

Task Force on Student Academic Performance

Hudson City School District – Board of Education

Meeting 2 **MINUTES***** August 5, 2009 6:30pm Hudson High
School Library

1. Open: 6:40PM. Attending: Peter Meyer, Martha Lane, Nicky Genito, Wayne Kinney, Bill Ebel, Theresa Moran, Maria Suttmeier, Elizabeth Fout, Di Stewart (who arrived about 7:10).
2. We breezed through Introductions, Minutes from previous meetings (no changes), Secretary (it's Meyer), Changes to Agenda, and Reading Assignments (per Agenda).
3. What should the TFSAP do? (item 7 on the Agenda). This was the subject of lively discussion for most of the rest of the meeting, which lasted until a little after 8. Will we focus on one thing – curriculum or test scores, it was suggested – or many things (per the Agenda list)? Shall we be hedgehogs or foxes? What do we mean by “academic performance”? What do we mean by curriculum? What is the goal of the Task Force?

Wayne raised a number of questions about the appropriateness of the Task Force addressing certain subjects because, he said, they were already being covered. For instance, he pointed out that “scheduling” was a “contractual” issue and there were committees dealing with that. Same with “teacher mentoring and evaluation” – there was an APPR [Annual Professional Performance Review]. And he saw no reason for concern about “teachers being involved in the discipline process.”

Wayne also pointed out there were already board policies – and he handed out copies of the policies -- that covered homework (#4710), curriculum (#4200), low expectations (#4000), and parental involvement (#1900). (The question of cell phone policy came up and Peter suggested that board had recently adopted a policy stating that cell phones were okay unless they disrupted the learning environment.)

Curriculum. Wayne also pointed out that there was already a State Ed curriculum on the core subjects, and he passed out a copy of the district’s “Science Curriculum Grades K-8,” dated August 1999. There was some discussion about what was and wasn’t State Ed curriculum. And Elizabeth showed an example of the State’s math curriculum (for K—8).

This raised the question of what a curriculum is, how a curriculum differs from curriculum “guidelines” and “learning standards,” and why, if we (the district) have a curriculum, parents (and others) can’t get copies of it when they ask? The discussion also brought

us to the question of how detailed a curriculum is or should be, whether it is “mandatory” or not, whether it needs to be integrated both at grade level – all teachers in 5th grade, for instance, are teaching the same thing -- and building from one grade to the next (scope and sequence)?

“Do we or don’t we have a curriculum?” asked Nicky. And if we have one – or several, as Elizabeth suggested might be the case – “who’s looking over it to make sure it’s actually being taught?”

The fact that Wayne handed out a curriculum dated 1999 suggests that we have something. But it was pointed out that curriculum is often done – “then thrown out” by a new superintendent. The conclusions seemed to be that teachers – and groups of teachers – fend for themselves with regard to curriculum.

Maria suggested that there were 4 key questions to be asked about curriculum: 1) Do we have it? 2) Is it any good? 3) Are we using it? And 4) Do we have ways of assessing it? Other suggested adding to the list of questions: What is a curriculum? and Is it consistent?

Tests and test scores. Wayne made the point that if he teaches the curriculum (e.g. science) the test scores will take care of themselves. Yes, the consensus seemed to be, test scores are important, but you don’t need to “teach to the test.” As to the emphasis on test scores in relation to whether they are a good marker of “student success,” there seemed to be consensus that, like it or not, student academic performance was judged by the test scores.

Communication, silos, duplication of effort, and follow-through. These things were problems, it was agreed, but do they represent a specific and separate concern vis a vis academic performance? Elizabeth thought so. And many people had complaints about duplication of effort and follow-through. (Bill asked about “silos” and Peter pointed out that it was a term used in the Baldwin report to illustrate the problem of school buildings in the district operating independently of one another.) Perhaps, it was later suggested, these concerns, while not directly involved with student academic performance, are important to address within each “category” of concern.

Teaching & administrative practices This seemed to be a core concern, even if we spent less time discussing it. There seemed to be agreement that though some of these issues were “covered” by contract or board policy, as Wayne had suggested, they were concerns. And, at least, those concerns had to be brought before the BOE.

CONCLUSION The TF should focus on three things: Academic performance, Curriculum/Test Scores, and Teaching & Administrative Practices. Theresa had three

categories of concern, related to this grouping, from a book by Massacono [??] – to be provided – but the consensus was the TF should focus on three concerns.

4. Working Groups. We decided that if we are to have “working groups,” they should be part of the full committee meeting. We should have regular TF meetings, every other week, for an hour-and-a-half, and include the working group idea into those meetings.

5. How should TFSAP do it? This was part of the agenda (#9) about Research, Guest speakers, Surveys, etc. And we didn't have time to discuss.

6. Next Meeting: Wednesday, August 19, 6:30pm. Plan on an hour-and-a-half.

FYI: Task Force Report due: January 11, 2010

7: We adjourned at 8:04pm.

Thank you, all.

***These minutes, prepared by Peter Meyer, are not intended to be comprehensive or complete

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