

**NORTH BRANFORD BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
FIRST BUDGET WORKSHOP
January 26, 2006**

The North Branford Board of Education met on Thursday, January 26, 2006 for their first budget workshop at 7:00 p.m. at North Branford High School Cafeteria. The following members attended:

Board Vice-Chairwoman:	Bonnie Symansky
Board Secretary:	Marcey Onofrio
Board Members:	Elisabeth Caplan Ron Haskins

Superintendent of Schools:	Dr. Robert K. Wolfe
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Absent:	Cheryl Smith, Board Chairwoman John Bozzuto, Jr. Board member
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I. Visitors

Director of Business/Personnel:	Donald Winnicki
Director of Instruction/Curriculum:	Joan Follo
Director of Special Services:	Suzanne Wright
Principals:	Dr. David Perry, NBHS Alan Davis, NBIS Nancy Brittingham, TVES Robin Brown-Criscuolo, JHS Dr. Karen Johnson, STW

Christine Imperato	Todd Stoeffler	Tamre Mockus
Dr. Kris Lindsay	Tracy Wootton	Abigail DeTour
Craig Creller	Rose Addario	Lisa Gagliardi
Penny Seaman	Eric Albert	Paula Buonasora
Paul Proto	Richard Dauster	

No visitor comments at this time.

January 26, 2006

Bonnie Symansky chaired tonight's meeting due to the absence of Cheryl Smith, Board Chair. Mrs. Symansky remarked that tonight's meeting was an informal budget workshop meeting and she encouraged all Board members to ask questions and comments from the public would be left until the end of the meeting.

Dr. Wolfe mentioned that tonight's meeting would focus on three topics:

Special Services
Teaching and Learning
North Branford High School Schedule

II. Special Services

Suzanne Wright spoke on the Special Services budget and highlighted the main areas. Mrs. Wright stated that there are 278 Special Services students in the North Branford Public Schools from age three to twenty-one. This number comprises 10.6% of the school population. She remarked that students are referred by birth to three referrals, doctors, parents and the Start Team.

Suzanne Wright mentioned that some of the contracted services include:

Occupational/ Physical therapy
Behavior Analyst
Teacher of the Deaf
Psychiatrist
Educational Consultant
Assistive Technology

Mrs. Wright remarked that the state of Connecticut requires that all Special Education students must be taught in the least restrictive environment. North Branford has seen an increase in students with autism spectrum disorders, students with mental health needs, tuition students returning to North Branford due to state monitoring and a recent increase in students with significant needs.

Suzanne Wright stated that we must provide appropriate staffing and programs to meet the needs of all students outlined in their IEP. She also mentioned that the proposed schedule change at NBHS would allow increased opportunities for these students.

January 26, 2006

Mrs. Wright stated there is a need to hire a speech pathologist due to the resignation of a speech pathologist last year. She mentioned that instructional supplies are determined by individual needs and updated assessments. She remarked that equipment could include a laptop computer, assistive technology, audiology equipment and specialized equipment determined by a student's IEP.

Suzanne Wright mentioned professional development for the inclusion of students, particularly those students with intellectual disabilities, CPR and First Aid for safety, autism spectrum disorders, intensive reading instruction, physical management training, applied behavior analysis and paraprofessional training.

III. Curriculum Management Cycle

Joan Follo stated that curriculum is everything we want our students to know and be able to do in pre- K through grade 12 including content, skills, attitudes we want them to develop and the technology we expect them to master. She stated it was a massive amount of planning and the Curriculum Management Cycle keeps everyone on task. She remarked that the Curriculum Management Cycle is a four- phase cycle: review, development, implementation and evaluation.

Mrs. Follo stated that the review phase determines the current status of an instructional program within the school district as well as current trends and BEST practices outside of the school district. She mentioned that the review phase team does a lot of research and a paper is put together to submit to the Board for review but the Board does not take action at this time. The review team makes recommendations and these recommendations go to the development team. The development team does the hands on work that goes into developing the curriculum of what will be taught in the classroom K-12. The development team submits their work to the Board for acceptance or the Board can make recommendations for changes. Joan stated that no supplies can be ordered until the Board of Education adopts the curriculum. The implementation phase works on developing a budget and professional development in support of the new implementation and this then goes to the Board for budget approval. Last the evaluation phase determines if the curriculum is working and if it is producing what we desire from our students.

Bonnie Symansky questioned if the monies budgeted is for textbooks only or if it includes monies for library books to support the curriculum.

Joan Follo stated that the monies budgeted is mostly for textbooks but some monies are budget for library literature books.

January 26, 2006

Dr. Wolfe remarked that it depends on the curriculum area.

Joan Follo also spoke on the new program POETS (Parents of Exceptional and Talented Students). She remarked these parents would work with the school system for the good of these students. She mentioned they are working on a position paper that will be presented to the Board at a future meeting.

Dr. Wolfe mentioned that the focus the school systems has put on learning in the last five years is one of the reasons why are students are doing exceptionally well on standardized tests and college acceptance.

IV. North Branford High School Schedule

Dr. David Perry remarked that NBHS is proposing to change the current schedule to a modified A/B block schedule. He mentioned that the high school is facing increased student enrollment that has caused an increase in class sizes. He remarked that budget constraints have not provided for the addition of new staff members to alleviate the rising enrollment.

Dr. Perry introduced Tamre Mockus, Tracy Wootton, Dr. Kris Lindsay, Abby DeTour, Rose Addario and Todd Stoeffler who were members of the leadership team to research the modified A/B block schedule. The team worked with outside consultants to develop goals, consider scheduling alternatives and ultimately recommend a schedule that would best meet the changing needs of NBHS.

Dr. Perry remarked that some of the goals of a modified A/B block schedule would be to reduce class size, reduce daily student contacts, provide additional flexibility in the student's schedule and provide increased opportunities for performance based activities and assessments in the classroom.

Tamre Mockus stated that the purpose of the team was to establish a clear plan leading to the implementation of a scheduling alternative that would allow students to take advantage of regional collaborative programs and further the mission of the school. She remarked that in the winter of 2004 the Leadership Team met on a monthly basis to consider scheduling options that would best meet these goals. Team members shared various options being considered with their departments to update staff members and obtain their feedback. The Team examined and considered twenty-five different scheduling models. At one point the team considered building a schedule unique to NBHS but it was determined to be too cumbersome, confusing and did not address their goals. The modified

January 26, 2006

A/B block schedule was determined to be the one that best met NBHS goals. Tamre Mockus remarked that a modified A/B block is defined as an 8 period schedule that meets every other day. Each block is 84 minutes and a half-block is 42 minutes long. She mentioned that longer passing times would accommodate student lavatory needs and a homeroom period would be in the middle of the day. The team is recommending implementing the modified A/B block for the 2006-2007 school year.

Todd Stoeffler showed a Power Point presentation on the research of the modified A/B block schedule. He mentioned that this schedule would improve time on task, more focus and less division, scheduling flexibility, less stress for teachers, improved attendance, curriculum enhancement and concentrated preparation time for faculty.

Toni DeLizzio, an NBHS parent, mentioned that she was an NBHS graduate and the schedule that is in place now has been in place since 1974. She talked about the problems of the current schedule and remarked that NBHS has a 1970's schedule in the millennium. She mentioned that NBHS students can't take many of the elective subjects because the seven period classes didn't allow them to as they needed so many credits to graduate.

Dr. Perry spoke on the concerns of the NBHS faculty and the document they presented to the Board at the last Board of Education meeting. He mentioned that many of the faculty concerns are valid concerns but he urged the Board to take advantage of next year's lull in enrollment to implement the modified A/B block schedule.

Dr. Perry stated that from now until March 2006 teachers would be trained on the A/B block, teachers would observe other schools systems with modified A/B block scheduling and it would be the focus of the March In-service.

Ron Haskins questioned the attention span of a ninth grader in an Algebra class.

Dr. Perry stated the classes would be project orientated and a teacher would not lecture for 84 minutes and they would have to use diversity in their approach.

Ron Haskins stated that our school system has grown enormously in the last four years and our test scores are better than most towns in our ERG who already have a block schedule in place.

January 26, 2006

Dr. Perry remarked that this shouldn't be an issue or have an impact on our test scores.

Todd Stoeffler mentioned that NBHS already has a 75 minute block in the middle of the day.

Dr. Perry stated a modified A/B block provides more depth and not less.

Bonnie Symansky stated that she did not want to see our high CAPT scores suffer. She questioned what kind of accountability we would have to make sure students didn't take too many study halls just to leave early at the end of the school day.

Dr. Perry remarked that he is positive students will take elective subjects as we have seventy-five students who can't get into art classes at this time. With an A/B block schedule they would be able to get into art, band, chorus, etc.

Bonnie Symansky questioned if there would be enough space and educators to teach these courses.

Dr. Perry remarked that the change is not block driven but enrollment driven and the Board will have to deal with this rise in enrollment in the fall of 2007.

Elisabeth Caplan questioned what kind of ongoing staff support was in place for next year and if there would be an assessment of the A/B block next year.

Dr. Perry remarked that teachers could visit other schools and observe but they really needed to write their own plans, teach their own classes and revise them if necessary. He mentioned that the Leadership Team would have to develop an assessment package. He stated that teachers would need at least a year to work out the kinks.

Tracy Wootton stated that if she didn't have the CAPT test and SAT's to worry about for her students she would be delighted with a modified A/B block schedule. She is a little apprehensive but will try in Algebra I and AP Calculus. She mentioned she worries about not having daily contact with students in math or world language.

January 26, 2006

V. Public Comments

Penny Seaman stated she still has two students at NBHS and encouraged the Board to deal with enrollment issues now. She mentioned she has long been a proponent of a block schedule and fully supported the proposal. She urged Board members to take advantage of programs in our own backyard, (Yale, East Haven High School, Guilford High School, etc.).

Lisa Gagliardi stated that this modified A/B block schedule is an empty shell and would only reduce class sizes and nothing more. She remarked she is a proponent of block scheduling if it is done right. This proposal will have students losing ten hours per class per year. She stated we need to hire more staff or it will force students to take filler courses or more than one 84- minute study hall.

Mrs. Gagliardi remarked that this is not block scheduling at its best and our students deserve better than this. She cautioned the Board that they need a true block schedule with more staff now or we would pay the cost in 2007. She urged the Board to return this proposal to include additional staff and do things the right way.

Sanjiv Chaturvedi remarked that North Branford has an exceptional Special Services department and dedicated staff. He stated that when all students graduate whether a special education student or a regular student he hopes their diploma means something. He urged the Board to look into helping special education students who go to work after high school. He stated there are many resource people in our area who are willing to help. He spoke about the Department of Labor in Hamden who has staff willing to teach students to write a resume, etc. He remarked that resources such as Yale are terrific but not to forget or overlook students who want careers in auto-mechanics, culinary, etc.

Claudia Faughnan thanked the Board for considering two new positions or kindergarten paraprofessionals. She remarked that would help them to meet their academic needs and invited any Board member to visit her classroom stating that kindergarten is nothing like it was years ago.

Paul Proto remarked that he is not a proponent of block scheduling and stated research shows that test scores decline in schools with block scheduling. He also mentioned that some school systems are dropping block scheduling. Mr. Proto remarked that the Board shouldn't adopt block scheduling just to be trendy and just because everyone is doing it.

January 26, 2006

Richard Dauster stated he is in favor of block scheduling and it has many advantages if it is done right. He mentioned that if the Board doesn't hire enough teachers or implement the schedule properly and put time into training teachers then we would not be taking advantage of a block schedule.

Lisa Gagliardi remarked that at one time the Board had mentioned that with a block schedule NBIS and NBHS could share teachers but urged the Board to view with caution half-time teachers.

Bonnie Symansky remarked that this Board would do things correctly.

Craig Creller stated that many staff members at NBHS beseeched him to speak tonight. He mentioned that block scheduling doesn't work for math or world language and he felt department heads were pressured into adopting this proposal. Mr. Creller remarked that you couldn't have smaller class sizes without hiring more staff members. He stated there was nothing wrong with block scheduling or eight-periods but more staff was needed. Mr. Creller urged the Board to take a year to properly study a block schedule and properly train staff. He remarked if a first class block schedule wasn't implemented then test scores would decline and there would be less class time in the long run. He urged the Board not to adopt this proposal.

Lisa Gagliardi questioned why the hiring of another speech pathologist was needed.

Suzanne Wright stated the number of IEP's K-12 justified the hiring of another speech pathologist.

This meeting of the North Branford Board of Education adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Sherry Ardine
Account Clerk

