

Lyons Township High School Community Advisory Council

7:00 PM – February 18, 2009

Minutes

Documents sent earlier:

1. LTCAC Agenda for the 2/18/09 meeting
2. LTCAC December 17, 2009 Meeting Consensus Table Answers to Board Questions

I. Business Meeting (7:06 PM)

A. Marilyn Kosin called the meeting to order.

1. Our Bylaws call for officer elections at the May meeting. To vote in May, it would be good to have a slate at the April meeting. There are four officer positions, and three are willing to return. However, if you'd like to serve as an officer, please submit your name to Marilyn Kosin or Joyce Marine and we can have a full election. Those willing to return are co-chairs, Marilyn Kosin and Joan Rykal; and, secretary, Ernie Froemel. The Membership Chairperson position is open. That person attempts to recruit new members to maintain geographic diversity and a balance of 1/3 community, 1/3 students, and 1/3 faculty/staff. Most of the work is done at the end of the summer.
2. Curriculum is a timely, but large topic. Tonight we'll look at a couple small aspects of curriculum that are of interest to the Board.
3. Minutes for 12/17/08 will be submitted in the packet for the next meeting.

B. Superintendent's Report, Dr. Kelley

1. The economy is affecting the school district budget. We have little control over revenues, but we assume that we'll be getting less from government, interest income, and property taxes. However, expenditures do not go down. The district has about \$30 million surplus, which would allow us to weather 3-5 bad years. Nevertheless, the Board is now looking at reducing the budget. There is a deficit this year, but a sizable surplus projected for next year. It all has to do with the CPI. The tax cap in the 1990s limits a yearly budget increase for school districts by the CPI and new growth. New growth won't be much in the next few years. The CPI has averaged 3% in the past few years. One percent in the CPI is worth \$1 million. Next year's surplus is due to the CPI being at 4.1%, the highest in several years. However, for 2010-2011, the CPI will be 0.1%. That is about a \$4 million loss, which is why the Board is now looking at ways to reduce costs. We are building two scenarios. One assumes that the CPI will hover around 2% over the next 2-3 years. The other assumes that the CPI will fluctuate with oil price growth. We will work with the staff to see where we can make reductions without cutting program or impacting the kids. We did this before in 1993 and 1998.
2. Other than the Superintendent, there are three important positions open. One is in Language Arts, our biggest division. Two finalists will be interviewed tomorrow. Another opening was in Student Support Services. A person was hired for that position today. The third opening is the head varsity football coach. Next week, eight candidates will be interviewed.

3. Last Friday was the 9th annual all-school assembly. Kris Costopoulos started this as a way to increase school spirit and bring everyone together.
 4. The WLTL Rock-a-thon last weekend raised about \$17,000.
 5. A number of our student members are excused tonight since they are in the final dress rehearsal for *Annie Get Your Gun* which starts tomorrow.
- C. School Board Report, Allen Polich
1. The School Board appreciates the advice from the LTCAC, and that the officers attend the Board meetings to present timely recommendations.
 2. The Board elections on 4/7/09 are contested for district 204, which is unusual. Every two years, 3-4 members are elected.
 3. Last week, the Board received résumés for five outstanding candidates for the superintendent's position. Three are sitting superintendents, and two are assistant superintendents. The LTCAC helped determine the characteristics that the consultants used to identify candidates. Next week, the Board will interview on Monday through Wednesday; bring back finalists on Friday; and, plan to announce the new superintendent at the March Board meeting. The new superintendent will attend the April LTCAC meeting.
 4. Another issue is the Data-Driven Decision-Making Process, which uses data from associated schools and students at LT to help develop better ways to learn. Some of the results will be brought back to this group. The whole goal is to improve instruction down to the first-grade level.
- II. Discussion of Members; Concerns and Issues (7:23 PM)
- A. Q. Are all the associated schools participating in that program?
 - A. One is not, since they have their own process in place.
 - B. Q. It is extremely generous that everyone got a free burrito, but there is senior unrest about that.
 - A. A company wanted to donate the burritos to all students; it was not a school decision. The senior sense of humor is appreciated.
- III. Presentation on Three LT Curricular Programs (7:26 PM)
1. Drivers Ed: Bob Fritch, Chair of the Applied Arts Department.
 - a. Last year and this year, Lyons Township and a number of other schools applied for a waiver to the new law regarding driver's education.
 - b. Driver's Ed is a three-phase program – there are 36 hours of classroom instruction; 11 hours on the driving range at south campus; and, 2 hours behind the wheel in the neighborhoods. The new law calls for 6 hours behind the wheel, not including simulator or range. With the range, LTHS is now providing 13 hours, and the range provides all maneuvers that you could do on the street.
 - c. Students take Driver's Ed for one semester, alternating between the three phases. During the summer, the same program is offered for four weeks.
 - d. Last year, we asked for a waiver, which we are asking for this year. Without the waiver, we'd have to cut down to six hours behind the wheel.

- e. Q. If the waiver is not granted, would all maneuvers be on the street?
A. Yes, but they would only have 6 hours instead of 13 hours of those maneuvers. There is a big study out of Oregon that shows the only way to improve driving is to learn behind the wheel.
- Q. Is there a cost trade-off between these two models?
A. It would cost more for less time since we could only put three students in a car and would need more instructors.
- Q. How can a waiver contravene State law?
A. There are a many waivers at LT. We have a waiver to not take off on Pulaski Day or on the exact date of Veteran's Day. There are a number of ways to petition the state to waive a requirement. It requires posting the request publicly, holding an open public hearing, conducting a voice vote, and submitting all evidence of these actions to Springfield. It is then placed on the docket for review by the State Board of Education and finally the State Legislature. If there are no concerns within a defined time limit, the waiver is granted.
- Q. Is range training a component of Driver's Ed in other schools?
A. There are now only three that use range.
- Q. Are simulators being used?
A. No, LTHS removed its simulators.
- Q. How many students take summer Driver's Ed?
A. Last summer, there were 135. We train about 750 during the school year with four instructors.
- Q. When will you know if the waiver has been approved?
A. We will know in late April or early May.
- Q. Is it likely to be approved?
A. Yes.
- Q. Are there data showing what best produces safe drivers for 17-18 year olds?
A. The Oregon study is online. It shows that the best results are obtained if you wait until age 18 to train drivers. The main reason is that the frontal lobes, where decision-making is done, are fully formed by 18. This 10-15 year study shows that accidents drop off at 18, whether the student begins learning at 16 or 18. Accidents increase around age 22, probably due to alcohol and decreases again around 24. This is why the State went to the 9-month permit. They are trying to push this off to age 16 ½.
- Q. Is there much of a difference between six hours road time and other methods?
A. Statistically, the more road time, the fewer accidents. That is why the 50 hours with parents, including 10 hours at night, is so essential.
- Q. Since the law has changed requiring nine months for the permit, have more LT students gone outside to get their license?
A. We haven't seen any changes.
- Q. What is the State requirement for graduation?
A. The State requires 30 hours of classroom training.

- Q. Do students who take Driver's Ed outside still need to take the classroom segment at LT?
- A. No, but they have to submit evidence that they've passed so they can get graduation credit.
2. ACT Prep Classes, Scott Eggerding, Director, Curriculum and Instruction
- a. It is a Board goal to increase opportunities for all students to maximize their performance on high stake tests. No test prep can teach the content, but it can give students the tools to make the right decisions and give them the opportunity to relax and show what they know. We have instituted two new things. One is a practice ACT for all Juniors. It gives us a snapshot of all Juniors, and allows us to show them how they did and where they made errors. We also do a study hall prep – all students who have a study hall and haven't enrolled in a test prep are automatically enrolled for 2 days a week for 8 weeks. It is a mirror of the evening test prep. It is also available for students who can't take evening or have failed one or more classes. It has been very successful. We try not to hold it on a Monday or Friday, and make sure the time is regular and meaningful.
- b. Colleges want to know what kids don't know. We concentrate on the common questions that they should know. Because the ACT has to be replicated each year, there are several constant areas – there are 24 algebra and pre-algebra, 18 intermediate and coordinate geometry questions, and 3-4 trig questions. English reading has three non-fiction passages which require a different way to read them. Test prep includes an orientation, 2 math, 2 science, 4 English and reading. We try to give students some information, tools, tips, tricks, and practical examples.
- c. The test prep staff has also created modules that teachers could incorporate in their teaching.
- d. Q. What are you doing to help kids prepare for the new writing segment?
- A. There is a written component, but it doesn't count as much as the grammar component. The score is 2/3 grammar and 1/3 writing sample. The writing sample is pretty mundane, eg. "Should schools require uniforms?" It is not the type of writing that we do. We do teach some mechanics that address this style. The writing sample is scanned and available to colleges. Admissions counselors like it; English teachers don't.
- Q. What happens with illegible writing?
- A. We don't know.
- Q. Are we buying into the test culture with test prep courses?
- A. We talk about this quite a bit. Why are we still focusing on these tests? Aren't there better measures? That has to be balanced against the fact that colleges place too much emphasis on these tests. If our kids are not showing their best, then they are punished by not getting into the schools they want.
- Q. Don't some colleges have curriculum or tuition benefits based on ACT scores?

- A. Yes, there are different things that colleges do, based on the ACT.
- Q. What do you want to use as a measure of success for data-driven decision-making?
- A. That's a big topic and probably a discussion for this group next year.
- Q. How does that tie into associate schools and the tests they use?
- A. The PLAN test is given to freshmen. Technically, they should get the EXPLORE. However the EXPLORE is given to 8th graders and used for placement. We give the PLAN since they've just taken the EXPLORE a few months earlier. It also gives us a good baseline and allows comparison over two years. ACT explains score banding as growing between 2-3 points from the EXPLORE to the PLAN to the ACT. With data mining, we can see where kids are falling short of that growth. College readiness benchmarks can be shared with students and teachers.
3. Humanities Program, Gretchen Kulat and Karen Raino
- a. Two years ago, the LTCAC provided honest views about the transition program. As a result, we looked closely at the program and created the Humanities Program which is a combination of English, History, and Reading. We wanted to bring a core group of kids together and give them as much support as possible. It uses four teachers -- English teacher, Reading teacher, Social Studies teacher, and either another English or Social Studies teacher. It provides a smaller class size and more one-on-one contact with kids. It is a re-thinking about how to teach kids who are struggling.
 - b. There is a team of eight that plan together. Teaching is in teams of four. The students in this program scored a 14 or below on the EXPLORE entrance test in Reading. Also, teachers from their middle schools may recommend students for these courses. It is a prep level course.
 - c. It is not a replacement for trans. It is as rigorous as any prep level course. There are 50 students in the morning and 59 in the afternoon.
 - d. There are also four para-professionals. With the four teachers and three classes, there is a 1:18 teacher-student ratio. The fourth person allows for more flexibility and better contact with parents and administration. In general, it allows better integration, more contact with students, and more time to plan.
 - e. After the first quarter, absenteeism is down. Fewer students are tardy than the general population. So, anecdotally, the students like to attend. There is a positive sense of community. The kids like the curriculum and are more engaged.
 - f. There were some stumbling blocks. We wanted to do some block scheduling, which turned out to be confusing for new students. But, the flexibility for block scheduling exists. Some students were not happy in Humanities due to their perception of the program.
 - g. Q. Are there any plans to continue beyond the freshman level?
A. Yes, we are discussing sophomore and science curricula.
Q. What do they get credit for?
A. History, English, and Reading.

- Q. Are they graded separately on each component?
 - A. Yes, they get a separate grade on their transcripts. For integrated projects, each teacher counts the grade in their course.
 - Q. Are the three class periods contiguous, and are they the same set of students?
 - A. Yes, but we do follow the bell schedule. The rosters are adjusted quarterly so they are not necessarily with the same kids all year long.
 - Q. Is there ever a time when there are more than 20 kids in a room with the two teachers?
 - A. It is varied. We have two classrooms on either side of the hall with moveable walls. We can do whole group, or smaller groups, or other splits. For one project, we worked with 9-10 students.
 - Q. What course will they take as sophomores?
 - A. The options would be English Lit Comp Prep, which is a year-long integrated class, or a semester of English II Prep.
 - Q. Is there a trans class at the sophomore level?
 - A. No.
 - Q. What happens if a parent objects to the placement in the Humanities Program?
 - A. Parents have a say in placement. The students have been identified for the prep level since they show a reading score below 14. It is a State requirement to make an intervention for students who have been measured as deficient in an area. Prep level courses are taught in a different way. Accelerated is the only option. We use data to help convince parents that this is a better program for their child.
 - Q. In there an improvement in the views of other kids for this program?
 - A. We don't hear negatives in the halls. Students know these are prep level and are reading the same books as their counterparts. They see that they are engaging in interesting activities that others are not. They feel good about being where they are. The memory of trans is dimming.
 - Q. Is it open to students with IEPs?
 - A. No, since it is a level 2 intervention.
- IV. Small group discussion, please complete per table and turn-in (8:32 PM)
- A. What changes in Drivers Ed do you support?
 - B. Is there anything else LTHS should be doing to prepare students for major tests?
 - C. If we have a Humanities Program for freshmen, should we have a similar program for sophomores?
- V. Adjournment (As small group discussions ended.)