



Citizens For Education



Spring Issue

May 2012

The objectives of Citizens For Education are to ensure a quality education for all students of the Council Rock School District, to better inform the Council Rock community of educational issues, and to increase the involvement of the community in the decision making processes affecting the quality of education in Council Rock.

Elementary Bully Prevention and Character Development

Bullying has risen to a level of national prominence in recent years. Research has shown that bullying has a negative impact on young people, including serious health and developmental concerns. While the national attention to this issue is recent, seven years ago Holland Elementary began a bully prevention/character development program as a means to prevent bullying and increase positive behavior. Two years ago Council Rock directed all elementary schools in the district to develop positive behavior programs to address bully prevention, tailoring research-based programs to match their school populations and focusing on character development and positive outcomes.

Norwegian researcher Dr. Dan Olweus, widely recognized as the founding father of research on bullying problems, whose research formed the basis for Holland Elementary's program, defines bullying as

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Middle Bucks Institute of Technology

Amazing things are happening at 2740 Old York Road in Jamison! That is the address of the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology (MBIT), which is by no means your typical "Tech School." Opened in 1969 and renovated in 2007, MBIT provides career development, advanced technical training, and pre-professional programs for high school students. MBIT currently serves approximately 800 students between the Centennial (28%), Central Bucks (54%), Council Rock (16%), and New Hope/Solebury (2%) school districts. Enrollment may also include students from Archbishop Wood and those who have been home-schooled. MBIT helps many students achieve success by finding the right niche.

Although MBIT does not fit the needs of all students, there are many Council Rock students who can and do benefit from what MBIT has to offer. Programs include: Automotive Technology, Building Trades Occupations, Commercial Art & Design,

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More Graded Student Work to Come Home

For more than a year, CFE has been having discussions with the CR administration about the issue of returning graded tests and other assessments to students. On March 1, 2012, the first public meeting on this topic was held when a discussion took place at an Academic Standards committee meeting. A panel, including four parents and five teachers, representing both high schools, was assembled for the purpose of presenting the perspective of each group so that members of the administration and school board could better understand each side's concerns.

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when a person is "exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other persons." He defines negative action as "when a person intentionally inflicts injury or discomfort upon another person, through physical contact, through words or in other ways." In a digital world, this can also include cyber bullying, defined by Merriam Webster as "the electronic posting of mean-spirited messages about a person done anonymously." The lack of personal accountability makes this type of bullying even more complicated.

Bullying can occur in school, on the playground, on the bus, in the community, and via electronic means. The solutions to bullying must include the school, home, and community, and involve teachers, parents, students, administrators, and community members.

National and County Efforts

At the national level, the US Department of Education, under the Office of Safe and Drug Free Schools, has guidelines and curricular recommendations for schools, along with national conferences for creating and maintaining conditions for learning. The National Education Association (NEA) provides resources and educational materials through its "Bully Free: It Starts With Me" campaign.

A national campaign called "The Bully Project" (www.thebullyproject.com) was launched by Harvey Weinstein (The Weinstein Company) after acquiring the documentary film, "Bully," and partnering with writer, director and producer Lee Hirsh. The project seeks to enlist everyone, from hometowns across America to celebrities, to start the conversation about this national epidemic. Much controversy accompanied the launch of the film, as the Motion Picture Association of America initially gave the film an R-rating, due to strong language. This rating would have made it very difficult for teenagers, the most critical viewers of the film, to see it. Citizens is happy to report that the MPAA has changed the rating to a more appropriate PG-13, allowing the target audience the ability to see this film. The film opened nationwide on April 13.

In Bucks County, The Peace Center in Langhorne specializes in bully prevention. Having successfully helped students, parents, teachers and police officers, they recently received a federal grant to fund a bullying resource center. The Peace Center's goal is "to help anyone in Bucks County who is bullied or concerned about bullying." Through grant funding they have added counselors and will continue to meet with and empower victims. For more information, visit the Peace Center website at www.thepeacecenter.org.

The Holland Elementary Approach

The current 6th grade at Holland Elementary has been exposed to a program of bully prevention since Kindergarten, meaning that this program has been an integral part of the entire school's culture. Citizens sat down with principal Andy Sanko and leaders of their program, IST teacher Beth Pacitti and Teacher Assistant Andrea Mangold, to learn more about their successful program.

Seven years ago Mr. Sanko and Teacher Assistant Marianne Pavie received a grant from Today, Inc. to begin implementation of the well regarded, research-based, Olweus Bully Prevention Program (www.violencepreventionworks.org). In 1970, Dr. Dan Olweus started a large-scale research project, now generally regarded as the world's first scientific study of bully/victim problems. In the 1980s, he began the first systematic study of bullying intervention and documented the positive effects of this program. Accompanying his program is his book [Bullying at School: What We Know and What We Can Do](#).

The Olweus Bullying Prevention program places the teacher as a key person, and classroom management as an important piece of the program. Maintaining an environment where learning can take place

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also serves to reduce the incidence of bullying. Students who have positive relationships and expectations within their classroom begin to view themselves as a group, with a “we” mentality. Key parts of the program include:

- Class-wide and/or school-wide rules and expectations against bullying. Studies show that having anti-bullying rules in class leads to less bullying.
- Positive reinforcement – Praise when a student is following the rules and supporting fellow students to reduce undesirable behaviors.
- Negative consequences – Should be directed toward the behavior, not the person, and include meaningful actions.
- Class meetings – Regular meetings to build a foundation for cooperative behavior. All students have a chance to participate and everyone’s viewpoint is heard and respected.
- Role-playing - Helps young students to understand how their actions affect others and pose solutions to common classroom problems.
- Meetings with parents - Help to encourage reinforcement at home, and place the school and parents as cooperative pieces all pulling together.

Stan Davis, researcher, social worker, and school counselor, from Maine, was brought to Holland Elementary to act as a trainer for parents, students and staff. Davis uses the Olweus program and others to develop bullying prevention interventions and has authored two books, Schools Where Everyone Belongs (Research Press, 2nd edition 2007) and Empowering Bystanders in Bullying Prevention (Research Press, 2007). He is also the cofounder of the International Bullying Prevention Association. His workshops include the importance of the bystander in preventing bullying. Training was done with staff and a daytime session was run for students. An evening presentation was arranged for parents.

In 2008-09 the decision was made to take the program one step further by incorporating “character education” using the “pillars” of Cooperation, Respect, Responsibility and Sportsmanship. To decide on a model to use, the Holland team visited Groveland Elementary in the Central

Bucks School District and Leary Elementary in the Centennial School District to see, first hand, how their successful programs worked. The Holland team conducted parent and peer surveys and decided on a course forward. With the PTO behind them, they launched their program, also incorporating programs from “Effective Playground” by Curt Hanson, allowing recess to be for kids of all abilities and interests.

Did you know that Citizens For Education has a new website? Visit www.citizensforeducation.com.

The Holland team has seen, first-hand, how this program has changed the school climate, and has seen students using what they have learned out in the community, on ball

fields, and other venues.

All Council Rock Elementary Schools

During the 2009-10 school year, all Council Rock elementary schools were tasked with developing a “positive behavior plan” to be implemented in the 2010-11 school year. Each school was required to submit their plan to Director of Elementary Education, Joy McClendon.

The schools used a template from the state called School-wide Positive Behavior Supports (SWPBS) that has as its central tenets Cooperation, Acceptance, Respect, Eagerness to Learn and Staying Safe (CARES). All schools implement the same core principals yet shape them to reflect their individual cultures. Some use acronyms like Churchville CARES: C=Cooperation; A= Acceptance; R= Respect; E= Eagerness to Learn; S= Staying Safe, or Hillcrest’s ROAR: R= Ready to Learn; O= Obey Safety Rules; A= Act Responsibly; R= Respect.

With a goal to teach expected behaviors, schools incorporated a combination of Second Step, a program provided to Council Rock through a grant secured by the Council Rock Coalition for Healthy Youth, some form of Responsive Classroom, and Restorative Practices. Each school runs assemblies following the central tenets of the program and models appropriate behavior through roleplaying.

Responsive Classroom is a method of building community. It has been in the district in some

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(Bully Prevention continued from page 3)

form for many years, but some of the teachers that were trained in the program have since retired. Two teachers are now being trained to be Certified Responsive Classroom trainers to provide turn-around training for the district. It is important to have an internal person to train other teachers because of the need for follow-up. Additionally, administrators will be trained in Responsive Classroom so that they can effectively observe and evaluate teachers.

Restorative Practices is a means to address concerns. It provides a process for holding students accountable for their actions while proactively building a nurturing school community. At the elementary level this involves behavior contracts that allow the student to reflect on what rule was broken and how it affected others. This helps build empathy and a positive school environment.

The Elementary Guidance Counselors are a key piece to implementing these character building programs. Citizens For Education began advocating for the hiring of Elementary Guidance Counselors twenty years ago. Citizens continued through the years to point out the value of these positions in assisting students while they are in the younger grades, and preventing undesirable behavior and larger problems later on. In August 2004 the district hired the first two Elementary Guidance Counselors. Currently there are 5 counselors shared between ten elementary schools. Their role in bully prevention is to promote and improve the school climate. To that end, they visit classrooms to teach the lines between bullying and teasing, how to report bullying, the role of the bystander and strategies to address these issues. This was incorporated into the K-6 guidance curriculum written a few years ago. Counselors meet monthly to talk about their school's initiatives and to share best practices. Principals do the same.

Ms. McClendon said that the challenge for these bully prevention programs is getting the word out to parents. Workshops that each school runs are not widely attended. Some parents are not receptive to advice on bully prevention outside of school and some do not understand the value of restorative practices, especially if they perceive their child is a victim of bullying. Additionally, parent confusion between what constitutes teasing versus bullying compounds the solution. Education of all parties is paramount for success in providing a positive, nurturing environment for all.

Assessing Effectiveness of District Programs

The district is gauging the success of the elementary programs through surveys. Students are surveyed to see if they know the rules and accepted behaviors. Results are graphed and the data is showing an increase in knowledge of the rules. In some schools students were asked questions about bullying before the program began to serve as baseline data. Following implementation, they were surveyed again to gauge what they had learned. The results have been positive.

While much is being accomplished at the elementary level, Citizens would like to know how this is viewed at the middle and high school levels. In a subsequent newsletter we will be inquiring about how the secondary schools in Council Rock are building on their elementary counterparts to address bullying prevention and character development as students reach adolescence and, with so many different programs at the elementary schools, if the middle schools are providing feedback to the elementary schools as they see students merging from differing elementary programs.

Council Rock is addressing the issue of bullying on many fronts. Citizens For Education thanks Mrs. McClendon and Elementary Guidance Counselor, Alexis Schoen, as well as the Holland team of Principal Andy Sanko, IST teacher Beth Pacitti, and teacher assistant Andrea Mangold, for meeting with us and helping us to understand how the elementary schools are tackling this important issue.

(Graded Student Work continued from page 1)

The parents shared some of their reasons for wanting graded assessments sent home:

- They can be used to study for midterms, finals, AP tests and SAT Subject Tests.
- Helps students improve study skills by focusing on what they don't know.
- When returned tests are simply reviewed in class, there is not necessarily sufficient time to process errors and learn.
- Due to other student obligations, students cannot always get to clinic.
- Having assessments at home allows students and parents to see if there are trends in areas of weakness.
- It is possible that teachers can make errors in grading or arithmetic.
- Paid tutors often have access to assessments that parents do not.
- It is not easy for parents to get to school to look at tests because of family obligations or work schedules.
- Reviewing previous work helps students focus on areas of weakness, making studying less stressful and more productive.
- A parent contacted Robert Marzano, author of "The Art and Science of Teaching," a book the district has adopted for the staff this year. When asked about returning tests, he said, "Teacher(s) should be using various types of assessments designed and scored by individual teachers. These should be routinely given back to students and parents."

The teachers shared some of their rationale for keeping tests in school:

- Creating good tests requires a great deal of effort, often in collaboration between multiple teachers over time. Questions are sometimes thrown out or re-worked to make them better, and a good test should be able to be used over again in subsequent years.
- Tests kept in school allow teachers to see patterns of weakness or challenge, which can help them better teach students.
- Teachers give students time to review assessments in class.
- In the absence of past assessments, study guides, homework and class notes should adequately prepare students for future assessments, midterms, finals and AP exams.
- Teachers don't want students to think the only thing to focus on when studying is past tests. Teachers are hoping for broader, more comprehensive learning from students.

In January, the administration distributed to staff the following revised expectations regarding the return of graded assessments. (To date, the administration has not directly communicated these changes to parents though the high school PTO's are including updates in their monthly newsletters.) The assessments marked with an "X" will go home (though some exceptions may be enforced, which the teacher will communicate through the course syllabus distributed on the first day of class for students and to parents at Back to School Night):

| | Essays | HW | Quizzes/Chapter Areas of Study | Projects/Labs | District/Dept. Tests* |
|-----------------------|---------------|-----------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| English | X | X | X | X | |
| Science | X | X | X | X | |
| Social Studies | X | X | X | X | |
| Math | | X | X | X | |
| World Language | X | X | X | X | |

*This includes midterms, finals and other district tests.

All teachers have been informed of the guidelines noted in the chart. The administration wants to hear from parents if there are teachers not following the above guidelines and asked that the appropriate school principal be notified in cases of noncompliance. Joy McClendon, Director of Elementary Education and Curriculum stated, "Everyone must realize that change does not happen overnight, but change is what we are seeking."

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(MBIT continued from page 1)

Cosmetology, Culinary Arts, Dental Occupations, Drafting & Design Technology, Health Occupations, Multimedia Technology and Practical Environmental Landscaping – just to name a few. Some courses offered are college level precursors to careers varying from Architecture to Engineering and more.

Students enrolled at MBIT spend half of their day at CR North or South, taking their required courses (Math, English, Social Studies) and the other half of the day at MBIT taking courses in their chosen program. Students receive instruction from faculty members who are experienced, knowledgeable and well respected in their fields. Programs combine classroom lectures with plenty of hands-on supervised training. As in other schools, there is an active student government called SkillsUSA. Teachers and students also meet with an Occupational Advisor at least twice a year.

The education program at MBIT is organized into 10 career clusters and 21 career pathways (i.e. major courses of study). Typically students enroll in one career pathway as their major field of study and then complete a core set of courses common to the career cluster with a highly rigorous technical sequence of courses related to their career pathway. Students may complete additional specialized

courses as they advance beyond the standard secondary curriculum. The career cluster model is recognized as one of the most effective educational initiatives for preparing young people for the new economy. MBIT students consistently place very high in SkillsUSA competitions locally, statewide, and nationally in many of the curricular areas.

Many of the MBIT programs offer students internship opportunities in the community where they receive valuable hands-on training in the work force. MBIT students are often sought after and there are

times when there are more internships or cooperative education opportunities to fill than there are students to fill them!

Below are highlights of some of the MBIT programs:

Did you know that 106 students from Council Rock are attending MBIT in the 2011-12 school year?

The Construction Carpentry class assumes the lead role for the Middle Bucks Student Built House project, now in its 33rd year. Students in the Drafting, HVAC/Plumbing and Electrical & Network Cabling programs work collaboratively to fully construct a house built to the highest residential specifications. The project is inspected and certified by the PA Dept. of Economic and Community Development, Division of Manufactured Housing. Sealed bids are then accepted for the fully completed 2,200 square foot house.

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(Student Graded Work continued from page 5)

The parents suggested it would be helpful to use the Home Access Center to note which assessments were coming home. For example, the description of an assessment could be posted with an asterisk (or some other notation) to indicate it is being sent home with students (for example: *Quiz – Chapter 7). Assessment items without an asterisk mean that they are staying with the teacher. By using this simple method of notation in the Home Access Center, students and parents would know which assessments they can expect to see at home, teachers and curriculum coordinators can quickly evaluate how much work is actually going home, and most importantly, the administration would have access to quantifiable data from across all disciplines at both schools to assess how well their directive is being implemented.

At the April 12 Academic Standards meeting, it was announced that the administration is in the process of developing an administrative regulation to address what will and will not be sent home, how teachers will review assessments with students and how district assessments will be reflected in the Home Access Center. The regulation will be completed by the end of the school year, along with a timeline for full implementation.

CFE will continue to monitor this issue to ensure that the district directive is followed and progress in this area is made.

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Recently added Career Education areas include the Building Trades program, which teaches skills beyond new construction in repair and renovation, as well commercial mechanical systems and maintenance. Other new programs much in demand in today's workforce are Networking and Operating Systems Security providing instruction in Computer Hacking and Forensics, and Public Safety, which encompasses courses and certifications in the fields of Police Science, Fire Science and Emergency Medical Technicians (EMT).

The aspiring young chefs in the Culinary Arts program operate Aspirations. This restaurant is open for lunch on Wednesdays and Thursdays throughout the school year. The upscale menu items include a variety of fresh meats, poultry, seafood and pasta. A special buffet is served on the last Thursday of each month. Reservations are required and are taken 2 weeks in advance of the requested date. Reservations are only taken on Wednesdays and Thursdays between 9:00 – 10:00 am and 12:00 – 2:00 pm. Please call 215-491-5647 for reservations. Most students taking this course become certified in the mandated Serve-Safe Certification. The state of the art equipment and extraordinary instructors provide a unique training opportunity for those desiring a future in the food service and hospitality fields. Each student learns every aspect of this industry from food prep to serving to management, both behind the scenes and to the public. Additionally, this course is one of the few in the state, which is accredited by American Culinary Federation (ACF) and students graduate with ACF certification.

The Early Childhood Care & Education program operates Li'l Bucks Partners in Learning, a state licensed childcare center for children between the ages of 18 months and 5 years. This center is approved through the PA Dept. of Public Welfare.



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...a voice for our children!

The educational program offered to children at Li'l Bucks Partners in Learning is unique in that the center serves as a teaching and learning clinic for the students in this MBIT program. Complementing the existing staff with student teachers affords children more individualized and small group instruction than generally found in most other preschool settings.

The Cosmetology students operate Salon Extreme, a full service salon offering all services (cuts, coloring, up-dos, manicures, etc.) but at greatly reduced rates. Students, under the supervision of teachers, do all work. Call 215-343-2480 x119 for an appointment.

Students who attend MBIT are well prepared after graduation to head into their chosen fields. Many acquire certifications while at MBIT. Some go on to attend two or four year colleges. Most have a definite advantage when applying for jobs in their field. MBIT turns out very capable, skilled and employable young men and women who are ready for what it takes to succeed in today's competitive economy.

Citizens for Education was quite impressed with their tour of the MBIT facility, realizing that there is so much more to MBIT than what they and most others perceive as technical education. Many more students may benefit if it were better communicated to staff, parents and students. We encourage every high school and middle school counselor to take a personal tour of the facility so that all who may benefit from this path, whether it is on to a two year or four year college or directly into the work force, don't miss this opportunity to gain a head start on their future.

For more information about MBIT and its programs, please go to www.mbit.org.

Citizens For Education Officers 2011-12

President: Nancy Sauers

Vice-President: Joanne Hinton

Treasurer: Allison MacGahan

Secretary: Marybeth Dugan

New School Board Member: Focus on Dr. Bill Foster

Citizens For Education welcomes Dr. Bill Foster, recently elected to the Council Rock School Board from Region 1 (representing Newtown Borough – Wards 1 and 2, and Newtown Township – Districts 4, 5, 6). Dr. Foster, a research toxicologist with Bristol-Myers Squibb in Princeton, brings his enthusiasm, optimism, and diverse background to this 4-year volunteer position. He is hopeful that more Council Rock residents will come to school board meetings, get involved, and maintain a dialogue with the school board members about their children's education.

Dr. Foster's educational background includes dual undergraduate degrees in Chemical Engineering and English from Carnegie Mellon University (1985). In addition, he earned both a Master's degree in Chemical Engineering (1990) and a PhD in Neuroscience (1994) from the University of Pennsylvania. His work experience includes night shift employment at a small family-owned chemical company in Florida, and a post-doctoral fellowship at Penn's Institute for Human Gene Therapy. He was also employed by chemical giant DuPont during and after graduate school, and after DuPont's Pharma division was acquired by Bristol-Myers Squibb, has been an employee of BMS for the last 10 years, where he applies his training in bioinformatics to pharmaceutical drug safety investigations.

In between his undergraduate and graduate school years, Dr. Foster also spent two years as a USA Peace Corps volunteer, teaching chemistry and physics to rural students in Ghana. The experience of living in a small village, eight hours away from the nearest American, steeped him in all things diverse: people, clothing, and food. In an effort to improve both the Ghanaian schools and the Peace Corps, Foster applied for and received a grant from the Canadian government to expand the school and also organized a conference for other Peace Corps volunteers to improve their ability to teach the children. Before leaving Ghana, he documented his lessons learned and identified current needs, leaving a path forward for the next volunteer assigned to his small village.

Since moving from Wilmington, Delaware seven years ago, Dr. Foster resides in Newtown Borough

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A Team Approach to Curriculum Renewal

The Council Rock curriculum renewal process used to choose the new, comprehensive elementary Reading, Writing and Language Arts program was outstandingly demonstrated using a bottom-up analytical investigation committee. Renewing curriculum is critical to the district's commitment to ongoing academic improvement that supports student success.

Because Council Rock's Literacy Program had been in place since 1999, it was not well aligned to current state standards or fully meeting the needs of students. In 2009, Joy McClendon (Director of Elementary/Curriculum Services), Pat Erickson (English and Language Arts Coordinator), and representative teachers and literacy specialists from every elementary school in the district began a thorough investigative search of a variety of programs from different publishing companies. The first step in the search was to get in touch and collaborate with surrounding school districts (Centennial, Central Bucks, Pennsbury, Penridge and Neshaminy) that were also looking to put new programs in place.

During the 2009-10 school year, publishers from ten companies met with the curriculum renewal team and in the spring of 2010, the committee voted to explore four of the ten programs. In October 2010, the committee was expanded to investigate these four programs in depth. Teachers met with the publishers, were given sample materials to share with their colleagues, and were able to access components of the programs online. By spring 2010, two of the four programs were eliminated.

To allow all the elementary teachers who would eventually implement the program to participate in the final selection, sample materials were displayed in teacher lounges and principals devoted faculty and grade level meeting time to give teachers the chance to review them. Teachers were also able to take materials home for review. By the end of May 2010, teachers voted online for the most effective program. By a vote of 60% to 40%, "Journeys" was the selected program.

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(Bill Foster continued from page 8)

with his wife, Jennifer, a landscape architect with Bowman's Hill Wildflower Preserve, and their two young children. In his limited free time, Dr. Foster, a licensed small aircraft pilot and member of a flying club in Doylestown, enjoys flying over the beautiful Bucks County landscape. He also enjoys backyard gardening, and successfully grew a small wheat crop, which he harvested, threshed, ground into flour, and turned into pancakes with his daughter.

Dr. Foster has several goals as a member of the Council Rock School Board, and chief among them is financial sustainability. The state budget is critical to this issue, as is the teacher pension fund (Public School Employees' Retirement System, PSERS), which by itself could result in approximately \$2 million increased spending for next year. Dr. Foster feels that creative approaches at the local and state levels are needed to deal with the increasing cost of education.

Dr. Foster also desires more mobility for teachers between school districts. Ideally, he would like to see a system in which teachers can increase their experience by having the ability to move to different districts for a period of time, and then move back to their home district without losing their tenure. This would allow a cross pollination of some of the best ideas among districts, and also permit teachers to find the best niche for themselves.

Dr. Foster is one of two school board members assigned to oversee the Middle Bucks Institute of Technology (MBIT), and would like to see more Council Rock students attend MBIT or at least seriously consider it, as he feels it has excellent facilities, staff, and opportunities. Noting the ongoing discussions concerning returning graded work to students (tests and other assessments), Dr. Foster feels strongly that all students deserve this important feedback, and that teachers should be encouraged to return student work on a timely basis. With the burgeoning availability of new computer technologies, Dr. Foster is very interested in the evolution of teaching methods and tools, and wants to ensure teachers stay current and measures are put in place to gauge the effective use of new technology in the district. In student athletics, Dr. Foster believes that with the relentless decrease in opportunities

for adults and children to be physically active in their daily lives, there should be a greater emphasis on those sports that you can take with you as you grow older, such as cross country running and swimming.

With young children, and his experience in pharmaceuticals where it can take a decade or more to get a new drug to market, Dr. Foster takes the long view for Council Rock's future by considering what the district should look like ten years from now. He has found his fellow board members to be sincere and good people who have Council Rock students' best interests in mind, along with balancing administrative, budgetary, and community needs. Like all collaborative situations, he realizes that it can be time consuming to come to a consensus, but is looking forward to the opportunity to work alongside his fellow board members. Citizens For Education thanks Dr. Foster for his time. His optimism and diverse background are sure to be an asset to the Council Rock School Board.

(Curriculum Renewal continued from page 8)

By this time teachers were so familiar with the program that thirty teachers volunteered to pilot the program during the 2011-12 school year. "Journeys" publisher, Harcourt/Houghton Mifflin, allowed Council Rock to pilot materials at no cost.

This curriculum renewal process, which included not only the curriculum coordinators and administrators, but also the teachers who would be using the materials daily, is very different from the top down approach that is common to other school districts. Having teachers so involved in the decision-making process takes time, but vastly increases the chances of a curriculum's success. Citizens For Education applauds all the curriculum coordinators and administrators who, instead of dictating mandated curriculum, spearheaded a team approach that will significantly benefit the district's students.

For more information about "Journeys," see article on the next page.

A “Journey” into Reading

The “Journeys” elementary reading program by Harcourt/Houghton Mifflin, currently being piloted in thirty Council Rock classrooms, was the topic at the Council Rock Board of Directors’ Academic Standards Committee Meeting on February 2, 2012. School Directors then approved the purchase of “Journeys” at their February 16 meeting, at a cost of \$881,665.24, to be paid over three years.

“Journeys” is a comprehensive program with differentiated instruction available to all levels of a classroom’s learners. This means that whether students are advanced, on grade level, have learning disabilities, need remediation, or are English language learners, the program can accommodate them. In order to be appropriately placed for their needs, instruction can be organized in whole groups, small groups, or for differentiated instruction. The program’s goal is to create life-long readers at all levels. The curriculum includes a rich blend of literary genres, comprehensive writing instruction, and daily practice, which seamlessly incorporates technology.

As Director of Elementary Education/ Curriculum Services, Joy McClendon stated in her June 16, 2011 memo to the School Board: “Today’s reading programs go well beyond the basal book of yesterday in which all students read as a large group from a grade level text. While there continues to be grade level materials, “Journeys” offers an abundance of below and above grade level materials for each classroom, thereby facilitating the delivery of differentiated instruction. Additionally, the online component of the program allows students and their parents to access the reading materials and support resources from home.”

The “Journeys” program includes a focus on phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. Literature selections address the needs of a 21st century edu-

cation by using selections from the most current publications and an emphasis on non-fiction texts.

The writing components have effective vocabulary and spelling strands that are integrated with the literature. Students practice the process of pre-writing, drafting, and revising every day with engaging writing prompts tied to the literature. Foundational spelling, grammar usage, comprehensive writing, and the familiar “daily edit” are all incorporated into instruction.

“Journeys” also engages students to use problem solving and critical thinking skills. With the “Your Turn,” “Turn and Talk,” and “Stop and Think” features throughout the program, students practice communication and collaboration skills. Included in the curriculum materials is a

student book that organizes reading selections with comprehensive questions, exercises, writing, and grammar activities directly related to the literature selection.

Did you know that Council Rock’s contribution to PSERS is mandated by the state?

“Journeys” also comes with dynamic assessment tools for teachers. They are diagnostic, informative, and have summative assessment opportunities and reports that inform instruction for every student. Teachers can then monitor student progress and provide corrective feedback.

Citizens For Education is as excited about “Journeys” as the pilot program teachers and students. The data that is generated by the program will be reported in a future CFE newsletter. The monetary cost of “Journeys” is \$157 per student for next year alone, but when considering that CR keeps a curriculum in place for 10 years, it translates to less than \$16 per student per year. “Journeys” is not just a great educational value; its worth to Council Rock students over their lifetime is priceless.

For more information about the curriculum renewal process that led to the selection of “Journeys,” see page 8.

In the Numbers – The Great Divide

| | North Newtown Boro, Newtown Twp., Upper Makefield, & Wrightstown 4 School Directors | South Northampton 5 School Directors |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Grade Levels | March 2012 Enrollment Students / % of Grade | |
| | Total | Total |
| K | 219 / 41% | 315 / 59% |
| 1st | 365 / 48% | 396 / 52% |
| 2nd | 352 / 44% | 450 / 56% |
| 3rd | 347 / 43% | 468 / 57% |
| 4th | 375 / 45% | 460 / 55% |
| 5th | 427 / 47% | 480 / 53% |
| 6th | 425 / 45% | 529 / 55% |
| Elementary Total | 2510 / 45% | 3098 / 55% |
| | Newtown | Holland & Richboro |
| 7th | 432 / 44% | 545 / 56% |
| 8th | 448 / 45% | 552 / 55% |
| Middle Total | 880 / 45% | 1097 / 55% |
| 9th | 452 / 48% | 495 / 52% |
| 10th | 497 / 47% | 553 / 53% |
| 11th | 516 / 50% | 507 / 50% |
| 12th | 548 / 53% | 488 / 47% |
| Secondary Ungraded* | 7 / 70% | 3 / 30% |
| High School Total | 2020 / 50% | 2046 / 50% |
| High School Classrooms | 103 / 54% | 87 / 46% |

* Secondary Ungraded are Special Education students that are educated until they are 21

The Beginning of “The Great Divide”

As the district embarks on the 2012-13 school year with a compulsory change in attendance boundaries at the high school level, the chart, “In the Numbers – The Great Divide,” gives related enrollment and facilities details.

After years of lobbying by a parent group, and discussions by School Directors and Administrators, the practice of giving CR students at Richboro Middle School (RMS) the choice between attending high school at either South or North is being abolished. On February 3, 2011, the Council Rock

(Continued on next page)

(The Great Divide continued from page 11)

School Board voted to “redistrict the RMS attendance area to Council Rock South effective with the 8th grade class of 2011-12.” The administration will allow exceptions for students who already have siblings at North.

The new mandated attendance boundaries remove the mechanism that kept enrollments at the high schools relatively equal, with slightly more students attending North, which has 16 more classrooms than South. This redistricting sets up a future enrollment imbalance that leaves South at or over capacity and North significantly under capacity.

The mandated boundaries are not in effect

until September 2012, and will take 4 years for full implementation before South enrolls all RMS students.

However, over the last few years while this was an ongoing discussion and promises

were made that this change would occur, more and more RMS students chose to go to South. As a result, in February, for the first time since the building opened in 2002, South’s enrollment surpassed North’s. At this point, even before the new attendance boundaries go into effect, the current 9th and 10th grades at South exceed those at North by 99 students.

As the “in the Numbers” chart demonstrates, four years from now when the current 5th, 6th, 7th and 8th grades are in the high school, what is currently a gap of just 26 students between South and North will be expanded to approximately 400 students. Organizing the district so that all Northampton students (with the exception of Special Education) attend schools only in Northampton sets up a “Great Divide” in the Council Rock community in academic offerings, opportunities for students, and political constituencies.

The disparate enrollment figures between the two high schools could have an effect on course offerings. Historically, courses have been dropped at both high schools due to under-enrollment, and over-registration can result in students being shut out of a class. There has never been a time since South opened that there was more than a 250 student difference between the two high schools. With an imbalance of close to 400 students likely in a few years time, offering the same courses at both schools could result in new challenges. There may be insufficient classrooms to accommodate all offerings at South, and there may not be sufficient enrollment to run all the classes at North.

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With such disparate high school populations, Northampton students at South could face more competition for school activities than those at North. This includes the ability to make it on to teams and gain leader-

ship posts in clubs.

Currently, two School Directors have constituents whose children attend both North and South. In “The Great Divide” there is no School Director who has constituents whose children attend both high schools. Five school directors’ constituents will go to only Northampton schools while the remaining four school directors’ constituents attend schools that only feed to North. In the future, having five Directors from the South sending area and the minority from the North sending area could spill over into political impacts that affect funding issues and other district decisions.

There will be many challenges as “The Great Divide” is fully realized. The greatest will be ensuring that all students and taxpayers feel they are part of a united school district, with two comparatively compatible segments, and not just an umbrella for two distinctly different sub-districts fragmented by a schism based on location.

Middle School Class Sizes: A comparison

The following data shows the school class sizes of the core courses (Math, English, Social Studies, Science and eighth grade World Language) at each of the middle schools.

| | RMS Grade 7 | RMS Grade 8 | NMS Grade 7 | NMS Grade 8 | HMS Grade 7 | HMS Grade 8 |
|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|------------------------|
| # of classes | | | | | | |
| <20 students | 4 | 23 | 8 | 11 | 30 | 15 |
| % of classes | 8% | 47% | 10% | 14% | 48% | 22% |
| | | | | | | |
| 20-25 students | 16 | 19 | 22 | 15 | 30 | 15 |
| % of classes | 30% | 39% | 28% | 19% | 48% | 37% |
| | | | | | | |
| 26-30 students | 28 | 6 | 29 | 27 | 3 | 18 |
| % of classes | 53% | 12% | 37% | 34% | 4% | 26% |
| | | | | | | |
| >30 students | 5 | 1 | 20 | 26 | 0 | 10 |
| % of classes | 9% | 2% | 25% | 33% | 0% | 15% |
| | | | | | | |
| Total Classes | 53 | 49 | 79 | 79 | 63 | 68 |

In reviewing the data above, it is important to understand a significant demographic change that was made this year. Beginning in the fall of 2011, Rolling Hills Elementary students were redistricted from Holland Middle School (HMS) to Richboro Middle School (RMS). This was done to increase the number of students at RMS, which had a very low enrollment. This redistricting brought fewer students to the seventh grade teams at HMS, but additional teachers still had to be maintained for the larger 8th grade population, so the staffing was higher in relation to the student enrollment. This situation will be remedied in 2012-2013, when several core area teaching positions will be eliminated, and possibly staff in some of the other non-core areas as well. According to Superintendent Mark Klein, this should result in substantial savings for the school district, but the amount can't be accurately calculated until all staffing needs across the district are addressed.

Evaluating the current sixth and seventh grade populations indicates that next year the enrollments at HMS and RMS should be roughly equivalent, at around 502 at HMS and 557 at RMS. Each school will continue to have four teams in total – two for each grade. It should be noted, however, that the number of classrooms in the two schools is significantly different: HMS has 43 in total with no trailers, and RMS has 28, which includes 3 trailers. Hopefully, the negative aspects of low enrollment which occurred at RMS, such as number of participants available for extra-curricular activities, will not be felt by HMS in the coming years.

The chart above also illustrates the large number of sections with over 30 students at Newtown Middle School (NMS). Historically, NMS has always had a greater number of classes run at this level than the other two schools. According to Mr. Klein, the enrollment numbers for NMS (currently 880 students) will be stable for the next few years and then will see a decrease in student population (when the current fourth grade enters middle school). While Mr. Klein realizes that the school is pushing the limits of ideal team size, to date NMS has been able to successfully schedule all classes and, while not perfect, the larger class sizes have not impacted the quality of the education received.

Citizens For Education will continue to look at the class size levels over the next few years to determine if the anticipated natural population decline addresses the class size issue at NMS.

The Future of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)

On February 9 2012, President Obama freed ten states from NCLB laws. NCLB, passed by President George Bush in 2001 had a lofty goal: Get all students proficient in math and reading by 2014. But, the nation is not getting there in part because of flaws in the law (such as, no exemptions for the special education population – all students proficient by 2014 means ALL students).

President Obama is allowing states to commit to their own, federally approved education plans that also allow states to judge students with methods other than test scores. They will also be able to factor in subjects other than just math and reading, which are the only two areas considered under NCLB. He stated that he was allowing these actions because Congress has failed to update the law since its passage despite widespread agreement that it needed to be fixed.

The ten states that are now excused from following the NCLB law have to put forward plans showing they will prepare students for college and careers, set new targets for improving achievement, reward best performing schools, and focus on ones doing the worst. Twenty-eight other states, the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico have indicated that they plan to create their own plans and flee the law. (Pennsylvania is NOT one of the states.)

Pennsylvania Department of Education is continuing to review the requirements and criteria of the waiver program to determine if it would be in the best interest of the state. Pennsylvania officials say they are hesitant to seek the waivers because they believe the federal government is trying to tell them how to replace the mandates. Pennsylvania continues to monitor student progress through standardized tests, which show whether school and districts are achieving Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).



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