

MONROE COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOL CORPORATION
BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES
Work Session, February 3, 2009

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 5:00 p.m. on Tuesday, February 3, 2009, at Bloomington High School South, 1965 South Walnut Street, Bloomington, Indiana.

Board members present: Jeannine Butler, John Hamilton, Valerie Merriam, Jim Muehling, Lois Sabo-Skelton, Vicki Streiff and Sue Wanzer

Also present: Tim Hyland, Superintendent; Tim Thrasher, Comptroller; Peggy Chambers, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources and Personnel; Mary Lovejoy, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction; Mike Shipman, Director of Assessment and School Operations; Kathleen Hugo, Director of Special Education; Mike Scherer, Director of Extended Services; John Carter, Director of Planning; Karen Portle, Director of Information Services; Jan McCollough, Assistant Director of Special Education; Janet Tupper, Administrative Assistant; and Andy Graham, Reporter for *The Herald-Times*.

Principals and Assistant Principals Present: Linda Black, Arlington; Joe Childers, Binford; Mary Sudbury, Childs; Tammy Miller, Clear Creek; Karen Adams, Fairview; Trudy Litz, Fairview; Jim Rose, Grandview; Jan Williamson, Highland Park; Tommy Richardson, Lakeview; Chris Finley, Marlin; Mark Conrad, Rogers; Doug Waltz, Summit; Dave Marshall, Unionville; Janice Bizzari, University; Paul White, Batchelor; Donna Noble, Jackson Creek; Gale Hill, Tri-North; Jeff Henderson, BHS North; Joe Doyle, BHS South; Alan Veach, New Tech HS; Ed Brown, Hoosier Hills Career Center; Sherry Dick, Adult Education/Broadview Learning Center.

President of the Board, Jeannine Butler, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. She noted that this meeting was scheduled for the Board to discuss CAPE recommendations and the parent engagement survey.

CAPE Recommendations and Parent Engagement Survey

Dr. Hyland said most of the people present for this meeting were present a couple of weeks ago when Dr. Lovejoy talked about CAPE recommendations. He said the concern is about customer service and how we interact with our many customers. Dr. Butler said some things do not cost money and someone asked what happened to the CAPE recommendations, especially the survey, which prompted the Board to call this meeting. Dr. Hyland said Mr. Shipman will distribute the survey.

Dr. Butler said we are searching for information and how best can we improve what we are doing to make people in our school corporation feel more welcome. She noted that the school system's new telephone system is not customer friendly; she does not think an automated answering machine for schools is very welcoming. She asked for discussion on how we communicate effectively with parents. Several principals gave examples of how their school communicates with parents including newsletters, parent advisory council, monthly meetings, active PTO, up-to-date website that includes activities at school, open house in fall and a few other social functions during the year, greeting parents when they come to school, answering the phone personally, daily announcements to parents via a listserv, etc. Some elementary principals said they believe they have more contact with parents because of the ages of their students; however, they voiced concern regarding how difficult it is to get a majority of the parents involved. They were curious to know how many people – and their background – who attended the public input meetings sponsored by CAPE to receive recommendations. As an example, one principal said her school had a 'book give-away' and only one parent showed up.

Dr. Butler said she believes that schools are making an effort to make parents and students feel welcome and to get them involved. She said the Board is trying to find out how we can do it better. Dr. Sabo-Skelton agreed, pointing out that the Board is trying to find ways to engage parents.

Regarding telephone service, Dr. Hyland noted that the phone services at Unionville and BHS North, for example, are dramatically different and if a person was going to answer the phone at BHS North every time it rings it would be a full time job. Mr. Henderson confirmed that he could have six secretaries working full time and they could not answer every call. He said BHS North phones default to ring to the receptionist first and then if she is on the phone, it goes to voice options. He added that they now have a half-time receptionist who works in the afternoons.

In response to a question, one principal said they are taking a look at providing in-service to teachers about how to talk to parents on the phone. He reported that a number of teachers have had difficult experiences with parents on the phone when the response on the other end was unprofessional and accusatory, placing all blame for student failure on the teacher which became a distasteful experience for them. His plan is to provide professional development for teachers regarding how to call parents and why initiating those conversations for early intervention would be very beneficial. He said teachers and administrators at his school attempt to return every call within 24 hours.

Another administrator said he had been accused of not returning calls when he actually did. He noted that at high schools there is no place for parents to come to during the middle of the day. Dr. Butler said she understands time constraints but she wonders about having department open house instead of an all school open house. One principal said an all-school open house was decided that way because if you put that many parents in a building who want to turn it into a parent-teacher conference instead of an open house you will find one parent monopolizing the teacher's time. The idea of an open house is to get contact information, get to know them and afterwards they can meet individually with parents. One high school administrator agreed and further explained that parents e-mail teachers and want the school to treat their children like in kindergarteners. He said we are training them for college and to learn to be responsible young people. He said parents who are interested come to open house; he thinks that is probably why some of the underserved parents do not come in – because they know one or two parents will monopolize teacher time.

A middle school principal said one way to reach parents is via listserv and when they talk to 6th grade parents the PTO strongly suggests they sign up to be on the listserv while their child is in 6th grade so that they get to know the school. She said middle school is different in that they have to make a transition from elementary to high school. She said at open house they departmentalize teachers so that parents can get to them and her PTO divides the parent list and calls every parent and invites them to come. She said another 7th grade orientation is held two days before school starts so that by the time parents get to the open house, which is scheduled before the first grading period ends, there is a small turnout because they have already met teachers and know the school. She agreed that schools do not get parent support; she tries to emphasize having a parent inside her door to make others feel welcome and she cannot get enough parents to man that table.

Dr. Lovejoy said transition seems to be a big issue and as the survey goes out one plan is for parents to tell us what they are interested in to meet their needs. Ms. Merriam asked if word is out to parents regarding RTI (Response To Intervention). Dr. Hyland said we will have a steering committee to decide what the parameters are in MCCSC. He said when Dr. Coopman arrives we will have a good idea about what RTI means for us. Dr. Hugo added that sometimes parents have a lot of things to do and many parents are just too busy to come to the meetings. She thinks what is important is that the School Board is identifying leadership. She said in special education they do it all on an individual basis.

An elementary principal said they have so many different kinds of parents and he sees many of their parents ten times a week and they have conversations. He said he is thinking about parents who do not come to school because they do not like school, i.e. their own experiences with school have been negative. He said their school takes an opportunity at the beginning of the year and have pizza night with them as a way to reach out.

Dr. Hyland said over the past month he has observed one symbolic thing and that is how parents and visitors are greeted when they come into a building. He mentioned one school that has a large welcome sign with a message 'we are glad you are here' in bold, and an added note 'we want you to step in and sign in'. He said schools can cite statute (regarding why visitors need to sign in) or they can be warm and fuzzy about it.

Mr. Henderson noted the difference in the volume of things at the secondary level. For example, an elementary teacher will have 25-30 students/parents whereas a secondary teacher will see 125 to 150 students. He said one of their goals is that a student will be followed through in an advisory way for four years and they will communicate home with parents to make key contacts. He said it is easy to track 20 kids but there is not enough time to tract and make phone calls for 150; the problem is more difficult to manage. He talked about BHS North's plans for reform and said having an advisory teacher will help with parent communication. Dr. Sabo-Skelton said she is excited about BHS North's design plan and they will have better communication.

Mr. Muehling observed that parents and kids change every year and overall you will not see many parents in the school. He said you probably see the same 20% of parents and the only time you see some is when they are upset, but if they feel comfortable they can approach the teacher.

Mr. Hamilton expressed appreciation for those who took time to be present for this discussion. He noted that high performing schools are viewed as friendly and welcoming schools. He added that the best predictor of parent involvement in schools is the schools' programs and implementation of those programs. He said the key factor in a parent involvement program was a connection to learning. He assumes the results of the parent survey will be publicized and asked will this instrument tell us if we have family friendly schools or is there something else we should be doing.

Dr. Butler said this survey was intended to be a beginning. She said parent coordinator Theresa Malone will have the responsibility of collating the results. She said the idea is to take the survey and then decide where to go from there.

An elementary principal said PL 221 Plans include results of a similar survey. He noted that the results can be skewed by several factors. For example, he thinks that parents from his school will probably respond but when he used to teach at another school, it was difficult to get things back from parents. He added that if only people who respond are those who are not happy, then the results would be much skewed.

Dr. Sabo-Skelton said this is a starting point. She said her personal experience is that she walks into schools and they are welcoming and she notices different personalities of the buildings. She said there is that percentage of parents who you never see but e need to work on it.

Ms. Dick said the Adult Education Program serves those parents who have not had good experiences in schools. She said a lot of the Adult Education students are low income and a lot of them are reading at 9th grade or lower grade level. She said they also have a huge ESL (English as a Second Language) program. She thinks that some of their students, who are MCCSC parents, would have difficulty responding to this survey. She said a Spanish and Korean liaison has office space at the Broadview Learning Center and would be happy to come to schools to help with translations. She suggested that if schools are having events and they have a large percentage of ESL and/or lower income students, they should let her know and they can put the event on their website and bulletin boards. She said open houses come early in the year but if they have two weeks to help advertise about the importance of being in that school, they could do that. Ms. Dick reiterated that some of these parents have had difficult experiences with schools so they do not feel comfortable and in some cases it is where they failed.

One secondary administrator said he thinks we are guilty of not advertising very well. He noted that all the schools have PTO groups, booster clubs, band parents, etc. and people are surprised at how friendly our schools are. He said this is not common knowledge to people who do not want to participate or to people who do not have a computer.

Dr. Butler asked principals and assistants to please not think that the Board believes that we have unfriendly schools. She said the Board just wants to know how important we think this is. She said all our schools do good things but the Board wants to know what we can do to make it better. She thanked administrators for attending this meeting.

The work session adjourned at 6:55 p.m.

Jeannine Butler, President

Valerie Merriam, Vice President

Vicki Streiff, Secretary

John Hamilton, Assistant Secretary

Jim Muehling, Member

Lois Sabo-Skelton, Member

ABSENT

Sue Wanzer, Member