

**MINUTES OF BOARD RETREAT HELD
January 24, 2007**

The Board Retreat of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by Mr. Hemant Marathe at 6:00 p.m. in the Media Center at High School North. The following Board members were present:

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| Mr. Hemant Marathe | Mr. Anthony Fleres | Mr. Richard Kaye |
| Mr. Robert Johnson | Ms. Anjani Gharpure | Mr. Randall Tucker |
| Ms. Patricia Bocarsly | Mr. Stan Katz | Ms. Ellen Walsh |

Present also were: Dr. Robert Loretan, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Larry Shanok, Assistant Superintendent for Finance; Dr. Victoria Kniewel, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, and Dr. Thomas Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Pupil Personnel Services/Planning

CONVENE

In accordance with the State's Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by mailing a notice of the time, date, location and, to the extent known, the agenda of this meeting to the PRINCETON PACKET, THE TIMES, THE TRENTONIAN, THE HOME NEWS TRIBUNE, AND WEST WINDSOR and PLAINSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARIES. Copies of the notice have also been posted in the board office and filed with Plainsboro's and West Windsor's township clerks and in each of the district schools.

No members of the public were present.

SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS

Bob Loretan introduced the agenda for the retreat and the importance of curriculum to the continued success and growth of the district, especially as fiscal conditions tighten.

BOARD PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS

Hemant Marathe thanked the board members for making the time to engage in this important dialogue.

DISCUSSION

Victoria Kniewel noted the importance of being able to see the impact of decisions over time on curriculum and instruction - as well as on the other areas of district activity (as those in turn have their impact on curriculum and instruction). Without discussions of this type it is difficult to keep in mind the entire cycle of discussion, decision, implementation and review. A great deal has been accomplished in recent years.

Victoria Kniewel discussed the expected outcomes of tonight's retreat. These included highlighting the board's contribution to district success; visions for the future; connecting the vision to current initiatives; identifying next steps; and deepening the shared understanding of priorities. The research that underlies our efforts was mentioned; these included board input; the American Diploma Project that has such state support; the new report from the National Center on Education and the Economy. While reviewing the overall educational experience of our students, the current emphasis on assessment was covered.

The Board and its committee structure have been vital to district success. Among the key inputs have been: the facilities referendum effort; program development; shift in health plans; strategic planning; community liaisons; recruitment and hiring; policies and regulations; and articulation and leadership. More specifically in regard to curriculum have been: the Princeton/WW-P jointure effort; the Benchmarking Consortium; moves in the language arts and mathematics assessments and materials; the professional development and summer curriculum writing efforts; shifts in the supervisory structure; the middle school study committee; and the program review structure.

Materials were provided as context for this evening's visioning discussion.

A board member commented on the importance of keeping top kids in the public school system; the support of their parents is a key factor. Without them public education will decline. Vital to every decision are: availability of advanced programs; superior extra curricular programs; good class sizes; and high stakes preparation. Another placed emphasis on aiding students that might not succeed without the district.

The need to attract, develop and retain the highest quality staff was stressed. An ability to hire quality teachers from non traditional backgrounds plays a role in that process. Communication with students in the years after their graduation can provide vital data for improvement. Subject knowledge is important but so is ability to work with others; relationships as well as technical savvy is needed for success in life. Colleges may not provide that well, so the K-12 experience is important.

As important as curriculum is to learning, it can be irrelevant in the face of poor teaching. What are the tools to deal with such teachers? Beyond the poor teachers, the merely mediocre teacher is more prevalent and can impede learning too. Fortunately we predominantly have good teachers but the others are a factor across the district; it was stressed that as brutal as the process may be, gather data and follow through on the ineffective teachers. Are we hiring the best of the best and can we reliably tell which individuals that may be? There are community members that should be utilized to provide a quality experience to our students. How do we deal with the many dimensions associated with technology? If technology allows access to top national educators, how will local districts add value to an education?

Review of Current Initiatives:

The development of rubrics is helping to establish what excellent teaching is. It provides leverage and a way to bring consistency through the district. Aspects contributing to the emotional intelligence of our students include the senior option, morning meeting at the middle school, and extracurricular programs. We need to help personnel see that disagreement can be handled in a respectful manner. Teaching has strong elements of pedagogy, strong content and relationships.

There is a pilot on online writing. With this program there is immediate feedback that avoids occasional teacher bias and the feedback excites some students. It was noted that in some circumstances the on line experience can be even more rigorous for some students. Among concepts in early stages are pod casting and web broadcasting of lectures. These may aid home instruction. Option Two has on line aspects too.

The stress on assessments and data provides an opportunity to move students further and with greater individuality and focused improvement. The role that differentiation can play is significant. Professional development is a key factor for success.

District Priorities: What are your goals?

How will we make hard decisions in the coming years? What determines the value of a department or an extra curricular activity? How do we ensure improvement? What is important and how is it measured?

It will be important that Program Reviews are actionable and do not simply get put on a shelf. How do we get accountability for action? The shift to internal personnel builds on that need.

How might our priorities and goals change if we were a private school or a K-8 district? Can we provide for excellence at every level of student? In the future we may have to confront tough choices. With advances in technology and the universal presence of English speakers around the world, might world languages not be as important? Yet language is not only words but culture too. Another example is our middle school experience: over the years more and more has been added. While wonderful, it is very expensive. What is of less importance?

There will be a need for more informed conversations. How do we put a premium on what we value most? How do we communicate that to our constituencies? Can we sell our vision the way any other product is sold to the public? Use the web in this effort to more advantage. Develop databases and means to utilize the data meaningfully. Even simple information may make a difference in that effort. There is a need to engage public support. The “new” student information system will have to play a role in this effort.

Summary

The Superintendent noted that tough choices are coming soon. People count on us to do well – they do not move to WW-P for the beaches.

Closed Session

Upon motion by Mr. Johnson, seconded by Mr. Katz, and by unanimous voice vote, the meeting moved to closed session for matters of personnel at 9:31 p.m.

The meeting returned to open session at 10:15 PM. Upon motion by Mr. Johnson seconded by Mr. Katz, and by unanimous voice vote the meeting adjourned at 10:15 PM.

Larry Shanok, Board Secretary

Prepared by:

Kathleen M. Bertram