Concord School District
Instructional Committee Meeting Minutes

Date: January 20, 2016

Committee members present: Jennifer Patterson, Maureen Redmond-Scura, Alana Kimball, Clint Cogswell (appointed)

Other Board members present: Jim Richards

Administration: Terri Forsten, Superintendent; Donna Palley, Assistant Superintendent; Gene Connolly, CHS Principal; Steve Rothenberg, CTRC Director

Jennifer Patterson chaired the meeting in the absence of the Committee Chair and appointed Clint Cogswell to serve on the committee for this meeting in the absence of one member. Ms. Patterson convened the meeting at 5:35 p.m.

Three agenda items were discussed: enrollments at Concord Regional Technical Center and the District’s special populations; an update on PACE; and the Smarter Balanced Assessment results.

1. Concord Regional Technical Center (CRTC) and District Student Services Enrollments

Superintendent Forsten introduced Steve Rothenberg, CRTC Director, to discuss programs and enrollment. Members watched a video developed by CRTC staff showing students and faculty at work in their classrooms, and discussing the importance and impact of their experiences. This video is shown at Concord High and nine other partner high schools during recruitment presentations. Mr. Rothenberg noted that 20 students and 10 teachers from CRTC take part in these visits and presentations.

Mr. Rothenberg presented information about CRTC enrollment trends over the last eight years. While the overall pool of juniors and seniors at the region’s high schools has declined from approximately 3513 in 2007-2008 to 2950 in 2015-2016, the percentage of these students enrolling at CRTC has grown from 14.5% in 2007-2008 to 18.5% this year. This year 545 students are taking a course at CRTC, with 61% of these students coming from the nine partner high schools.

Mr. Rothenberg aims to enroll approximately 60% of CRTC students from the sending schools, with 40% of the slots going to Concord High students. Target class size is approximately 20, with slightly lower numbers in the Fire Science class. Class sizes this year range from 13 and 16 in Culinary Arts I to 30 in Health Science 2, with most classes in the 17-22 range. This year, they have seen reduced enrollment in the Culinary Arts program and for next year they are marketing the baking aspect of this program to try to attract more students with this specialized interest.
The CRTC offers two-year programs, but not all first-year students are invited back for a second year. CRTC teachers and students use ongoing measures of progress in the first year to inform decisions about who returns for a second year.

Mr. Rothenberg indicated that CRTC staff have to work hard to recruit students, as there are many limiting factors for potential students to consider, including sending school schedules, competing course offerings, and travel time to Concord. CRTC classes run for two periods rather than the typical one period course. Mr. Rothenberg believes that CRTC staff must work to constantly improve their programs in order to stay competitive in recruitment.

Mr. Rothenberg described the number and variety of industry certificates that CRTC students can earn from their work in the Center. In addition, many of the programs offer opportunities for students to gain college credit while taking CRTC courses. Credit agreements are currently in place with Southern New Hampshire University, Lakes Region Community College, Manchester Community College and the New Hampshire Technical Institute. These arrangements for certificates and credits help students on their career pathways, helping them save money and time as they prepare for post-secondary college and/or careers.

**Special Education, English Learner and Home School Enrollments**

Bob Belmont, Director of Student Services, presented information about enrollments in programs for students with disabilities and for students learning English. Approximately 15% of the student population, a total of 696 students, are identified as eligible for special education. This number has been relatively consistent for several years. At the elementary schools, 286 students, or 15% of the population, qualifies for special education. At the middle school, 150 students, or 16%, qualify. At the high school level, 260 students, or 17% of the population qualifies for special education. An additional 87 students with disabilities participate in District preschool programs.

At the preschool level, students are served at center-based programs at Beaver Meadow and Mill Brook Schools, or are placed in one of several partner community preschool programs. The District offers preschool screening and referral clinics three times each year in order to facilitate the early identification of students in need of special education services.

Almost all elementary school students with disabilities attend their neighborhood schools. New accessible buildings have helped to support this philosophy. There are seven elementary-age students enrolled in the 3R program, a small specialized program for students with significant emotional/behavioral challenges located at Beaver Meadow School. There is one student placed in an out-of-district school program.

The number of students eligible for special education services at Rundlett has remained fairly stable as a percentage of the total population over the last few years. There are six middle school students with disabilities placed in out-of-district school programs. These students experience severe behavioral/emotional challenges or
autism. District special educators work to develop programming to support students to return to their local schools, as possible.

Ms. Patterson asked whether the focus on early intervention with students with autism has resulted in reduced numbers of students identified with this disability over time. Early intervention has allowed many students to progress further and has mitigated the severity of their autism, but most students will still maintain eligibility for special education.

Concord High School offers a variety of special education programs in the context of a highly inclusionary high school. The District runs one off-site program for students with significant disabilities, Project Search, at Concord Hospital, which is now in its fourth year. This is a regional program, with 1-3 Concord students participating each year. The high school also provides special educational services to Deerfield students, with 27 students receiving special education this year.

Mr. Cogswell noted that the number of student with disabilities seems to go up in higher grades and asked about the factors associated with this increase. Mr. Belmont and Ms. Palley indicated that there are likely several factors at play. Students are eligible for special education services until they are 21, so some students stay at Concord High for seven years. Additionally, there are certain disabilities, including some related to mental health challenges, that may not manifest themselves fully until later in childhood or adolescence.

Jim Richards asked whether additional funding is provided by the state if the district has a higher percentage of students with disabilities. Mr. Belmont noted that the Department of Education collects population data each October and the District receives $1400 from the state for each student with a disability. The District receives a total of approximately $1.2 million through the special education entitlement grant, with an additional $25,000 to support preschool special education programs. This amount does not support all the needs of these students. It is up to each district to provide the funds that are needed for most of these specialized programs.

Through the state’s Catastrophic Aid program, the District is reimbursed for eligible costs for individual students that exceed $46,000 for an individual student. This year the District was reimbursed for excess costs for 19 students. Some of these students are in out-of-district placements, while others receive a variety of services in local schools. Expenses that are eligible to be reimbursed include transportation, individual educational assistants, summer school programs and school-day special program costs. The claims are submitted at the end of the fiscal year and funds are received in December. Each year, the Legislature sets the amount of funds that will be allocated for this purpose. This year, the District received 70% of the claim amount.

The District is required by law to provide special education services for Concord students attending charter schools. Mr. Belmont provided information about students attending Strong Foundations Charter School. In 2014-2015, 66 students from Concord attended this school, with 14 of these students receiving special education services.
This year 46 students attend the charter school, with 12 students receiving special education services. The District receives the per student allocation for students with disabilities for students attending the charter schools.

Mr. Belmont described the enrollment in the District’s programs for English Learners (ELs) in Concord. Currently, 333 students are receiving direct EL services, with 144 students at the elementary level, 61 at the middle school, and 128 at the high school. Students in grades K-2 attend their neighborhood schools, and receive EL services there. The District has a magnet program for students in grades 3-5 located at Broken Ground School. The majority of our EL families live in the Mill Brook/Broken Ground neighborhood. Most of our new students are coming from African countries. We have recently begun to use funds from Title I and the Safe Schools grant to support early literacy development for English learning preschoolers.

Families in Concord are currently homeschooling 110 students: 37 at elementary, 30 at middle and 43 at the high school level. This number fluctuates across the school year. Public school officials have very little oversight of homeschooling. Parents are required to notify the District when they begin and end homeschooling. Homeschoolers are not eligible for special education services, but they may participate in classes and extracurricular offerings.

3. Performance Assessment in Competency Education (PACE) Update

Ms. Palley shared information about the PACE initiative in the district. Members reviewed copies of a variety of performance assessments in math, science and language arts that Concord students in various grades, 3-10, will take this winter and spring. The assessments are challenging, multi-faceted experiences where students must apply their skills and knowledge to real-world problems. The PACE assessments will take the place of Smarter Balanced and NECAP assessments for students in most grades. Students in grade 3 will take the Smarter Balanced language arts assessment, and students in grade 4 will take the Smarter Balanced math assessment. Students in grade 8 will take both language arts and math assessments through Smarter Balanced. Juniors at Concord High will take the newly revised SAT as the state accountability assessment on March 2. The Department of Education is paying for the math and language arts sections of the SAT. There is an optional SAT writing section which students can pay $11 to take. Some scholarships are available for the writing section. There are free resources available for students who want to prepare for this assessment.

4. Smarter Balanced Assessment Results: District Overview

Superintendent Forsten provided an overview of the results from the Smarter Balanced assessments administered in spring 2015. Students were assigned to one of four score categories. Students at Level 1 did not meet achievement standards. Students at Level 2 were nearing the standards; Level 3 students met the standards; and students at Level 4 exceeded the standards. In language arts, the percent of Concord students at Levels 3 and 4 meeting or exceeding the standards, ranged from 38% in grade 3 to 55% in grade
5, while the state average ranged from 55% to 63%. Scores for students in grades 3 and 4 showed the greatest discrepancy compared to the state average. Math results were a bit stronger than language arts. The percentage of students in grades 5 through 8 scoring at Levels 3 and 4 was equal to or above the state average. Superintendent Forsten noted that, going forward, administrators and teachers will focus on understanding more about why we are not achieving closer to the average range of the state at certain grade levels. We also regularly review results from other assessments, including district reading and writing assessments.

This was the first administration of the Smarter Balanced test. Committee members asked about the students’ familiarity with the technology used during the testing. Ms. Palley noted that the students were unable to use their iPads for testing, and so used devices with which they were less familiar. We also had some younger students who began with the wrong assessment tool, which may have influenced their performance.

Committee members noted that the PACE assessments may provide more natural assessment conditions, creating less anxiety for students. In addition, the use of the SAT may encourage more students to put forth their best effort compared to the previously used NECAP test.

The Committee voted 4-0 to adjourn (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Maureen Redmond-Scura).

The meeting was adjourned at 7:42 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson, Acting Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder