

13 members of Citizens for Quality Education met with Dr. Schuler and Dr. Damyanovich for about an hour and a half.

Dr. Schuler's Report

He welcomed the group and mentioned that his will be an ongoing process.

He shared that Dr. Damyanovich will be taking the lead, working with division heads, teachers, etc. He's been doing as much as he can considering it is summer and not everyone is around. He will be heading a review effort with a 3-pronged emphasis:

- 1- communication of the policies and process as they now stand
- 2- consistency of practice throughout departments and district schools
- 3- documentation of feedback from parents and students
(note: in the past, teachers handled any discussion about controversial materials and did not pass on that information to a dept. head or administration)

What has been done so far?

- 1- The controversial issues policy was included in all school's August Parent Newsletter
- 2- It is contained in the print and online version of "What Parents Should Know"
- 3- It would have been nice if it was included in the student handbook, however it missed the printing deadline and therefore is not included this year.

What other action will be taken?

- 1- Two things that will help parents have better information: a) Course Information Sheets will be developed that list the instructional materials and media used in each course. These will be distributed to students and to parents at the parent information night. b) The electronic "MyGradeBook" will be used throughout the district this year. It was piloted in some schools/classes last year and got excellent reviews. It makes it possible for parents to be much more involved and to interact with the teachers about specific issues or assignments.

(At this point there was a brief discussion about using only the edited "educational version" of R rated movies in classrooms.)

- 2- Staff development personnel are working with all teachers to make sure they are aware of the controversial issues policies, alternative assignments, etc. They discovered that really no one had been focused on this area in the past.

- 3- The goal is to develop a consistent protocol for alternative assignments. This includes developing and using a form that documents all requests for alternative assignments, so they know how often it is happening, what the issues are, etc. The department heads have agreed to this and are working on a form that can be used across all departments. It is to be in place by January.

Dr. Schuler feels that they've been moving pretty quickly since the May 25 meeting. There has been good, forward progress, but there is still work to be done.

Dr. Schuler said he needed to hear from us if we feel there is a lack of consistency or if we feel something has happened that was not following the proper procedure. He needs to hear if something happens that is not appropriate. Student's names need not be used, but the information must be specific. This information should be given to Dr. Damyanovich. (We are suggesting it come to COE first, so that we can continue to track progress on these situations.) Dr. Damyanovich commented that this is a learning process for all of us and the district will need for us to stay involved.

Discussion:

Joanne K. spoke toward the controversial issues policy. In the current form it does not appear to protect the rights of students and parents. It is too subjective, and there is not a uniform standard or consistency. She gave Dr. Schuler and Dr. Damyanovich a paper pointing out some of the failings in the current policy. Dr. Schuler commented that they have decided to use the 2006-2007 as a learning time. Then they will decide if the current policy needs some revision. To revise it now would have been premature—more data and insight is needed.

Sam M. brought up the issue of basing our decision about the scope of the problem only on the requests for alternative assignments. Many students and parents may wish to object to some material but are not willing to put their child through all that is involved in the alternative assignment. He questioned if some materials are really representative of mainstream society in our district, and if a poll of parents could get at this better than basing our decisions just on the number of document requests for other assignments.

Teresa H. pointed out that alternative assignments often pit child against parent. The student doesn't want to be isolated from the rest of the class but the parent may want them removed from a particular material or discussion. This area needs to be fixed so it's not this way.

Bruce T. mentioned the safety issue when kids are singled out and removed from the rest of the class. If this happens more than once, it could easily lead to being belittled or picked on by the other kids. This is not providing a safe learning environment where all views (and all students) are respected.

Linda T. addressed the issue of the standards when selecting materials, both from the standpoint of using materials that are academically challenging and those without offensive materials. Dr. Schuler responded that there is a process in place for selecting materials that are used. He is comfortable with this process. Now that the May 25 meeting and subsequent discussion has brought new scrutiny to this issue, he wants to make sure that the present process is strictly followed. He also mentioned that we will see more uniformity across the district, rather than letting each school basically choose their own materials. Teresa questioned him on the criteria that underlie the process—do the staff who select materials know clearly where the lines are between what is appropriate and what isn't?

Curt H. shared the list of ideas generated at the COE August 4 meeting as suggestions to make better policies and practice in this regard. He thanked the District 214 leaders that some of these are already in initial stages of implementation. He summarized by saying that more information, well in advance of when potentially controversial materials will be used, will allow parents and educators to work together well. When information about controversial materials comes up "at the last minute" it can much more easily lead to conflicts. Dr. Schuler and Dr. Damyanovich received a printed copy of these ideas for better policies and practice.

Wrap-Up:

COE: Bruce T. briefly explained the network that is developing that is being known as Citizens for Quality Education. He talked about our desire to be aware, to document instances that need to be brought to the attention of the district administration, and to be part of a collaborative effort in bringing about positive change within the district.

Documentation: The question about documenting specific situations from previous years was asked. Dr. Schuler and Dr. Damyanovich are open to receiving reports of instances of things deemed inappropriate in previous years, as long as they were specific as to the class, materials used, etc. They will be looking closely at things this year, but detailed accounts of objectionable instances in the last year or two could also be helpful.

Next Meeting: We will schedule another meeting, probably in late October. It should be an evening meeting so that more parents may be able to attend.