Committee members present: Barbara Higgins, Chair; Jennifer Patterson; Tom Croteau; Rusty Cofrin

Other Board members present: Kass Ardinger, Clint Cogswell

Administrators and school staff present: Chris Rath, Superintendent; Donna Palley; Assistant Superintendent; Gene Connolly; Concord High School Principal; Tom Crumrine, Concord High School Assistant Principal; Steve Rothenberg, Concord High School Assistant Principal; Ronna Cadarette, Concord High School Assistant Principal; Chris Herr, Social Studies Facilitator/Teacher; Linda Lawson, English Facilitator/Teacher; Lise Bofinger, Science Facilitator/Teacher; Tamara Hatcher, Math Facilitator/Teacher; Judy Batcheldor, Math Teacher; Kristina Peare and Cathy Kilday, Special Educators

1. Competencies

Tom Crumrine presented information about competency work at Concord High School. CHS has been working with competencies for 7 years, beginning in 2006-2007, in preparation for the NH State Standards requirement that districts must have a competency assessment process and defined competencies in place by the 2008-2009 school year. The Minimum Standards at 306.27 state:

- The local school board shall require that graduation be based on the mastery of required graduation competencies.
- Credits shall be based on the demonstration of district and/or graduation competencies not on time spent achieving these competencies.

Mr. Crumrine noted that the Standards have moved away from students acquiring Carnegie units or completing seat time. Instead, students must demonstrate mastery of the established competencies in each content area to gain graduation credit.

The high school chose to use the Understanding by Design (UbD) model for its competency work. This was a model it had previously used to design curriculum units. This approach continues to be a best practice in the field.

Concord High’s competency work was built on a foundation that included the district goals; the high school’s mission and graduation expectations; the curriculum guides; and content department goals. All these documents informed the development of department competencies and course competencies.
Mr. Crumrine described the evolving nature of competency work. Teachers continuously refer to their student data to assess their work, and consider how to improve. Competencies are refined along the way.

Competencies allow teachers, students and parents to know the big picture, the ‘enduring understandings’ that every student must know. These are the things that we hope students remember in 40 years, a subset of all the knowledge we identify as ‘important to know’ and ‘worth being familiar with.’ The enduring understanding is the key – the focus for students and teachers.

Why are competencies good for students, parents and teachers? Mr. Crumrine explained that students can hit a target if they know what it is and it doesn’t move.

Competencies allow teachers to clearly communicate the expected goals for the students.

2. Extended Classes at Concord High

Gene Connolly and a group of teachers representing the core content areas at Concord High presented information about their ‘extended learning’ work. Each content area presented data, stories, celebrations, concerns, and next steps for their work.

Lise Bofinger and Cathy Kilday provided information about extended classes in biology and chemistry, which have been in place now for two years. They noted that the offerings in chemistry have changed – there used to be two courses offered, including a lower level course. Beginning this school year, there is only one heterogeneous chemistry course offered. Many students are experiencing a more rigorous chemistry class, and some are struggling. In the lower level chemistry course, 70% of the students were earning grades of D or F. While there are students in chemistry who are still not doing well, many students who have taken the extended courses offered are having success.

Students are in the extended class for 45 minutes, twice each week, in groups of 12. The class is part of their schedule, which involves dividing 90-minute periods into 45-minute A and B blocks. Rundlett teachers recommend the 8th graders for the 9th grade classes. The 9th grade biology teachers recommend students for the 10th grade chemistry class. If there are openings during the quarter (for example, if students are successful and exit the class), teachers make recommendations based on need. There are 24 students attending the class in each quarter, but not necessarily the same students from the beginning of the school year until now. Over 30 students have accessed the extended class to date.

The teachers displayed a chart of grades for students who attended the extended classes. It was noted that the chart represented a snapshot. Students may enter or leave the course at different times. In the chart shown for Biology, 19 of the 24 students passed the class for semester 1 this year.

Ms. Kilday described the extended class, noting that students seem to be comfortable in the smaller setting, more willing to engage with the content, and more confident. The
teachers can provide more on-the-spot support. Some students have indicated that they would never have passed chemistry without this class.

It is noted that at any given time 24 out of approximately 400 students are receiving the additional support class. There are probably 100 or so students who would have previously taken the lower level chemistry class who are now taking the chemistry class. Tom Croteau wondered if two sections of extended classes were enough. Mr. Connolly noted that there are a number of other options for academic support at Concord High, including extra help offered for each core content area every period of the day, and daily afterschool help.

Clint Cogswell recalled hearing 5 or 6 years ago that 25% of the students were failing core classes like English, science, social studies, and math. He asked for the information about the percent of students who have failed classes this past year.

The grade information was presented in a table – positive changes over the last three years are seen, with reduced failure rates.

The use of a more targeted competency approach has led to changes in the way that summer school is structured at Concord High. Teachers can target the specific competencies that students need to work on in summer school. Rather than giving up if they are at risk for failing, students can keep working on their competencies, and focus in the summer on those they haven’t mastered.

Linda Lawson provided a handout describing how the English ‘Flex’ teachers are using their time. This is the second year for the English 9 group and the first year for the English 10 program. They have worked on developing assessments, and have met individually and in small groups with students. They have worked with students who are struggling, but also with students who are looking for enrichment. The grade chart shows that failure rates have declined over the past three years. The Flex program started with students coming on a voluntary basis, but they have adjusted this and now students are assigned. There were occasions when students didn’t have open periods or study halls during the time that the Flex period is offered. Next year, they will assign students early to Flex classes. They are also collecting student forms completed by teachers that target competencies that need to be made up over the summer.

Chris Herr described the extended classes in Social Studies. He noted that the ACE (Achieving Competency Excellence) extended classes have been more successful this year as a result of teachers working closely together all year. US History teachers, including the ACE teachers, meet together twice weekly to develop their common curriculum, including common competencies and assessments.

The courses are offered in 45-minute blocks, co-taught by a history and a special education teacher. There are generally about 20 students participating at any given time. Students move into and out of the class across the year. Of the 21 students present in the class at the end of the first semester, only 4 failed their US History class. 9th grade
geography teachers recommend students for ACE. Mr. Connolly noted that three levels of US History used to be taught, and now just one heterogeneous class is taught.

Teachers surveyed students taking the ACE class. Most of the students surveyed described better understanding of the course material, an increased interest in history, improved ability to concentrate in class and more confidence in their history class as a result of taking ACE. Mr. Cogswell encouraged Mr. Herr to explore the free Big History curriculum from Stanford University.

Kass Ardinger noted that she is proud of what these teachers are doing, and is a convert to cutting the lower expectation classes and providing heterogeneity. She has been asked by parents of aggressive learners: what are you doing for my students? There is concern by some parents about whether classes have retained the rigor from before these changes were made. Mr. Connolly indicated that he will address the issue of rigor in the next Instructional Committee meeting.

Tamara Hatcher described the extended classes being offered in Math, which are called ‘Explorations.’ Students meet in these classes for 45 minutes, twice weekly. Students are initially identified for the extended classes based on low scores on 8th grade NECAP tests. Teachers refer students during the semester.

Judy Batcheldor and Kristina Peare co-teach four 45-minute periods of Exploration classes. They also participate on the Algebra team, meeting with other algebra teachers twice weekly to develop lessons and assessments and to review data. They described the rigor of the extended classes. They aim to build student confidence so that they can be leaders in the Algebra classroom. Most students entering the class have limited confidence and define themselves as students who can’t do math. The teachers asked the students in today’s Explorations class what they should say to the school board. Students reported very positive feelings about the class, describing it as safe, active, and exciting. About 80% of the students in the classes have attended the entire year.

Ms. Hatcher reported that the iPads are being used as a learning tool in algebra classes. There have been some growing pains with the iPads, but students are now using them well as learning tools. The teachers have developed their own instructional materials. Ms. Hatcher noted that she would consider purchasing a textbook in the future if there was a good one available.

Mr. Croteau noted that the energy in the room was terrific, and that he appreciated the care that the high school teachers were putting into this work. Teachers are breaking down barriers to learning that students have had for many years and are working to help as many students as possible to be successful. Barbara Higgins noted that students feel safe and comfortable in these extended class environments and that confidence is an important factor in learning. Rusty Cofrin commented that he’d like to see competencies posted on the district website.

Respectfully submitted,

Donna Palley, Recorder