

**BRISTOL WARREN REGIONAL
SCHOOL COMMITTEE WORKSHOP
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2009**

The bi-monthly meeting of the Bristol Warren Regional School Committee was held on Monday, November 16, 2009, (rescheduled from November 9, 2009) in the cafeteria of Mt. Hope High School, 199 Chestnut Street in Bristol, RI. The Chairperson, Paul Silva, called the meeting to order at approximately 7:21 PM.

Present: Paul Silva, Chair, Paul E. Brule, Vice-Chair, William M. O'Dell, Treasurer, Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary, Denise R. Arsenault, John C. Bento, Diana B. Campbell, Karen A. Lynch and John P. Saviano; Edward P. Mara, Superintendent; Melinda L. Thies, Assistant Superintendent for Secondary Curriculum, Assessment and Instruction; Jane F. Correia, Director of Administration and Finance; and Mary N. Almeida, Director of Literacy and Title I

Absent: none

OPENING BUSINESS

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

None

PUBLIC FORUM

None

PRESENTATION – DISTRICT NECAP SCIENCE ACHIEVEMENT

Mrs. Thies thanked the Committee for the opportunity to provide information about our science curriculum. Because data can be dry Mrs. Thies asked some members at each level to share what their curriculum looks like. A partnership with the Dana Center in Austin, Texas has provided some wonderful professional development with a slightly different approach; RIDE has also partnered with the Dana Center to examine science and math content areas across the state.

Mrs. Thies presented the following data on the District's K-12 Science Program. It provides a NECAP overview, analysis of test scores by school, an overview of the science curriculum, assessment and instruction on the high school, middle school and elementary levels and two options for the next steps.

Mrs. Thies explained that this being only the second year of science testing, two points of test data does not tell us a lot, we need multiple points. Our science level has improved on the high school level; however, the data is somewhat skewed, as it is only a slice of information. There was a decrease in the “inquiry” domain across the state; the reason is not known but this does guide the curriculum.

The middle level performance was disappointing despite a great deal of effort and time spent at this level; we will return to the drawing board to retool; the entire state lost ground at this level. On the elementary level, Colt Andrews’ data is about the average for the District with 45% proficient, 45% partially proficient and 11% substantially below proficient. Guiteras had a significant increase from last year; Mrs. Whipp had made this a personal administrative goal.

Mr. Saviano asked Mrs. Thies what she does when she is unhappy with the performance of a particular school. Mrs. Thies explained she meets with the administration and the individual departments to make a concerted effort for commonality, knowing the curriculum is viable and teachers are proficient. Mr. Saviano also asked if she considered the use of rewards as incentives. Mrs. Thies believes because there are so many variables from year to year, it is about coming together as a team; a community has been created and ultimately it is the student who needs to feel connected and must want to do well. Mrs.

McBride pointed out that during the Commissioner's Community Forum the question of what is being done for students to exceed the standard came up, now the focus is how many kids we can move out of "below"; she does not want the upper level students forgotten. Mrs. Thies agrees; the connection with the Dana Center is helpful on this front.

Mrs. Thies has concerns with Hugh Cole, which dropped 6 points in the proficient level; this population has high needs with many IEP students; it is an area needing to be addressed, but again, two data points are not enough. Mrs. Lynch asked if there is concern that the same group of students is not tested over time. Mrs. Thies feels this is a valid point; two or three students can make a huge difference; the system is complex and is based more on trends. Mrs. Campbell added we are then not measuring the students, but the curriculum—are we teaching the right things and can the students learn it. Mrs. Thies said it is a measure of the content of what we are teaching.

High School

Principal Don Rebello said their curriculum, instruction and assessments are aligned with many things including the GSEs; working with the Dana Center has been invaluable. He introduced science teacher, Mr. Greg Shea, who has unique skills in interpreting GSEs for genuine integration into all aspects of his curriculum. Mr. Shea provided an overview of curriculum pathways for students; the

course of studies is designed so every student receives the core science content and beyond, creating a delivery challenge for the teachers; NECAP science standards are actually taught in the first few years of high school so the challenge is to see that the information stays fresh until the time of NECAP testing in the 11th grade. One of their missions last year was to increase the rigor and raise the bar for students. An inquiry template was created that is very generic in nature and can be used in any class or discipline, which forces critical thinking, which in turn resulted in increased ability to respond to NECAP questions in the subject area and improved work in other areas as well. He consulted NECAP about the questions; they said the exam is expressly designed so less than 1% of students achieve level 4; given that, he is comfortable with getting most of the students to level 3. Other tests and common tasks are administered throughout the year that provide practice for students and help teach them to use their thinking skills in all areas of life. Mrs. Arsenault commented that kids discover how exciting and fun science can be when they have the freedom to think, talk and experiment; she hopes this is happening at every level. With the many students excited about science at the high school, Mrs. Arsenault suggested tracking student career paths after they level the high school; the real rewards of teaching are when you see what students do beyond high school. Mr. Shea mentioned nearly 40 students were taken on a field trip to Northeastern University. Mr. Shea also showed a video clip of an assignment he gives to students, where the students must calculate many factors in order to attempt to

drop a raw egg from the top of the bleachers while blindfolded, onto his head as he walks by below; this year, one student was successful.

Mrs. McBride encouraged Mr. Shea to strive for level 4 students. Mr. Bento congratulated and thanked Mr. Shea and the entire Science Department for their dissection of the scores and forcing critical thinking within the students; he is interested in seeing how students adapt to jobs when finished with school.

Middle School

Mrs. Cynthia Sadler said their team is part of the Dana Center work being done with all levels; they look at what the elementary level is doing and try to mirror some of the things done at the high school. She introduced science teacher Mr. Bob Stringer. Mr. Stringer gave a history of the middle school science curricula from 1992 to the present. It was discovered that although the same content areas were covered by each of the science teachers, each teacher spent largely different amounts of time on any one particular topic, such as Electricity & Magnetism, Narragansett Bay, or Human Body, depending the teacher's personal area of interest. Science kits from EBEC are utilized with great success; texts as well. The team used a professional development day to do an assessment analysis. Although targets are the same, GSEs are different from state to state. Our grade spans from RIDE are 5 to 8 so they connect with the elementary schools. Common vocabulary and common assessments

were developed; last year they began end-of-year tests. In response to Mrs. Lynch, Mr. Stringer said all three science teachers use the same assessments; when they analyzed the released tasks NECAP scores, it was discovered that a large percentage of students did not answer questions or answered very badly; as a result all 8th grade students will be tutored for two weeks before the test on how to structure responses.

Mrs. Pat Wells, 6th grade science teacher, described a sample lesson where students design a density home. Teachers review the assessment target of the lesson; the workshop model of teaching is utilized and students work in groups. Previous to the lesson they find the mass of different objects; a great deal of math is necessary. The students have a scientist notebook where they record data, make observations then prove what they think is happening; Mrs. Wells feels it would be very helpful to hold the notebooks and pass them on to the next grade. Once students complete the assignment, they group as a class to discuss problems and observations; then students sign an exit pass where they must apply what they learned to a different problem.

Elementary

Colt Andrews third grade teacher, Ms. Kate Barry, talked about science instruction on the elementary level which is a challenge in that there are six grade levels, in four buildings in two towns; but in common to every classroom is the use of science kits from EBEC;

they do not have hard cover text books in the elementary grades. A number of years ago the teachers started using their budget money to develop a non-fiction leveled library that is shared so that science can be reinforced in reading activities; science excites the kids. They do vocabulary enrichment and science is integrated into math and writing. Teachers were taught at a professional development day by scientists from EBEC how to develop science notebooks which requires the use of science process skills. Mr. Saviano asked if Ms. Barry felt that students have mastered reading by the time they finish the third grade. Ms. Barry said the majority does and everyone makes progress. Mr. Saviano said that a large number of studies point to a lack of reading skills as a significant factor for 9th and 10th grade drop outs.

Mrs. Mary Almeida presented the information prepared by Mrs. Sonya Whipp, Principal of Guiteras, who was unable to attend the meeting. Guiteras is shining right now and they are trying to determine the cause. National Geographic Explorer magazines help students focus on the implementation of science at their own reading level; these have been used for the past two years. Understanding the literacy piece was important; at Guiteras each teacher teaches their own subject and there is grade collaboration. All K – 5 classes have 50 to 55 minutes walks twice a week. The focus on literacy and guided level text gave children a great deal of background knowledge. Hands on learning is reinforced through field trips to various places such as the Audubon Society. Mrs. Arsenault commented that

National Geographic is an amazing resource.

Mrs. Thies thanked the staff who came to share what they do on a daily basis and their curriculum assessments; we all benefit from sharing our knowledge. Mrs. Campbell asked if Mrs. Thies has specific goals in this area. Mrs. Thies said we are working with our East Bay partners in pooling resources and will continue to work with the Dana Center; it is so very important to move forward as a team; she has no doubt we will see success in a short period of time.

Mr. Silva thanked Mrs. Thies and the representatives from the schools for a great presentation.

BUDGET FACILITIES SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. O'Dell reported a few projects in a holding pattern on the drawing board.

POLICY/ COMMUNITY AFFAIRS SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. Campbell said the Committee will not meet in December; the next meeting is scheduled for Monday, January 4, 6:30 PM at Oliver.

PERSONNEL/ CONTRACT NEGOTIATION SUBCOMMITTEE

Mr. Saviano said the Committee is not working on anything of great

significance at this time.

FUTURE ENROLLMENT AND FACILITIES TASK FORCE

Mrs. Lynch said the next meeting is November 24, at 6:00 PM in the Oliver Administration Building Conference Room; they are wrapping things up to prepare a presentation planned for a February workshop.

CHAIRPERSON'S INITIATIVES

School Committee Goals

This is not placed on the agenda for discussion, but as a reminder that Mrs. Arsenault and Mr. Bento are collecting goal suggestions from the Committee to be placed on an agenda when ready for discussion. Those who have not submitted goals are asked to forward them to the clerk as soon as possible.

Governor's Visit on Tuesday, November 17

Dr. Mara said the Governor is due to arrive at Mt. Hope between 9:15 and 9:30 AM, so Committee members should come between 9:00 and 9:15 AM; the function will be in the auditorium.

ADJOURNMENT – 9:30 PM

MOTION: There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Brule, seconded by Mrs. McBride, motioned to adjourn at 9:30 PM. The

motion was unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Marjorie J. McBride, Secretary

/c