

Superintendent's Meetings with Instructional Staff Representatives
Region III - February 17, 2009

Human Resources:

Q: When will our current teacher's contract be revisited and re-negotiated and are considerations and ideas from all the teachers as expressed in mass emails across the district being explored? And what feedback can the teachers expect to receive?

A: The current PCTA contract has been under discussion since last spring. Our collaborative bargaining process is a year-long process that allows us to address issues as they occur. The 3-year labor agreement expired on June 30, 2008 and is under re-negotiations for a new contract for 2008-11. Right now, 41 of the 48 articles in the PCTA agreement have been tentatively agreed to between the administration and the Association. The budget crisis at all levels has created a significant delay in completing negotiations due to our efforts to address statewide budget reductions. The purpose of the most recent request for employee input was to broaden the perspective on areas the district might consider in addressing the shortfall which is projected to be almost \$68-million for 2009-10. The school board and the respective bargaining teams will be reviewing the feasibility and the financial impact of any of the proposed ideas received.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

A: As you know, the 2005-2008 PCTA contract expired on June 30, 2008. Since that time, the district and PCTA have been operating on that contract's terms as the "status quo" until a new contract is in place. Since well before June 30, 2008, and continuing to the present day, the district's bargaining team has been meeting with PCTA leadership in negotiation sessions to reach agreement on all terms of a new contract. Under the law, the district cannot bargain with individual teachers, but rather must work through PCTA as their representative. Consequently, I would recommend that any suggestions you have on contract language be sent to PCTA for discussion at the bargaining table.

Submitted by Jim Robinson

Q: The contract was negotiated between the district and PCTA with the best interest of students in mind. Teachers ratified the contract through the voting process. The district violated the terms with intent. The parties engaged in arbitration. The arbitrator concurred with the teacher's position: there was a violation. The district has made clear its intent to continue violating those specific terms of the contract. The district's position represents neither the best interests of students, faculty, or commitment to character guidelines. How can you, as a superintendent, gain our trust in you?

A: The Superintendent is charged with managing the school district and its budget. The case in question was prompted by what a districtwide committee thought was in the best interests of middle school students in an effort to reduce the potential for dropouts at that level. The old contract language did not support the recommendations of the committee nor the Superintendent. The outdated language is now being renegotiated to provide greater latitude to schools to address the needs of students. The board has the right to make unilateral decisions so long as it bargains the impact of those decisions.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: With the impasse that has been declared regarding the middle school contract, how much money do you anticipate it will cost the taxpayers to have this go through the court system? With the budget in crisis, does it make sense to spend money on a lawsuit?

A: It should be noted that the lawsuit was filed by the Association regarding the arbitrator's award – not by the school board. The board is defending itself in that lawsuit. The impasse process is a totally separate process to resolve negotiations for the successor agreement and does not go through the court system.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Are middle schools going to block scheduling next year? Teachers are concerned about their schedule next year (block, seven periods etc.).

A: The schedules for next year will be determined on a school-by-school basis with funding for staffing of schools based on a 7-period schedule of some kind. Schools may elect to maintain a 6-of-7 period format or develop a block type schedule that provides seven opportunities for students to select courses. The district is still in discussion with PCTA regarding alternatives that will provide flexibility in scheduling while still generating a cost savings to the district toward meeting our \$68-million budget reduction.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Teachers are obviously concerned with the rumors we have been hearing. What does the word "furlough" mean and how could it be applied to instructional staff.

A: A "furlough" would be a reduction in the number of actual days required to work and a corresponding reduction in annual pay. No decisions have been made regarding furloughs but they are on the list for consideration.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Employees feel very strongly that teacher's salaries should not be cut under any circumstance.

A: Salary reductions will be a "last resort" measure. However, when one realizes that more than 85 percent of the district budget is dedicated to salaries and benefits, the potential for

salary reductions becomes more likely considering the fact we have already reduced the district budget by almost \$42-million and 512 positions during the current fiscal year. Other employee groups feel just as strongly that their salaries should not be cut. However, several of our employee groups have indicated their willingness to reduce salaries if it will avoid employees losing their jobs next year.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Q: Has the board considered dropping the extended Drop? Has the Board considered early buy-out for those close to retirement? Has the board considered pay cuts or furloughs for those at the top of the "non-teaching" administrative pyramid, i.e., those at the administration mentioned in the *St. Petersburg Times* article?

A: All of these concepts are currently under discussion. It should be noted that the number of teachers extended after completion of the DROP program for 2008-09 was triple that of other employee groups. That is, far more teachers requested re-employment after completing DROP than did administrators. Furloughs and salary reductions, if used will be applied to all levels of the organization. The superintendent has to consider all employees in the system – not just instructional employees. Every person in this district provides a vital service toward helping students achieve. It's a shame that some teachers are attempting to protect themselves financially to the exclusion of all other employee groups in the district. We need to work together to resolve the financial crisis we are experiencing – not turn on each other.

Submitted by Dr. Ron Stone

Deputy Superintendent

Q: If it does not come up would you please ask what the difference is between the original "Middle School Model" that was developed and "tested" at Riviera and Azalea Middle Schools (~33 years ago) and the current "model" of seven periods? The question is asked, because the "original" model was discarded by the county because it "cost too much", yet now more periods have been added as a way of helping save the county money.

A: The original middle school model of 30+ years ago was a daily 5-of-7 period model. Teachers taught for five periods per day with two planning periods. This model was costly and was dropped because teachers only had direct instructional contact with students for 71.4 percent of the day.

The proposed scheduling model is 6-of-7 periods or its financial equivalent. In this model, teachers typically have one planning period and direct instructional contact with students for 85.7 percent of the day making it much more cost effective. There are a variety of ways, however, that a seven period student schedule may be delivered – e.g. a floating seventh period, A days and B days, blocked periods with singletons, etc.

Submitted by Cathy Fleeger

Q: What about the so called summer ELP programs for helping students who failed? Is that still going to be implemented, or eliminated as a cost saving measure? The question is asked because it will affect scheduling for next year, and may affect 8th grade students who failed a course and need it to move on to 9th grade. It may also affect how some students do during the last semester of the present year, they may try a bit harder knowing that they cannot “make it up over the summer”, but have to take two math or language arts, etc. classes next year.

A: All of our middle schools will be offering summer ELP programs to assist with this described situation. There is a big push to give these targeted 8th grade students every opportunity to be successful, and a great deal of work is being done to insure this. Stephanie Joyner, Director of Middle School Education, has been meeting with middle schools in the development of their summer program.

Submitted by Pam Moore

Director of Operations:

Q: What is being done about the attendance policy for middle school students? If we go to a block schedule, how will this effect students who are consistently absent on a regular basis?

A: Any student who is absent on a regular basis regardless of the schedule or the instructional level should be identified quickly with strategies put in place to ensure proper attendance. The school’s Child Study Team, which includes an attendance specialist, discusses those types of strategies and interventions which can improve a student’s attendance and hopefully their level of achievement. Interventions include counseling, home visits, parent conferences, and referrals to attendance programs or community service organizations. Students may be referred to the Truancy Magistrate Program (12 middle schools), the Teen Truancy Court Program and regular Truancy Court. Organizations such as Family Resources and Operation PAR work in conjunction with our attendance programs. It is a constant struggle to achieve 100 percent daily attendance but that is our ultimate goal.

Submitted by Ward Kennedy

Q: Why do we not have an attendance requirement for middle school? The absentee rate is horrible.

A: All middle school students are expected to abide the district’s expectations as stated in the Code of Student Conduct, pages 5-6. The average rate of attendance for our middle schools, excluding fundamentals, intermediates, centers, and secondary schools, is in excess of 96 percent on a daily basis. The efforts of our social workers, attendance specialists, and Child Study Teams continue to improve upon that number every day.

Submitted by Ward Kennedy

Q: During legislation there were changes and amendments made to the School Law section at the State. It appears that many of these changes were not made in the student code of conduct for our district. When looking at other school district's Student Codes of Conduct which follow the State School Laws it becomes apparent that Pinellas County School District is different in composition. Other districts have consequences that can be imposed where Pinellas County has very few allowances for imposing consequences on students for violating school law. Is there a possibility that our Student Code of Conduct can be revised to reflect current law and be similar in nature to other districts?

A: Our Code of Student Conduct is reviewed annually by a group comprised of various stakeholders, including administrators, teachers, students, and parents. This group formulates their recommendations based upon what they feel will work best in our district. I review the group's recommendations, make any changes I believe best serves our district, and then present the recommended changes to the school board. The board must vote on the changes since the Code of Student Conduct is a School Board policy. If you believe the Code is missing a specific legal requirement, please let me know.

Submitted by Jim Robinson

A: Not knowing specifically as to what laws you are referring to makes it difficult to answer. Our School Board approved Code of Student Conduct serves as a disciplinary policy and procedural guide for our school administrators, parents and students. It is a policy constructed by the district in accordance with some of the Florida Statutes. In fulfilling the statutory requirements, we have incorporated the specified legal definitions into the language of the Code. Such is the case in the areas of as zero tolerance for crime, firearms, weapons, and substance abuse. Zero tolerance, keep in mind, only means that certain kinds of misconduct will always lead to a disciplinary consequence. For certain misconduct, administrators have discretion as to discipline and penalties and for others the school board has mandatory penalties. All of these policies have been enacted to ensure that all students are safe and that each student has the opportunity to benefit from instruction.

Submitted by Ward Kennedy

Region Superintendent:

Q: What is the most widely used strategy that the district has implemented to close the achievement gap, particularly for African-American males? Also, what is the progress of the district since NCLB?

A: The most widely used strategy the district has implemented is Cultural Competency training. The second phase of CCII focused on addressing the needs of diverse learners through the

acknowledgement and application of multiple intelligences best practices. The train-the-trainer model was utilized to ensure that each school had a team in place to deliver this mandated training. As a mandated strategy, this consistent training throughout the district was a necessary step toward addressing the needs of not only African-American learners, but all learners. The other emphasis within the training dealt with the expectations we hold for diverse learners and challenged our beliefs systems in educating them.

The 5000 Role Model Program is probably the most widely used district-wide strategy in addressing the needs of African-American males. This program focuses on helping African-American males adopt positive behaviors that lead to success and incorporates the use of mentors to provide meaningful role model relationships.

Submitted by Joan Minnis

Q: Why do some schools require a portfolio for evaluation purposes?

A: The portfolio has never been a requirement for the evaluation process. Some staffs have developed portfolios as a tool to keep their documents pertaining to different sections of the evaluation in an organized manner to facilitate the appraisal process.

Submitted by Joan Minnis

Q: Staff morale is at an all-time low in the middle schools, not only because of this year's scheduling problems, but because of the poor behavior of our students. Student discipline is a major issue. What is being done by Pinellas County Schools to train administrators to be more effective when dealing with hard-core behavior problems; to show more support for teachers; and to keep the parents' demands and complaints under control?

A: Each school has a discipline committee where the most prevalent problems for that individual school are discussed. Strategies, interventions and training should be incorporated into the school-wide discipline plan and implemented throughout the year. The plan hopefully provides training opportunities for students, parents, and staff. The district's Cultural Competency and Crisis Prevention Intervention trainings assist staff in understanding some underlying problems, as well as how to diffuse situations. Many of our schools are finding success by having their staff trained in and implementing programs such as PBS and CHAMPS, in addition to utilizing their own school based positive behavior and recognition systems. It is difficult to stem the tide of parent's demands and complaints however; the successful use of those programs along with bullying awareness, commitment to character, and others may reduce discipline issues and in turn hopefully reduce parent complaints.

Research demonstrates what is done in practice at the classroom level has more impact on closing the achievement gap than the use of the latest technology. Extensive research by Dr.

Belinda Williams on "Closing the Achievement Gap" is available through the use of the NEA CARE guide. This free guide incorporates researched-based practices for classroom use and is available online at www.nea.org. Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu's new book written for educators, [100+ Educational Strategies to Teach Children of Color](#), is another excellent resource for addressing the achievement gap. The Region III Achievement Specialist is available to help teachers and is just a phone call or e-mail away.

Submitted by Joan Minnis

Q: Will there be funds next year to support true teaming at the middle school level? How do you propose we can get teachers to buy in on the true teaming concept from discipline to curriculum?

A: The district currently supports teaming at the middle school level. In the summer of 2007, teaming training was offered for schools to send teacher groups/teams. At these trainings, 18 of our current middle schools took advantage of this opportunity to learn more about teaming. During January, 2008, a follow up teaming training was conducted on a Saturday with stipends being paid to those who participated. It is up to each school if they actually put teaming into the master schedule. This is the first step before you can truly have teaming from discipline to curriculum. Currently, the district has a consultant coming in to meet with schools that requested more scheduling information on block scheduling and/or team scheduling for the 2009-10 school year. The district also has purchased teaming books to be used during SA&A for each of the middle school principals in the district. We hope to get these books out to the principals by the end of March.

Submitted by Joan Minnis

Q: What kind of resources, if any, can we expect next year at Tyrone Middle School to increase student achievement, such as technology, student resources, updated equipment at a school like ours with diverse needs and an aging school facility?

A: Due to their needs, we are currently requesting three additional ELP computers. Additionally, Tyrone Middle receives technology support through referendum funds and the districts refresh program.

Submitted by Joan Minnis

Facilities:

Q: With the budget crisis, what is being done to help with the maintenance staff at middle schools with cleaning? Classrooms are not being cleaned every night.

A: Middle schools are staffed the same as high schools. We offer support through training, evaluating the circumstances to see if hours can be adjusted to meet the needs, and work with administration to involve the faculty. We often find that more effort is needed during the day

because of student discipline issues. If this causes issues such as graffiti and vandalism then we ask that work orders be put in for the maintenance department to assist.

Submitted by Mike Bessette

Q: What measures are being taken to ensure student safety during arrival and dismissal at Madeira Beach Fundamental Middle School given that there will be upwards of 1,000 car riders and a car circle that backs into a major highway?

A: Money has been allocated to redesign the parent pick-up at Madeira Beach to make sure we have adequate car stacking on our site.

Submitted by Mike Bessette

Budget:

Q: Since Pinellas County Schools has a shortage of over \$40-million for personnel, and at the same time the Pinellas County School Board has approved a capital outlay plan of over \$700-million for new construction in the next five years, why can't the county shift some of these funds into personnel until the economy picks up? With future funding from the federal government, could we expect PCS to be more transparent and open as to where and how the money is going to be used?

A: Florida Statute specifies the allowable uses of capital outlay funds (new construction and remodeling projects; maintenance, renovation and repair: purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of school buses: purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of new and replacement equipment; payment of loans approved pursuant to ss. 1011.14 and 1011.15; payment of the cost of the opening day collection for the library media center of a new school). The use of capital outlay for the expenditure of the day to day operations of the school system is not a valid use of these funds. Violation of the expenditure provisions in statute requires an equal dollar reduction in the Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funds for the violating district.

In the past, the Florida Legislature has been reluctant to expand the acceptable uses of capital outlay; however, during the recent special session they did provide some added flexibility. The following were added to statute as allowable purchases out of capital: "the purchase, lease-purchase, or lease of driver's education vehicles; motor vehicles used for the maintenance or operation of plants and equipment; "payment of the cost of premiums for property and casualty insurance necessary to insure school district educational and ancillary plants". This change to the provision of property and casualty insurance will translate into a potential shifting of \$10-million of expenditures out of the general fund into capital (this savings has already been considered in our latest Budget Model). Time will tell if the current economic situation will open the Florida Legislature to further flexibility.

Submitted by Fred Matz

Q: Has the school board considered not purchasing some of the textbooks and instead paying the much smaller penalty for renegeing on the purchase?

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

Legal

Q: In the present state of our districts financial crisis and after reviewing public records of financial statements, district financial audits, and the school board minutes over the past two-three years, there seems to be many areas where decisions were made that were political in nature and not necessarily in the best interest of our students or the school district. Can this notion become a viable investigation at the district office to review these documents and question the school board; thus publically holding them accountable for making poor judgments in decision making or making demanding decisions for personal gains regarding re-election, funds for teacher salaries, and the downsizing of the administrative staff in this district which has landed the district in a crisis situation?

A: I understand your question to be whether the district administration can conduct an investigation of alleged wrong-doings of the school board. The administration does not investigate the school board. School board members are elected constitutional officers answerable to their constituent voters.

Submitted by Jim Robinson