



Centennial School District Education Committee of the Board

Meeting of May 11, 2009

Minutes

Attendance:

Board

Thomas Hezel**
Mark Miller
Michael Monaghan**
Cynthia Mueller
Andrew Pollock***
Jane Schrader Lynch*
Thomas Reinboth

Administrators

Jennifer Foight-Cressman
Sandy Homel
Eileen Poroszok
Robert Reed
Timothy Vail

Staff

Community

Joseph Faust
Megan Faust
Leigh Lieberman
Charles Murphy
Kaylyn Pacchioli
Barbara Patrick
Michael Pio
Janet Richard
Robert Schaffer

* Chair

** Committee member

*** Alternate member

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

Mrs. Schrader Lynch called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. and welcomed all in attendance.

Mr. Monaghan moved to approve the minutes from April 6, 2009. Mr. Hezel seconded the motion. The minutes were approved in a vote of 3-0.

ALUMNI STUDENT PANEL FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION OF WTHS

Mr. Hezel welcomed the student panel and stated that our Directors are always looking for ways to improve our district and that the Board, teachers, and administrators value student voices in that process. The following students were present: Ms. Megan Faust, Mr. Charles Murphy, Ms. Kaylyn Pacchioli, and Mr. Michael Pio. Ms. Faust is studying accounting at Susquehanna University; Mr. Murphy is studying film and video at Drexel University; Ms. Pacchioli is studying elementary education at Pennsylvania State University; Mr. Pio is studying finance at LaSalle University.

Mr. Hezel facilitated the discussion and asked a series of questions. To the question, "How has your education at William Tennent High School helped you in your work at college?", the student panel responded that they all found the faculty and staff at William Tennent High School to be very professional and extremely helpful. Mr. Pio noted how teachers would work with him one-on-one afterschool. Ms. Pacchioli indicated that her biggest adjustment was to college life, not to the

academics. Each student noted the importance of writing in their work at the post-secondary level and stated that the writing demands were heavier than they had experienced in high school.

Mr. Hezel asked, "Are there things you would have changed in what you did at William Tennent High School that would have made you better prepared for college work?" Mr. Murphy wished his schedule had permitted additional electives in video production and photography. Mr. Pio stated that, if he were in high school now, he would spend more time reading and preparing before class to understand the overall goals of the course. Ms. Pacchioli said that her Advanced Placement coursework was her best preparation for college and that it prepared her for the lecture format and necessary study habits. The block schedule assisted Ms. Faust in having the stamina to sit through a college-length lecture. Mr. Murphy wished that more of his high school assignments had been long-term and project-based.

When asked how they fare in comparison with their peers who went to other high schools, Mr. Murphy replied that he felt William Tennent High School had prepared him socially to deal with a diverse college community. Ms. Pacchioli indicated that she is competitive and initially had some concern as to whether she would be as prepared as her peers; she soon found this fear to be unfounded. Ms. Faust indicated that she has compared experiences with college friends and that they found their diverse high school experiences to be remarkably similar and of equal preparation.

To the question, "If there is one thing you would want to remain unchanged at William Tennent High School, what would it be?", students responded that their relationships with their teachers were of primary importance. Ms. Faust cited her preparation from William Tennent High School's Business Department and that her professors were surprised at how much she knows. Mr. Pio praised his mathematics teacher, Mr. Eric Goldsman, for his dedication, commenting that Mr. Goldsman has continued to provide assistance to him via e-mail and the phone now that he is in college. Mr. Murphy praised Ms. Lee Speiser and Mr. Jeffrey Czekaj as being influential in his educational experience.

When asked, "If you could change one thing about the educational program at William Tennent High School, what would it be?", Ms. Faust stated that she would have liked to have been better prepared to meet the rigorous writing demands of college. All four students said that they wished students at William Tennent High School could once again have a block schedule as it prepared them to have the intellectual stamina for college courses, provided more opportunities for electives and writing assignments across the curriculum, and assisted them with homework and time management skills.

Students responded that they now rely heavily on their college advisors. In response to the question, "Were William Tennent High School guidance services helpful to you?", the students all indicated that William Tennent High School counselors were extremely helpful, but that they, as students, would have relied more heavily on them in retrospect.

In terms of defining a career, Ms. Faust found her business and accounting courses to be invaluable. Mr. Pio indicated that his mathematics coursework provided vital preparation. Mr. Murphy indicated his television production course and working on school plays were his best high school preparation. Ms. Pacchioli knew that she always wanted to become an educator and that every teacher she encountered "shaped in her mind what teachers should be".

In response to how finances affected their choice of college, each student replied that his or her parents had been extremely supportive in their choice of college and encouraged them to seek out the programs that best matched their personalities and career goals. Their educations are being funded through financial aid, family legacy scholarships, athletic scholarships, and family contributions. One student commutes to college to help defray expenses.

Mr. Hezel inquired if the students would like to make additional comments. Mr. Pio advised future college students that professors stress punctuality and attendance at lectures. Ms. Faust reiterated that the block schedule was more conducive to an easy adjustment to college work. Mr. Murphy and Ms. Pacchioli both indicated that they enjoyed group projects in high school and found that those experiences best prepared them for the demands of group assignments and a collaborative environment at the post-secondary level. All students expressed the regret that they were unable to take more elective courses in high school.

Mrs. Poroszok commented that all students were encouraged to visit their guidance counselor at least twice a year. Each guidance counselor currently has a caseload of approximately 350 students; students are assigned by alphabetical order, but will be assigned by grade level in the new house system. Dr. Pollock shared his experiences as a college advisor where a student caseload is assigned to each professor according to discipline. Mr. Monaghan wondered whether guidance services and current staffing levels were adequate. Mrs. Schrader Lynch suggested that the Education Committee generate questions for discussion at the June Education Committee meeting. Mrs. Homel agreed to supply answers to their questions.

Mr. Hezel, Mr. Monaghan, and Mrs. Schrader Lynch enthusiastically thanked the student panel for their participation. Mrs. Schrader Lynch thanked Mr. Hezel for his “brainchild” in requesting that the student panel be present. All Directors were in agreement that the discussion had been valuable and had provided a unique lens onto the high school experience of our alumni.

RELOCATION OF DOROTHY HENRY SATELLITE SCHOOL

Mrs. Sandy Homel provided an overview of the Dorothy Henry Satellite School that had been prepared by Dr. Lisa Palmer. The program has been in existence for thirty-five years and provides students who struggle with the environment at William Tennent High School with a more intimate, family-like atmosphere. Students self-select participation in the program and undergo a screening process that is approved by the building principal, Mrs. Eileen Poroszok, and Mrs. Homel. Currently, twenty-nine students are studying at Dorothy Henry Satellite School. The students have a seven-period day, with two periods of physical education, and they eat lunch at the school. Students have access to William Tennent High School’s services, including the library and the guidance office. The teachers assigned to Dorothy Henry Satellite School spend the entire day with the students.

Mrs. Homel pointed out that the students have a proven track record in terms of a high graduation rate. She expressed concerns that, in the event of an emergency, such as a fire or intruder, the school is isolated. She also indicated that students were limited, for the most part, to core classes and were unable to access the wealth of electives available at William Tennent High School. Dr. Pollock expressed concern that the district was out of compliance in terms of ensuring the teachers had the half-hour lunch guaranteed them by law and appropriate preparation time as guaranteed by the contract. Mr. Miller inquired as to the current student cap at Dorothy Henry Satellite School and was told that it is currently limited to thirty students, but could be expanded to thirty-five to forty students if relocated to the Central Office. Mrs. Poroszok expressed concerns that students do not traditionally transition back to William Tennent High School. Mr. Hezel asked for additional information regarding the type of student who is attracted to Dorothy Henry Satellite School. Mrs. Homel informed him that these students, for the most part, do not have IEPs or receive special education services and are not discipline issues. They are students who truly benefit from a smaller, more nurturing environment. Sometimes students have school phobia or have medically fragile conditions.

Mr. Hezel expressed concern that these students be “brought back into the fold” and wondered why information regarding the Dorothy Henry Satellite School had not been included in the feasibility

study. Mrs. Mueller expressed concern that these students do not currently have easy access to assemblies, guidance services, library services, or electives, such as Advanced Placement courses. Mrs. Mueller stated that the concern for students and their well-being prompted the proposed move of the Dorothy Henry Satellite School. Mrs. Homel noted concerns regarding the necessity of multiple certifications for teachers to maintain compliance. Mrs. Homel also stated the current Dorothy Henry campus is not ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) accessible. Dr. Pollock indicated that, under Act 1, every program is “under a microscope” and needs to be subjected to scrutiny.

Before making a recommendation to the full Board, Mrs. Schrader Lynch requested that a student panel of graduates of William Tennent High School who attended Dorothy Henry Satellite School be invited to the June Education Committee meeting to provide insight into their educational experience.

TECHNOLOGY PROJECTS UPDATE

Mr. Robert Reed, Director of Technology, provided an overview of the current website and a tour of a beta-version of the new website generated by Schoolwires. Each district and building page would have a similar layout and would have a variety of attractive photographs that would change. Mr. Reed informed the Board that a meta-calendar would capture all building and district events. Mr. Reed indicated that the Technology Department is committed to completing the migration to the new platform by July 1, 2009.

Mr. Hezel asked what the process would be to have teachers create and regularly update their websites. Mr. Reed indicated that professional development workshops would be devoted this summer and over the 2009-2010 school year to this important task. Mr. Monaghan expressed concern over the issue of branding and reminded Directors that branding required Board discussion and approval. Mr. Miller requested that “Academics, Athletics, and the Arts” be integrated into the website design.

Mr. Reed requested guidance regarding several aesthetic and informational choices. Dr. Pollock and Mr. Hezel indicated that the Technology Department is capable of making those decisions and should move forward with the project. Mrs. Mueller expressed disappointment that a student’s website design was not easily migrated to the new platform. Mr. Reed replied that, while the student’s work could not be “cut and pasted” into the new platform, elements of the site and content could be reproduced on the Schoolwires platform. Mr. Vail and Dr. Pollock both were in agreement that students should be given the opportunity to contribute to the district website; however, the overall architecture of the site needs to be maintained by district employees.

The Education Committee was in agreement that it was not the role of Directors to attempt to manage the development of the new website and that any concerns should be communicated to the Technology Department through the Acting Superintendent. Mr. Monaghan made a motion to direct administration to fast-track the process of the development of the website by the Technology Department, with a target date of July 1, 2009, by providing administrators with firm guidelines and specific deadlines to complete the project. Mr. Hezel seconded the motion and the motion passed 3-0.

Dr. Pollock made the motion to adjourn and was seconded by Mr. Hezel. The motion passed 3-0. Mrs. Schrader Lynch thanked all in attendance for their attention and participation and adjourned the meeting at 8:16 p.m.

JFC/rc