

**O'Rourke Middle School Building Council Retreat**  
**Friday, June 26, 2009 – 8:30-2:30 - Library Classroom**

1. *Attendance:* Don Germain, Andy Lancaster, Kevin Ahern, Judy Brinkman, Shauna Bryk (for Karen Shipston representing staff development), Penny McDonnell, Amy Clark, Suzanne Rayome, Janet Bianchi, Pattie Rakvika, Lori Moore, Robin Gawrys, Nancy Pearse, Valerie Wadsworth
2. *Welcome and Introductions:* New members were introduced and welcomed to the Council. A revised membership chart was shared with the representatives.
3. *Review of Shared Decision Making Protocols and Mandated District SDM Checklist:* The District Guidelines for Shared Decision Making were reviewed in detail. The SDM checklist items were evaluated and approved unanimously by the members. Specific items of related discussion were:
  - Representation of and for Constituents – How can we better communicate to the masses to get pertinent feedback on the topics addressed at the meetings, while providing for better representation?
  - Email Merges: A list serve of constituent members, particularly parents was suggested as a potential vehicle for information delivery.
  - Continue the special area teacher meetings to give them a formal venue for deliberation on the topics that influence their areas of expertise.
  - Continue the comprehensive publication and distribution of the minutes, while continuing to upgrade the web as a venue for information dissemination.
  - Continue the ongoing collaborative relationship and dialog with Cabinet and the teaching teams to maximize the decision making potential and effectiveness of the organization.
  - Philosophy and Mission: Are we a broad clearing house for information; or do we exist solely as a decision making body? What decisions are to be made at this level – policy or curriculum, or both? Are these lines being muddled of late due to the overwhelming amount of information and reflective decision making taking place throughout the entire BHBL organization?
4. *Culture, Team, Data:* The Council members discussed the progress the building continues to make toward fulfilling its goals to mold a professional learning community through their work in the arenas of Culture, Team, and Data. An overview of the comprehensive work of the constituent teams and individual staff members to utilize CTD strategies to improve learning was given by the Council representatives including:
  - The development and maintenance of team and SMART goals,
  - The utilization of a broad range of comprehensive evaluative strategies to improve instruction and student performance through the analysis of pertinent data,
  - The development and implementation of cultural initiatives,
  - The restructuring of the organization to maximize the potential of each of its members,
  - The utilization of a variety of other researched based CDT initiatives to serve children,
  - The infusion of research based programming to support the personalization of the educational process for all children, to name a few...

The members also articulated some of the pitfalls that have been encountered as they navigate through the complex transition to a District wide PLC foundation including:

- Culture: As with teaming, the culture of this school is one of the principle driving factors for success in overall student achievement. Students who are willing and ready to learn, in a supportive and nurturing environment, will reach their maximum potential. Therefore the Council representatives articulated that

members of the middle school community have made it a priority to target specific work toward improving the school learning climate and culture including: character education programming, the modeling of inherent core values by the staff, setting and maintaining high standards for achievement and learning, improving the facilities, setting and maintaining a school climate that is safe and healthy, fostering team building and community, celebrating success, and motivating students to achieve excellence in all aspects of the learning. They cautioned that we cannot artificially manufacture a positive and productive learning climate and culture. Therefore, it is essential that we maintain the rich culture of this district by keeping the balance in the delivery of educational practices and programs, ensuring that we do not get bogged down with the technical aspects of the business to the detriment of the children, maintaining quality over quantity in our work, fostering more professional dialog, defining what mastery means specifically to BHBL, and maintaining hiring practices and mentoring practices that bring in skilled professionals to our fold that uphold our strong core values.

- Team: The use of multi-layers of instructional teams is inherent to the middle level movement and O'Rourke Middle School since its inception in the 1960's. The recent District wide movement to a comprehensive teaming plan has warranted an adjustment in the practices currently employed in the middle level team structures. This process has been challenging as the members of the staff try to juggle the many aspects of change incorporated through this multi-leveled team approach to teaching and learning without the additional time or comprehensive training necessary to make this happen. Some of the changes has streamlined teaming toward more effective and realistic reviews of student performance, but have hindered the development of other aspects of middle level education. Through the reflections of the members it was articulated that this approach, in its infant stages, appears to be more disjointed due to the fact that the guiding principles do not include specificity in globalized district goals, but rather have diverted the efforts of the teams toward more individualized, departmentalized initiatives. This perceived paradigm shift seems at times artificially contrived. Although there is an appreciation of the process and the potential for significant improvements in student achievement utilizing coordinated team structures, there is reservation that if not implemented properly there could be an erosion of high standards of rigor, while narrowing the scope of learning potential for all students. The members and their constituents embrace the teaming process, but require more guidance as to its effective implementation within the greater PLC charge.
  - Data: The need for more professional development to better apply the data model toward helping individual students, more time to evaluate data for the betterment of instruction, a checklist of effective grassroots prevention and intervention measures, a better system of accountability and data management (data warehousing, more screening tools that are current and pertinent, more grassroots intervention strategies), a broader range of analytical data that is curriculum based that helps to expand the rigor and relevance of our educational system, and a continuation of the development of our local curriculum utilizing longitudinal data analysis to expand the scope of learning well beyond the minimum competency standards, were all recommended by the constituency representatives.
5. *Standing Committee Reports and Final Recommendations:*
- a. Class Night: Changes to the program, rules, and venue have improved the Class Night Awards Ceremony and Dance. This year's program was deemed a tremendous success. The PTA, staff, and administration were praised for their support and comprehensive organization of the program. Recommendations for future programs include:
    - Improve the lineup process to accommodate the move to the gymnasium,

- Utilize fans to improve the air flow at the venue,
  - Review the electronic device policy for all evening activities,
  - Improve the coordination of sound and lighting at the awards ceremony,
  - Re-evaluate which awards are appropriate for this ceremony,
  - Improve the ceremony signage.
- b. American Education Week: This program continues with measured success. Placing invitations in the interim reports has helped to sustain the participation levels of parents visiting our school during the week of celebration. Efforts to get parents into school on a regular basis throughout the year as visitors or volunteers have helped to build strong community relationships and partnerships for education. Career days, Spirit Days, Interdisciplinary projects, formal presentations, and other similar events hosted by the departments and grade level teams have encouraged community participation. Recommendations for the future include:
- Improve the parent meet and greet prior to the programs for the week.
- c. Committee for Academic and Personal Excellence: This committee finalized revisions in the summer school grading policy to align them with those of the High School. Its members also developed and had approved by the staff, Cabinet, and Council a rubric for the grading of student personal development averages. Discussion took place by the Council regarding staff comments of student evaluative reports and a cumulative PDA average for the year. It was felt at this time that a cumulative PDA average was not warranted and that staff members should continue to find ways to provide pertinent information regarding student performance to parents in a timely and convenient manner. Recommendations for the future include:
- Reinforce the PDA expectations with staff, students and parents in the fall,
  - Place the PDA rubric on the web as a source of information,
  - Review the current research on homework, as well as the District and building guidelines, to make future recommendations.
- d. Health and Safety: The health and safety initiatives for the year were discussed in detail including security, air quality control, septic upgrades, HVAC, and other related matters. Recommendations for the future include:
- Evaluate the impact on reductions or elimination of front door security on the health and safety of the population,
  - Monitor air quality control and make recommendations to the district committee,
  - Consider volunteers to replace the door monitors.
- e. School Climate and Character Education: The School Spirit Committee which includes students, parents and staff members developed and implemented several school spirit days. The Character Education Committee worked extensively on vision, philosophical, and core values statements. The Capturing Kids Hearts program is still a major functional part of our cultural curriculum, but budgetary constraints has forced the District to think about how to develop an effective mirror curriculum, while continuing to train staff to run the program in their classrooms. Collaborative efforts with other districts such as Gloversville and Scotia have helped to support this process. Initial work on a BHBL model curriculum and program essentials will begin this summer with a selected district-wide team. The members also discussed other ways to infuse culture into our curriculum. Recommendations for the future include:
- Finalize the updated philosophy, vision, mission, and core values statements,
  - Explore the creation of a formal "Capturing Kids' Hearts" mentoring program for staff,
  - Maintain the Breakfast of Celebration for the 2nd and 3<sup>rd</sup> quarters of each year under the same criteria. However, monitor the selection of students who

participate more closely to insure that their selection is warranted, based on overall academic and social performance.

- f. SASI Committee: The District committee to review new administrative software will supersede any localized building SASI initiatives. However, building functional operating support for SASI will still continue until such time as a new software package is implemented.
  - g. Transition Committee: Extensive work was completed by the Transition Committee to upgrade current practices directly related to student transition from grade level to grade level. They also began work with grade level teams to improve articulation, provide for more continuity in expectations for students across the grade levels, and infuse more study and organizational strategies into the daily classroom routines of all students and teachers. The student agenda was upgraded to reflect some of these changes and support student development. Recommendations for the future include:
    - Continue the work to refine continuity in expectations across the grade levels through the work of the Transition Committee and grade level teams,
    - Foster more articulation between the grade level teams, particularly 6<sup>th</sup> to 7<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup>.
  - h. Sunshine Committee: The committee was instrumental in supporting the inordinate amount of incidents of personal joy and sorrow experienced by the members of the learning community this year. Santina Florio and Lauren DeFilippo will be taking over the facilitation of the committee for next year.
  - i. Technology Committee: This committee did not meet formally this year due to the fact that district and department efforts in this arena superseded or melded with any building initiatives. Discussion took place regarding personnel changes, lab and tech support, and replacement programming. It was recommended by the members that the impact of these changes be reviewed in November.
  - j. Disconnected Kids: This committee met to try to formulate a plan to introduce a study skills program, Strive for Success, for targeted disconnected kids and their families. Due to logistical, time, and financial constraints the program never came to fruition. The Academic Support Program was in its second year of development. Preliminary evaluations indicate that students who completed the program demonstrated measured overall growth and success in their academic and social performance. Placing teachers in the position as program overseers has improved the program and its outcomes significantly. Other ongoing work to help disconnected kids succeed, SMART Goal # 2, includes: the restructuring of the PAT team, classroom based RTI strategies, character education programs, rewards and incentives, team based intervention strategies, etc. The committee recommended:
    - That efforts be continued to track the performance of these students and support efforts to positively engage them in their learning through innovative programming and other researched based methodologies,
    - It was also suggested that teachers become more directly involved in the PAT student performance review process when an identified child they serve is brought to the team.
  - k. Construction: A complete review of the potential construction project elements to improve the infrastructure of our buildings and grounds was completed. Currently, the BOE is deliberating on a proposal from administrative and district wide committees to float a bond in the fall of 2009.
6. *Update on Building and District Initiatives*: An overview on a variety of building and district goals was presented to the members. Highlights of this review were:
- a. Areas of Focus: Globalized areas of middle level focus based on the research based 7 Essential Elements of a Standards Based Middle School were reviewed.

b. SMART Goals: Progress toward achievement for the two building SMART Goals was presented. Initial results from quarterly data reviews indicate that we continue to make progress toward achieving our goals in all areas of focus. A final review of yearly data will be completed this summer and included in a report to the Superintendent. This information will be shared with the staff and Council in the fall. Building SMART Goals will be carried forward again to the 2009-2010.

c. Council Goals: The Building Council goals for the 2008-09 school year were reviewed in detail. Although the agenda was ambitious, most of the goals that were outlined in the retreat minutes from June of 2008 were met or exceeded. These are highlighted in the text below.

- *Goal #1 – Culture: To improve the cultural climate of the O’Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will take the following initiatives:*
  - ❖ Facilitate grade level transitions – Ongoing - see Transition Committee report.
  - ❖ Engage disconnected kids – Making sustained progress in all targeted areas of student achievement, including a significant reduction in mandated summer school attendance this year – see Disconnected Kids Committee report.
  - ❖ Promote character education – Ongoing – see Character Education Committee report.
  - ❖ Continue to improve open lines of communication with all constituent groups – Progress is being made, but more effort to capture the ideas of all constituent groups is ongoing. Continue Special Area Team meetings, Parent Teas and Forums, Parent Immersion Events, etc.,
  - ❖ Update student agenda protocols with regard to technology – Completed spring of 2009. However, the more global issue of the Cyber influence on the educational world needs to be researched and recommendations need to be made that could include policy changes, the law and cyberspace, social cyber issues, the development and enforcement of rules and regulations, the positive use and infusion of personal technology tools in the educational setting, and curriculum and instruction initiatives that support the use technology.
  
- *Goal #2 – Team: To further foster the growth and facilitation of teaming at O’Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will:*
  - ❖ Increase the involvement of special area staff in the team process – Quarterly team meetings were held with the Special Area teachers to address their needs and concerns as a unit. Some special area teachers were placed on the grade level teams, where their schedules supported that. Special Area and Special Education teachers were participated actively on assigned primary teams.
  - ❖ Support the teams in their efforts to improve students’ organizational, study, and test taking skills – see the minutes of the Transition Committee and Grade level team goals.
  - ❖ Investigate the creation of interdisciplinary teaching teams at the 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade levels – a block scheduling survey was conducted in 2009 and discussion took place at the Administrative, Cabinet, and Council levels. Numerous constraints still exist in trying to move the school forward with a comprehensive and contiguous scheduling model that supports flexible blocking and interdisciplinary teams.
  - ❖ Support furthering the understanding of PLC’s through staff development – Ongoing at many levels department, faculty, team, but it would be warranted to infuse more refined and concentrated staff development into the calendar for the future to minimize areas of confusion and maximize the potential of team to influence learning.

➤ *Goal #3 – Data: To continue to improve the growth and development of O’Rourke Middle School students, the Building Council will utilize data to evaluate the following items:*

- ❖ PDA Rubric – the document was created, revised and approved by the staff, Council, and Cabinet for implementation in the fall of 2009.
- ❖ O’Rourke Middle School SMART Goals – sustained progress toward reaching our SMART Goal completion at the Building, team and personal level is ongoing and achieving measured success.
- ❖ Summer School Grading Policies – were revised and implemented for the summer school program beginning in the summer of 2009.
- ❖ Homework Practices – dialog was carried on throughout the year at the Cabinet, Council and team level, but no formal recommendations or decisions were rendered at this time.
- ❖ Visionary Framework – this document continues to be a guiding force in the decision making process. However, it has not been revised in several years due to the commitment to other prescribed initiatives.
- ❖ Pyramid of Intervention Strategies – work is ongoing in this arena driving intervention and prevention initiatives at the Cabinet, Council, PAT, team, classroom, and District levels with the District committee developing recommendations and protocols for future implementation.

d. *Team Goals:* The grade level team goals were reviewed with the members. Teams developed goals in the fall, implemented related strategies throughout the year, and analyzed those goals in the spring in their reports to the Principal. Preliminary grade level team goals have been established for the ensuing school year during the spring professional development workshops.

e. *Primary Department Team Goals:* Highlights of department goals, presented in Cabinet, were shared with the Council members.

f. *Surveys:* Several surveys were conducted throughout the year to gather information on pertinent topics affecting the growth of the organization. These include: block scheduling, professional development, and effective organization restructuring.

g. *Accelerated Science:* A report from the Science Department on the implementation of the Accelerated program was shared with the members. Student achievement results were excellent in this first year. Overall, the program has been a great success. The Science Department has recommended that the master schedule be reviewed in hopes of altering its format to support more continuity in the delivery of the accelerated program, particularly the labs.

7. *Recommendations for and Prioritization of 2009-2010 Goals:* The constituent representatives presented the following goal proposals for consideration:

- a. Explore the possibilities of creating more concentrated, common planning time for all staff to work on building grade level team driven goals and initiatives, PGP’s, SMART Goals, and department ventures.
- b. Develop a student supported Sunshine Committee and create a Middle School Chapter of the Giving Tree program, modeled after the High School service.
- c. Continue the work of the Transition Committee and Grade Level Teams on organization and study skill initiatives for all students.
- d. Research the negative and positive factors of the Cyber influence on learning, students, and the school climate; and make recommendations to the Council for deliberation.
- e. Deliberate on the potential impact on learning of the proposed State Assessment schedule changes and make recommendations to improve the continuity and delivery of high quality instruction within the confines of the mandated testing schedules for exam preparation, administration, and scoring.

- f. Research and deliberate on the potential benefits and drawbacks of homework on learning and make recommendations there of.
- g. Continue our work on defining strategies to support the growing needs of disconnect students and make recommendations there of. Evaluate the impact of ancillary support programs: AIS, Academic Support, OASIS, etc. on student connections to school and resulting academic progress; or lack there of.
- h. Revise or develop the following statements of guiding principles: Vision, Philosophy, Mission, and Core Values.
- i. Evaluate the impact of current budget cuts on the delivery of an effective educational program and the maintenance of a safe, healthy, and productive school climate.

8. *2009-2010 Goal Development:*

- Goal # 1 - Culture: To improve and maintain the quality culture and climate of the O'Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will oversee work on the following initiatives:
  - ❖ Develop a student supported Sunshine Committee and create a Middle School chapter of the Giving Tree program, modeled after the High School program.
  - ❖ Continue the work on defining strategies to support the growing needs of disconnect students and make recommendations there of. Evaluate the impact of ancillary support programs: AIS, Academic Support, OASIS, etc. on student connections to school and resulting academic progress; or lack there of.
  - ❖ Revise existing or develop new statements for guiding and operating principles: Vision, Philosophy, Mission, and Core Values.
  - ❖ Research the negative and positive factors of the Cyber influence on learning, students, and school climate; and make recommendations to the Council for deliberation.
- Goal #2 – Team: To further the growth and facilitation of teaming at the O'Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will:
  - ❖ Continue the work of the Transition Committee and Grade Level Teams on organization and study skill initiatives for all students.
  - ❖ Explore the possibilities of creating more common planning time for all staff to work on building grade level team driven goals and initiatives, PGP's, SMART Goals, and department primary team initiatives.
- Goal #3 – Data: To continue to improve the growth and development of O'Rourke Middle School students and staff, the Building Council will utilize data to evaluate the following items:
  - ❖ Deliberate on the potential impact on learning of the proposed State Assessment schedule changes and make recommendations to improve the continuity and delivery of high quality instruction within the confines of the mandated testing schedules for exam preparation, administration, and scoring.
  - ❖ Research and deliberate on the potential benefits and drawbacks of homework on learning and make recommendations there of.
  - ❖ Evaluate the impact of current budget cuts on the delivery of an effective educational program and the maintenance of a safe, healthy, and productive school climate.

