindergarten and high school levels. She was concerned that the resulting fall-out will be grander than originally thought. She said the children were our future and it began at the pre-kindergarten program and ended at the high school level. Mrs. Durante said the allowable 32 credits made the student a different person and they needed the offered electives to assist them in making a decision about their future field of study.

Director Amato reviewed the amount of credits required for graduation and inquired if a student could enter college one semester earlier in consideration of meeting the necessary requirements early.

Mrs. Durante replied that the students were allowed to take 32 credits but 26 credits were required for graduation with 25 with community service. She agreed that it was possible to meet the requirements early and start college because it was done in the past.

Director Amato commented that it would most likely take a few years for the process to be organized but he thought it was possible. He noted that early entry into college should be researched in the consideration of the district’s current financial situation.

Mrs. Durante replied that it was Dr. Silva’s role to review Mr. Amato’s suggestion.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM CHANGE RESOLUTION

Dr. Roy introduced the potential program changes and the associated legal review of said changes. He explained that the Pennsylvania Department of Education had to approve of the changes by receiving a letter from the superintendent requesting approval of the furloughs and also a copy of a board resolution approving program changes or curtailments. The administration would be asking for the board’s endorsement of the resolution so it could be submitted to PDE.

Dr. Silva stated the program changes were also presented at the March 24 and April 7 Budget Workshops. He explained that the board had the discretion to make subsequent resolutions with regard to program changes.

Dr. Silva noted the need to provide greater support to elementary students in Grades 1 and 2 because of the proposed reduction in kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs. Their focus was to shield program reductions in those core areas as much as possible. He reviewed the pre-kindergarten program which would relocate students into elementary school buildings. The change would result in a decrease of classrooms in the 2011-2012 year from 15 to 4-5 classrooms. He also reviewed the reduction in elementary school classrooms due to a decline in enrollment which would result in a furlough of ten teachers. Dr. Silva further explained the changes at the middle school level with the present interdisciplinary integrated team-based scheduling moving to a more content area focus of instruction. He noted the middle school principals were in consultation with Dr. George White, who was very knowledgeable in middle school scheduling.

Dr. Silva reviewed the decision to require a minimum of a 20 student enrollment in high school electives which would eliminate the less popular electives. They would continue to encourage students to take other off-campus courses offered through dual-enrollment, service learning, or early entry into college studies during their senior year. The proposal would result in the furlough of approximately 18 to 20 teachers.

Dr. Silva noted the planned overall district reduction of 3 district guidance counselors which permitted them to stay within the preferred student/counselor ratio. He also reviewed teacher coaching positions within the district who worked with small groups of students. The plan was to re-deploy the positions in a manner by which they could serve a greater number of students. They would also need to make a better effort to promote the district's professional development programs and support staff development in lieu of the technology, math, and literacy coaching. The change would result in the furlough of approximately 5 teachers.

Dr. Silva pointed out the significant decline in the enrollment of ESOL students within the last three years which would result in a reduction of 3 teachers.

Director Amato inquired about the pre-kindergarten program.

Dr. Silva explained the reduction of the SPARK classes which would result in their relocation to elementary schools or an alternate location. He said the SPARK building would be closed.

Director Leeson inquired about the guidance counselor student ratio at the high school level.

Dr. Silva replied there was a ratio of 425:1 at the elementary, 307:1 at the middle school, and 245:1 at the high school level. The overall district ratio was approximately 309:1. If a reduction was made at the high school level the ratio would be 290:1.

Dr Roy pointed out that the goal was to reduce the guidance counselors district-wide by 3 counselors.

Director Leeson emphasized the need for every student to have access to a guidance counselor at the high school level.

Director McKeon inquired about the status of full-day kindergarten classes.

Dr. Roy stated that the present 12 full-day kindergartens would be converted to half-day programs.

Director McKeon asked about the disposition of students in the ESOL Program in consideration of teacher reductions. He inquired about the point of full entry into the regular classroom environment.

Dr. Silva explained that it varied based upon the starting level of the student. If a student entered the system at an intermediate level, they could transition quickly.

Director Leeson inquired if they would be addressing transportation.

Dr. Roy and Dr. Silva replied that they were focusing on curriculum only which would impact professional staff.

Director Leeson asked about the honors elective offerings with regard to sequencing of courses. She pointed out there were alternative methods for students to take challenging coursework such as dual enrollment

Dr. Silva replied that staffing the required courses related to scope and sequence would be the priority. He also mentioned the consideration of combining a Level 4 and 5 course so it could still be offered.

Director Burkhardt inquired if they would be telling students they were not permitted to take a full load of courses.

Dr. Silva said it would be the decision of the administration. The resolution, as written, does not require “not scheduling” students in the classes but it allowed flexibility. The board would have the ability to manage the level at which the students participated in the elective system.

Dr. Roy pointed out that the early dismissal/late arrival process was not actually part of the program change summary.

Dr. Burkhardt expressed concern about returning to massive study halls in the high schools. He also thought there might be issues related to transportation for students on a delayed schedule.

Director Follweiler stated that she viewed the minimum count of 20 students for elective courses might cause certain students to resort to study halls.

Dr. Silva commented that they would encourage students to participate in dual enrollment and service learning opportunities. He also noted there would be increased numbers in the existing elective courses. He said it would be dependent on the type of course offered.

Director Follweiler supported having a larger class size for certain electives because it enabled more conversation among students, which in turn offered a greater opportunity for learning.

Director Burkhardt the amount of potential course loss with teacher cuts. He hoped it wouldn't be an issue that a student couldn't take a certain course because there was not room.

Director Follweiler suggested offering certain courses during alternative years.

Director Amato reviewed the concern about students taking a study hall if they could not gain entry into an elective. He suggested increasing the class size because the students would need to deal with the same environment when they entered college.

Dr. Silva emphasized that the course offerings involved had a 20 student minimum to be offered and they had the option of larger class sizes.

Dr. Roy pointed out the district's goal was to not increase class sizes in the core areas. If the elective class sizes increased, the trade-off would be the ability to maintain core class size.

Director Leeson asked about course offerings for next year.

Dr. Silva reviewed some of the elective courses which would no longer be offered. He said some courses would be combined such as Introduction to Computer Programming and Introduction to Computer Programming F. Another course combination would be Intermediate and Advanced Accounting in addition to Flash I and Flash II, which were technology courses.

Director Leeson asked about the specific science classes that would not be offered.

Dr. Silva stated that AP Chemistry and AP Physics would not be offered because of low enrollment.

Director Burkhardt inquired about the balance of course offerings at both high schools.

Director Leeson pointed out the significant change to the science offerings with the elimination of AP Physics.

Dr. Silva replied the decision was based entirely on enrollment.

Director Leeson reviewed that Liberty High School would not be offering the "extra" AP Physics classes but will be offering a general AP Physics class. She asked about the offering of AP Physics at Freedom High School.

Dr. Silva reviewed that AP Physics – C and AP Physics – C extension would not be offered.

Kim Harper said the first level of AP Physics would be offered in addition to honors physics. Director Leeson expressed concern about the science course offerings for college bound students having a focus on engineering.

Director Cann inquired about the thematic teams at Nitschmann and East Hills Middle Schools.

Dr. Silva said they would not be running thematic teams at the middle school level during 2011-2012.

Dr. Roy commented that they were still working with Dr. White on the scheduling and added that there was a better likelihood of keeping a two-person team but they would no longer have the four-person teaming. It was still under consideration.

Director Burkhardt inquired about the reduction of elementary teachers due to a decline in enrollment. He asked about the effect of the student-teacher ratio.

Dr. Silva said the human resources office was in the process of evaluating the number and location of students. He reviewed there was a 206 elementary student decline in enrollment therefore 10 teachers appeared to be a reasonable number.

Dr. Roy noted that when they moved all the grade levels up across the buildings, there was a potential saving of 15 positions, but to permit flexibility, the decision arrived at 10 positions.

Director Leeson inquired if 9th grade teaming would continue.

Dr. Silva commented that the 9th grade teaming process was more of a clustered system which is not the same type of teaming as the traditional middle school teaming approach.

Director Burkhardt inquired about the support of the board on the agenda item.

Director Leeson said she did not support the high school early dismissal and late arrival process with students.

Director Cann agreed with Director Leeson but she did not think it was included in the present recommendation.

The remaining members of the board agreed upon moving forward with the recommendation.

BENCHMARK ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE UPDATE

Dr. Silva reviewed the current 4Sight Assessment System. He thought there should be a more efficient system for student assessment. He commented about the balance of instructional time versus assessment time. He said they needed to consolidate and become more efficient.

Dr. Silva pointed out there were various assessment tools used in the district and there was a need to have one reliable system agreed upon by the committee. He emphasized the need to give the teachers more instructional time. He commented that improved student achievement was a direct consequence of good teaching and the more good teaching was offered, the greater the student achievement. He said the assessment system should be done in an efficient manner which is valid, provides a quick turnaround with information, and assists the teacher with instructional guidance once they receive the information. He did not think the current 4Sight Assessment warranted the amount of time and expense involved. Dr. Silva reviewed the scheduling of the benchmark assessments during the school year and believed it took valuable teaching time away from the students and teachers. He stated there was a need to consolidate and streamline the assessment system in addition to discontinuing the assessment of students at the high school level already considered proficient or advanced. He reviewed that the Benchmark Assessment Committee was in the process of evaluating Study Island and Acuity for future efficient student benchmark assessment.

Director Follweiler inquired about the comparison of costs to the present assessment system.

Dr. Silva thought there would be an increased cost to the new assessment but it was important to have one reliable resource for the entire district.

Director Follweiler asked for follow-up communication with regard to the cost associated with the system. She emphasized the need for all schools in the district to utilize the same assessment system.

Director Leeson addressed the assessment of computation skills and the importance to student success. She suggested the reinstatement of a checkpoint in the system to ensure that student skills were rock solid.

Agenda Items for April 11, 2011, Regular Board Meeting

Director Burkhardt received board approval to list the following agenda items for the April 18, 2011 Regular Board Meeting:

- A. Approval of High School Summer School Program**

- B. Educational Program Change Resolution**

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

- 1. Ms. Jolene Vitalos – President of Bethlehem Education Association**
Ms. Vitalos expressed gratitude to Dr. Silva, on behalf of the district's teachers, for his efforts to address the benchmark assessment system.

OPEN FORUM

Director Leeson inquired about the Foss Kits for the Science Program and the expense associated with the program. She asked Dr. Silva to review the cost of the elementary school kits.

Dr. Silva replied that he was under the impression that the elementary science supplies associated with the Foss system was funded by stimulus funds. He agreed to review the hands-on science program and associated costs in the near future.

Director Leeson said she liked hands-on science at the elementary level but noted it was time consuming so content might be limited. She thought it could be an area to address for cost containment as they moved forward.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:06 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:

Donna L. Wenz
Confidential Secretary – Department of Educational Programs