

A Board Retreat of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held on Wednesday, October 12, 2011 at 5:10 p.m., in the Board Room, 625 Plum Street, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. Ulrich presiding and the following members present: Frank DiGiorgio, Scott English, Eugene Medio, Carlos Mercado, Alan Mounier, and Patricia Phillips. Absent: Mr. Fanucci and Ms. Rios.

Also present: Dr. Banks, Superintendent, Mr. Franchetta, Board Secretary, Ms. Charlene Zoerb, of the New Jersey School Boards Association and Debbie Marko, Daily Journal.

Mr. Ulrich announced that in compliance with the New Jersey meeting law commonly referred to as "The Sunshine Law," the Vineland Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting.

Flag Salute:

Mr. Ulrich introduced Ms. Charlene Zoerb the Field Service Representative from the New Jersey School Board Association.

Ms. Zoerb introduced Dr. Mary Gruccio to give a brief overview of the test scores.

Dr. Gruccio said this is another transition year due to the benchmarks changing. She said at the middle school level sixth grade math increased and language arts remained the same. Dr. Gruccio said seventh grade dropped slightly in language arts and rose slightly in math. Eighth grade scores decreased in language arts and math. The high school scores showed a five percent increase in language arts and a three percent increase in math. Dr. Gruccio said we are a District Factor Group A and when you compare our district to other districts in the state and county we are above all. Dr. Gruccio said Johnstone, Wallace and Veterans Memorial Schools achieved the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) designation. The district as a whole showed an eleven point gain in 6<sup>th</sup> grade math. At the high school level including the Alternative School we had an eight point gain in the total population and a five point gain for general population. If we exclude the Alternative Program at Vineland High School our eleventh graders actually met the ninety two percent proficiency in language arts. Dr. Gruccio said we still have room for improvement but when we look at the big picture and compare our district to other districts in the county and state we are doing well. She said our challenge is to mold instruction and to teach our students at the highest possible level. Dr. Gruccio said we should be proud of the efforts that our teachers and students are making.

Dr. Gruccio said after reviewing the test results a plan was put in place as to what things we are going to do to continue to improve. We will continue to analyze our data and use what we find to drive the instruction in the classrooms at all levels, focus on effective instructional practices and plan effective professional development.

Mr. Mercado asked what communities in New Jersey compare to Vineland. Dr. Gruccio said we are above Bridgeton and Millville.

Dr. Mounier asked if the increases were over previous performances. Dr. Gruccio said the benchmark has risen and the performances were based on the new benchmarks. Dr. Mounier asked how do we know where we stand if we do not compare the performance from last year. Dr. Gruccio said Mr. Savage will explain that in the three year trend chart.

Dr. Banks said the three focus areas are basically the corrective action plan that is in place.

Ms. Zoerb said the change in benchmarks does not mean that the test has changed. She said every so many years the state is looking for your student achievement to increase in order to make AYP. Ms. Zoerb said these tests are all part of No Child Left Behind and this accountability is helping students achieve at a higher level. She said there are too many students attending college and having to take remedial classes.

Dr. Banks recommended for student achievement to be one of our focus areas for growth for the upcoming year. She would like to propose that we continue to analyze data from the programs we currently have in place to measure student growth.

Ms. Zoerb said how we are looking at and utilizing data accountability has improved. She said when we discuss setting goals we need to make sure that we are looking at the data and using real information. Ms. Zoerb said there are many forms of data that board members receive to measure student progress. She summarized the following data sources: School Report Card, Classroom Assessments, Enrollment Projections, Graduation Rates Staff/Community Input, NJQSAC, NCLB/CAPA Report, Drop-out Rates, Suspension & Discipline Data, Absentee Rates, Violence & Vandalism Report, Bullying, Intimidation, and Harassment Statistics and Board Self Evaluation. Ms. Zoerb said the following goal categories are: Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment, School Culture, Student Support, Professional Development and Efficiency & Organization. Ms. Zoerb asked for comments or ideas from the board members on district goals.

Mr. Ulrich said he is looking forward in reviewing the data to see where we are with the progress. He thinks focus has to be on at risk students and subgroups. Mr. Ulrich said we need to use a firm technology plan to benefit our children in a meaningful way and have long range facility plans with dollars behind it.

Dr. Mounier asked how you deal with the disparity and ability between students. Ms. Zoerb said it is actually coming down to individual students.

Mr. Medio said there needs to be more attention on discipline, learning and the atmosphere in schools. He said teachers need to be in the classrooms as much as possible and should not be pulled for professional development when it means leaving students with a substitute. Mr. Medio feels disruptive students should be removed from classrooms and high school students who are arrested should be sent to the alternative high school.

Mrs. Phillips agrees with Mr. Medio and said there was a time when teachers were out of the classroom more than in the classroom. She said there were previous superintendents who held staff development all the time during school hours. Mrs. Phillips said it is at a minimum now with Dr. Banks.

Dr. Banks also agrees with Mr. Medio and said as a building principal she use to go crazy when half her building was out for staff development on a day all her students were in attendance.

Mr. Ulrich said we have no alternative because AYP is a reality and a federal law. Unfortunately, our high school is in its ninth year of improvement and eventually the state is going to do what it is going to do. Mr. Ulrich said he agrees with many of Mr. Medio's comments but would like to see the teacher who is out more than they are in. He knows for a fact it is hard to get a break because his wife is an elementary teacher and does not get taken out of the classroom.

Ms. Zoerb said AYP is one piece of the puzzle that gives you information but there are many other sources that are not as measurable. She said you are measuring student progress all throughout the year.

Dr. Banks said at the high school there is the development of departmentalized final exams rather than individual teacher made final exams, which will help us determine if the curriculum across the board is being delivered.

Dr. Banks said there is a movement county wide to develop a common curriculum based on the common core standards. Dr. Banks said the science curriculum has just been completed and the language arts curriculum will be started.

Mr. Fanucci arrived at 5:59 p.m.

Mr. English said he attended his child's back to school night at Vineland High School and every teacher said the students are not prepared for the honors program. He questioned if there is a lack of communication at the lower level and asked how we should bridge the gap between the middle and high school. Dr. Banks said you are speaking about vertical articulation in terms of the curriculum, which is something that happens. She said it is another transition piece. Ms. Zoerb said this may be something that should be a focus area for the coming years.

Mr. Ulrich said it would be interesting to see the data as to how many students coming from Vineland High School are taking remedial courses. He said there are a lot of incoming freshman who are lacking in preparation as far as research papers and reading. Dr. Banks said students who will be attending Cumberland County College take the Accuplacer Test around March and the test results determine if the student has to take remedial courses. She said the thought was that our students are not taking that placement test seriously. Dr. Banks said ways were discussed on how to inform the students how important it is to do well on this test.

Mr. Fanucci asked if there was any way to go back to the old methods of teaching. He does not know that if the way students are being taught today is the most practical. Mr. Fanucci expressed his concern that there are students who do not know their multiplication tables and have been made to become lazy because they can use a calculator.

Mrs. Phillips feels Mr. Fanucci has a valid point. She said when she was the principal of Cunningham School it was the philosophy that every student had to memorize their times tables, which is why we always scored the highest in Math 24 and NJ ASK.

Mr. Medio said if you want to be realistic you have to start failing students and require that students accomplish things before they pass to the next grade. He knows for a fact that a student could get straight failures and pass.

Ms. Zoerb said there are certain state mandates and policies that you have to follow along with core curriculum standards that are in place.

Ms. Zoerb said making sure students have the basics is something that can be addressed in your district.

Mr. Ulrich asked in what levels have Everyday Math Curriculum. Dr. Banks said elementary through fifth. Dr. Banks said this could be infused into that.

Mr. English said when he was in school the guidance counselors helped guide him through the process. Ms. Zoerb said the National Standards are addressing career readiness.

Dr. Banks said because of time constraints with the regular meeting she is recommending for this discussion to be continued at a second board retreat.

Ms. Zoerb said we can reconvene and the board can return with other ideas to continue the discussion.

Dr. Mounier asked how we are measuring progress and how is it done in the context of the classroom so those who do not need remediation do not get held back. Dr. Banks said through differentiation of instruction. She said students who are severely at risk will be pulled out for tutorial instruction.

Mrs. Phillips said if you are a failing school you will receive a lot of funding for those expensive after school mandated programs that parents have the right to send their children to. Mrs. Phillips asked how you help the child that cannot stay for the after school assistance.

Mr. Medio asked when are the state tests are given. Dr. Banks said HESPA is given in March and NJ ASK in May. Ms. Zoerb mentioned that you do not receive the results until August.

Ms. Zoerb asked the board if there is any other information for the next session they would like based on the conversations.

Mr. DiGiorgio said a five year facility and technology plan.

Mr. Fanucci asked when we want to have discussion on the six million dollars and how we want to allocate it. Mr. Ulrich said we will need to have a special meeting as a committee as a whole to discuss this.

Mr. Ulrich said the tentative continuation of the board retreat will be held on Wednesday, November 9, 2011 before the regular meeting. Ms. Zoerb said she will check her schedule and get back to him

Mr. Mercado said he would like to see a mentoring program implemented for at risk students and staff in the district who are interested in becoming administrators. Mr. Ulrich said there are many mentoring programs being put together by an array of service organizations throughout the community such as DYFS, Big Brothers/Big Sisters and PAL. He said there is an extension of Rutgers University that receives funding for doing this and targets at risk communities. Mrs. Phillips said they found it to be more effective when you do it at your school level.

Dr. Banks thinks this was a very important session and looks forward to the next.

Public Comments: None.

The meeting was adjourned by voice vote at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin J. Franchetta  
Board Secretary

KJF:df