

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
January 28, 2015
Bedford High School - Large Group Instruction Room

1. Call to Order

At 7:35 p.m., Mr. Hafer called to order the meeting of the Bedford School Committee. Other members present included Ms. Seibert, Ms. Guay, Mr. McAllister and Mr. Pierce. Sophia Kyrou, student representative, was absent.

2. Comments from Public

None

3. Personnel Report

Mr. Sills thanked the DPW and Facilities Department for working so hard over the last two days to get schools ready to open tomorrow after 1-2 feet of snow and a snow day.

Mr. Sills announced the resignation of Jayme Szymczak, teacher at the Integrated Pre-School.

4. 2015-2016 Bedford High School Program of Studies

Dr. Turner, Principal of Bedford High School, gave the School Committee members a memo describing the many changes proposed to the 2015-2016 Program of Studies. He explained why there are so many changes and to present some ideas he has for also changing the Student Handbook later on this year.

Dr. Turner explained that many of the proposed changes were done to meet two goals from the School Improvement Plan – to reduce unhealthy stress of students and to ensure high expectations for all students. Changes were also made in attempt to have the students’ transcripts be more transparent to colleges and the NCAA. He also wanted to tighten up the story on the strength of Bedford High’s academics.

Dr. Turner noted these key changes:

- Levels of the courses are now named High Honors/AP, Honors, College Prep, and Introductory. (No longer using numbers)
- With few exceptions, all minors are now college prep.
- Music will now offer “majors” as art has done for several years.
- Students wishing to take a 6th major class will require approval from parent and Guidance Counselor

Dr. Turner said that these changes prompted a lot of faculty discussions on leveling and determining student’s readiness for courses. He and the staff firmly believe that college prep classes will prepare students for all types of colleges from Ivy League to 2 year programs. The staff is still discussing why we do not offer more AP classes, especially when all agree that the High Honor classes (formerly Level 5) are equivalent to AP quality.

Dr. Turner also noted that he hopes that requiring a Guidance Counselor and/or parent approval for a sixth major class will reduce stress on some students. Not all students are ready for six major classes and an adult conversation is needed when deciding on this action.

Dr. Turner shared data that clearly showed that stress on high school students is growing. He also noted however that there are about 25% of the students that say they are not stressed at all. Dr. Turner is concerned about this group as well.

Dr. Turner then shared some new ideas that are being considered for the incoming freshman class of 2019.

- Grade 9 academics will not be included in the GPA calculation for college applications.
- Shift the GPA scale from a 4.7 – 7.1 to 4.0 unweighted and 5.0 weighted scales.
- High Honors and Honors will be weighted equally.
- Only majors will be calculated in the weighted GPA.

Dr. Turner explained that these changes are only proposed at this time and he will assure JGMS parents that they will have an opportunity to learn about them and contribute to the conversations. He will work with Mr. Tracey, Principal of JGMS, to set up this opportunity.

Dr. Turner said that many of these changes are designed to alleviate stress and to be clearer to colleges. He hopes that the changes will encourage students to take the right mix of classes and levels. Possibly even to try something new. He also hopes it will help teachers close the gap between Honors level classes and High Honors level classes.

Dr. Turner said that conversations with teachers and parents have been passionate. And he has received a lot of very solid feedback.

Mr. Pierce asked why the Program of Studies is proposing to do away with the P.E. waiver option for seniors playing more than one sport. Mr. Pierce said that this option was brought about by a group of parents. Dr. Turner said he did not know this was the back ground. Dr. Turner said he was under the impression that this waiver went against PE guidelines from the State. He will look into it further with Mr. Mangan.

Mr. Pierce said that overall, the typical grading scale used for high school students does not acknowledge the student's true strengths and weaknesses. Dr. Turner agreed and said that the teachers are aware of this shortcoming.

Mr. Pierce said using the word "continuing" in a course description sounds as if it is remedial.

Mr. Pierce also said that he would like to the school to offer the Statistics and Probability course since this is one area of math that many students will use in their real world experience. He is sorry to see that this will be the second year that it will not be offered.

Mr. Pierce also suggested that the math courses be more clearly differentiated (noting depth, rigor, and pace). Dr. Turner agreed that this would be a good idea,

Mr. Pierce asked why the CPR course was no longer being offered. Dr. Turner said that it was hard to stretch CPR training into a year-long course. He also noted that he is striving to have all PE courses be active. Components of the CPR class will be worked into the other PE class offerings.

Ms. Guay said she is also a proponent of the Statistics course. She sees it especially important for students interested in the social sciences.

Ms. Guay said she applauds the entire staff for trying to improve the high school experience for all students. She is also pleased to see that Dr. Turner is so receptive to listening to parents' perspectives.

Mr. McAllister said that he applauds any decision made to reduce student stress. He said it is good to remove any of the "gamesmanship" that students may get involved in when trying to improve their GPA.

Mr. McAllister also suggested that Dr. Turner work with Mr. Tracey to try to figure out why 9th graders have a lot of stress. Maybe there is a way to better prepare these students for high school.

Ms. Seibert said that stress reduction is very important. She thinks not including grade 9 in the GPA is a great idea. She thinks 9th grade is a year when students get used to "doing high school". She said parents and students need to understand that GPA is not what high school is all about. She thinks the proposed changes are right on target to make high school a more rewarding experience for all students.

Dr. Turner said yes, the goal is to balance rigor and less stress.

Dr. Turner then mentioned the new Dual Enrollment program that Amie Capodano, Guidance Director, is working to implement. Next year, the high school's Economics class will be the first course that will earn college credits from Middlesex Community College. Dr. Turner pointed out that this credit could be considered by the UMass system. He hopes to get a few more classes approved for Dual Enrollment and recognizes that earning these credits could help make a UMass education more affordable and more attractive to students.

Mr. Hafer asked Dr. Turner if he know enough about the types of stress students are experiencing. He said he did not want to change policies based on stress alone since stress can be caused by other things besides school.

Mr. Hafer asked what if anything will be replacing the rubric that explained the different levels of rigor. Dr. Turner said that staff is working on having guidelines to help them understand the various levels of a course and how to use them to teach and to place students. He said that a document like this really does not belong in the Program of Studies since the Program of Studies is designed to help students. He will however, find the right place to share this information once it is updated by the staff.

Mr. Hafer asked why the math pre-requisite grade guidelines are being removed. Dr. Turner said that this change reflects practice. Decisions are truly based on qualitative reasons and not solely on final grades.

Mr. Hafer said it is true that 9th grade is a transitional year but colleges are still going to consider 9th grade grades. Therefore, he is not in favor of excluding it from GPA calculations used on college transcripts.

Mr. Hafer also believes that Honors and High Honors should be weighted differently.

Mr. Sills commented that course descriptions should all look similar despite the level of rigor. He said it is critical that all students learn the same curriculum. He also asked Dr. Turner to ensure that the Modern American History descriptions all have a History Fair component in the

description since they all require this project. He also suggests broadening the Modern World History description. He suggested setting up links to the web site for additional information on the courses.

Mr. Pierce asked if Dr. Turner would consider publishing calculated GPAs at the end of each year so everyone can see the trends. Dr. Turner said that he is discussing this idea with staff.

Dr. Turner praised the work Ms. Capodanno has done on sharing the success story of BHS with parents and colleges. Not only has she revamped the College Profile, but she shares the story personally with many college reps and colleagues.

Mr. Pierce made the following motion:

MOVED That the School Committee approve the 2015-2016 Program of Studies as described in the memo dated January 23, 2015, except for the changes in the PE waiver section.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Guay

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

Dr. Turner thanked Assistant Principal Boynton for her hard work in updating and coordinating the Program of Studies updates.

4. 2015-2016 School Calendar

Mr. Sills presented two version of the 2015-2016 School Calendar. Mr. Sills said he presented two options because this year, the Labor Day holiday is very late – September 8. One version has school starting for all students before Labor Day and the other version shows school starting after Labor Day. Bedford traditionally does not start before Labor Day but has in the past when scheduling was unusual due to building renovations. Mr. Sills also said that the BEA would agree to start before Labor Day this year, as long as it is a one-time event.

Mr. Hafer proposed a third option too. This option started before Labor Day but not as early as Mr. Sills. Mr. Hafer suggested starting school for all students on September 1st.

The School Committee discussed the various options. They weighed the pros and cons of all including three day weekend before Labor Day or the tradition of having the Friday off as part of extending the Labor Day weekend. The Committee tried to consider all students in all grade levels as well as the stress of families and athletic schedules.

The School Committee agreed that any decisions made regarding the calendar should be made with the best interests of the students. Is it easier or harder to come to school early or go late into June? Which situation will be the most beneficial to learning – not family or athletic schedules.

The School Committee agreed to wait and vote on the Calendar next week as they consider what is truly best for student learning.

5. FY'16 Operating Budget

Mr. Sills showed the School Committee the budget presentation he intends to deliver to the Finance Committee tomorrow night.

He began by clarifying how the schools were able to add more staff during FY'15. He said that during FY'15, the schools ended up adding a new Kindergarten teacher, a new Kindergarten

Assistant and a new Inclusion Specialist for a new student with Downs Syndrome at Lane School. Mr. Sills said funding for these unplanned positions was possible due to savings in Special Education due to two out-placed students returning to school and eliminating the PE/Health Program Administrator stipend. These positions he noted were not funded with “extra cash”.

Mr. Sills then discussed the FY’ 16 budget proposal. He explained that in order to maintain existing salaries, there would be a 3.43% increase from last year. This is due to the teacher contract and to adding 18 minutes to teaching time at Davis school. This increase alone is above the Finance Committee’s guideline for FY’ 16.

Mr. Sills also noted that operating expenses for maintenance of service budget is not level funded due to last year’s cuts in custodial supplies and text books at JGMS. This maintenance of service budget also includes restoring Professional Development cuts, the Bedford Youth-Risk Survey, and updates to Microsoft Office and firewall software. The budget also includes expenses due to new mandated psychological testing protocols.

Mr. Sills also presented his desired expansion budget. This budget is proposed due to enrollment trends. He expects to add another kindergarten class at Davis School. The accompanying need for an additional PE teacher will be a .4 FTE since existing staff from the high and middle schools can be utilized at Davis too.

Mr. Sills then presented his budget request of additional needs (FY16 Expansion Budget). Drivers of this request include enrollment, increasing social emotional needs, in-house Special Education program expansion and programmatic, academic, and accountability needs. Mr. Sills also noted using revenue from the school’s revolving accounts such as E-Rate, Building Rental, and Food Services. The total expansion budget is \$257,656 which is a 4.43% increase over last year’s budget. The total FY’ 16 budget request to the Finance Committee is \$36,260,993.

Ms. Seibert made the following motion:

MOVED: That the School Committee approve a FY’16 school budget request of \$36,260,993.

MOTION SECONDED by Ms. Guay

MOTION APPROVED: 5-0

School Committee members discussed the fact that the Finance Committee guideline was \$35,594,535 which means that the two budgets differ by \$666,458. The School Committee members hope to be able to come to terms with the Finance Committee and reduce or eliminate this difference.

Mr. Hafer pointed out that if the schools decide after a later date discussion to not move forward with the PARCC testing, the schools still have a need for the \$55,000 in new equipment purchases.

The School Committee also spent time reviewing the slides Mr. Sills had in his presentation. For example, Mr. Pierce and Mr. Coelho discussed the chart on Maintenance of Service Salaries to ensure that the numbers used correctly reflect the loss of a position with no back fill.

6. Superintendent’s Report

None

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
January 28, 2015
Exhibits/Document

- Memo from Dr. Turner to Mr. Sills dated January 23, 2015 regarding proposed changes to the 2015-2016 Program of Studies.
- Presentation: FY16 Budget dated January 27, 2015

BEDFORD SCHOOL COMMITTEE
Executive Session
January 28, 2015