

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
TUESDAY, OCTOBER 14, 2008**

The monthly workshop of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street, Bristol, RI, on Tuesday, October 14, 2008. The Chairperson, William A. Estrella, Jr, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:12 PM.

Present: William A. Estrella, Jr., Marjorie J. McBride, Paul Silva, William M. O'Dell, Paul E. Brule, David L. Dugan, Karen A. Lynch and John P. Saviano; and Edward P. Mara, Superintendent; Melinda L. Thies, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; and Jane F. Correia, Director of Administration and Finance

Absent: Diana B. Campbell

OPENING BUSINESS

All present were invited to join in the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Mr. Estrella asked everyone to remain standing in recognition of the passing of Fred Elias, an architect with Prout, Robert and Elias, who has worked with the District on a number of projects, and for Cheryl Rodrigues, who had supported the District for many years as a

teacher assistant and secretary to the Building Committee.

Announcements

Mr. Estrella announced that in addition to the regularly scheduled School Committee Meeting on October 27, the Organizational Meeting, where operation is transferred to the next School Committee, will be held on Monday, November 10; at this time the swearing in of the new members and the election of officers will take place. The November Workshop will be held on November 17.

GRADUATION RATE

Dr. Mara reported that the unofficial graduation rate for 2007-2008 is 83%. This has been consistent for a few years now. Dr. Mara pleaded with parents not to sign their students out of school, because there are very few opportunities for young people without a high school diploma.

Dr. Mara and Mrs. Thies explained that many alternate programs and supports are available to students who are at risk, including extended day programs, Mt. Hope Plus, MASH program, tutoring with recovery teachers and MY TURN, so the schools are able to customize educational programs to help every student succeed. Focus has been placed on transitioning from 5th to 6th grades and 8th to 9th grades. Mr. Saviano said the SIT team has been working feverishly on this problem and he believes the change in the start time will help

improve things; he also said research shows you can identify potential drop outs in as early as the 3rd and 4th grades. Dr. Mara responded that being aware of this, the District uses a comprehensive assessment system in grades 3, 8 and 9-- NWEA, that provides teachers, parents and students specific information within 24 hours on where they are proficient and where they are deficient so adjustments can be made immediately.

Mrs. McBride said students and parents should know that if a student takes longer than four years to graduate, they get a diploma, but not a Regents diploma, which is viewed differently by colleges; also, the Committee had set a graduation rate goal of 90% and she feels we must do whatever it takes to reach that goal. The state average is 75%.

Mr. Saviano asked if exit interviews are conducted when a student wishes to drop out. Dr. Mara confirmed that the Guidance Director is diligent in this regard and some students have actually changed their minds in the process.

Mrs. Thies explained that the high school is building a culture within the community, educating parents and students on the importance of a diploma and is developing flexibility in providing instruction and a connectedness for students to apply classroom instruction to the outside world. Mr. Estrella feels the District is trying to respond in every way possible; there is no excuse for a student not to graduate.

Mr. Saviano said Mr. Murgio created a very effective program of bussing freshmen to meet with 8th graders and pairing them up so that when the 8th graders arrive at Mt. Hope, they have a “buddy.” Also, there are Roger Williams University students mentoring our juniors and seniors to encourage college entrance.

Dr. Mara and Mrs. Thies explained that the graduation rate is computed by a process starting with the number of 9th graders; students who move out of district and do not re-enroll elsewhere, or are not home-schooled, are counted as a dropout. Mr. Estrella asked that the Superintendent keep the Committee apprised of the graduation rate and put together a list of programs available for at risk students.

SUPERINTENDENT’S ISSUES AND UPDATES

Dr. Mara reported no burning issues. NECAP assessments are underway and will be the focus for the next two to three weeks; students have been diligent and are serious about the test-taking. Mrs. Thies is working on the math curriculum and science will be addressed next; they have already begun meeting with the Middle and High School Science Department Heads. Mrs. Lynch said she was instructed by her child’s teacher to make sure the students have “scrambled eggs and pancakes” every morning; she has concerns about the time taken away from classroom instruction for testing. Dr. Mara and Mrs. Thies explained that NECAP testing is mandated, and

the NWEA testing done by the choice of the District, takes about one hour for math and one hour for science, and the live data generated from this testing is well worth the minimal time investment. Mr. Estrella reiterated to parents the importance of staying involved with their students' schools.

CHAIRPERSON'S INITIATIVES

Change in Enabling Act

Mr. Estrella reviewed the process for changing the enabling legislation as outlined by the District Solicitor: 1) Draft the proposed amendment; 2) Pass a resolution (with explanation for changes) to be forwarded to both towns with the proposed legislation; 3) Ask both towns for their support; and 4) If support is given, forward to local legislator for introduction and commence with voting process. Mrs. McBride reminded the public that this cannot happen without their vote and she encouraged everyone to attend discussion sessions.

Mr. Estrella requested the authority of the School Committee, without objection, for him and the District Solicitor to draft a resolution for a change in the enabling act for the transportation of elementary students across town lines. There was no objection.

Population Count and NESDEC Report

Dr. Mara reported enrollment at 3402, with 1125 at the high school,

and 789 at the middle school. The new NESDEC form is in and being worked on.

GED and Adult Education

Dr. Mara and Mrs. Thies reported that the Adult Education Program has been temporarily suspended because of the lack of space; however, GED will begin again as an evening program to be held at the high school. Dr. Mara has a meeting with RIDE next week. Mr. Estrella had contacted Mr. Alfano of the Warren Town Council who has offered space in the Warren Senior Center on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays for daytime classes. Adult Education is funded through a grant that provides approximately \$80,000 over three years, this does not always cover costs. Although the GED program is considered beneficial it should not be used by high school students as a graduation program. The program is open to all Rhode Island residents; Newport has an Adult Ed Program and East Providence has just dropped theirs. There is a fee structure for the program and students must pay a testing fee. Mr. Saviano commented he attended the graduation of 37 GED recipients, some of them 37 and 38 years old, and was very impressed with their stories of how the program positively affected their lives.

Continuing Adult Education courses will no longer be offered; Mrs. Correia said that these classes used to be self-supporting, but once they started requiring subsidizing, it was not worth it; there are more offerings in other communities. Mrs. McBride is concerned that the

public pays taxes for the schools and does not get to use them; she would like to revisit this in another form. Dr. Mara said finding teachers is difficult as well; he is willing to run the classes again as long as they are self-sufficient; the program will require a coordinator who is aggressive. Mr. O'Dell was disturbed that he was not aware that the program was in jeopardy and discontinued. Dr. Mara said he did mention this in his reports to the School Committee.

After the meeting with RIDE next week, Dr. Mara will know when the evening GED classes will begin, and sometime after that, day classes will hopefully start. The District will reconsider the Continuing Education Program.

BUDGET/ FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. O'Dell said there is one more meeting before the new School Committee is in place; the new architect will be there to advise us on facilities maintenance. He would like to take up the Adult Education issue once the new Committee is seated.

PERSONNEL/CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS SUBCOMMITTEE

No new updates.

POLICY/COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

No new updates.

COLT ANDREWS CONSTRUCTION SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. McBride announced the grand opening is Sunday, November 2, 2:00 – 4:00 PM; the public is most welcomed.

SCHOOL AND CLASS OFFICERS TASK FORCE

Mrs. Campbell will organize this task force; she is away at this time.

OPEN FORUM

Dr. Mara reminded the public of the Kickemuit Education Foundation Walk/Run on Sunday, October 19 at 10:00 AM in Colt State Park; the Foundation provides mini-grants to the entire District, not just Kickemuit.

Mr. Estrella reminded the public to make use of our website. Dr. Mara commended Geoffrey Keegan, the Mt. Hope Senior who videotapes the meetings, for his great work in helping to change the look of our website.

ADJOURNMENT – 8:30 PM

There being no further business to discuss, Mrs. McBride, seconded by Mr. Brule, motioned to adjourn at 8:30 PM. The motion passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Paul Silva, Secretary

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