

**MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION**  
**BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES**  
**Work Session, October 21, 2008**

**MEMORANDA**

The Board of School Trustees of the Monroe County Community School Corporation met in work session, for which proper notice had been given, at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, October 21, 2008, at Bloomington High School South, 1965 South Walnut Street, Bloomington, Indiana.

**Board members present:** Teresa Grossi, Valerie Merriam, Jim Muehling, Lois Sabo-Skelton, and Sue Wanzer

**Board members absent:** Jeannine Butler and Vicki Streiff

**Also present:** Timothy F. Hyland, Superintendent; Peggy Chambers, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Personnel; Mary Lovejoy, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Linda Richardson, MCEA President; Janet Tupper, Administrative Assistant; John Hamilton, School Board Member candidate; Sarah Morin, *The Herald-Times* reporter; and 15 members of the Middle School Task Force: Gale Hill, Tri-North Principal; Donna Noble, Jackson Creek Principal; Paul White, Batchelor Principal; Bob Austin, Jackson Creek teacher; Terry Daugherty, Batchelor teacher; Myra Farmer, Tri-North teacher; Valerie Gliessman, Templeton teacher; Melinda Hamilton, Binford media specialist; Rita Knox, Jackson Creek teacher; Amy Martin, Batchelor teacher; Nancy Martin, Jackson Creek teacher; Lissa May, community member and parent; Lora Snow, Jackson Creek teacher; Lynne Snyder, Tri-North counselor; Karin St. John, Tri-North parent.

President of the Board, Teresa Grossi, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

**Middle School Restructuring** – Dr. Hyland had shared with members of the task force a recommendation for the group to focus upon three issues: (1) Best practices with regard to the transition of students into and out of middle school; (2) Matters of equity and parity to ensure that all MCCSC students have equal access to the district's resources; and (3) The tendency for middle school students who begin to exhibit a lack of interest in a school with an eye towards reversing that shift. Dr. Grossi reviewed this recommendation and explained that she and Dr. Hyland attended a Middle School Task Force meeting and it seemed that members were not clear on the goal. She said the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was a part of the conversation and Dr. Hyland's comment about 6<sup>th</sup> grade was that the Board had not had a conversation about moving 6<sup>th</sup> grade to middle school. She said middle school is a fit subject for study unto itself. She said they met with a few of the faculty and asked should we continue to use the task force or break into building based committees and the idea to continue to use the task force seemed appropriate.

Dr. Grossi said clearly the transition to middle school is always an issue and when they leave middle school and move to high school is another matter. She said equal parity for all students is the goal – we want to bring proper resources to every classroom and building and done in an equitable way. She said when looking at middle school students who exhibit lack of interest, perhaps we need a different kind of professional to work with those students and that would mean a shift in tax dollars. She said this is not to put a fence around conversations but to have a targeted focus.

Terry Daugherty said he did not know what the Board's 'buy-in' is on these three items. He said for the task force to move forward they need to know Board members' concerns and positions and somewhat what their vision is for this task force.

Dr. Sabo-Skelton said she has been waiting to get together to talk openly. She said she does not want to tell the task force what to do but she has some ideas. She said we talked a little about making a decision about how we are going to group the middle school students – 6-7-8 or 7-8 – but at the same time the bottom line was it depends on what is going on in the building, but we will have to make that decision at some point. She

said the issues are grouping of age levels, where will we put everybody, do we need another middle school or do we just need to redesign. She said she has talked to many people, including judges and teachers, about our middle school kids and that is where we need to address if they are having problems. She said since Aurora High School has had so much success, she is thinking about an Aurora Junior. Even with that thought, Dr. Sabo-Skelton said questions would have to be answered regarding would it be a separate school or a part of Aurora senior high school and could that same building house both levels. She said she also heard it is not good to put together grades 6-12 but would it be a difference dynamic with fewer students.

Ms. Merriam said she thinks it is up to the teachers; they know best what is going on in their classrooms. She said she does not think grade configuration makes that much difference and she does not know if it will be important. She said we have talked about the need to expand space for alternatives to expulsion and suspension and perhaps those could be kept in the loop. She said she knows that equal parity is a big issue but she does not think every school must do the same thing. She said a couple of years ago Batchelor had an experiment going on where girls and boys were separated for some classes and she read a study that both learn more in some classes if they are separated. Ms. Merriam said she hopes the task force will not overlook that possibility. She said when you come to us with suggestions we will look at it and decide based on money available, but the suggestions must come from you (the task force).

Mr. Muehling said his opinion is formed by the information he receives and the research based information that you (task force members) provide. He said information provided gave him food for thought and it sounded like 6-8 was better because of the early maturation of kids and he thinks kids are more mature at an earlier age now. He said you (the teachers and principals) are the ones who deal with those kids and that is the most difficult group of students to deal with so he relies on their opinion to form his own. He said we would like to look at the ripple effect, i.e. the Board has been asked what to do with kindergarten if all attend full day – do we move 6<sup>th</sup> grade out and would we have to realign districts. Mr. Muehling said he is not inclined to say if you have a strong opinion to go 6-8, can we do it financially. He said he is open to the task force's input and that is what he expects from the task force: 'these are our recommendations from our study and research'.

Ms. Wanzer said her vision was to continue what our high school task force had started in terms of transformation and reform of middle school. She said she thinks it is important but it is the task force's work. She said the Board can make decisions when the task force brings recommendations. She added that she looks forward to the information that the task force will bring and that will give Board members a basis for what they need to do – based on your (the task force's) research.

Dr. Grossi commended task force members for a great job doing research. She said she thinks the recommendations are valid. She said rumors were that Binford would be a middle school and that was the charge going down but the Board had not talked about that. She said they (Board members) were under the assumption that the Middle School Task Force was continuing its work. She said these three priorities are extremely important and knowing we are in the midst of a superintendent search and do not want to say, 'welcome, we are going to do realignment'. She said if realignment takes place, it would be some three years down the road. She sees this as great work for the year ahead.

Mr. Daugherty said he heard big dreams and pieces but he wanted to know if the Board had major concerns about middle school already, i.e. gut feelings about middle school. He said that he and Dr. Hill have at least three three-ring binders of middle school information. He said they want to accomplish something and not have another binder that sets on the shelf.

Dr. Grossi said we do not know property tax implications so the cost piece is huge, but looking at the three priorities there are some things that can move forward without huge cost, such as the transformation piece.

Mr. Muehling said that would be a good discussion. He assumes equity and resources would be the central issue. He said often times middle school folks feel like a stepchild because there is not as much attention focused on middle schools. He asked if there are concerns, how we solve that.

Ms. Wanzer noted that Dr. Hyland said this was not meant to be a fence around discussion; she also does not want to limit what the task force is exploring. She said you (task force members) are the folks who will have to help us (the Board) come to some decisions.

Dr. Grossi said she heard a judge say by second grade you can almost identify those kids who will struggle in school and this is a starting point. She said another question is how to keep dialogue going out in the public. She noted that high school transformation is not done but we want to keep it on the radar and receive updates.

Mr. Daugherty said they hope to have a commitment from the Board. Dr. Grossi responded that the Board will not participate in dialogue but will listen and wants the task force to come back to keep the board up-to-date. Dr. Sabo-Skelton said that she and Ms. Merriam (both ex officio members of the task force) are committed and look forward to keeping people informed. Dr. Grossi asked the task force chairs to make sure these ex officio members receive information about meeting dates.

Mr. Daugherty asked if the Board had questions. Dr. Grossi said she makes the assumption that the task force makes sure that summaries of the meetings are on the web to keep the district informed about where you are headed.

Ms. Merriam said there is such an opportunity for so many children to achieve an education through 21<sup>st</sup> Century Scholars and Early College and she hopes the task force will work on getting parents to sign up because it is crucial for a lot of these young people. She wants us to reach those parents.

Ms. Knox said we have a lot of great programs already in the middle schools and their only major limit has been resources. She said they have seen that configuration change and it does not matter but the number of students and contacts make a difference. She said there are limits and people are stretched as far as possible.

Dr. Grossi said if there are some things to come forward, it is good to get some idea of what is needed. She said it would be nice to have priorities come forward because it probably will not be possible to get all at once.

Dr. Sabo-Skelton asked what it will take financially to get what you (teachers) want. Mr. Daugherty said an incremental plan is important in an ever-changing superintendents and School Board environment. He asked if the Board is aware of current plans for the future, such as building. Mr. Muehling said he thinks this would be an ideal time to implement a plan because we are bringing in a new superintendent that we plan to keep at least six years. He said this would be the time for changes because we want an innovative superintendent who will stay for a few years. Ms. Wanzer said she does not think we can move forward without a plan. She noted that the building plan is a 20-year plan and every few years it is revised. She said at least if we have a plan it could be revised as needed.

Dr. Grossi said she is also concerned about how to keep this on the radar; even though it may be four or five years, you keep working through it. Ms. Wanzer agreed; she said this is a perfect time as we interview superintendent candidates and it is a wonderful time to give feedback.

Karin St. John said if the task force reports back to the Board in May, she would expect if recommendations do not cost money they may be realized in the fall. Dr. Hyland said he did not think this would preclude changes in the fall. He said the task force would come before the Board in May but he did not expect the

Board to take action that night; typically topics are presented to the Board for information and then Board members have an opportunity to think and seek input and act at a subsequent meeting. He said he is anxious to see how this works out; he said the task force could come back to the Board before May. Dr. Hyland said if task force members want to come back to the Board in January and tell the Board where the wind is blowing, that makes sense – and two Board members will run interference for the group.

Dr. Grossi suggested that the task force share the initial report at a public Board meeting because it is on tape and a lot of people do watch the regular meetings.

Ms. Merriam said she would like to hear how much FTE's (full time equivalencies) it would take to do looping at all three schools.

Mr. Daugherty said they are looking at how we can better service our students and he knows for years that in this school corporation some have taken their children to middle school holding their nose but these are kids and some we just cannot reach and we do not have resources to accomplish that. He said this is our shot at helping all kids and consider how we reach every kid. Ms. Wanzer said she is not sure how people work in those situations but agreed the question is how to reach every kid but if we do things differently for high school, why not middle school. Dr. Gross added, and how to connect with them.

Dr. Hyland said the Board will be having conversation and discussion about RTI (Response To Intervention) which focuses on reaching all kids. He said that may be something the task force may want to consider. He said in an effort to first articulate central office staff, everybody went to an RTI training session. He said this morning they put together a small group to present to the Board so they will know about it. He said this year we also want to begin having professional development with principals and teachers. Dr. Hyland noted that in many ways we have been trying to do that anyway; different format but not a new issue.

Mr. Muehling said he would like to move quickly on achieving equity and asked what that entails. Dr. Grossi suggested that feedback should be specific; she asked the task force to go back and define what it means because that will be important as we communicate those needs to the community. Mr. Daugherty said they would need to have a priority list. Dr. Grossi suggested that the Board also needs to know what it means – inequities: class size or different resources or number of students per counselor, etc. Ms. Merriam noted that there is never enough money but the concept of sacrifice may mean redistribution.

Ms. St. John asked is it possible that if the task force brings a recommended plan to the Board in February, when hiring decisions are made, that changes could go into effect by the next school year. Dr. Hyland said the sooner the better. He said he would ask middle school principals how much flexibility they have. Mr. Muehling said another critical fact is the State Legislature says they are taking over the General Fund that covers teachers and programs. He said we may come out ahead if we float to the top but we do not know.

Bob Austin said in the past we have seen a committee like this go to the bitter end and the School Board go in a seemingly opposite direction. He said we may not be able to get what we recommend but if we communicate along the way at least we will not end up with nothing. Dr. Grossi confirmed his understanding. She said she thinks the task force should report to the Board regularly so there are no surprises. She noted that Board members are given an opportunity to share committee reports at the end of each meeting.

The work session adjourned at 6:45 p.m.

ABSENT

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Teresa Grossi, President

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Jeannine Butler, Vice President

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Valerie Merriam, Secretary

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Susan P. Wanzer, Assistant Secretary

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Jim Muehling, Member

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Lois Sabo-Skelton, Member

ABSENT

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Vicki Streiff, Member