

Approved by the Rye School Board at its August 15, 2007 meeting.

**RYE SCHOOL DISTRICT
RYE, NEW HAMPSHIRE**

The Rye School Board met for its annual planning session on July 12, 2007 at the Rye Public Library after a School Board business meeting.

PRESENT:

School Board Members: Ian Grant, Betty Anderson, Peggy Balboni,
Gary Dodds, Michael Schwartz

Administrators: Dr. George A. Cushing, Superintendent
Mary Lyons, Director of Pupil Services
Chris Pollet, Principal of Rye Junior High
Lane Richardson, Principal of Rye Elementary School
Dr. Heather Driscoll, Curriculum, Data & Grants Coordinator

Visitor: David Flynn – Director of the Commission on Public Elementary
and Middle Schools, New England Association of Schools and
Colleges (NEASC)

OPENING OF THE PLANNING SESSION:

Dr. Cushing opened the retreat at 9:04 a.m. He introduced David Flynn, Director of the Commission on Public Elementary and Middle Schools of NEASC.

Summary of David Flynn's presentation:

Mr. Flynn explained his task for today was to explain the accreditation process. He feels it is important for all to understand the process as there is a cost involved and it is a community process. There is an emphasis on standards and using the process to improve our schools.

NEASC accredits schools in 80 countries. College funding is dependent on NEASC accreditation. NEASC's goal is to provide opportunities for schools to get better. The self-study process is a 10-year process and breaks down as follows:

1. Self-study – 10-18 months, the self-study allows time to stop and think, reflect, and come to a consensus.
2. Peer group – a group spends 3-1/2 days in the school after reading the self-study to validate data in the self-study. They then issue the “Visiting Committee Report” (Housing and meals are provided for the peer group over these 3-1/2 days.)
3. The School must address each recommendation in a 5-year window.
4. 2-year update – two years from the team visit a progress report is created on each recommendation. This monitors how standards are being met.
5. Year 8 – time to get ready for accreditation

School improvement through self-assessment:

- Is the school a good school?
- How do you know?
- How do you measure yourself?
- Against what?

- Do you have documented proof?
- How do you really know?

The mission statement is the driving force and everyone needs to be on the same page.

Mission statement → Curriculum (vehicle) → Instruction (how we do it) → Assessment (how we know we got it right)

Good teaching & learning (instruction) needs support of:

1. leadership and organization
2. school resources for learning
3. community resources

Self study:

- school specific
- faculty driven
- parent/community input
- requires reflection, discussion, consensus and back-up
- tells story of how well school meets NEASC standards for good schooling

Process: How you measure yourself against the standards

- Do you meet the standards?
- How well do you meet the standards?
- Identify strengths and needs
- What do you need to do to better meet the standards?
- Develop action plan

Mr. Grant asked who sets the standards. Mr. Flynn said it starts with NEASC, member schools, and administrators. The standards get tweaked every few years. Mr. Flynn stated that the process is really just a snapshot. Each school creates a "Steering Committee" of key people who will filter data. Rye Elementary School would have about 12 people on its Steering Committee and Rye Junior High would have about 7 people on its Steering Committee. Ms. Richardson asked who comprises the Steering Committee. Mr. Flynn recommended you have a parent, a tech person, a couple of good writers; you look for "can-do" people; although you want to leave some leader-type people for other committees too. The school principal would not be on the committee but would attend the meetings. Dr. Cushing noted that the Steering Committee also supports the Visiting Committee so it is also good to really have someone who really knows the community.

Mr. Schwartz asked if the committees were at a school level or district level. Mr. Flynn said if both RES and RJH were going for accreditation at the same time it could work to have one committee serve both schools. Mr. Schwartz thought this might make sense given efforts to coordinate and remain cohesive between the two schools.

Mr. Flynn stated that Rye School District gets the following out of the accreditation:

- Self-awareness
- Self-evaluation
- Planning opportunities
- Upholding standards

- Quality control
- Public accountability
- School approval
- School improvement

Costs of the accreditation process:

- Annual dues paid: \$1160 per school
- Cost of visit: \$4,000 - \$7,000 per school for housing, food, substitutes, etc.

Ms. Anderson asked if the accreditation standards are the same for independent schools and public schools. Mr. Flynn stated that public school standards are not the same as those of independent schools. Ms. Anderson then asked why the visiting peer group would be from a school/community similar to Rye as Mr. Flynn had stated rather than a group from a school/community that didn't necessarily have similarities to Rye. Mr. Flynn responded that they try to build a comfort level by sending "somewhat like" people to visit a school. As part of the process he asks if there are particular wants before creating the peer group. For example; a school may want a librarian as part of the peer group if they know that this is an area they want to focus on. Typically there are only 1-2 administrators as part of the group. Mr. Grant asked if the Peer School Committee's mission is to find best practices among schools within New England or if we can identify with schools beyond New England. Mr. Flynn stated that it may be possible to go beyond New England.

Mr. Schwartz asked if there are template-surveys available as part of the self-study. Mr. Flynn stated there are no templates but we could do a focus group and create a survey to use. Dr. Cushing noted this would probably be best done at another stage.

Mr. Schwartz noted that there are two pieces that result from including other schools/experts in the inquiry process. One, we may gain 'best practices' and two, "we do not know what we don't know" and outside experts might help educate us.

Ms. Anderson asked how much of NEASC accreditation focuses on special education. Mr. Flynn responded that special education has a small part of the focus.

This concluded Mr. Flynn's presentation. Mr. Grant thanked Mr. Flynn for his time and presentation.

NON-PUBLIC SESSION

Ms. Anderson proposed, seconded by Mr. Dodds, a motion to go into non-public session to discuss personnel matters at 10:29 a.m. Unanimously approved on a roll call vote.

PUBLIC SESSION

The Board returned to public session at 10:42 a.m.

Ms. Anderson stated that during the building administrator search process for RJH it became clear to the Board that, in order to get a high quality principal based on the current market rates, it would need to pay more than it had budgeted. This also showed the Board that it was lucky to get and keep Ms. Richardson for what she is paid. The Board also felt that, based on the current market rate for a principal, Ms. Richardson should receive more compensation for her years of experience. Thus, Ms. Anderson made a motion, seconded by Mr. Schwartz, to increase Ms. Richardson's salary by \$5,000, retroactive to July 1, 2007. Vote: unanimously approved. Ms. Richardson thanked Ms. Anderson and the Board for their support and expressed her sincere appreciation to them.

PLANNING SESSION

Mr. Grant began the planning session by stating what a terrific year this Board and Administrators have had as a team. He expressed his appreciation to everyone on the administrative side as well as the individual Board members. He said it is clear the schools are in a better place than they had been before.

Review of 2006-07 Goals:

Mr. Grant then asked everyone to look at last year's goals so it could be determined which goals had been completed, those that could be eliminated, and those that should remain for next year.

Curriculum

1. Goal “Research and develop a formal method/process for program evaluation that includes input from teachers, parents, and the community, information from SAU-50 and peer schools about their program(s), and a time-line for the process, including completing a time-on-learning study 6-8, to help with future curriculum and instruction decisions.” Dr. Driscoll stated the 1st stage is nearly complete and the 2nd piece is being picked up by NEASC. This goal is open and worthy of keeping.
2. Goal “Make a proposal for the RJH foreign language program to include Spanish for the 2007/2008 school year” – done
3. Goal “Define a model to inform the Board of anticipated or planned curriculum changes” – done
4. Goal “Make a proposal for the Art and Music programs for the 2007/08 school year” – Curriculum piece open and pending

Comments about these goals:

Mr. Schwartz noted that the program review process and timelines for review have been questioned by teachers. Dr. Driscoll said she meets twice per year with the administrators to go over program reviews. Dr. Cushing said he doesn't want to be doing other assessments while we do the NEASC Accreditation process. Mr. Grant stated that we looked at foreign language three years ago, we looked at art and music this year, and we will look at another subject next year. His personal concern is that he does not want to put everything on hold for two years while the NEASC process is in the works. Dr. Cushing stated that, by the same token, we don't want to keep doing things that are not worthwhile. Ms. Balboni feels there are two things going on: foreign language and music/arts were identified as needing attention. She wondered how were those identified and how others will be identified. She sees that as a separate review process from the NEASC process; however, she wants a process that keeps individual teachers from feeling negative about the review process.

Dr. Driscoll said we want to establish a regular cycle of review. Dr. Cushing stated the NEASC accreditation process will be a vehicle for identifying strengths. Ms. Balboni said she is trying to reconcile Board-driven goals vs. school identified goals.

With regard to goal #3, Ms. Anderson reviewed the history, for Mr. Pollet's edification, stating that the Board asked that the Principals to keep them apprised of curriculum changes, i.e.: Merrowvista camp going from 4 days to 3 days. These actions don't necessarily need the Board's approval, but it is important to communicate so the Board remains informed, particularly where the change will result in community members asking the Board questions about the change.

Communication – Goal 1 is on-going.

Leadership and Organization:

1. Done – ongoing with a little more structure
2. Done
3. Done
4. Change to review and update the Professional Development Master Plan

Budget:

1. Almost done. Mrs. Lyons said she looked at this for Special Ed. as well but found we are better off with the daily rate.
2. On-going. Ms. Richardson stated she has a custodial interview tomorrow. There is now some sharing of technology personnel. The principals are still talking about music and art.
3. The parent piece is still needed. There will be an update at the August meeting.

Assessment and Accountability:

1. on hold
2. some elements are in place but this is not complete. We still don't have feedback about 9th grade success.
3. Done

Curriculum On-going:

1. Keep
2. continue to align curriculum
3. Keep.

Leadership and Organization On-going:

Mrs. Lyons stated she has a UNH intern at the preschool and maybe another for RJH Special Ed. Dr. Driscoll will continue the formal approach she's taking and Mr. Pollet will make informal inquiries.

Review of additional 2007-08 Goals:

Mr. Grant outlined a process to follow as the goals were reviewed. He suggested we contribute ideas for goals for next year, provide a "brain storm" for discussion, reach consensus, and create goals from there.

Mr. Schwartz asked how the NEASC self awareness factors in. Dr. Cushing stated his personal goal is to support the Principals in preparation for the NEASC self-study. Ms. Balboni said this should go under "Leadership and Organization".

Board members contributed ideas for goals:

Mr. Grant stated that for discussion purposes he, again, would like to work under the premise where we view the parents as the customers. Mr. Grant sees the benefits of the whole school organization working from that premise; and if not then we should make adjustments. Ms. Richardson feels that is something we are all on board with and that it's a work in progress that happens over time. Mr. Pollet stated he feels communication is critical. Communication from teacher to parent, parent to parent, parent to student, teacher to student is key to creating the climate and respect that creates the atmosphere of parents being our customers. Mr. Pollet thinks the NEASC self-study will provide much of this information. Mr. Schwartz would like to encourage a "culture of community".

Mr. Grant stated that another idea is to create some sort of written plan for students that are excelling. While they usually are challenged we need to put what their "program" will be in writing for parent's

and students to see and to have an accountability mechanism. He thinks this will, in the long run, be an advantage to the teacher, the student, and the parent. "What are we doing for this student and how?" For SPED students we have IEPs; for a student that is a great math student maybe we could create a formal vehicle of communication and create a plan for that student equivalent to an IEP but on the other end of the scale. Mr. Pollet confirmed with Mrs. Lyons that an IEP is not a specific road-map and that it really just provides guidelines. Mr. Grant's concern is that on the other end there isn't a clear road-map for a 4th grader who is reading at a 9th grade level. Mr. Grant suggested an IEP may be the wrong example. Dr. Cushing said the IEP is the wrong example but the point made is a good one. Mr. Pollet stated that an "IEP at a glance" could be a good method to use. Ms. Balboni stated there needs to be a notation/understanding of specific modifications adapted for excelling students included in the individual student's records so that momentum is not lost. Ms. Richardson feels many teachers do an excellent job identifying students and challenging them; almost like having a 504. Mrs. Lyons said that special education processes for differentiating education can also work well for regular education. The idea and the premise behind "Follow the Child" is to determine the strengths of the child and up the ante a notch that will include differentiated instruction. Mr. Pollet stated that getting to know who your students are before school begins via profile sheets is important and a great vehicle of communication from teacher to teacher. Mr. Pollet thinks the challenge for teachers with differentiated instruction is to determine what standards we want students to reach, what rubric we want to use, and then determine what activities we use as a vehicle to teach. Mr. Grant said there is the risk that "squeaky wheel gets the attention/help" but the first grader reading Harry Potter can't be overlooked and needs to be challenged. Mrs. Lyons stated that formalizing comes in pieces of team meeting, data, etc. Mr. Pollet agreed, stating that it is ongoing authentic assessment which happens throughout the year. Dr. Cushing stated that Stanford is developing courses for the advanced learner. Ms. Anderson suggested that, with expansion of authentic teacher comments on both the RES and RJH report cards, if those report cards with comments were given to the next year's teacher, that is a great starting point for giving important information to make sure the child does not lose ground in his or her progress. Mr. Schwartz suggested taking the elementary school report card and creating a differentiated instruction block for input.

Ms. Balboni suggested as a goal that we use the follow the child model which emphasizes the need to address students individual goals in all areas of growth.

Ms. Anderson stated that, in addition to Mr. Grant's goal of challenging gifted students, she would expand that goal to make sure all students are challenged to their potential which is really the point of differentiated instruction. Mr. Grant agreed, but thought it needed to start somewhere as a process. Mrs. Lyons stated that it is important to remember that it is difficult to do differentiated instruction well. It requires constant monitoring and a tremendous amount of energy and organization. She loves the fact that we are committed to small class size as there is a lot to manage as a classroom teacher. Ms. Anderson agreed and said she would like more discussion about the role of SPED and how SPED techniques could be used to move from philosophical discussions about differentiated instruction in regular education to more nuts and bolts techniques of how to more effectively implement differentiated instruction for all students.

Mr. Pollet said our perception of what curriculum is has to change as curriculum is always morphing.

Mr. Grant then asked for other goals.

Mr. Schwartz suggested the following for consideration:

- Identifying measurements for growth (Ms. Yost's project as part of Follow the Child)
- Sharing technology between schools
- RJH needs updated technology plan

Ms. Balboni suggested more detailed assessment of the Arts on the report card – not just behavioral marks but information about performance as it relates to the curriculum.

Mr. Dodds stated that in general he would like a better understanding of facility maintenance; where we are and what we want to do.

Dr. Cushing stated that we are all very committed to the NEASC process. He also has asked the guidance counselors to look at gender issues across various programs. He has also asked Tim Moynahan to create technology goals for RES and RJH with input from Ms. Richardson and Mr. Pollet.

Ms. Balboni said we need to make sure students are leaving our schools with certain technology-based skills. Mr. Grant agreed.

Mr. Dodds commented that we often talk about Portsmouth High School and perhaps we could create a goal of improving communication between our schools and PHS. Dr. Cushing stated that is his job and that we need to address how to have effective input into PHS decision-making.

As the discussions concluded the following goals were identified:

1. Commence NEASC accreditation process
2. Enhance parents as customers
3. Identify Follow the Child growth
4. Excelled student instruction with plans that follow them to the next teacher
5. Improve differentiated instruction for all children with plans that follow them to the next teacher
6. Update RJH technology plan
7. Improve communication with Portsmouth High School (Two levels: SAU-level and board-level)
8. Look at gender issues at both Rye Elementary School and Rye Junior High
9. Provide better assessment of unified arts via report cards
10. Review RJH report card
11. Create quarterly facility management update
12. Technology skills assessment

Mr. Grant then asked that everyone look at the list and see if there is consensus of the goals.

Ms. Lyons questioned use of the term “parents as customers”. She feels it is a wide-spread belief that “customers are always right” and that's something she doesn't completely agree with. Mr. Grant stated that his discussion of “parents as customers” does not mean that customers are always right but that we have to acknowledge that it's the parents' kids and the parent's/taxpayers' money who pay for education. Ms. Balboni questioned making parents as customers as she views the students as the customers.

After further discussion it was agreed to eliminate goal #2: Enhance parents as customers.

Mr. Grant stated that for the next meeting we will merge new and old goals and create verbiage.

OTHER BUSINESS

Dr. Driscoll then updated the Board on the SAU-wide email system. She has selected Daystar Computer Services as the provider and every SAU 50 employee and school board member will have an email address. Mr. Grant asked if it would now be possible to send school-wide email notification to parents as this was a major limitation of the service provided by UNH (data from MMS did not work with Neatmail). Dr. Driscoll said she had overlooked this but will contact Daystar to confirm that it will be compatible with MMS. Ms. Richardson reiterated the importance of this compatibility.

Dr. Cushing told the Board that Mr. Katkin may ask for a meeting to have manifests signed.

ADJOURN:

Ms. Anderson proposed a motion, seconded by Mr. Dodds, to adjourn at 12:28 p.m. Vote: Unanimously approved.

School Board Secretary