Board Committee: Instructional
Date: November 20, 2013
Committee members present: Jennifer Patterson, Chair, Clint Cogswell, Tom Croteau, Barbara Higgins
Other Board member present: Kass Ardinger
Administrators present: Chris Rath, Superintendent; Donna Palley, Assistant Superintendent

1. 2014-2015 School Calendar

Superintendent Rath introduced a draft 2014-2015 school calendar and information about a change in the way that the state defines instructional time. The proposed calendar would include three additional full days for professional development. It would eliminate, for one year, five 90-minute early release days. It reduces the number of student instructional days from 180 to 178.

Until 2011, school districts were required to provide 180 school days for students. The new standards describe the school year in terms of hours rather than days. The minimum requirements for instructional hours per year are as follows:

- Kindergarten: 450 hours
- Grades 1-5: 945 hours
- Middle and High Schools: 990 hours

Concord School District currently provides between 1030 and 1060 instructional hours in grades 1-12 and will still be above the minimal requirements if the student calendar is reduced by 2 days.

The administration discussed several concerns about the early release structure. The 90-minute blocks do not provide sufficient time for professional learning. It is not possible to bring teachers together from different levels, as the schools’ start and end times are different. The shortened day schedule can be less effective for student learning on early release days, and families may find the schedule difficult to manage.

Currently, teachers have two full days each year for professional development (PD): one day before school starts, and one day in October. In the proposed schedule for 2014-2015, the three additional PD days are November 10, January 20 and March 13.

District administrators and the CEA membership are supportive of the proposal, and it has also been shared with the CRTC Advisory Committee.
CEAA President Sue Maher addressed the Committee. She asked whether the District’s educational assistants will be able to participate during these days and expressed a concern that the CEAA contract will be reduced because there are fewer student days. She noted that if the early release days are eliminated, the assistants will have little to no opportunities for professional development, which she believes is much needed and appreciated. She suggested that outside speakers or trainers could be brought in to provide PD for educational assistants during these full days, and that assistants could use some of that time to produce student materials. The CEAA has many PD topics they would like to see addressed on behalf of their members, including new technology and Pro-Act training.

Committee members expressed an interest in acting on the proposed calendar at this meeting, and suggested that the question about how CEAA members would participate during the PD days be taken up in discussions with the CEAA.

Bus drivers and food service workers will also be affected by the reduction in student school days. The proposed changes have been publicized in the Superintendent’s newsletter, but the administration will speak directly with the leadership of both of these groups. The Committee recommended that the administration seek feedback from staff about how these days will be most beneficial for them.

The Committee voted 3-0 to recommend the proposed pilot calendar to the full Board (motioned by Clint Cogswell, seconded by Tom Croteau).

2. Common Core Standards and Content Teachers, grades 6-12

Assistant Superintendent Donna Palley provided the Committee with an overview of the Common Core Standards in Literacy for Science, History/Social Studies and Technical Subjects. Ms. Palley highlighted the shift that the Common Core standards represent. Content area teachers are asked to teach students to read and write about academic content in their respective domains “like an expert in their field."

Ms. Palley showed a segment of an interview with John King, New York’s Commissioner of Education, and David Coleman, one of the authors of the Common Core, in which they speak about the role of content teachers in teaching informational text to students. They note that it is important for content teachers to become knowledgeable about text complexity and how to share primary documents from their discipline with their students.

Ms. Palley showed an example of the Standard’s expectations for students in Social Studies and Science and pointed out the reading and writing standards for History/Social Studies and for Science/Technical Subjects. The standards for these content areas are organized around the same categories as the standards in Literacy and Math: Key Ideas and Details; Craft and Structure; Integration of Knowledge and Ideas; and Range and Level of Text Complexity.

Committee members pointed out the importance of citing textual evidence and the more critical thinking required by these Common Core standards. It is also important
that teachers and students know the characteristics of work that demonstrates the rigor expected in the Common Core standards.

Respectfully submitted,

Jennifer Patterson, Chair
Donna Palley, Recorder