Concord School District
Instructional Committee Minutes

School Board Committee: Instructional
Date: May 9, 2011
Present: Eric Williams, Chair, Clint Cogswell, Chris Casko, Jennifer Patterson
Other Board members: Jack Dunn, Kass Ardinger
Admin: Chris Rath, Rob Prohl, Gene Connolly, Steve Rothenberg, Adam Osburn, Andrea Elliot (left at 6:30 p.m.), Chris Demers
Teachers: LuAnne Pigeon, Mary Wilke, Tom Crumrine
Others: Donna Palley, DINI Coordinator

Agenda Item I: Science curriculum
The first agenda item was a request by Project SEE Director LuAnne Pigeon and Broken Ground School classroom teacher Mary Wilke, to purchase science curriculum for all fifth-grade teachers in the district from the Instructional Trust. The science curriculum is titled “Planets and Moon.” The students learn about the solar system, with a focus on how technology is used for exploration. Nine books engage students in doing, talking, reading and writing about the science of planets and the moon. Roughly half the sessions are focused on science content and process skills, the other half on reading and writing in science.

Ms. Wilke described how she had piloted the curriculum this year with her class and highly recommends the purchase of the curriculum. The purchase involves 16 sets, one for each fifth-grade classroom. Mr. Dunn suggested that a discount on the shipping be requested, because the District is making the purchase now rather than after July 1, when other school districts will be placing orders. The administration agreed to this suggestion.

The Committee approved by a vote of 4-0 (motioned by Mr. Cogswell, seconded by Mr. Casko) to purchase 16 copies of the curriculum plus shipping for a cost of $18,571 from the Instructional Trust.

Agenda Item II: AYP update
The second agenda item was an informational presentation of AYP – Adequate Annual Yearly Progress – the results of the NECAP testing in reading and math, per the federal law No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

Chris Demers explained how index scores for each student are determined and how those scores are used to determine if a school has made AYP. Chris also explained how the target for index scores increases in two-year intervals, as the goal of the NCLB was to have all students proficient by 2014. Chris noted that if one of the identified
subgroups in a school, e.g. ELL or SpEd, doesn’t make AYP, then the school doesn’t make AYP. Donna Palley reviewed the sanctions when a school doesn’t make AYP for multiple years. Beaver Meadow (reading) and Rundlett Middle School (math) are beginning year 4 of the sanctions, which means they will need to spend the year developing a Restructuring Plan. Ms. Palley also noted that NCLB is scheduled to be reauthorized and that it is likely these sanctions will be revised.

Tom Crumrine reviewed the data that show the progress District schools are making with subgroups, as well as areas where continued improvement is needed.

**Agenda Item III: CHS schedule change**

The third agenda item was a proposal and a discussion about the high school changing its schedule from an 8-period-day to a 7-period-day. Principal Gene Connolly and Assistant Principals Steve Rothenberg, Andrea Elliot, and Adam Osburn discussed the issues with the 8-period-day. The biggest concern is that a majority of students takes six classes or fewer, which means students have at least two study halls. Students in grades 11 and 12 are allowed to have open time rather than study halls, which requires supervision on the campus. In addition, it was noted that many students in study halls do not use this time for its intended purpose.

A 7-period-day would mean that each class would have an additional 17 minutes of instructional time per week. Mr. Rothenberg explained that a 7-period-day would generate some scheduling issues on Monday with CRTC students, but that these issues can be resolved.

It was also noted that the small number of students who take eight classes could have additional learning opportunities outside of the school day per School Board policy #621, Extended Learning Opportunities, and through the Virtual Learning Academy Charter School (VLACS) – online courses at no cost to students.

Eric Williams noted that the problem the administration is trying to solve is that too many students have too much free time on their hands, and the proposed solution is to decrease the number of course offerings. Also, many students rely on their one study hall per day to complete their homework so they can participate in extracurricular activities. Moving to a seven-period-day would eliminate this opportunity and make it more difficult for students to participate in extracurricular activities. Mr. Williams suggested that rather than decreasing expectations, the Board should increase the minimum course requirements from 20 to 24 for graduation.

Several Board members expressed concerns about students who want to take eight classes and wondered if a 7-period-day would restrict students from taking non-required courses like music and other related arts. Another concern was that while a 7-period schedule benefits the majority of the students, the interests of the minority should also be considered.
Principal Connolly raised the question whether, if the number of credits required for graduation were to be increased, that would reduce the study hall/unstructured time issue for students.

The committee requested that the administration research whether the high school would need additional staff if credits required for graduation were increased from 20 to 24. The committee also asked for statistics on how many students now graduate with 24 or more credits, and what the credit requirement is for high school graduation in other school districts in our area.

Several parents were present; the committee provided them the opportunity to speak. The parents expressed concerns that a 7-period schedule penalizes high-achieving students who want to take eight courses. They also expressed concern that their children would not be able take classes in the performing arts. In addition, they noted that student athletes who take seven classes would not benefit from having a needed study hall, and that it is not fair to implement changes for grades 11-12 when students have already signed up for eight classes.

Other suggestions were made for the administration to explore next year: whether students should be allowed to test out of required courses; whether course requirements could be waived during a transition to a new schedule; whether students in grades 9 and 10 could be allowed to opt out of PE classes if they play on CHS athletic teams; whether students who now take seven classes could drop a class in order to have a study hall; determining the number of students who will be negatively impacted if the high school changes to a 7-period day; and possible solutions for those students.

No action was taken. The administration will bring this issue back to the committee next month.