

**Poultney Board of School Directors'
Special Meeting - Community Forum
May 25, 2011
6:00PM
Poultney Elementary School Library**

Unofficial Minutes/Notes

Board Members Present: Mary Jo Teetor, Pat Davenport, Alicia Marcy and Chrispin White.
Administration Present: Poultney Elementary School Principal Kristen Caliguiri, Poultney High School Principal Tom Fitzgerald, Poultney High School Dean of Students Joe DeBonis, Jr., Superintendent Joan Paustian.
Facilitator: Bob Isherwood

The meeting was called to order by Board Chair Mary Jo Teetor at 6:02PM. Introductions of Board Members, Administrators and Facilitator were made.

Mr. White (Board Member) thanked everyone for coming and presented an overview of the purpose of the meeting.

Mr. Sherwood (Facilitator) started by asking the first question then opening the floor to the audience for questions.

Following is a summary of the questions and comments made by the audience and responses by the panel (board, and administration). Q= Question A=Answer/response C= Comments

Q: In regard to the broadband communication project, what efforts are being made to take advantage of and expand on these opportunities?

A: Netbooks have been purchased for all Grade 5 & 6 students. There is much excitement and enthusiasm from students and teachers alike with this program. Teachers are participating in professional development around 21st Century Learning Skills. Digital Wish Program, Distance Learning and Virtual High School are a few of the opportunities that our schools are using. Teachers are embracing the Netbooks at PES. Teachers and students are progressing well through the training in utilizing the Netbooks; they are praised by the trainers for their efforts. It is possible that additional Netbooks may be purchased through grant funds in the 2011-2012 school year to be made available for Grade 4 students as well as possibly Grade 7 & 8 students.

C: No discussion has occurred at the board level regarding going to a paperless textbook system. This may occur in the future. Teachers were praised for the wonderful job they are doing with our students.

Q: Inquiry as to if/when additional course offerings will be available at PHS; is it true that Anatomy and Physiology and Personal Finance courses as well as others are being added?

A: Virtual High School offers over 300 virtual class offerings; AP and Personal Finance are being added and will be taught onsite by current staff. Virtual High School will be available beginning in the Fall of 2011. Grade 11 & 12 students will have first option of these courses initially. Underclassmen (Grades 9-10) have many core courses to take and concentration is focused on these first. PHS is embracing student use of cell phones in school. Smart Phones offer many tools that students can benefit from. The faculty, staff and administration are stressing responsible use of cell phones during school hours (by students); to be used for school projects, research, etc.

Q: What progress has been made regarding an earlier joint meeting held between Poultney and Fair Haven

Union High School Boards?

A: Poultney High School would be happy to have FHUHS students participate in the Virtual High School courses. The only joint venture the two boards have participated in to date is a joint fuel oil bid. Other small ventures include sharing of transportation to sporting events.

C: Back on the topic of technology - at the last RSWSU Board meeting, discussion occurred regarding the positive impact of using I-Pads for special education students could have. Research has shown that students see significant gains in occupational therapy goals as well as many other areas. Google Apps (currently free to schools) is now available across our supervisory union. This provides many opportunities for Project Based Learning. Our SU Technology Committee meets regularly to work on providing increased accessibility and opportunities for students. Students will all have their own accounts starting next school year. Students will be able to work independently or collaboratively with other students from their own school, other schools throughout the country and even students from other countries.

The RSWSU is fortunate to have the expertise of a Technology Integration Specialist who works with Teachers in all schools. He assists teachers in planning lessons which incorporates the use of technology and guides them to the many programs and applications that are available. He also ensures that the lessons align with the curriculum. He co-teaches with the classroom teachers. This had proven very beneficial to students and teachers.

One new Smart Board was recently installed at PES, with two more to be installed in the near future. The goal is to have one in each classroom. PES teachers share the current resources, for example if a classroom which has a Smart Board is vacant for a timeframe, due to specials, other teachers frequently move their classes into the room to utilize the Smart Board; this provides greater exposure to technology for more students.

Q: Is there a method of projecting enrollment?

A: There is a ratio which is determined by birth records, and historical data; state and national data/trends are also taken into account. Factors such as local job market and economic trends are also considered. We are working hard to ensure that our classroom student/teacher ratio makes sense. Due to our small class sizes we are able to offer a stronger quality of education.

C: Communication is welcomed; the board and administration appreciate the communities input. The Board hopes to have more meetings of this type. The Board encourages more participation at meetings.

Q: What suggestions does the community have regarding how to best market our schools? We want to more effectively market our schools.

C: Two programs were highlighted as very valuable:

Mentorship program (with CSC and GMC students); this is beneficial to students in many ways. It provides a very positive experience for young students which carry into their high school years and beyond. This program is to be celebrated!

The Enrichment program should also be celebrated. The past few years have offered huge growth and opportunities for our students.

C: Individual Learning Plans are another way where students may grow and excel. This program allows students who have met the requirements to access college level courses locally or online. This offers huge growth and success for our students at a very reasonable cost.

Q: Do we track data on high school graduation rate and percentage of graduates attending higher education?

A: Our current average graduation rate is 80-88% with 50-60% going onto higher education or tech

schools. One upside to having small class sizes is students receive more individualized attention and focus.

C: Due to a recent change in legislation, the pre-school cap has now been removed. Schools are no longer limited to the number of pre-school students they can accept. We can accept as many students as space allows beginning next school year. This pertains to both the EEE (Early Essential Education) Program as well as the Leap Frog Nursery School.

C: Regarding communication - the school's website is underutilized, not updated regularly and not user friendly. It should be updated and changed to promote the schools and offer more information.

C: The website committee recently met for exactly that purpose. We anticipate updates and changes by the end of this school year. Suggestions are welcomed.

Q: PHS no longer has a shop (industrial arts/woodworking); what opportunities are available for students who have an interest in woodworking?

A: The board struggled with the decision to let the shop program go but when a long time shop teacher left, there were several years where we tried to find a teacher to fill the spot. When that was unsuccessful, the decision was made to let the program go. The space is currently being used for our Wellness Center, which is open to the public as well as our students, faculty and staff. Stafford Technical Center offers woodworking/shop programs which our students may take advantage of. Stafford offers a large variety of quality vocational and technical programs, a number of high school students (Grades 10-12) take courses each year. Transportation is provided. This often leads to employment opportunities or credits to other technical schools. Some programs offer embedded credits (for core courses). Students who attend Stafford may take needed core courses at Rutland High School in the mornings and access the Stafford programs in the afternoon.

Q: GMC offers a shop program. Is it possible that PHS and GMC could collaborate to offer courses to high school students in the future?

A: This is a possibility.

C: The PHS Work Experience Program was highlighted as being very successful. Mrs. Linda Smith was praised as well as her staff for her hard work with this program. This is a very positive experience for students as well as employers. It was suggested that more employers participate in the program.

Q: Recently students have been able to travel to Boston and the Bronx Zoo for field trips. This is a wonderful opportunity for our students, how are these trips funded?

A: Last year, the Boston trip was funded through a grant. This year the Bronx trip was funded through local budget funding due to the Smokey House Program not being available. Funding which was budgeted for the Smokey House Program was utilized for the benefit of all students rather than a limited number who would have participated in the Smokey House Program.

C: We have been very fortunate to receive a lot of support from Hill and Hollows Grants.

Q: Currently PHS is using block scheduling, are there any changes anticipated?

A: PHS currently is on a 4 by 4 block schedule which allows students to earn 8 credits per year. This schedule also allows us to maximize teaching time. Students are provided Teacher Advisory time and breakfast first thing. Teachers are reporting students are more focused as a result and more awake by the time academic courses begin. There are no anticipated changes at this time.

Q: Currently at PES students who participate in breakfast do not have to be in their classrooms until 8:15 while students who do not participate in the breakfast program have to be in their classrooms by 8:05. Is it

possible to change the schedule so that all students need to be in the classrooms by 8:15?

A: This area is studied each year. Tardy records are reviewed, and scheduling is revisited. It is necessary to have a schedule in place which maximizes learning time. Parents with concerns are encouraged to meet with the Principal to discuss as individual situations vary.

Q: How are the new science labs at PHS affecting student's learning outcomes?

A: Poultney should be very proud of these science labs, they are by far one of the finest in the area. Teachers have embraced the labs. They are also getting students outside for hands on labs as well. All science programs are utilizing the labs. Block scheduling results in longer lab times and more opportunities for students as well. We are seeing more inquiry based learning occurring with the labs. We still have room for improvement to maximize their usage, but we are headed in the right direction.

Q: Are there any faculty changes for next year?

A: One Kindergarten teacher is retiring at the end of this year. We are able to fill her position using current staff; therefore no additional teacher will be needed. An Art teacher is being recalled for a .50 FTE position at PES she will begin in January and we will be starting the year with a long term substitute (to be hired in the near future). This is due to a change in schedule for the current Art teacher who will be working entirely at PHS next year, increasing Art Education to .67% at PHS. One English Language teacher is retiring at the end of this year, his position will be filled internally by the current year's Title I English Teacher and a new Title I Math Teacher has been hired for next year, at PHS. We were checked marked in Math so this additional math teacher should help. It was necessary to RIF (reduction in force) one Special Education Teacher at PHS due to a decrease in student need. The shared Librarian is anticipated to retire in January as well, we will be advertising for this position in the near future. We do have a veteran staff and we are starting to see a few approaching retirement age.

Q: What is the status of the Art Programs?

A: Beginning next school year, there will be a .50 FTE Art Teacher at PES and a .67 FTE Art Teacher at PHS. Currently one teacher is shared between the two schools. The change next year will offer students more art time at both schools. Some of the art courses being offered at PHS include 3-D Art, Ceramics, Pottery, Foundations of Art, Mixed Media, and possibly Digital Art beginning next year. Students, who are interested in taking additional art courses, may take courses at GMC or CSC and Stafford Technical Center. Independent Study may also be available, as well as several courses through the Virtual High School.

C: A recent change in the legislation now requires all high schools to offer dual enrollment. Students may take college courses and receive both college credits and high school credits. We have already been doing this for several years.

Q: How can the Board/Schools get information out to the communities, we are seeking suggestions.

A: Some suggestions were:

- Website (will be updated more frequently)
- E-Mail List- currently using, may expand
- Front Porch - New Neighborhood
- Community WIFI Portal (coming soon)
- Alert Now
- WVNR - Local Radio Station
- Peg-TV
- Friday Newsletter PES
- Virtual Newsletter PHS
- Articles in Lakes Region Free Press - PHS News
- Parents can now access student grades online

Q: The Principals were asked what their top goals for next year are.

A: Principal Caliguiri (PES) wishes to continue to bridge communication with community. Continuation of collaboration with college students and PES students is also a goal. She would like to see improvement in Writing and embedded technology.

A: Principal Fitzgerald indicated that we have great kids at PHS. He would like to see more student input; greater student voice. Students and Teachers will be attending a training this summer which educates them on collaborating for the betterment of the school. This goes along with the improved school climate work that is currently being done.

Mr. White indicated that the scheduled end time was nearing and again announced that the concert would be starting and meeting participants were invited to attend. He thanked all for coming and indicated that the board will be holding many more meetings of this type in the future. Community input is valued by the board. If there are other suggestions or topics of discussions for upcoming meetings, he suggested folks notify the administration at each school. He also invited folks to participate in the regular monthly board meetings, held on the third Tuesday of each month at Poultney High School's Library. Executive Session starts at 5:30PM and Open (Public) Session begin at 6PM.

C: Mr. DeBonis invited folks to stop into the schools to see what is going on.

C: One suggestion for future forums would be to offer tours of each school.

C: Another suggestion was to provide audio assistance (sound systems or microphones etc.) for meetings. Many times audience members cannot follow the meeting as they cannot hear well. This may be a reason low attendance at meetings.

The Board and Administration thanked the community members for attending.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Jan Dente
Poultney Board Recording Secretary