

WORK SESSION OF THE GREENWICH BOARD OF EDUCATION

DATE: April 8, 2010, 7:00 p.m.

PLACE: Havemeyer Building, Board Room

PRESENT:

Board: Mr. Steven B. Anderson, Chairman
Mrs. Leslie Moriarty, Vice-Chairman
Mr. Michael Bodson, Secretary
Mrs. Marianna Ponns Cohen
Ms. Nancy Kail
Mr. Jonathan Cohen
Mr. Peter Sherr
Ms. Natalie Queen

Administration:

Dr. Sidney Freund, Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Ellen Flanagan, Deputy Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Robert Lichtenfeld, Managing Director of Operations
Ms. Mary P. Forde, Director, Pupil Personnel Services
Ms. Kim Eves, Director, Communications
Ms. Regina Williams, Interim Director, Human Resources

Other: Sylvia Romero, EMS; Carol Alessi, CMS; Jo Ann Sbrizzi, Silvana Cipollone, Liz Fraser, Lin Young, Bohdan Kodiak, Camille Broderick, Adriana Ospina, GHS; Leborah Loebelson, WMS; Sue Rogers, PTAC; Dana Evans, OG; Paige Davis, SES; Christina Russell, ALP; Jill Ireland, CC
An attendance list is on file in the Board of Education office.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Anderson, Chairman, at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Anderson recognized the GHS Math Team which was recently named the State of Connecticut Champions.

Curriculum Review III – World Language

Dr. Freund recognized the World Languages staff, noting their attendance as a tribute to Ms. Schenker. Ms. Schenker presented the Curriculum Review III – World Language. Ms. Schenker noted that the report she presented was the culmination of two years of arduous work. Ms. Schenker noted the increase in the comprehensiveness of the GPS World Language Program, explaining that there are 55 teachers in the program K-12, that 90% of the GHS World Language students continue in the program for 3 years or more and that 7 languages are offered at GHS and 2 languages are offered at the elementary level. Ms. Schenker discussed the Native Language Arts program and the fact that it is a part of the curriculum at all levels: elementary, middle school and high school.

Ms. Schenker discussed the “Curriculum Review”. Ms. Schenker noted that World Language affects all students in all curriculums and that teachers breathe life into the curriculum. Ms. Schenker introduced the staff members of the World Language Program who were in attendance. Ms. Schenker explained the move from content based curriculum to contact connected which allows students to interact on a more practical and useful level in the language that they are studying.

Mr. Anderson commended the good work of the World Languages Department. Ms. Cohen questioned the limited time allotted to World Language classes. Dr. Freund explained that it is a function of fitting all of the core subjects into a finite school day. Ms. Kail questioned assessment of the contact connected curriculum. Ms. Schenker responded that assessments are on-going and will be piloted in the 2010-11 school year, noting that the integration may be affected by the budget as tests are expensive to purchase and administer. Ms. Cohen questioned the number of tests and the cost per test. Ms. Schenker noted that the assessment test currently being used is free of charge. Ms. Moriarty questioned contact connected curriculum and its affect on middle school and high school students. Ms. Schenker responded that it is still a work in process but so far they have not seen a decline in enrollment; that students are studying to a higher level. Ms. Moriarty questioned training and staff development and the challenges of moving staff into a contact connected curriculum. Ms. Schenker responded that she did not believe it would be a difficult process but it will take two years.

Monitoring Report E-003, ELL

Ms. Kristi Lawson presented the Monitoring Report E-003, ELL. Ms. Lawson shared the success of the ELL program; noting that one out of five GPS students come from a home where English is not the first language. Ms. Lawson discussed AMAO goals related to progress, proficiency and academic success based on the CMT, noting that math goals are being met but language arts goals are not. Ms. Lawson discussed the action plan, a service model to fit the individual schools with the same goals.

Dr. Freund noted that the ELL program is exiting 200 students per year and discussed closing the achievement gap, noting the changing nature of the populations such that 1/3 of the students are new, 1/3 of the students stay in the program and 1/3 of the students exit the program.

Mr. Cohen questioned testing, specifically, how is proficiency measured? Ms. Lawson explained the State of CT Language Assessment Skills (LAS). Mr. Cohen commended Ms. Lawson on the report.

A discussion ensued regarding Native Language classes. Ms. Lawson explained that it is very important for all students to learn basic “learning skills” and that non-english speaking students can then transfer those skills to English once they become proficient. Noting that if we attempted to teach them the basic learning skills in English we would only be compounding the difficulty of learning the basic skills by teaching them in a language in which they are not proficient. She noted that this approach was researched based. Ms. Ponn Cohen asked if there was any data that demonstrated that the time frame for achieving English proficiency does not require 7 years of native language instruction.

A discussion was held regarding “exiting” initiated by Mr. Sherr. Ms. Lawson noted that she is currently working with Dr. Mitchell and Ms. Gunnip to establish benchmarks for English mastery standards. Ms. Lawson explained that “exiting” is dropping the ELL identification by meeting the proficiency requirements of the CT State Department of Education based on grade levels. Ms. Ponn Cohen asked whether the district tracked the achievement of ELL students once they were mainstreamed, and asked further what correlation, if any, there was to the achievement gap. Mr. Anderson questioned whether it was faster to exit a kindergarten student or a ninth grade student who is new to the program. Ms. Jean DiVincenzo joined Ms. Lawson for a discussion regarding high school students who are new to the program. It was noted that it was very important to collaborate with mainstream classes in order to meet graduation requirements. Ms. DiVincenzo also noted that country of origin of the population fluctuated based on the economy, as does the funding for the program.

Ms. Cohen questioned how parent liaisons would be used and how they would be funded. She asked if the K-12 parent liaison would be available district wide to all schools. Dr. Freund noted that parent liaisons are used district-wide. Concern was noted on whether the district would have "supplant" versus "supplement" issues by using grant monies for this service in the future. Ms. Ponn Cohen also questioned whether a program such as this should be centralized or decentralized for cost tracking purposes. Superintendent Freund stated that he had not yet decided what the most proper way was to account for this service.

Dr. Freund stated that Ms. Lawson would advise where parent liaisons are needed, where the funding will come from and how the funding will be tracked. Ms. Moriarty initiated a discussion regarding management and delivery systems. Ms. Lawson explained that the program that was started for ELL students (SIOP) is applicable to all learners as it unifies the approach and protocols. Ms. Moriarty questioned resources and adequacy. Ms. Lawson advised that she has not had to turn anyone away, and while AMAO indicates that staffing levels are adequate she believes they could be better. Dr. Freund explained that the program is being revisited.

Ms. Queen questioned the influx of Albanian students in the Greenwich Public School system. Ms. Lawson acknowledged that there are pockets of growth and discussed training parents to navigate the GPS and ELL programs.

Pupil Personnel Services Report / Special Education Action Plan

Ms. Mary Forde presented the Pupil Personnel Services Report / Special Education Action Plan. Dr. Freund noted that this report reflected the 2008-09 school year and it did not include Nursing or Guidance. Ms. Forde noted staff development is a source of increasing tension between elementary school and secondary school staff; staff is torn by the amount of time that must be spent between instruction versus meeting compliance regulations. In addition she noted the demands on both General Education and Special Education teachers to understand each others' curriculum. Ms. Forde noted that IDEA evaluations which include private school students are "time eaters." Under the Child Find program expenses are not reimbursable. Student demographics were discussed, noting speech and language were the two most frequent areas that prompt student evaluation; reading being the main reason for PPS intervention.

Evaluations were discussed. It was noted that 2008-09 was the second year of emphasis on early intervention. It was noted that evaluation is more difficult at the high school level.

Litigation was discussed, specifically related to the increase in the number of cases. Ms. Forde noted that causes included private school requests that result in due process hearings and out of district cases, i.e., homeless students and DCF cases. Ms. Forde discussed the difficulty of balancing the need to follow process which could result in an adversarial environment being created versus placing the system at risk of litigation.

Management issues were discussed. Ms. Forde noted it is imperative to prioritize. Time has become an enormous issue. Private school issues are problematic where management is concerned as is the OT/PT budget.

Dr. Freund discussed goals and objectives. It was noted that the focus of goals should be pivotal rather than based on minutia.

Ms. Ponns Cohen initiated a discussion on RTI, questioning placement of students who do not fit into a specific group, i.e., ELL.

Mr. Sherr initiated a discussion based on administration and support. PPT's were discussed. Ms. Forde explained that obtaining the required insurance is a major impediment in the fulfillment of contracts and is a hiring problem. It was noted that parents should make their needs known. Transition into the Special Education program was discussed; it was noted that trends have remained the same. Dr. Freund discussed the Special Education program and GHS and emphasized the importance of improving communication, noting that he was guardedly optimistic.

Ms. Moriarty commented on the lack of an action plan in the report, noting the report was mostly a collection of data. Ms. Moriarty noted the need to explain the status of the program and the increase in the number of litigation cases. The SPED Delivery model was discussed as was the action plan. Ms. Moriarty expressed the need for an executive summary in a report as comprehensive as the one presented.

Quality of instruction was discussed. Long term goals were discussed. Mr. Bodson questioned success beyond compliance. Dr. Freund shared his list of Special Education goals.

MOTION: It was moved by Mrs. Moriarty and seconded by Mr. Cohen to extend the meeting by 15 minutes.

VOTE: 8 in favor, none opposed MOTION CARRIED

Monitoring Report E-060, Administrative Code of Ethics

Ms. Gina Williams presented the Monitoring Report E-060 Administrative Code of Ethics. Ms. Williams noted the three codes of ethics currently in place for Town of Greenwich employees: Town of Greenwich Code of Ethics, Professional Responsibility and Code of Conduct. Dr. Freund questioned enforcement of the Town of Greenwich Code of Ethics. Ms. Williams responded that it was the responsibility of the Town to enforce it.

Monitoring Report E-080, Public Involvement in Schools

Ms. Kim Eves presented the Monitoring Report E-080, Public Involvement in Schools. Ms. Eves noted the three Greenwich Public School policies that deal with public involvement: E-040, E-051 and E-080. E-080 specifically deals with volunteers and visitors to the schools; it was written by the Human Resources Department and was approved in November 2009. The role of the PTA was discussed in relationship to its role as a liaison with public offices.

Mr. Anderson discussed the recent example of the request made by an outside organization to use school facilities and noted that teamwork between various town agencies resulted in a plan that was acceptable to all.

Discussion on Review of Improvements to Budget Process

Dr. Freund initiated his discussion on the review of improvements to the budget process. Dr. Freund noted that the 2010-11 budget approval is still in process but noted the large quantity of questions that arise from the BOE itself and outside entities such as the BET and RTM, noting how much administrative time is devoted to addressing the questions. The question was raised: How can it be improved? Several ideas were shared including increased graphics, notations, more user-friendly jargon as opposed to financial jargon, initiating pre-meetings with the BET / RTM prior to 2011-12 budget process and strengthening the relationship between decision making bodies. Dr. Freund committed himself to more involvement in the budget development process. Mr. Bodson added that the RTM Education and Budget Committees should be involved earlier on in the process. Dr. Freund expressed the need to stop the "compartmentalization" of budget roles. Ms. Moriarty discussed outreach goals and Mr. Sherr stressed the need for more transparency and expressed that he was willing to help work on the budget in order to help simplify it.

Dr. Freund noted that the budget document is very comprehensive and far exceeds other communities in the scope and depth of data that is available. The issue is that it is difficult to find the data that one seeks.

Review of 2009-10 Agenda Plan

Ms. Kim Eves presented the Review of the 2009-10 Agenda Plan. Ms. Eves noted that the discussion of the 2010-11 calendar needs to be moved to the 5/13/10 Board Worksession because of school handbooks that are distributed before the end of the school year and the upcoming calendar is an integral part of the information that goes home with the handbooks. Ms. Eves noted that a discussion of BOE policy E-001 Programs, Services and Curriculum will also be moved up to the 5/13/10 Board Worksession.

Ms. Moriarty proposed the Board of Education create a news article prior to the 2011-12 budget and GHS MISA guidelines will be an item at the 5/13/10 Board Work session

MOTION: It was moved by Mr. Anderson, seconded by Mr. Cohen to adjourn at 9:20 p.m.

VOTE: 8 in favor, none opposed MOTION CARRIED

Respectfully Submitted,

Michael C. Bodson
Secretary