Concord School District
Instructional Committee Minutes

School Board Committee: Instructional
Date: August 10, 2009

Committee Members Present: Clint Cogswell, Chairperson, Kass Ardinger, Jack Dunn and Eric Williams (appointed by Mr. Cogswell to serve on the committee in the absence of other committee members) and Jennifer Patterson (by telephone)

Other Board Members Present: Jack Dunn

Administration: Rob Prohl

Chairperson Clint Cogswell called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and appointed Eric Williams, Kass Ardinger, and Jack Dunn to serve on the committee given the absence of other committee members. Jennifer Patterson participated in the discussion by phone.

Mr. Cogswell turned the meeting over to Mr. Williams, who had previously agreed to chair the review of the research on class size. This committee is examining the research on class size given current School Board Policy # 641 on class size guidelines, which was adopted by the Board in 1983.

Mr. Williams had members of the committee review the findings of the following articles:

- April 2001 study by Finn et al – The Enduring Effects of Small Classes
- February 2003 study by Kennedy – Sizing Up Smaller Class Size
- March 2002 study by Finn – Small Classes in American Schools: Research, Practice and Politics
- Summer, 2003 study by O’Neill and Mercier – Shrinking Size
- Summer, 2005 study by Peevely et al – The Relationship of Class Size Effects and Teacher Salary
- 2008 study by Konstantopoulou – Do Small Classes Reduce the Achievement Gap Between Low and High Achievers
- Summer, 1999 study by Grissmer – Class Size Effects: Assessing the Evidence, Its Policy Implications and Future Research Agenda
- 2006 study by Normore et al – Cost-Effective School Inputs: Is Class Size Reduction the best Educational Expenditure for Florida
- 2007 study by Finn et al – Small Classes in the Early Grade: One Policy – Multiple Outcomes
- Summer 1999 study by Hanushek – Some Findings from an Independent Investigation of Tennessee STAR Experiment and from other Investigations of Class Size Effects
- Sept 2003 study by Zahorik et al – Teaching Practices for Smaller Classes
The committee discussed each research article and identified relevant findings:

The Tennessee’s study, Project Star, is the most comprehensive study on class size for the primary grades. The study randomly assigned more than 11,000 students in grades K-3 to small classes (13-17), large classes (20-25), and large classes with aides. Students were tracked through high school graduation. Its findings indicate:

1. Students in small classes in grades K-3 showed better performance on standardized tests in grades 4, 6, and 8, better high school graduation rates, and were on average ½ month to 5 ½ months ahead of their control group peers in learning.
2. The longer (3-4 yrs) the student is in smaller class sizes the greater benefit, including increased test scores, fewer discipline problems, lower dropout rates
3. Smaller is defined as 13-17 – some of Concord’s primary classes are at the upper end of that range
4. Adding classroom aides (not clear whether the aides were teacher assistants or if they had special education responsibilities) or a second teacher doesn’t make a significant difference
5. Low income students showed the most benefit from smaller class sizes. There were conflicting data on who benefits the most – high- or low-achievement students (circular reasoning) and whether the achievement gap between these groups narrows over time, but all students benefit, especially lower-income students.
6. Teachers need to be well-trained in instructional methodology and classroom management.
7. Unclear whether higher teacher salaries are correlated with higher student achievement.

Other issues and questions:

1. The district has limited resources; is reducing class size at the primary level the best use of resources for increasing student performance? What about all-day kindergarten and/or the Dame Family Center model or universal preschool – are there studies that measure the effects of those programs on student achievement in primary/intermediate grades?
2. Is district data available from Dame’s preschool program and its implementation of Responsive Classroom that indicate if those two interventions have resulted in higher student performance?
3. Did the research studies reviewed have inclusive classrooms or were students with significant disabilities in separate classrooms or schools? Does that make a difference?
   a. If Concord has smaller class sizes at the primary level, will as many special education aides need to be assigned to individual students?
4. The preschool study by Dr. John Hornstein should be sent to the full Board. Does Dr. Hornstein have research on the effects of universal preschool or all-day kindergarten? Will spending resources in those areas result in increased student achievement? Will this have a greater effect than lowering class size?

5. Is there research to show that state-of-the-art facilities will increase student performance?

Next steps: The class-size policy study is intended to follow the Carver process discussed at the board’s January retreat, whereby an issue is studied, organized, and focused in committee, and then presented to the full board for deliberative discussion and recommendation. The Instructional Committee will present to the board at its September meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 8 p.m.

Clint Cogswell, Chair
Rob Prohl, Recorder

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