



BOARD CURRICULUM COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES MONDAY, AUGUST 1, 2011

Members of the Board Curriculum Committee met on Monday, August 1, 2011, in the Dining Room at the Education Center. The following Board Members were in attendance: Rosario Amato, William Burkhardt, Michele Cann, Michael Faccinetto, Loretta Leeson, and Benjamin Tenaglia. Absent: Irene Follweiler, Eugene McKeon and Aurea Ortiz. Also in attendance were: Dr. Joseph Roy, superintendent of schools; Dr. Jack Silva, assistant superintendent for education; Frank Arbushites, director of technology; Dr. Dean Donaher, director of student services; Richard Agretto, director of special education; Janet Tate, supervisor of grants; Vivian Robledo-Shorey, supervisor of minority affairs; principals, teachers, and representatives of the press.

Director Burkhardt called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

1. Mr. Stephen Antalics – 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem
Mr. Antalics commented on a matter recently discussed on NPR radio regarding teacher qualifications in Pennsylvania. He asked if the PSSA student scores within the district are evaluated with respect to the efficiency of their teacher.

Director Burkhardt replied that the question would be addressed later in the meeting.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT RESULTS – Executive Summary: Stretch Learning – 2011 Advanced Placement Scores

Dr. Silva reviewed the key concepts associated with advanced placement courses. He explained the relationship of student test scores to college credit, noting that it gave students the opportunity to advance into their college careers while still in high school. He evaluated Freedom and Liberty High Schools overall progress with the course offerings. He noted there was stronger equity (more students taking AP courses) at Liberty High School whereas there was stronger excellence (students with scores of 3, 4, or 5) at Freedom High School. His goal was to increase the equity/excellence index in the overall high school population. He stated that a combination of the two areas would be the ideal district achievement.

Dr. Silva pointed out the impressive jump in Grade 10 at both schools. He said it was an important discovery especially if the students continued with the coursework for the duration of their high school career. He emphasized the need for continuous recruiting of students, removing obstacles for their success, and encouraging test taking and test success. Dr. Silva announced a 34 percent increase in the number of students enrolled in AP courses in the approaching school year. He noted that he would be meeting with the principals and department chairpersons on a regular basis to discuss guideposts with regard to recruitment, interventions, and to address best practices in AP instruction. He reflected on the recent professional development completed by instructors.

Dr. Roy commented that the equity and excellence AP measure was newly introduced within the last few years. He felt the equity measure was very important as a main data point as a measure of school success. He pointed out that U.S. News used it as a main assessment when profiling high schools. He stated the measure involved college level work against a rigorous examination including the number of students sitting for and scoring well in the assessment.

Director Burkhardt noted that AP coursework was the only national stretch standard. He added that every state had separate standards with regard to No Child Left Behind.

Director Leeson commented that the coursework was an excellent transition into college. She complimented the analysis presented by Dr. Silva. She inquired about AP History and AP Calculus. She expressed the need for students to be exposed to AP Calculus if they were interested in engineering. She said the course was a gateway to technological careers. She said many colleges expected completion of the course before entry. She wanted the math program to return to a more successful status. She also expressed concern about the AP History course.

Dr. Silva commented about the broader participation in the history course which might tend to dampen the average score because of the introduction of more marginal students into the test pool. He said he wanted to set average score targets for each course with evidence of annual improvement.

Director Leeson suggested reviewing the most popular AP courses, which were readily accepted by colleges and communicate the information to the students. She expressed the need for significant improvement on the AP examination scores.

PRELIMINARY PSSA RESULTS

Dr. Silva reviewed the preliminary PSSA results for the district which determined the school district's adequate yearly progress (AYP). He reviewed the three areas which contributed to AYP which included attendance and graduation rate, a 95 percent or greater participation in the PSSA, and performance and proficiency, which was the biggest challenge for the district. He explained that the "bar" went up this year with regard to expected student performance. He added that it would continue to rise in subsequent years until the target of 100 percent is achieved in 2014.

Dr. Silva pointed out that federal legislators have been looking at the reauthorization of NCLB to see if there is an alternative to meeting the benchmarks and rather moving towards a growth model of having the same students show incremental growth. He thought it would be a better scale for NCLB if they added value every year to the same students.

Dr. Silva provided a breakdown of subgroups existing in each school which affected the outcome of student scores. He said the separate populations at each school must also meet proficiency targets such as Latino, IEP, and economically disadvantaged students. He emphasized the need as a district to do everything possible to achieve success within both the aggregate and subgroups.

Dr. Silva noted that Marvine and Lincoln Elementary Schools achieved the necessary targets and therefore were no longer on the sanctioned list. He reviewed the two schools that did not meet AYP were Donegan and Fountain Hill Elementary Schools. Fountain Hill Elementary met 20 out of 23 targets and moved into the corrective action status. Donegan Elementary met 20 out of 21 targets with their IEP reading group narrowly missing the target. Dr. Silva pointed out that as a whole; the Bethlehem Area School District Elementary Schools met 30 out of 32 targets. The two targets not met were the reading and math achievement of the IEP subgroup which therefore was classified as a warning status.

Dr. Silva reviewed the middle school results. Nitschmann met all targets. Northeast was very close but did not meet their target in the IEP math subgroup. East Hills had a challenge with their IEP reading subgroup. He noted that Broughal met 24 out of 29 targets but were challenged with the IEP subgroup in math and reading, the Latino subgroup in math and reading, and the economically disadvantaged students in math. Overall, 30 of 32 targets at the middle level were met with the exception of IEP math and reading.

Dr. Silva stated the high school PSSA performance was very similar to the previous year with Freedom High School meeting 20 out of 25 targets. The challenges included all reading, IEP students, African American math and reading subgroups. Liberty High School met 18 out of 26 targets. All three spans did not meet the necessary target; therefore the district was placed in warning status.

Dr. Silva said the results were somewhat disappointing, but he understood that many factors contributed to the scores. He emphasized that he did not want the message of the presentation to place blame on the IEP students. He knew they needed to have a specific plan and target for IEP core instruction, but the district also needed to live up to the law in terms of No Child Left Behind and focus on all students. He also provided a longitudinal history of previous results which revealed they were nowhere near the span of 2003-2007 when the district was in District Improvement II, Corrective Action, and Corrective Action I.

He discussed the Getting Results – School Improvement Model template and the amount of work involved in the process. He reflected that Marvine and Lincoln Elementary Schools recently had program plans approved, and at the present time, they were off the list. He explained how certain schools contributed to the district IEP pool by having their IEP students do well, even if there are only a few students in their building.

Dr. Silva believed they should have shorter, more specific, and tightly focused plans for every school related to the district's AYP status. He stated the principals will place more attention on the supervision of teachers including the timely use of data in terms of benchmarking assessments and overall instructional strategies which would lead to better learning. He also pointed out the significant gains acquired by students utilizing READ 180 which in turn will contribute to positive AYP results. Dr. Silva concluded by stating he wanted to see a 22-school approach to adequate yearly progress.

Director Cann reviewed the necessary target requirements at all grade levels. She asked about the target requirements for the subgroups.

Dr. Silva noted that it was more difficult for schools with multiple subgroups to achieve AYP status.

Director Leeson commented that she noted a drop in score results from last year's Grade 4 to this year's Grade 5. She noted it was relatively the same cohort. She thought there was a need to evaluate those Grade 5 students and what could be done as a district with regard to that particular trend.

Dr. Silva explained that PVAAS provides an assistive statistical measurement which showed the progress of an individual student over successive PSSAs and their continuous growth. He noted the results would be forthcoming in the fall.

Director Leeson also commented on the high school results. She said she didn't expect immediate plans but she thought there was a need for cohesive, well developed plans to move the district forward and address a proper reflection on the community.

Dr. Roy pointed out that in observing the Grade 3 to Grade 4 cohort, one would see the percentage of students at proficient may not drop significantly but if their individual growth was evaluated on PVAAS, they may have dropped. He noted that in order to get an overall impression, one should evaluate the student results from Grade 3 through Grade 5.

Dr. Silva stated there was a need to have a common notion of what rigor and success looks like by students, teachers, and parents.

Director Tenaglia commented about disparity with regard to the definition of rigor between students and teachers.

Director Burkhardt inquired with Mr. Agretto about the potential for growth with IEP students.

Mr. Agretto commented that it was a difficult balance. He explained that the teachers and administrators were working hard but they needed to work harder. He said they still had to believe that all kids want to be successful and can be successful. They needed to increase rigor and expectations and also ensure the correct interventions were provided for every student's disability such as RTII. He also supported the exposure of more students to READ 180.

Dr. Roy added that it was the growth that counted.

Mr. Agretto agreed and said that within a student's IEP, it was defined as progress monitoring.

Director Burkhardt commented that the original goal of NCLB in Pennsylvania was to meet 100 percent by 2014. He felt that it was an unrealistic goal put forth by the politicians. He said that the only group he had concern for was the special education students. He thought more districts would not be meeting AYP as time progresses.

Director Burkhardt believed that the diversity of the student population was always considered to be a strength of the district. As the required "number" continues to increase, he expressed fear that the focus would be placed on certain groups in order to place blame. He thought it was a travesty caused by politicians and change was needed quickly.

Mr. Agretto mentioned that in 2009-2010, each IEP student grade span met all targets in both reading and math but it was before the required target increased. He reiterated the need to target the students who were very close to proficiency levels and provide necessary interventions.

Director Burkhardt supported targeting the students and giving them extra assistance, but he expressed concern about pushing the students beyond realistic expectations.

Director Leeson said she would also be looking for a plan to address the IEP students. She noted there was a need for realistic balance between academics and extra-curricular activities for the students.

ATHLETIC REVENUE UPDATE FOR ADDITIONAL SPORTS

Dr. Silva introduced the research data compiled by Dr. Donaher detailing the anticipated additional revenue which would result by charging admission at additional stadium or gym athletic events. Dr. Silva said that it appeared the costs associated with charging admission would not yield sufficient funds to support the concept. He thought they might lose money on middle school gym events and freshman football would be very marginal. Overall the potential estimate of revenue was \$9,616. He also suggested limiting the additional fee related events to the high school.

Director Faccinetto noted the cost of adult entry to a volleyball game at \$7 per person. He thought it was a relatively high amount of money to charge for admission.

Dr. Silva thought the idea might influence families to consider purchasing family passes.

Director Leeson commented about concessions being a source of revenue rather than hiring people to collect fees for admission. She added that she was not very excited about charging for admission.

Director Amato inquired about the proceeds from a high school football game. He didn't think they earned enough money to cover the expenses associated with police coverage.

The Board of Directors in attendance agreed that it was not a worthwhile consideration to charge admission at the middle school football, basketball, and volleyball contests as well as high school volleyball, soccer, and field hockey.

INFORMATION ITEMS

A. Conference Attendance

Dr. Silva spoke of the furlough of a teacher from Liberty High School who was scheduled to teach the Advanced Placement Environmental Science course. As a result it was determined that Mr. Theodore Schafer would teach the new course. In consideration of this new course offering, board approval was requested and granted for Mr. Schafer to attend a training session at Middlesex County Community College in New Jersey.

B. Gateway To College

Dr. Silva provided an overview of a grant supported opportunity involving an agreement between the community college, public school systems, and students. Student drop-outs had the opportunity to enroll as a community college student and gradually gain back credits toward a high school diploma as well as a start towards a college degree. He pointed out that Janet Tate and Vivian Robledo-Shorey had been working closely with representatives from Northampton Community College. He explained that it was strictly a “pass-through” expense for the district because the students remained within the district’s membership. The community college creates a cohort involved in special classes along with a specific advisor to meet the needs of the new students.

Director Leeson commented positively about the past students who participated in the program. She pointed out the percentage of students who experienced success through the program was extraordinarily high. She agreed with Dr. Silva in that the program was a nice partnership with the community college.

Director Burkhardt stated that when he was a high school principal, it was not uncommon for him to meet with a senior who was unhappy in school. He recalled advising those students to bring forth evidence of college studies at the community college and he would grant them high school credit for the work. He said the students followed up appropriately.

COURTESY OF THE FLOOR

1. Mr. Stephen Antalics – 737 Ridge Street, Bethlehem
Mr. Antalics addressed the number of suicides associated with gay teens who were bullied within the school environment. He noted that there was a lack of policy in many districts with regard to the openness of gay students. He inquired if there was a formal policy associated with the district and also suggested sensitivity training for students with regard to equality.

Mr. Antalics also mentioned a concern about terrorism and the lack of student ability to speak a decent sentence in English after graduation. He suggested a speech course as a mandate for all students.

Director Burkhardt explained there was a gay-straight alliance existing in both high schools which offered equal student rights and platforms. He added that they had the privilege to use the public address system as often as any other group in the building. He also believed that awareness was discussed during Grade 9 and 10 health classes.

Dr. Silva said he didn't believe there was a specific separate policy addressing bullying prevention for gay students. He said that bullying prevention was ingrained in the curriculum throughout different parts of the scope and sequence of courses and through advocacy groups, student groups, and "No Place For Hate" campaigns throughout the high school system.

Mr. Antalics asked if a student would feel comfortable "coming out" in this district.

Director Burkhardt stated he thought, by his own personal observations, that many openly gay students had no problem at all with the interaction of the large school community.

OPEN FORUM

Dr. Roy commented on Mr. Antalics' earlier comments and inquiry with regard to student test performance and teacher evaluations. He stated that the district did not have a policy but he believed the state was in the process of formulating a state-wide teacher system which would include some performance measurement.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:01 p.m.

Minutes prepared by:

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