

Superintendent's Meeting with Instructional Staff Representatives  
Region II – Thursday, February 19, 2009

Human Resources:

Q: A question was raised regarding our contract. A teacher submitted a concern regarding the ongoing debate regarding the middle school contract. The feeling was that the contract was broken with no consequence. She has heard that no planning periods for teachers are in the current contract negotiation. Please respond.

A: Teachers have a contract in place. The labor agreement between the School Board and PCTA expired in June of 2008. However, under Florida law, the old contract maintains "status quo" until a new contract is negotiated. Many districts in Florida have not yet completed negotiations due to the downturn in the economy and its impact on public education. The Board's bargaining teams continue to meet to wrap up just a few outstanding issues still on the bargaining table. Most of those issues are financial.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: With so many school closings scheduled for next year, will displaced teachers be able to bump teachers who are still on an annual contract from their current teaching positions?

A: Pinellas County does not use any form of "bumping" between and among schools. A protocol for school closings and mergers has been developed jointly between the administration and the labor organizations that represent affected employees. Contract status will not be a variable in the placement process except as it might relate to seniority in the district and overall qualifications. However, in some circumstances, certification, endorsements and specialized skills may become criteria for placement as well.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: How is the district responding to the *St. Petersburg Times* article concerning the top heavy administration of Pinellas County?

A: I think this assessment of what administrators do is a biased generalization on the basis of the experience of the individual who is asking the question. The administrators identified in the *St. Petersburg Times* that may be making "six figure salaries" are a limited number in a district of more than 17,000 employees and for the most part have worked their way up the career ladder over more than 30 years. Many of these administrators started as classroom teachers and were promoted to these positions as a result of their particular expertise in their assignments. During difficult financial times, it is easy to target subgroups in the organization out of frustration. This is counterproductive to solving the problems we need to address in the months ahead.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Why are all principals on 12-month contracts? Before taking preschool workdays away from the teachers, wouldn't it make better sense to take principals off 12-month contracts as opposed to having 5 principals working at the same summer schools?

A: Principals, by definition in Section 1011.60, Florida Statutes must receive 12 calendar months of employment. During the summer months, principals may be responsible for summer programs either in their schools or in other schools. They are also interviewing teachers for their schools to fill vacancies, making changes in the master schedule created by last minute retirements or leaves of teachers, supervising major construction or renovation projects on their campus, closing out the end of one school year and preparing for the opening of the next year. They are also working with parents during their selection process for schools under the Student Assignment Plan and may also be working on curriculum development teams as well.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Will I have a job?

A: The district is working collaboratively with all of our employee groups to find ways to avoid layoffs.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: What are the budget implications for support staff?

A: Other than the closing and consolidating of schools at this time, there have been no recommendations with respect to reductions specifically of support staff.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: How will the county help employees in schools that are closing and those whose positions will be eliminated like reading coaches find positions next year? Will positions be based on school seniority or county seniority?

A: A transition team has already begun meetings with the faculty and staff at the closing and consolidating schools. These questions are being answered as part of that process. The intent is to try to find an assignment for everyone for next year. In general, seniority for the involuntary transfer process is based on district seniority.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: I am currently in DROP. My ending date is October 1, 2010. I plan to start the year. Would I be able to finish the year if my principal approves?

A: No decisions have been made for DROP extensions for any employees for 2009-10. We have routinely been approving DROP extensions through the end of this year for those teachers whose DROP ended during the current school year. In addition, we have made a recommendation to the bargaining team that teachers who are extended beyond the fifth year of DROP can only be hired at step 8 on the teacher salary schedule. This will eliminate the challenge that teachers are "double dipping" in response to recent media articles on public

employees rehired after retirement. A similar limit is being reviewed for any administrators returning after DROP although they have to suspend their retirement distributions for one year before they can begin to draw their Florida Retirement Systems contributions.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Professional Development:

Q: How many trade days will there be for next year?

A: At this time, there are three trade days on the calendar for 2009-2010.

Submitted by Marlyn Dennison

Q: Why isn't it up to the individual teachers to determine their inservice needs? (Reference specifically the embedded in-service at the school level)

A: The determination as to what training teachers need to take happens at several levels.

It is up to the individual teacher to determine his/her in-service needs. This should be based on the student achievement data for the students in his/her classroom and the teacher's needs as determined by appraisal or by the desire to grow professionally. This is reflected in the teacher's Individual Professional Development Plan.

In addition, the regional superintendent, the school principal and the school leadership team review student achievement data from each school and determine school-wide needs for training, also based on the needs of the students at that school. The embedded staff developers are then scheduled to come to that school to work with the staff.

The district superintendent also looks at the needs of the district as a whole and can mandate training to meet those needs. Our superintendent has determined that Cultural Competence and Crisis Prevention Intervention are needed.

The state also determines training needs such as ESOL and Reading Endorsement and requirements of Differentiated Accountability.

Submitted by Marlyn Dennison

Q: Will the district award component points to the teachers who recertify as National Board Teachers since they will receive no bonus after the first 10-year certification period?

A: A teacher, who recertifies as a National Board Teacher, does not need to earn additional component points to recertify. As long as a teacher holds a valid National Board Certification, that recertification can be used to recertify with the state for ten years.

If a teacher chooses not to recertify with National Board, they would need to recertify with the state in the same way as all other teachers – with component points, passing subject area test(s) or college credit.

Submitted by Marlyn Dennison

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Curriculum / Testing

Q: Too much time is spent on testing – specifically common assessments and FCAT – when we have pacing guides and timelines to accomplish.

A: There is a district instructional assessment plan in place which is explained in our PIAP booklet. Results from the common assessments (given three times during the year; September, January, and April) are to be used to inform instruction. The common assessments are summative in nature, which allows a comparison to be made from beginning, to mid, and to end-of-year results. The data from the Common Assessments provide teachers with consistent information to inform instruction and to help guide planning for remediation and enhancement/enrichment lessons.

The Pinellas Instructional Assessment Plan (PIAP) is the district plan that is designed to provide curriculum, assessment, and instructional information in the academic areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science, as well as information about health and social development. Periodic and ongoing assessments are an integral part of instruction. The Pinellas Classroom Assessment Series (PCAS) lists specific assessments (PCAS Common Assessments) that are to be given at each grade level for each assessment cycle, as well as additional diagnostic assessments to determine the nature of the student's difficulty and areas of academic need. The Pinellas Classroom Assessment Series (PCAS) is the assessment piece of the Pinellas Instructional Assessment Plan (PIAP). These assessments are to be used to guide instruction and are NOT to be used as a grade.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: Can the common assessments for math and science have fewer questions so they could be done in one 90-minute period? Using up four instructional days for testing is too much time missed.

A: The number of items on the math and science assessments was increased in order to provide students with a great opportunity to show what they know. The change in the number of items was made by the Research and Accountability Department to increase the validity of our assessments. The decision was made to spread the 50 items over two days for math and two days for science to give the students more time to think about the questions more carefully. We will PDSA this process during the summer and discuss whether the 50 items could be given in one testing period instead of the two.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: Why do the reading common assessments have some passages that have reading levels that are at a significantly higher reading level than the grade being tested? Example: 2<sup>nd</sup> grade has a passage on Common Assessment 2 with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade readability level?

A: The Lexile ranges for grades 2-5 are as follows:

Grade 2: 300-600

Grade 3: 500-800

Grade 4: 600-900

Grade 5: 700-1000

The Lexile ranges for the passages on the Common Assessments fall within these ranges. Not all passages are appropriate for Lexiling. Poems, recipes, lists, plays should not be lexiled.

For grade 2, cycle 2, the Lexiles are as follows:

Finding New Friends = 350

A Different Bird = 510

The Boy in the Tree = 440

Connie Chung = 580

The Gift = 540

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: In what educational research journal is a "flow of the day with teaching points" shown to increase math or science scores? Please forward articles from teaching journals in math and/or science that support a "flow of the day with teaching points". Flow of the day with teaching points sounds exactly opposite of inquiry based science lessons.

A: Robert Marzano, Rick Stiggins and Richard Dufour all support teaching, learning points or learning targets. They may not use those terms, but the meaning is the same. All three of these leading educational experts emphasize that it is very important to share clear and appropriate learning targets with the students from the beginning of learning. In science, by using a teaching point for each of the science workshops, we are able to support this as well. Each day during science instruction using our 5 E's science workshop model, by beginning in the gathering area where the teaching point should be visible to all students, the teacher can reinforce what the learning target is in relation to the benchmark. Each day whether it is the engage, explore, explain, elaborate or evaluate phase, if a teacher asks the students how did our exploration relate to our teaching/learning point, a connection is continuously made and higher level thinking is being done by the students to make this connection. Science teaching/learning points do not tell the students the answer. They give them a focus point each day. If the teaching / learning point is just posted, and not being used as an instructional tool, it has no value. Using the teaching/learning point effectively supports inquiry based science. In the engage, we are sparking interest. In the explore section, students are expanding on prior knowledge and building new ideas, and in the explain section, students are taking these ideas prior and new and explaining and justifying them based on evidence. In the elaboration step,

students are given opportunities to internalize their ideas, use vocabulary in another setting and the evaluate part is ongoing but formalized at the end of a science workshop. The teaching/learning point does not interfere with students exploring and building their ideas. It offers them a focus point in which they can see how what they did in science that day and what new ideas they are forming related to a focused learning target.

You can check their research in most of their books. Listed below is a great book by DuFour, "On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities," Richard DuFour, Robert Eaker, Rebecca DuFour, 2005.

Submitted by Pam Moore

**Q:** There have been numerous studies done to support the belief that more instruction of fewer concepts at each grade level will lead to better math understanding and readiness for high school math. Is the district considering adopting fewer math strands for elementary schools, so mastery can be achieved by every student?

**A:** The district uses the Sunshine State Standards for determining the curriculum that is taught in elementary schools. Grades K-2 currently use the new standards, now called Next Generation Sunshine State Standards or NGSSS. Grades 3-5 are in transition from using the old standards, moving towards the NGSSS. The new K-8 mathematics content standards reduce the grade level expectations from an average of more than 80 per grade to an average of less than 20 benchmarks per grade, thereby allowing teachers to "dig deeper" into the benchmarks selected for their grade level.

Standards for each of the K-8 levels are termed Big Ideas and Supporting Ideas. The set of standards for each grade level consists of three Big Ideas and varying numbers of Supporting Ideas. The Big Ideas do not address the same topics for each grade. At each grade level, there are certain skills which must be honed to prepare students for more rigorous instruction as they move to the next grade. Supporting Ideas are standards which are fundamental to sound mathematics instruction. They are not less important than the Big Ideas; they serve to provide connections between topics at different grade levels. Copies of the NGSSS for grades K-5 were included in the back of every teacher's Math Curriculum Guide this year.

Submitted by Pam Moore

**Q:** I would like to know about the considerations for replacing the writing units of study with the Macmillan writing already purchased by the county. Is that a possibility?

**A:** The Units of Study for Writing provide the basis for writing instruction in our district. They will continue to be the foundation for writing instruction in Pinellas and will not be replaced by the Macmillan lessons.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: Has there been research done on young children bubbling answers on Scantron Sheets (Like the children have to do now with the Common Assessments)? We're concerned that a child may have right answers in his test booklet, but then may not mark the answers correctly on the answer sheet. If a child accidentally skips a line (or two); many of the subsequent answers will be wrong. The test will not be accurately assessing his reading ability. It will also be a test of bubbling skills which will distort his reading "grade."

A: As stated in the PIAP booklet (page 28): The results from the Common Assessments are to be used to guide instruction, and are not to be used as a grade, and thus will not "distort a student's reading grade."

Odd numbered questions have answer choices A, B, C, D. Even numbered questions have answer choices F, G, H, I. This helps student's stay on track for each question. Teachers may look at the Student Answer Grid in EDS to see exactly what answers the student recorded for each question. Teachers can analyze the data to see if particular students have difficulty with this task, and then provide these students with the opportunity to practice the task before the next assessment period.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: What process is in place when a scan sheet error is detected on a third grade portfolio assessment (for example the Cycle 1, 2, or 3 common assessments)?

A: There is a process in place to deal with this very situation. The process was explained to the participants who attended the scanning training at the beginning of the year. If a third grade student received different scores (those results marked in the booklet and those results marked on the scan sheet), this should be documented in the student's PIAP portfolio.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: To protect the integrity of the portfolio, and to maintain the common assessment as a valid and reliable reading assessment tool, our focus should be to accurately assess reading ability. Therefore, if an error is detected as a result of inaccurate bubbling, latitude should be given to correctly record the child's reading score and in turn justly reflect the child's true reading ability. This is of primary importance as the assessments are placed in the portfolio to protect a child whose ability might not be accurately reflected on the FCAT.

A: Please see the answer above – there is a process in place to address this situation. Teachers must use caution when assuming that the student did not change his mind on a particular answer. A student may have marked one answer in the test booklet, and then changed his mind about the answer and recorded the new answer choice on the scan sheet, without going back and changing the answer in the student booklet.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: At the elementary level, we have pacing guides to help drive curriculum. In the past, these guides have been tied to Common Assessment testing during the middle cycles. The first and last tests have been cumulative for the year to give a picture of growth. My question refers to PMPs given after the testing cycle #2. This test was another cumulative test and covered material not yet introduced to our classes. Why do we give PMPs over material that children have never been taught? If this is truly progress monitoring then how do these two items relate? The second grade math test we gave for cycle 2 tested so many concepts that have not ever been touched on in math curriculum or calendar math. How can we explain this to parents? There is no correlation between the test and the student's actual progress in class over what they have been taught and what we are saying by giving them a PMP for a test over material that hasn't been taught yet. Is this a best practice and does it provide an authentic picture of a child's progress?

A: The PIAP booklet designates that PPs must be written for students who score in the "One Star or Two Star" category. Please refer to page 30 in the PIAP booklet to see the specific criteria for each grade level in Math. "One Star" students in second grade are those who score below expectations on the Common Assessment AND have a Math current grade of an "N or U". Students who have a Math current grade of an "E, V, or S" do not fall into the "One Star" category, and thus do not need a PMP. The Common Assessments are all summative this year, which allows the data to be compared from cycle to cycle and allows the district to provide comparable data to the state for those schools that are required to send in state reports.  
Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: From the understanding that effective teachers should individualize teaching techniques for the benefit of their class and individual students, how does the district justify the apparent insistence that each school, each grade level and each class must be on the same objective, same page number and same lesson each moment of each day with the same basic class set up and structure?

A: In science, teachers should be in the same unit of study as identified on the Science Unit of Study Timeline, PIAP. Within each of the Units of study, teachers have the flexibility to select what lessons to teach and when to teach the aligned concepts as long as they align to the grade level benchmarks.  
Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: Does the district have a written RtI plan for "struggling students" that teachers can access in order to be the most effective practitioners they can be?

A: The state is requiring that districts create their RtI plan during this school year with its implementation effective for the 09/10 school year. Our District RtI Leadership Team is a cross-functional group that includes a variety of stakeholders and practitioners to guide us in the development of this plan. We are relying heavily upon the excellent work that is being done by

our six elementary RtI Pilot schools, and their input has been instrumental in the development of our district plan.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: The fifth grade team would like to know why they are still doing PRIDE since it isn't tied to Benchmarks. This is taking up valuable time.

A: The PRIDE Student Recognition Program has been a Pinellas County Initiative since the early 90's. It began as a state requirement to recognize only high school seniors, but Pinellas County expanded the program to touch all three levels. It was never designed to test "benchmarks"; it was intended to promote highest student achievement in mathematics, science, writing, social studies, and foreign language. Our School Board views this event as a wonderful way to recognize student excellence among parents and students.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Q: Two years ago the SRI was removed from the third grade portfolio. We understand that it was deemed less than reliable or valid as a true measure of reading ability. Why then, has it been returned to the portfolio, a critical collection of assessments, so closely tied to promotion and retention?

A: The portfolio assessments have changed from last year to this year. Harcourt assessments were replaced with Macmillan assessments. The NRT (SAT-10) option was eliminated by the state. We wanted to allow our third grade students 10 opportunities to achieve the required five checkmarks, so the decision was made to put the SRI back into the portfolio. Unlike the other nine opportunities, the SRI actually allows three chances for the student to make the passing criteria. We will have further discussion about this option for next year's portfolio options.

Submitted by Pam Moore

#### Student Assignment:

Q: When will elementary schools know the new zoning boundaries for next year?

A: The board passed the elementary boundaries on February 10, 2009. To find out the zone for a specific address, you can use the school locator tool on the district web site. Within the next two weeks there will also be a tool to see the specific boundaries for each school's zone.

Submitted by Jim Madden

Q: It appears that some of the boundaries for the new home schools favor certain neighborhoods and schools.

A: The zone lines were not drawn to favor any neighborhoods. They were drawn based on where students live, how the current grid zones are configured, capacities of schools, looking at

historic zoning patterns where applicable; trying, in as many instances as possible, to avoid major roadways, and other variables.

Submitted by Jim Madden

Q: I would like to know how much attention, if any, was paid to an equitable distribution of free lunch students. Is the goal of the county to create school populations to obtain additional federal dollars? Also, if the criteria are the location of the home, shouldn't some attention have been to creating a balanced student population for all schools?

A: In cases where schools were closed and large numbers of free and reduced lunch students were involved, the lines were drawn to reduce the impact as much as possible. The difficulty in doing this in all cases is that the housing patterns make it very challenging.

Submitted by Jim Madden

Region Superintendent:

Q: If the district is forced to cut teacher hours, what current requirements/expectations will the district remove from elementary teachers? We are already working the number of hours that the middle school teachers are grieving!

Q: If we lose the days before school starts to get ready for the students, how will we prepare our classrooms for the beginning of school?

Q: If it is necessary to take away preschool workdays from teachers why can't you cut back on the use of staff developers for schools making AYP?

Q: Another concern is the potential loss of hourly teachers who currently make it possible for us to comply with State Rule 6A-6.054 (K-12 Student Reading Intervention Requirements) in meeting the needs of students with identified reading deficiencies. Will we continue to use hourly teachers to meet these needs?

All of the above questions relate to possible steps that could be taken to balance the budget. No decisions have been made. There was a survey made available for any PCS employee to provide input.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: Why are different standards held for middle school teachers and high school teachers versus elementary teachers? Example: The number of meetings that elementary is required to attend and other levels don't. The expectation that conferences (in elementary) take place after hours in order to finish. Elementary simply doesn't have enough time to plan when we have meetings two, three, four times a week.

A: The requirement for middle school teaching is bound by the contract, as is the “after school events” a teacher is required to attend. Parent conferences are often scheduled before and during school hours.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: Why is it necessary for the principal to observe experienced elementary teachers for a full 90 minutes? How long do middle and high school teachers get observed?

A: An administrator who commits to observing the 90 minute reading block is committing a great deal of time to understand the beginning, middle and end of the state mandated reading block. Often the teacher will state, “If you only could have seen what happened before you arrived or after you left”. To my understanding this is not the “official” observation, but rather a time for the administrator to give feedback, support and discuss next steps for the teacher.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: What would be the possibility of having assistants in kindergarten?

A: Given that the district must cut \$69-million from the budget, this will not be a consideration in the near future. It is important to keep in mind that the Teacher Pupil Ratio in kindergarten has been reduced from the 24-25 students that in years past generated the assistant in kindergarten.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: Many teachers at the elementary level are feeling a huge amount of pressure with all the new programs constantly being added to our plates, yet no more time to complete them. We are always willing to step up to the plate to go the extra mile, but no matter what we do there is always more that we should be doing. Many staff members I have spoken to are feeling overwhelmed. Now the notion that some of our preplanning days may be disposed of next year to save money is a looming possibility. Early days of preplanning are spent in meetings, not our classrooms. We absolutely need that time to be ready. We also need our daily planning times more than ever with the constantly increasing demands placed on us. Please, can we prioritize and focus our efforts and trust the wonderful teachers in our schools? There are too many new programs constantly being rolled out for us to keep up with and implement effectively. Can you help us?

A: We recognize that excellent teaching requires excellent planning. The new programs that you may be referring to are the new Reading Adoption and the new math standards. Both of these “programs” are mandates of the state, not the district. Yes, we can help and are available to work with your staff to share what other schools are doing to “gain” additional planning time. During the summer, principals in Region II worked together to create schedules and teaming efforts that provided additional time for teachers.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: When teams meet for their weekly PLC's, we have been told that during these PLC's we are only allowed to discuss the two areas that each grade level team has chosen for their SIP. On many occasions, there is a need to discuss other areas. Is this a school-based decision or a county-wide decision?

A: The work of the PLC's is a school-based decision. PLC's exist to provide teachers with the opportunity to grow professionally, through collaboration and conversation. Many schools have set processes in place to ensure that all content areas are addressed.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

Q: We know that we are mandated to do a certain amount of training per year. However, many on our staff are less than enthused about the disruption the on-site training with staff developers cause. Could we as a district make better use of their expertise as classroom teachers?

Q: With the existing budget concerns, how does the district justify sending additional personnel (e.g., staff developers, curriculum specialists) to schools that have consistently scored well in both reading and math, as evidenced by the Common Assessments? Is there a greater need at schools that are not scoring well?

Q: Why is the district spending money on staff developers for A rated schools? Reading, math, and science teachers on special assignment come into our classrooms and disrupt our flow and take us away from our students three times a month. This is nothing personal against the trainers – they are good teachers and are sincere in wanting to improve instruction – and I'm sure that they are just doing what they've been told to do. However, in many cases this is not a good use of our precious teaching time and it wastes the district's money. Why should high performing, experienced, successful classroom teachers be required to stop what they are doing to watch a trainer? Some of these high performing, experienced, successful teachers could train the trainers. Why doesn't the county make the trainers available to teachers who need or want help instead of forcing all teachers to take instruction in strategies that they may already be proficient in - we don't do this to children, why is the district doing it to teachers?

A: (for the three questions above) As in all professions, educators also recognize that continuing to grow in their practice is critical. Although we have many schools receiving an A grade from the state, the vast majority of our schools recognize that this does not mean that all students are proficient and prepared for middle school. In fact, none of our schools have achieved 100% learning gains- and it takes only a 66% success rate in the cells that count for the state grade to be awarded an A. Research clearly supports professional development- students grow when teachers grow. A comprehensive professional development plan includes three levels of support. The most common, and least effective when done in isolation of the other two levels,

is acquisition of knowledge/skills. This is the traditional trainings that we all have experienced. This professional development is referred to as knowledge *for* practice. The second level of professional development, knowledge *in* practice, is the support that is provided to individuals when they return to their work site and begin implementing the new trainings. This is where the staff developer is critical, as they are there to support, guide, model and coach teachers who are working on new strategies and practices. Through collaboration and dialogue with peers and the staff developers this can generate reflection as well as make public the new knowledge and skills that are being created and perfected. The third level of professional development is knowledge *of* practice, or inquiry/action research. Teachers focus on raising questions about and systematically studying their own classroom teaching. Teachers and administrators involved in inquiry work benefit greatly from the collaboration, support and coaching of the staff developers. It is only when all three levels of professional growth are provided that real change can occur.

Submitted by Dr. Carol Thomas

#### Exceptional Student Education:

Q: Can we get the test scores of our students with disabilities (especially the deaf and visually impaired who come to this school from out of their zone) disaggregated from the school's total scores? In other words, can their scores be sent to their neighborhood schools so that Cross Bayou is not penalized for not meeting AYP? These students have IEPs and their needs are being met by ESE professionals. This would lower the number of scores we have from SWDs.

A: The suggestion of pulling out students or moving them to other schools for accountability purposes is against the intent of NCLB and AYP. If a student is at a school for both FTE periods then they will be included in that school's grade and AYP calculations. I don't really have the means to assign students to accountable schools; that is entirely handled by the DOE through the FTE files and by their rules and procedures.

Submitted by Octavio Salcedo

#### Risk Management:

Q: Is the district working toward getting better health care options for its employees?

A: We will be conducting a formal request for proposal (RFP) for health insurance this spring for coverage effective January 1, 2010. Carrier and plan selection will be done through the collaborative bargaining process and is subject to board approval.

Submitted by Ted Pafundi

## Facilities:

Q: Will additional school closings be on the list again for reducing the budget and what factors will be involved in determining and selecting schools for that list? Size? Building age? Operating budget?

A: The answer to this question really depends on the student population trends. If the projections from the state (and from our own department) hold true, there will be a need for additional school closings. At a minimum over the next year, we need to reduce the number of seats on inventory. While the school closings this year help, we will focus on reducing portable classrooms next year to lessen the need to close any more schools. However, there is no assurance that we will not be back again next year with a recommendation to the superintendent to close more schools.

Size of school, age of school, property size, projected capital costs, energy costs, demographics of where students' actually live and operating costs are some of the variables that are taken into consideration when determining which schools are on the potential school closing list.

Submitted by Jim Madden

Q: What is an appropriate amount of time for a Head Plant Operator (HPO) to respond to safety concerns in a school building? Some issues are a year old.

A: Safety concerns should be addressed immediately. The question is what is the nature of the emergency? Any imminent danger issue should be called in to Customer Service immediately and followed up as needed. The area could be roped off and measures taken to protect the students and staff until it is corrected.

Work orders should be submitted as soon as the HPO is aware of a safety concern. Sometimes the matter is not an immediate threat to someone's security, but the work order should be followed up with an e-mail to the AMS or BOM to make them aware of the situation and to get their support. If no action is taken on the request for assistance within a few days, the HPO should follow up by either calling Customer Service, their AMS or BOM, or resubmitting the work order.

Some safety concerns cannot always be corrected immediately and may have to be prioritized and budgeted. The HPO should keep a record of how the request is progressing and follow up as necessary. They need to follow up with the AMS or BOM if they need assistance. One example of a safety issue that may be budgeted is the need for a secondary means of egress. We require this in rooms that have 10 or more students in it. Though this is a safety issue, the situation may allow the action to be postponed until funds are available.

Submitted by Doug Abbott

## Budget:

Q: How do you foresee the potential funding from the federal "Bailout Bill" helping to ease our state and county budget deficits?

A: Most parts of the "American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009" are focused on specific activities or programs. These specific activities include enhancements to NCLB (Title I) funding and IDEA funding. This funding is limited in its use and due to "supplement not supplant" requirements and is not likely available to help with the district budget shortfall.

The legislation does create a "State Fiscal Stabilization Fund" which is designed to restore state and local funding to the 2008 level. This funding will be given to the state governors for distribution to local education agencies (LEA).

Submitted by Dr. Doug Forth

Q: There was an article in the newspaper that the new administration (Obama's) is allocating a large amount of money to be sent to education to help with NCLB legislation. This is part of his stimulus package. How will this affect our budget and the projected cuts?

A: The funding in the "American Recovery and Investment Act of 2009" designated for use in NCLB (Title I) programs has the usual "supplement not supplant" language within it. Some legislative language provides authority to the Secretary of Education to waive the maintenance of effort language. However, the NCLB focused dollars are not intended to replace projected state or district budget cuts.

Submitted by Dr. Doug Forth

Q: Since the budget continues to be slashed will the county still proceed with next year's textbook adoption? If so why? Could that money be spent on other things more beneficial?

A: The district will not proceed with language arts, music or physical education adoptions as planned. Since this flexibility in the use of instructional materials funding is presently a onetime event, the district is holding the \$4.5 million not spent in reserve rather than expend it on recurring needs.

Submitted by Dr. Doug Forth

## Superintendent

Q: How will the district more effectively communicate each step taken toward decision making in this budget crisis? With so much anxiety happening within our personnel, and these uncertain times, we cannot afford to have things come down through the rumor mill. What proactive steps are being made to alleviate this process that is currently not successful? Suggestion: Our principal sends out weekly updates of school happenings, changes, etc. Our school superintendent should be the singular role model of effective communication in our

district for all other levels of professionals to aspire to. We should be able to comment on the steps of the process, not just read end results of the process.

A: Budget information has been communicated in a variety of ways – budget bulletins, video presentations, PCS Journal interview segments on Ch 14 and the website, e-mails, employee input survey and in PowerPoint presentations at the Superintendent meetings (posted on the website). Please keep in mind that the budget discussions will continue over the next few months and many decisions have not yet been made. During the process, district representatives regularly meet with employee bargaining representatives who report back to their employee groups. We will continue to update employees on any new developments. On February 17, 2009, a new monthly Superintendent's Update was sent to all employees as an additional way to regularly communicate with PCS employees about things that are happening in the district, including the budget.

Submitted by Andrea Zahn