



Citizens For Education



Spring Issue

May 2011

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.

Special Education

Citizens For Education interviewed Dr. Charles Lambert, Director of Special Services, to learn how Special Education is delivered in the Council Rock School District. Dr. Lambert came from the Upper Moreland School District six years ago, where he had served for seven years on Upper Moreland's administrative team and, before that, for seven years as a school psychologist.

Because of the extensive amount of relevant information he shared, Citizens is including articles in this newsletter and in upcoming issues. In this newsletter you will find "Special Education Laws & Regulations" on page 2, "Special Education Delivery in Council Rock" on page 7 and "Special Education – Special Cost – Insufficient Funding" on page 13. Look for more articles in future newsletters. It should be noted that unless otherwise specified the CR Humanities program, which falls under the Special Education umbrella, is not included in these articles.

Citizens For Education thanks Dr. Lambert for spending time educating us on this important curricular area.

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VOTING IS PRIMARY Why YOU Should Vote in the Primary Election May 17, 2011

Voting to choose your School Director is one of the most fundamental ways to participate in the decision making process that affects Council Rock, and May 17, 2011 is the primary election for five of nine on the Council Rock School Board.

Many people feel that primary elections are not important – not so! School board candidates are allowed to cross-file in primary elections (filing on both the Democratic and Republican tickets). Therefore school board elections can be won and lost in the primary election.

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Policy Regarding the Return of Tests and Quizzes

Should tests, quizzes, and other graded work be given back to students to be used to review and study from? Or, should these tests and quizzes be kept by teachers to reduce the time and effort needed to write new tests? Will giving back students' graded work offer an additional tool for learning or will it lead to an increase in student cheating? These questions are being debated as the district works to create a written policy to address concerns brought to the forefront by Citizens For Education.

Nearly fifteen years ago, Citizens For Education advocated for a written district policy regarding student assessments. Specifically, there was concern that students were not getting back their work and information about student progress was not available to parents. In response, the district issued a directive acknowledging that student assessments (class work, homework, reports, projects, student writing, student perform-

(Continued on page 5)

Special Education Laws and Regulations

Federal and state laws govern Special Education. Council Rock complies with these laws when it creates and implements an Individualized Education Program (IEP) for students who are eligible under both the federal and state eligibility/disability requirements. The federal and state laws regulate the process for Identification and complaints, require the collection and reporting of data, and set rigorous academic standards. Specifics on the delivery of Special Education in Council Rock can be found on page 7.

Federal Special Education Laws

Federal laws governing Special Education include the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)*, the *Rehabilitation Act of 1973* and the *Americans with Disabilities Act*.

In order for a student to qualify for a special education service under IDEA, the disability must result in needing different or additional services to succeed in school. IDEA has been amended several times and in 2004 Congress clarified that students must be provided a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) from birth (Early Intervention Programs) through age 21.

The IDEA recognizes 13 categories of disabilities including: students with mental retardation, hearing impairments (including deafness), speech or language impairments, visual impairments (including blindness), serious emotional disturbances, orthopedic impairments, Autism, traumatic brain injury, other health impairments, specific learning disabilities, and those who because of conditions need special education and related services. Under the auspices of the IDEA, schools districts are required to develop an IEP designed to meet the specific needs of each individual child.

One of the major amendments to IDEA in recent years was the provision for education to be given in “the least restrictive environment”. This means that the school is required to frame an IEP to give the individual student the greatest access to

his/her peers in a regular classroom environment, as well as access to extra-curricular and social activities within the school day.

Pennsylvania State Laws and Regulations

Title 22 PA School Code (Chapter 14) requires that each school district develop and implement a special education plan “aligned with the strategic plan of the school district.” Chapter 14 describes the state regulations for implementing IDEA, defines reporting data, outlines what the IEP of each student should include, and gives the number of students allowed on a teacher’s caseload. Since the 1990’s, there has been a change in how the regulations are applied. Currently the IEP and delivery of special education is more focused on the needs of the child, not the title of the disability.

Some of the data that the state requires from the school district are enrollments by special needs title, the amount of time (as a percentage of the day) the students spend in a regular education classroom, and participation and performance in statewide assessments.

The district has nine categories of Special Education: Learning Support, Emotional Support, Autistic Support, Life Skills Support, Multiple Disabilities, Speech/Language Support, Vision Support, Hearing Support and Physical Support. Within those nine categories there are three levels of intensity of services: Itinerant (least restrictive), Supplemental (moderately restrictive), and Full-Time (most restrictive).

The state requires that the district report the amount of time each student spends in a mainstream environment inside the regular classroom in three categories: 80% or more of the day, 79% to 40%, and less than 40% of the day. The state also requires a breakdown of the number of students going to a school outside the district including: special schools, residential facilities, instruction inside the home and other settings. This is expressed as 80% or more and 40% or less.

Abiding by all state and federal Special Education laws and regulations comes at a high price. Please see the article titled “Special Education – Special Cost – Insufficient Funding” on page 13.

In the Numbers

| Secondary Buildings and Classroom Sizes | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|--|----------------------------|--|-----------|---------------------------|---------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|----------|------|----------|------|-------|------|
| Building Size | | | | HMS | | NMS | | RMS | | CR North | | CR South | | | |
| Building Size | Building sqft | | | | 142,272 | 133,900 | 85,440 | 340,000 | 380,000 | | | | | | |
| | Classroom Trailers sqft | | | | 0 | 7,776 | 2,592 | 0 | 0 | | | | | | |
| | Proposed Additions: none | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | Total: Building + Trailers | | | | 142,272 | 141,676 | 88,032 | 340,000 | 380,000 | | | | | | |
| Classrooms Sizes | | | | Plancon Square Feet | Plancon Capacity | HMS | | NMS | | RMS | | North | | South | |
| | | | | | | # | sqft | # | sqft | # | sqft | # | sqft | # | sqft |
| General Classroom | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | 30 | 660 | 8 | >900 | 1 | >1000 | 11 | >1000 | 18 | 1210 | |
| | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | 2 | 955 | 11 | >800 | 3 | >900 | 18 | >900 | 1 | 1100 | |
| | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | 2 | 775 | 20 | >660 | 13 | >800 | 12 | >800 | 1 | 912 | |
| | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | 1 | 1088 | | | | | 36 | >660 | 4 | 864 | |
| | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | 2 | 1292 | | | | | | | 51 | 815 | |
| | Full Sized Classrooms | | >660 | 25 | | | | | | | | | 10 | 720 | |
| | Medium Classrooms | | 440 - 660 | 0 | | | | | 8 | <660 | 19 | <660 | 2 | 590 | |
| | Small Classrooms | | 200 - 440 | 0 | 6 | 384 | | | | | 7 | <440 | | | |
| | Classroom Trailers | | 864 | 0 | | | 9 | 864 | 3 | 864 | | | | | |
| Total Room Count | | | | | 43 | 48 | 28 | 103 | 87 | | | | | | |
| ENROLLMENT as of April 2011 | | | | | 671 | 849 | 425 | 2137 | 2062 | | | | | | |
| Room Counts DO NOT include music, art, shops, IA, Family Consumer Science, or special use rooms. | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| HMS = Holland Middle School, NMS = Newtown Middle School, RMS = Richboro Middle School | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

The chart above documents CR's secondary building sizes in context with present enrollment. It is also relevant to examining the redistricting that will have more students attend RMS and South. The chart, when put together with enrollment projections, reveals little correlation between the number of classrooms in a building and the number of students who will ultimately be in attendance.

The District redistricted to equalize the enrollment between its largest and smallest middle schools. The largest middle school without trailers is HMS and the smallest is RMS. HMS has 43 classrooms and RMS has 25 classrooms and 3 trailers for a total of 28. Despite this difference, the district has decided to equalize their population by changing the middle school destination of Rolling Hills Elementary students from HMS to RMS. In 2012-13 the district is predicting an enrollment of 532 for its smallest middle school, RMS, and 516 for its largest middle school, HMS.

Trailers are needed at two middle schools and HMS will be below capacity. The recent redistricting does nothing to relieve NMS, the second largest middle school building that is dependent on 9 trailers to accommodate its 849 students. NMS's 9 trailers and the 3 at RMS exacerbate rather than relieve the dependence on 12 middle level trailers. The redistricting of Rolling Hills to RMS will leave the only middle school without trailers (HMS) under-populated.

South has more square footage & North has more classrooms. Although South has more square footage than North, it has 16 fewer classrooms. North has 67 large classrooms, 19 medium and 7 small for a total of 103. South has 85 large classrooms, and 2 medium for a total of 87 instructional spaces. Since South's opening in 2002, its enrollment has been less than North with a current difference of 75.

Redistricting RMS creates a significant high school enrollment gap. In 2012-13, all RMS students will go to South, ending the two high schools near equal enrollment. By September 2012 when all Northampton students will start attending South, South's enrollment is projected to exceed North's. In 2012-13, except for students who still have siblings at North, the six Northampton elementary schools will feed into the two Northampton middle schools (HMS & RMS) and all those students will attend South. With just four elementary schools going to NMS and feeding into North, the gap between South's enrollment and North's will grow every year until the difference between the two schools has been projected to be as much as 400. How this gap will affect course offerings and/or opportunities for high school students is not fully known.

Citizens will be tracking impacts. Citizens For Education will be tracking enrollment numbers and reporting any impacts resulting from redistricting at the secondary level that was approved in 2010-11.

Mr. Dan Greenland, HMS' Principled Principal

Principal Dan Greenland took the helm at Holland Middle School last fall, and after 6 months on the job, he shared his thoughts with Citizens For Education about his administrative philosophy: "Holland Middle School is a community where everyone has a voice." More than just a mantra, Mr. Greenland has initiated Circle Time every 6th school day, in which small groups of students meet for 10 minutes with a staff member who facilitates discussions among them. One of the goals is to "empower the silent majority" so that kids who might not normally speak up about an issue have the opportunity and encouragement to do so. Mr. Greenland also finds ways to give the teachers a voice in decisions that affect the student body.

Mr. Greenland's upbringing in a small western Pennsylvania town taught him the importance of a friendly, open atmosphere and he brings this sensibility to his work at HMS, where he formerly held the position of Assistant Principal for 11 years. Besides the subjects and facts that students are taught, Mr. Greenland feels that when his staff can foster a love of learning in their students, such that their students cannot wait to come to school, then they have done their job well. In addition, he hopes that by modeling compassion, the HMS students will learn to show compassion to others, thereby enriching their own lives and the lives of those around them.

Mr. Greenland received bachelor and master degrees in Education from Bloomsburg University, and then attended Temple University where he obtained administrative certifications. He began his teaching career at Rolling Hills Elementary School in the 1970s, and after a few years became the Acting Principal of both Goodnoe (Grades 4-6) and Chancellor (Grades K-3) Schools. This coincided with the time when 6th grade was moved from the Junior High Schools to the elementary schools. Mr. Greenland then returned to Rolling Hills, where he split his time between teaching and administration, and then did a second stint at Goodnoe as Assistant Principal for 5 years, before moving on to HMS. Mr. Greenland and his wife Terry, a former Council Rock music teacher who now teaches at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia, have 3 sons and make their home in Yardley Borough. In his spare time, Mr. Greenland enjoys woodworking,

especially making reproductions of antiques, and like every parent, is always happy to see his sons interacting positively with each other.

Throughout his career, Mr. Greenland has seen the expansion of technology in the schools and in the culture. While Smart boards and online test help can truly improve the educational experience for children, he worries that middle school children don't always have the wisdom to properly handle the downside of technology, including the lack of privacy inherent in their Facebook accounts. Kids of this age tend to follow the crowd, and Mr. Greenland encourages HMS students to be their own person and be true to themselves. Coming from an elementary school background, Mr. Greenland notes that discipline can be easier at the middle level compared to the elementary level, because students know the difference between right and wrong by the age of 12 or 13.

With the District moving Rolling Hills Elementary students from HMS to Richboro Middle School, Citizens For Education asked Mr. Greenland about what the impact might be on HMS. He said HMS would lose 50 kids the first year and 50 the second year. With a loss of 100 students, there would be a need for some HMS staff members to also transition to other Council Rock positions. While he doesn't like to lose good teachers, Mr. Greenland feels that a smaller school can be beneficial to students, especially when it comes to competition to be on sports and other teams. However, he also stressed the importance of retaining program opportunities in a smaller school environment. Mr. Greenland regularly shares his experiences with his counterparts at Richboro and Newtown Middle Schools, and will borrow ideas from them as well. Parity between the schools is important to Mr. Greenland, but he feels that each school will have its own identity based on the personalities and backgrounds of its staff and students.

Mr. Greenland credits his smooth transition to Principal in part to former HMS Principal Mike Lecker, who shared his philosophy that administrators should know all aspects of the job, from management to budgeting to scheduling to discipline and more. He also credits his new Assistant Principal, Ms. Terry Kluck, as a quick learner. Summing up his experience at Council Rock and particularly at Holland Middle School, Mr. Greenland states happily, "We have good students, good parents, and a good staff."

(Return of Tests continued from page 1)

ance, quizzes, teacher designed tests, department/district tests, midterms, final exams and standardized tests) should be available to parents. The directive concluded with the statement: "The District's position is that a minimum of 80% of all assessments will be returned to students to take home for parent review."

Over the past decade, the practice regarding the returning of assessments changed. Although most of the language remained intact, the final statement that quantified how this policy would be administered was removed.

Currently, within the high schools there is now a culture that sets no expectation or defined guidelines for the return of student tests, quizzes, or other graded work. Without a specific published guideline of how many assessments a parent should expect to see, a serious lack of communication exists.

Members of the Citizens board have met with many parents and discussed this topic within the Council Rock community and learned that there are instances where teachers are **not allowing any tests or quizzes to come home**. The culture has evolved from one where there was an expectation that the majority of a student's work would come home to today where in some instances 0% of work comes home.

This evolution adversely affects students. To best study and learn, having the ability to look at one's mistakes, to fully understand coursework, is critical. Using previously graded work as a study tool can be a crucial element to academic success for many students.

Did you know that Council Rock has saved \$9,335,000 since 2005 through our Energy Management Program? That's the equivalent of powering 2,397 houses for a year!

Citizens listened to the concerns from within the community and asked to meet with district administration about this topic. In late February, members of the Citizens Executive Board met with Barry Desko (Director of Secondary Education), Joy McClendon (Director of Elementary Education and Curriculum), Susan McCarthy (Principal of CRHS North), Al Funk (Principal of CRHS South) and Frank Grimes (Chemistry Teacher at CRHS North). At that time, the administration agreed to investigate this matter further within the high schools and scheduled meetings in early April with high school department chairpersons. From that meeting, a subcommittee that includes teachers from both high schools, covering each content area, and both principals was formed. The purpose of this subcommittee, which will meet in late April, is, according to Joy McClendon, "The drafting of an updated statement of practice."

Citizens is advocating for the return of quantifiable language in the student handbook that makes clear what parents can expect to review at home with regard to their child's work. Giving students their own graded tests and quizzes to review at home could help develop better study skills, and potentially allow study time to be more productive and less stressful. It also opens communication for parents to get a clearer understanding of a student's progress, beyond simply knowing grades.

Citizens will follow up in the fall newsletter with specific information about how this policy has changed. We thank the many community members who brought this issue to our attention.

Citizens For Education Officers 2010-11

President: Joanne Hinton
Vice-President: Allison MacGahan
Treasurer: June Wallace
Secretary: Nancy Sauers

(Voting is Primary continued from page 1)

Even though Citizens For Education (CFE) is non-partisan and non-political and does not endorse specific candidates, CFE strongly urges all our members in the five regions where there is an election to familiarize themselves with the candidates and vote.

Typically, less than 15% of registered voters turn out on Primary Day. In the last school director elections in 2009, in Bucks County the voter turnout was 12.79%. If this statistic is repeated in this year's May primary, the winner of a Council Rock School Board election could be decided by the votes cast by just 1 out of every 10 registered voters. This makes YOUR one vote very valuable!

If the same candidate wins on both the Republican and Democratic ticket, the election is essentially over, however an independent candidate can file to be on the ballot in November. The same name will appear in November under both parties. If the same person does not win on both sides, it is possible in November to have a registered Democrat on the Republican ticket and/or a registered Republican on the Democratic ticket. This is done to make school board elections non-partisan.

School board elections should not be about political parties, they should be about educating the future generation. A truly representative outcome to the School Board Director elections is when all constituents vote including parents, older adults, adults with no children in the district, and voting age students.



Your vote is important because the elected school board director's job is to ensure a quality education at a reasonable cost, and protect property values while producing young adults that will be contributing members of our community and the nation.

Please vote on May 17, 2011!

PSSA's at the Elementary Level

Citizens For Education analyzed 3rd and 5th grade PSSA Reading and Math scores for all Council Rock School District (CRSD) elementary schools over the last 5 academic years, ending in 2009-10. While the PSSA scores are just one snapshot of student academic success, it does allow for comparisons to be made among the elementary schools and to the scaled state scores.

According to the administration, scores in any comparison must differ by at least 50 points in order to be considered statistically significant. Although there were 3 cases over the five year period where an elementary school had an average Reading or Math score lower than the state score, none of these were statistically significant (there were two 20-point and one 10-point difference). So it can safely be said that CRSD students in 3rd and 5th grades perform consistently better than the state scaled score in both Math and Reading, and have done so for at least the last five years.

When comparing the elementary schools to each

other, four different schools have been able to claim the "Top CRSD Score" award: Goodnoe, Hillcrest, Sol Feinstone and Wrightstown. Each of the ten elementary schools has been in the top three scoring schools at least once in the five year period.

A comparison of test scores of 3rd graders to the same group of students two years later as 5th graders was conducted. This analysis evaluated data from 2006-07 3rd graders who became 2008-09 5th graders, and from 2007-08 3rd graders who became 2009-10 5th graders. In both 2008-09 and 2009-10, the Reading score for two schools increased by more than 50 points. The remaining schools' Reading scores increased from 3rd to 5th grade as well, although the increases were not statistically significant (50 point benchmark). In Math, however, every elementary school showed a 50-point or more increase in scores from 3rd to 5th grade. The administration credits this improvement to a number of factors, including student familiarity with taking assessments, alignment of the math curriculum to the material on the test, and the work of the math specialists and teachers.

Special Education Delivery in Council Rock

Special Education in Council Rock involves all schools and curricular areas from Pre-Kindergarten through a student turning 21 years of age, and comprises 20.3% of the district's annual budget. A student must first be identified as in need of services, then placed in the appropriate classroom, to access the curriculum.

Identification

In Council Rock, the chronology of identification of a child with special needs is as follows:

1. Referral by parent, doctor, teacher or other care giver
2. Testing by a multi-disciplinary team to determine eligibility for Special Education services
3. Formation of the IEP (Individualized Education Program) team which typically includes: the parents of the child; not less than one regular education teacher of the child (if the child is, or may be, participating in the regular education environment); not less than one special educator of the child; the representative(s) from CR who is qualified to provide, or supervise the specially designed instruction to meet the unique needs of children with disabilities, and someone from CRSD who is knowledgeable about the general education curriculum and the resources of CRSD
4. IEP Team determines what is needed for appropriate educational services
5. Once the IEP team evaluates the needs of the child, the student is placed in the program that best fits their needs. All students are reevaluated as needed to determine appropriate program and placement.

Implementation

In the 2009-10 school year, Council Rock reported 2,118 children between the ages of 2

and 21 receiving Special Education - 1,926 students of those students were ages 6 to 21 years. In the 2010-11 school year there are 1,895 identified Special Education students receiving special education, of which 44 are aged 19-21 years. There are also 1,078 students who were identified as gifted and 63 of those gifted students were also identified as having a disability.

Currently, there are six different, broad ranging areas of Special Education throughout the district. They are: Learning Support, Autistic Support, Emotional Support, Multiple Disabilities, Life Skills Support and Intensive Learning Support.

Special Education students' school assignment is not based on their address; they are placed in a school where the support program matches the intensity of services required. This can result in special education students attending a school that is different from their neighbors and one they would otherwise not have attended. These "district level classes" are noted in the following chart as DLC, which refers to students not at their home school.

All 15 schools in the district provide Itinerant Learning Support (ILS). The other five areas of Special Education that are specific to a particular school are detailed in the chart on page 8, along with the population of ILS by school. The chart reflects data as of January 2011 for elementary schools, and April, 2011 for the secondary schools.

Students with needs in all areas of support are provided services inside the district, but students with more intense needs in Learning Support, Emotional Support and Life Skills Support are educated outside of the district. Students with outside placements account for 1.3% of students with disabilities.

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Did you know the state and federal government funds only 19% of Council Rock's Special Education budget?



Citizens
For
Education

...a voice for our children!

(Special Education Delivery continued from page 7)

| School | Iterant Learning Sup | | Autistic Support | | Emotional Support | | Multiple Disabilities | | Life Skills Support | | Intensive Learning Support | |
|--------------------|----------------------|------|------------------|------|-------------------|-----|-----------------------|-----|---------------------|-----|----------------------------|-----|
| | Total | DLC* | Total | DLC | Total | DLC | Total | DLC | Total | DLC | Total | DLC |
| Churchville Elem | 62 | 5 | | | | | | | | | 8 | |
| Goodhoe Elem | 77 | 0 | 74 | 58 | | | | | | | | |
| Hillcrest Elem | 29 | 0 | | | | | | | 12 | 10 | | |
| Holland Elem | 58 | 14 | | | | | | | | | 18 | |
| Newtown Elem | 51 | 0 | | | | | 5 | 4 | | | | |
| Richboro Elem | 39 | 0 | 8 | 6 | | | | | | | | |
| Rolling Hills Elem | 52 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Sol Feinstone Elem | 64 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |
| Welch Elem | 60 | 0 | | | 19 | 17 | | | | | | |
| Wrightstown Elem | 36 | 0 | | | | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Holland Middle | 85 | 0 | | | 4 | | | | | | | |
| Newtown Middle | 118 | 0 | 17 | n/a* | 7 | | | | | | | |
| Richboro Middle | 64 | 0 | | | 2 | | 3 | n/a | 8 | n/a | | |
| | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| North HS | 255 | 0 | 29 | n/a | 29 | 0 | | | | | | |
| South HS | 232 | 0 | | | 11 | 0 | 7 | n/a | 8 | n/a | | |

*DLC – number of students in District Level Classes—students who would have gone to a different school if there were no special needs requirements.

**n/a – not available at this time

Special Education Curriculum Delivery

The process of placing students in classrooms, and setting curriculum, must encompass all students' needs as determined by their IEP. The district must always be mindful of a requirement that the classroom provide the "least restrictive environment," meaning that students must be included in classrooms with their peers whenever possible.

Classes are formed based on need and each case may result in a different placement. At the primary level, a "Response to Intervention" process is used to initially identify children at risk academically. A structured intervention is provided to see if the student responds before the formal evaluation for eligibility begins. The students are evaluated and needs are determined prior to deciding which school the student will attend. That placement is based on the alignment of need and services provided.

Curriculum delivery is up to the district, but it must

align with the Council Rock and Pennsylvania state standards. This does not necessarily mean a student is following the curriculum appropriate for their age or grade level. If they are not able to process the material, the curriculum will be delivered for the grade level at which they are able to work, but it must maintain the Council Rock curriculum. For example, a 5th grade student working at a 3rd grade level in reading will follow the same curriculum guidelines as the 3rd graders for reading.

To ensure the "least restrictive environment", a variety of assistive technology devices and software are available to allow students to participate in regular education classes. These are determined by the formal IEP process. Additionally, staff development on inclusive practices for teachers and assistants is provided. In recent years the district has broadened the staff development to include not only academic classes,

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(Special Education Delivery continued from page 8)
but specials and electives.

There are many tools available to teachers of Special Education. At the elementary level are the Wilson Reading Program, "Visualizing and Verbalizing", and "Seeing Stars" for Reading, English, Language Arts (RELA). At the secondary level there are computer applications: Kid Biz and Teen Biz, both for RELA, and Touch Math for Math remediation. In addition, Holland and Goodnoe elementary schools run a facilitated recess program currently the focus of a research project with the University of Pennsylvania.

In Council Rock, Special Education Supervisors are the point people for curriculum. There are six Special Education Supervisors; two at the elementary level, one at the middle level, one for each high school and one devoted to autistic support. These supervisors are members of the curriculum committee and interact with the specialists for each subject area to stay informed as curriculum is updated. The Special Education Supervisors have supervisory responsibility for the Custodial Teacher. The Custodial is a Special Education teacher who interprets the way the student's IEP is delivered. They are the in-

terface between all of the child's teachers and are responsible for all state required paperwork.

Each student is assessed based on how they are progressing relative to their IEP; they are not compared to other students in the classroom. An attachment to the elementary report card indicates which needed modifications were applied. A section of the IEP called "Specially Designed Instruction" also specifies these modifications for Special Education students at all levels. Parents are given a progress monitoring report four times a year.

Students are exited from the program either by District recommendation or parent request (against District recommendation). In 2009-10 approximately 170 students (about 9%) exited the program. Of these, approximately 35% were students receiving only speech services. Very few students leave the program by parent request.

Providing an appropriate curriculum for Special Education students, while following all state and federal laws and regulations (see article "Special Education Laws and Regulations on page 9) comes at a high cost. Please see "Special Education – Special Cost – Insufficient Funding on page 13.

National Honor Society Eligibility Changes For the Class of 2012 and Beyond

Three years ago, Council Rock made a dramatic change to its class weight, rank and GPA policies in the high schools. In passing a new system, the district went from an un-weighted GPA/weighted rank to the current system of a weighted GPA with no individual class rank. Classes themselves no longer have a weight, only the grades earned in each class do. Since acceptance into the National Honor Society (NHS) had been based on quality points, calculated using class weights and grades, new eligibility requirements for NHS had to be developed to work within the revised GPA system.

A committee of teachers, administrators, guidance counselors, and National Honor Society advisors met a number of times in the last few

months to review criteria requirements for NHS. After careful analysis of former (and current) NHS members' GPA compared to projected GPA's under the new system, some natural "breakpoints" in the data appeared to be evident. The committee recommended the following changes in scholastic criteria eligibility for NHS:

- By the end of tenth grade, the student must obtain a weighted GPA of 3.65 or higher
- During grades 9, 10 or 11, the student must have enrolled in at least one Honors or AP level course

The other components necessary for admittance to NHS, including community service, leadership and character, remain unchanged from the previous requirements. A minimum of 35 LINC's hours must be completed prior to application to NHS and demonstrated leadership in a school or extracurricular activity must be part of each applicant's experience. An essay is also a part of the application. NHS induction ceremonies took place on April 6 and April 28 at North and South respec-

ROBERTS RULE In the CR Business Office

The rule in Council Rock's business office seems to be that both the Director and Assistant Business Administrator should have the name "Robert." Fortunately for Council Rock the people attached to the name Robert have become synonymous with someone who is an integral and important asset to the district.

The most recent Robert is Robert (Bob) Kennedy who started at Council Rock in the position of Assistant Business Manager in August 2010. He follows another Robert, Robert Riegel, who left Council Rock on July 1, 2010 to become the Business Administrator for the Quakertown School District. Robert Kennedy reports to Robert Reinhart, Council Rock's Business Manager, who replaced Robert Schoch who left last year for the North Penn School District.

Like the Robert before him, Robert Kennedy has a wealth of experience. Robert Kennedy brings to Council Rock a variety of learning from previous positions that each lasted almost seven years - seven years at a for-profit company in Industry, seven years at a not-for-profit, and seven years at Pennsylvania's largest School District. It is the combination of these experiences that makes Robert Kennedy a great asset to the Business Office.

Kennedy attributes his three past work experiences with giving him three different kinds of challenges that helped him grow both personally and professionally. He cites his seven years at the "Charming Shoppes" for developing his focus on the bottom line and credits his seven years at the Educational Testing Service (ETS) as where he developed his own Robert's rule, which is, "lessons learned from challenges can make a difference." His biggest challenge was as a Budget Manager in the Budget Office of the Philadelphia School District (PSD).

A few facts about PSD can give some insight into the expansiveness of his tasks in his

Budget Manager's job. PSD is the eighth largest in the country and is responsible for the education, including charter schools, of 190,000 students, as compared to Council Rock's 11,900 students. In Philadelphia, the 2010 final budget was \$2.4 billion dollars as compared to Council Rock's proposed \$198+ million preliminary budget for 2011-2012. Kennedy was one of Philadelphia district's 22,000 employees.

While there, Kennedy reported to a revolving door of three different Superintendents and four different Business Managers, all of whom needed time to transition, had new ideas, and instituted different processes. The constant change in top management contributed to PSD not just being very large and bureaucratic, but also having a culture that was resistant to long-term improvement.

Kennedy's employment background is enhanced by his educational and professional credentials. He graduated from the University of Delaware in 1991 with a Business Administration Degree in Accounting. He received his CPA in 1992 and in 2003 he added an MBA in Finance from Widener University to his resume.

Kennedy sought his position in Council Rock so that he could be in a place where he could make a difference. He was among many who submitted an application. He was offered the job after extensive interviews and a rigorous background check. He currently commutes from Bensalem, where he lives with his wife and 3 year old son, and he hopes to eventually move even closer. His job description responsibilities include: taxes, payroll, purchasing, accounts payable, financial reporting, accounting and budgeting. Even though he has been here less than a year, he has a thorough understanding of the current budgetary challenges, which will force the district to operate with "less and less" resources. To that end he is working to revise and simplify the "processes" of the Business Office.

Citizens For Education thanks all the Roberts, both past and present, for their service to Council Rock, for their interest in Citizens For Education, and help with articles. Each has put a personal and valued stamp on the school district. Citizens wishes Kennedy, the newest Robert, much good luck and success.

Proposed State Budget Negatively Impacts Council Rock

(Disclaimer: Information in this article is based on public information available through April 28.)

The 2011-12 Pennsylvania state budget proposed by Governor Tom Corbett decreases education funding across the state by \$1 billion dollars. This statewide reduction translates to a \$3.7 million loss in education funding for the Council Rock School District (CRSD) across four categories of funding: Basic Education Subsidy, Social Security Reimbursement, Charter School Payments, and Accountability Block Grants. In 2010-11, Council Rock received an estimated \$18.9 million from the state for these four expenditures. If the proposed budget is passed, this amount will be reduced to \$15.2 million in 2011-12.

State education funding cuts exacerbate an already difficult budgetary environment. On February 3, before the Governor's budget reductions were known, but after an \$11 million CRSD budget deficit was already understood, the School Board voted unanimously to limit local tax increases to 1.4% in compliance with the Act 1 index. The Governor's cuts, announced on March 8, increased the total budget deficit to \$14.2 million. The presumed 1.4% local tax increase would bring the district \$1.96 million in additional revenues. To close the deficit, the district has been actively evaluating \$9.1 million in spending cuts and the use of \$4 million from fund balance reserves. Spending cuts are achieved in part by proposed teacher salary concessions totaling approximately \$1.1 million, the proposed elimination of over 60 staff including 52.4 classroom positions for \$3,435,000, and \$1 million in facilities and maintenance savings.

The proposed state funding reduction of \$3.7 million is broken down as follows:

\$1.7 million in Basic Education Subsidy, the major grant program through which funds are distributed from the state to school districts, primarily for basic instruction and operations. In 2010-11 CRSD received \$14.4 million; the proposed subsidy for 2011-12 is \$12.7 million.

\$1.53 million for Social Security Reimbursement, which reflects the state's share of employers' social security. Previously the state paid 50%

of every school district's Social Security costs. The proposed budget only reimburses each district at its 'aid ratio' for personnel employed after July 1, 1994. Aid ratios are determined by a formula based on personal income and property values within each district. CR's aid ratio is 15%, much lower than other districts, which can have aid ratios up to 85%. This would result in a deeper cut for CRSD and similar suburban school districts.

\$75,000 in Charter School Payments will be eliminated because the state intends to change the way charter schools operate and are funded.

\$425,000 in Accountability Block Grants will be eliminated. In the past Council Rock has used these funds to implement Reading Recovery, which has been in place since 2000-01. With the elimination of this grant money, CR plans to eliminate the program entirely, which will not only reduce CR's programming cost but also provide an additional savings of \$285,000 with the elimination of 3.8 Reading Recovery trained elementary teachers.

The proposed elimination of Reading Recovery would remove a short-term early intervention program for the lowest achieving first graders. Through Reading Recovery, students receive a half-hour, one-on-one lesson, every school day for 12-20 weeks with a specially trained teacher. CR's tracking of participating students finds that, post-Reading Recovery, students sustain proficient levels at approximately 75% in 2nd grade and just over 50% in 3rd grade.

CRSD proposes that the lowest achieving first graders be taught using the Leveled Literacy Intervention System to replace Reading Recovery. As per a letter from the Superintendent posted on the CRSD website on April 28th, multiple assessments will be used to identify the lowest achieving students who previously would have qualified for Reading Recovery. They will be taught in a pull-out program in groups of 3 or less with a Literacy Specialist 3 to 5 times a week. The Leveled Literacy Intervention System was recently purchased by all schools through Federal Stimulus Funds.

What effect the transition to the Leveled Literacy Intervention System will have on struggling readers is unknown. At the time of this

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(Proposed State Budget continued from page 11)

publication this new reading strategy has not been presented at an Academic Standards Committee meeting nor piloted with those who previously would have qualified for Reading Recovery. Success rates can only be determined when and if the district does comparable testing with students who previously would have qualified for Reading Recovery, and compares the results to those who will learn using the Leveled Literacy Intervention System, instead of Reading Recovery, next year. Citizens For Education advocates that this be done.

Additional cuts in the proposed CRSD budget, which will come up for a vote on June 9th, can directly impact students.

The impacts of proposed budget cuts at the time of this publication are still unknown:

- It is expected that the 52.4 classroom cuts will result in less total classroom sections and more sections close to maximum student enrollment guidelines.
- More high school classes are being dropped or shuttled between North and South because of lower than minimum required enrollments.
- In elementary schools with non-learning support special education students, a new policy of no longer counting these students in the calculations to determine the number of classroom sections per grade will result in some reduction in the total number of sections. Taking these special education students who are often included in the regular education classes out of the total count will bring class sizes closer to or slightly over maximums at some schools (for schools that might be affected, see the Special Education chart on page 8).
- Both Richboro and Holland Middle Schools will no longer have assistant principals.
- Ninth grade sports teams are to be eliminated, which will affect athletic opportunities. Participation in extra-curricular offer-

ings may be reduced now that 5:00 pm buses for after school activities are proposed to be eliminated.

Citizens For Education will be tracking and reporting impacts at all grade levels in future newsletters.

There are legislative proposals that would increase state funding for education. Although the state budget is still being considered and it is not known when it will come up for a vote, many legislators are voicing concerns that the Governor's budget places too heavy a burden on students while giving oil and gas companies a free ride. While Governor Corbett continues to repeat his 'no new taxes' pledge from his campaign, some lawmakers are requesting the Governor impose a gas severance tax on natural gas drillers in Pennsylvania as other states do. The \$250-300 million in revenue it would generate, along with revenue from other proposed reductions, would help mitigate some of the severe cuts being imposed on public schools. Residents concerned about the impacts of funding cuts on CRSD should contact their state representatives to request that they prioritize state funding of education:

State Representatives
Steven J. Santarsiero (D-31)
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215-968-3975
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Scott A. Petri (R-178)
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215-364-3414
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Governor
Thomas Corbett
Governor's Office
Room 225
Main Capitol Building
Harrisburg, PA 17120
717-787-5962
governor@state.pa.us

State Senators
Tommy Tomlinson (R-6)
2212 Bristol Pike
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215-638-1784
rtomlinson@pasen.gov

Chuck McIlhinney (R-10)
22 South Main Street
Suite 220
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Did you know that the Governor's proposed 2011-12 budget would reduce Council Rock's state funding by \$3.75 million?

Special Education Special Cost – Insufficient Funding

Special Education is an underfunded mandate. Abiding by all state and federal regulations comes with a high price tag and low governmental reimbursement rates from the same state and federal governments that issue the mandates. Providing services to all Special Education students, including “gifted,” in an individualized manner carries a cost that is mostly paid by local taxation.

Special Education cost is going up and government funding is going down. Next year the cost of Special Education, including the “gifted” program, is projected to be \$42.6 million dollars, up 5.24% from \$40.5 million in 2010-11, and the combined federal and state reimbursement for Special Education is projected to be \$8 million. The \$2.1 million expenditure increase that is mandated and/or contractual comes in the same year that the state is funding Special Education at 2010 levels and cutting 6% from Council Rock’s overall state funding.

Council Rock’s taxpayers must make up state and federal funding gaps in the Special Education budget. This year, there are 1,895 Special Education students in Council Rock at a cost of \$40.5 million, representing 20.3% of the district’s total budget. To fund Special Education this year, Council Rock received approximately:

- \$3.3 million (7.7%) from the federal government
- \$6.3 million (15.5%) from the state government
- \$31 million (76.4%) from local taxation

Next year, less Special Education funding is expected from the federal government and the state reimbursement remains the same. Council Rock is projected to receive approximately:

- \$1.8 million (4.2%) from the federal government – a 45% reduction from 2010 levels
- \$6.3 million (14.8%) from the state government
- \$34.5 million (81%) from local taxation – an 11% increase from 2010 levels

As Special Education cost rises, and state and federal subsidies remain static or decline, local taxpayers are forced to pick up more of the tab.

Council Rock has gained better control and reduced expenditures for Special Education over

the years. Until 2003, the Bucks County Intermediate Unit (IU), a department of the state, provided many Special Education services in CRSD. In 2003, the Autistic support classes at Richboro Elementary were transferred from the IU (a process termed Transfer of Entity) to be run by CRSD. When Dr. Charles Lambert, Director of Special Services, joined CRSD, he determined that Special Education in Council Rock could run more effectively and with great cost savings if additional Special Education services provided by the IU were run in-house, particularly Autistic Support at Goodnoe Elementary. That change occurred in the 2007-08 school year. At this time, Becky O’Hara is the Supervisor of Autistic Support Programs, and Scott Helsinger is the Autistic Support Program Coordinator. Together, they oversee many of the functions previously done by the IU.

According to the Pennsylvania Association of Intermediate Units, “Intermediate units provide services for students (ages three-21) in public and non-public schools that support, enhance, and augment their educational experience” in many areas of Special Education; programs such as early intervention and Head Start, and other services, such as preschool and after school programs, Drug/Alcohol prevention and more. The district still contracts with the IU for speech, occupational and physical therapies, vision and hearing support.

Cost has also been contained by utilizing aides (as appropriate) in inclusion classrooms instead of providing a second teacher, and using programs for early intervention such as Reading Recovery. Although Reading Recovery is not part of the Special Education budget, its 70% continued success rate in 2nd grade for those who received Reading Recovery in 1st grade has deferred students who struggle with reading from being identified as in need of Special Education. Technology has also progressed allowing for cost savings. For example an iPad can now do, with one inexpensive device, what multiple technologies were required for in the past.

For 2011-12, Council Rock is proposing \$1.2 million in staffing cuts to Special Education. The “gifted” program will have two less support

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(Special Education-Special Cost continued from page 13)

teachers – one at the high school and one at the middle school. There will also be savings realized by the reduction of 10.8 teachers (4.5 at the elementary level, 2 at the middle level and 4.3 at the high school level) and 10 Instructional Assistants in the Special Services department. These staff cuts result from decreases in overall enrollment and identified students, and changes in team structures at the Middle Level. While there will always be some impact when staff is decreased, the District is confident that the needs of all students will continue to be met at the levels CRSD expects.

The effect of proposed cuts to supplies and programs on Special Education is unknown.

There are other proposed reductions in the Council Rock 2011-12 budget that may affect Special Education students. Teen Biz, a middle school computer program that helps both regular and

Special Ed inclusion students read and work at appropriate reading levels, will be eliminated for regular education and still be in use for some Special Education programs. Reading Recovery, which has been previously touted as a program that keeps regular education students out of what is a more expensive Special Education placement, is also at this writing among the proposed cuts. As a substitute for Reading Recovery, students will be taught using the Leveled Literacy Identification System (see Budget article on page 11). The effect this change might have on Special Education will not be known until future data can be analyzed regarding numbers of students being referred to Special Education.

It is clear that Council Rock has reduced Special Education costs where possible, while mandates at the state and federal level remain unfunded or underfunded, resulting in a



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