

COMMENTS ABOUT THE SECONDARY PROGRAM

Facilitator: Bob Hanlon, Communications Specialist, Capital Region BOCES

Administrator: Secondary Principal Marna McMorris

The following topics were discussed at the five tables as we circulated to discuss ways the secondary program, grades 7-12, could be improved 5- and 10-years in the future. **The topics are in no particular order.**

INTERNATIONAL BACCALAUREATE PROGRAM: “We need to improve our product and IB would do that.” “We need to find ways to fund this.” Comments included comparisons to the BOCES New Visions Program and support for the idea of immersing students into a program, much as New Visions does. Marna indicated that the Advanced Placement program and IB could not co-exist since they would be choosing the same students; she also pointed out that most colleges do not accept IB credit, but many accept AP.

INTERNATIONAL STUDENT PROGRAM: This proposal would bring students to BKW from other countries for a year. The students would be housed here and pay tuition to attend BKW. This has been used successfully by Newcomb Central Schools, which has attracted 43 international students from 21 nations over the past four years. The district apparently looked into this a few years ago but it fell apart for a variety of reasons. “We need somebody to spearhead this at the school district.” “We need a niche to identify ourselves – we are in the heart of the Helderbergs.” “I am concerned that the district will not be able to sustain itself in 5 or 10 years.” “Kids need sensitivity of cultural awareness.” This proposal was discussed as being a benefit by increasing enrollment, student diversity (“since 99% of BKW students are white”) and adding to the school budget.

VOCATIONAL PROGRAMS: “We need to try to reach the kids who will not go to college but who want to get a job after school.” This person proposed adding vocational programs at BKW before students could attend the CTE High School at BOCES beginning in their junior year.

MORE COOPERATION BETWEEN TEACHERS: One parent said her child was penalized for missing part of a class because she had another commitment, such as music lessons. She said teachers should realize that students are juggling a lot of things and they should be cooperative with students about missing parts of classes or arriving late. Marna asked this parent to contact her.

COMMUNICATIONS: Many of the comments involved parents who did not know what was happening with their high school-aged child. While common at that age, it was frustrating for parents to not realize course choices, information about vocational opportunities and other information. Marna said assemblies and parent nights have been held. Most seemed to agree that the “backpack flyers” commonly used with elementary students doesn’t work with older students. Some parents get

information from SNN, some from the website, some from Facebook, some from word of mouth. Again, this is common in most school districts. One suggestion was to post the daily announcements on the website so parents could see what is happening and what students are hearing in homeroom. One parent said that a student club, not the BOCES Communications Service, should be overseeing the district's website and Facebook pages. He felt more information relevant to students, such as academic information and sporting events, would be posted more often.

PROGRAMS THAT CONNECT WITH OTHER SCHOOLS/ORGANIZATIONS: The idea here was that the district should explore working with other schools and colleges to offer joint everything from clubs to academic programs. "If you live in a bubbled, you'll be in trouble." "The Board of Education and administrators should go to other schools and see what they are offering." One person mentioned a program at Ballston Spa that is connected to HVCC and RPI, allowing students to leave high school with an associate's degree. "It's similar to what is done at Tech Valley High School." One parent mentioned a program that connects high school students with Capital Rep and Proctor's Theater.

COLLEGE PREPARATION: The comment was made that perhaps colleges could visit and discuss "topical areas," such as health service, police enforcement, etc. Then a student could go and discuss that field with several folks instead of going to visit one college representative. There was also discussion of internships, "experiential learning" and other outreaches to colleges and businesses to offer BKW students internships and "real life" experiences, again similar to New Visions. One person mentioned that she went to high school and worked as a candy striper, which convinced her that she did *not* want to be involved with the medical field.

ADVANCED PLACEMENT PROGRAMS: One person said his child graduated from BKW with 9-12 credits that were used toward college. "We used to have such a strong program." Now, there are four AP classes with one additional being proposed for the 2016-17 school year, Marna said.

MORE ELECTIVES: The comment was made that BKW used to offer many electives, such as in art, music and photography. Because of cutbacks, most of those have been curtailed. "You should poll the students and ask them what they would like." "We are sitting on the basics – that's all that offered here." One parent said that other schools offer an honors program as well as AP. "We need more art, music and theater classes. It gives kids something they are interested in and that they can work toward." One parent said his child was involved in the first photo class but was disappointed that there no other photo courses for him to take. Marna mentioned that a Spanish 4 course, AP in Government and a course about agriculture would be offered in the coming year. She's anxious to see if students sign up for the classes. She also mentioned that students have opportunities through Distance Learning to take a variety of courses not offered at BKW.

COMMENTS FROM ART TEACHER: *These comments were submitted by a BKW art teacher:*

With the passage of Pathways as an option for graduation I think we need to begin thinking about changes we need to make in the Art courses for a more solid future for our students here at BKW. We need another art teacher on board! We had three art teachers for years and then when the cuts were made, our program suffered tremendously. As a result, we began teaching some courses every other

year and two of us teaching six courses (or more) just to keep the students' opportunities as open as possible.

The Elementary Art teacher's schedule is maxed; she has K-7 and the Foundations in Arts Course. If we were to bring in another art teacher, that person could take the 7th, 8th and Foundations in Art bringing the middle school back to the format of a true middle school. Even if it were just a part-time position, this would enhance what we have now. If it were a full time position then we could add courses like AP Art Studio, a true Humanities class, a co-taught graphic arts with technology, a Media Arts course with graphic design and maybe a sculpture/tech class using the 3-D printer in addition to the popular sculpture class we have now. We could also possibly add a "Community arts class" to work with the Berne Library and Pastor Wendy Cook who is trying to get BAA off the ground (Berne Arts Association).

What with the idea of planning the next five years, I think we need to think about this idea.

LATE BUSES: Many parents said it would be helpful if there were more late buses each week. Now, there is a 3:40 p.m. bus three days each week. They said later buses would allow students to stay for extra help and participate in clubs and sports and still get rides home. It is difficult in a rural district to expect parents to transport students back and forth.

LEADERSHIP THROUGH EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES: One person said that allowing students to get involved in extracurricular activities builds leadership and other adult skills in children. "They are here to go to school, but with extracurricular activities, they can make some health choices and really develop." One person said extracurricular activities keep students out of trouble, especially in a rural area. "We need to build some extra structure into the day, to allow kids to do these things."

PEER MEDIATION/STUDENT JUDICIAL COURT: One parent asked why BKW doesn't offer a peer mediation program, in which students who are "charged" with school offenses and facing school discipline argue their cases before other students. Marna said she'd be open to this suggestion and would work with the district attorney to study it.

CONTINUITY: BKW needs continuity, meaning administrators who have an interest in the school and can plan its future. There have been several changes in administration over the past few years; current Superintendent Timothy Mundell was hired this past summer and the two principals have less than one year experience at BKW.

ADULT EDUCATION: One person said that he thinks adults should be able to attend the school during the day and, perhaps, be taught topics such as how to use email by students. He felt there was a wealth of knowledge locked up inside of students that could be used to teach adults. He said the buildings should be used more extensively by the community. The district does not offer an adult education program.