

**DANBURY BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORKSHOP MEETING MINUTES
Beaver Brook Administrative Center
63 Beaver Brook Road, Danbury**

**Wednesday, May 7, 2014
6:30 P.M.**

Present: Eileen Alberts, Gladys Cooper, Michael Ferguson, Annrose Fluskey-Lattin, Richard Hawley, David Metrena (6:55 p.m.), Kathleen Molinaro, Robert Taborsak, Phyllis Tranzillo, Board Members; Drs. William Glass, Dr. Sal Pascarella from Administration

Absent: Richard Jannelli, Ralph Pietrafesa, Board Members
Joseph Martino, Atty. K. Thompson, Administration

CALL TO ORDER

Chairperson E. Alberts called the meeting to order at 6:34 p.m. and those assembled recited the Pledge of Allegiance. Dr. Pascarella introduced Gary Bocaccio, Principal of Danbury High School. G. Bocaccio said he is here tonight to talk about what has been discussed at the high school and the background behind it. He is concerned with the tremendous amount of time devoted to preparation for exams. We have four half days in January and four half days in June. In addition, most teachers are spending approximately five days preparing for midterms and final exams. He questions whether this is a valuable use of time and spoke with teachers who also had concerns. Also, there is a great deal of time being used to modify the exams for special education students and ESL students. Students do not feel they are a learning tool and teachers do not feel they are teaching tools. G. Bocaccio also talked about the fact that resources are limited and exams use supplies and time and there are security issues. He further said they are moving toward project-based learning. The Department Heads seemed to agree. Many schools are getting away from exams, and he met with the faculty and formed five groups to see what impact it will have if exams were not given.

Dr. Meghan Martins, Associate Principal of Danbury High School, gave a Power Point Presentation to those present and embellished on each point in the presentation:

Assessment Best Practice
Current Assessment System
Benchmark Assessments
Assessment Frequency
Process
Summary of DHS Faculty Research Review
Current Issues in College

What are colleges looking for?

Cons to Eliminating Current Structure

Pros to Eliminating Current Structure

Potential Alternatives

In summation, G. Bocaccio said we are here because the pros outweigh the single con and certainly justify taking a look at eliminating midterms and final exams.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin said she is all for increasing instructional time and applauds their efforts. She said she would completely support this effort because she completely agrees. As an elementary school teacher, she feels the students are over tested at that level. She asked a clarifying question about the Pre-CFA, Post-CFA Tests, and the 2020 Capstone Test. Dr. Martins explained in detail. Phyllis Tranzillo, Robert Taborsak and K. Molinaro had clarifying questions which were answered in detail by Dr. Martins with regard to the Capstone Test. Dr. Martins said it is a teaching expectation. R. Taborsak said he was never in favor of having exams because of the amount of time that is taken away from teaching. A discussion ensued as to the exams given in college versus projects and presentations. Dr. Martins and G. Bocaccio spoke about their experiences in speaking with WCSU students and others who would be happy to eliminate the exams, and he feels it is best for students. Also, in speaking with other districts, they were excited about the idea, and were looking to Danbury to take the first step in Connecticut.

R. Hawley asked if there is a difference of opinion between the content base in Science and Math versus Social Studies and English. John LaRosa, Science Department Head, said science is 99% content, and he thought his committee would be against it. Some had concerns but explained how his department can make it work. All eight members of his committee agreed. The Math Department Head, Lisa Erhartic, was present and reported they have a similar thought process. The ESL Department Head, Heather Pellicone, also spoke and agreed they are losing an immense amount of time, and there is no need for the exams.

Annrose Fluskey-Lattin questioned that if the exams were eliminated, would the End of Unit Assessment happen at the same time for all academic classes? Dr. Martins said benchmarks happen in the same window, end of unit assessments differ by course.

G. Bocaccio said he talked with a number of key teachers in different departments and the Department Heads as well, and it seems like the people that voted against it were in three groups: One group felt it is important for college. The second group was skeptical and wondered if there might be an interior motive, and the third group voted against it because they did not see students in the course of their day and liked having half days. The STC was supportive. Sixty parents were in attendance at the PTO meeting last Monday when they presented, and many were supportive after the presentation. He would not be here before the Board if he did not think we have the majority of the people to support it.

Dr. Martins said they are looking at benchmark purposes and unpacking standards. She said if you look into what students are expected to do once they leave high school, it is very different than it was five years ago. She said if we continue to do midterms and finals, we would frustrate a lot of teachers. We already have the information. It is not helping the teachers teach better. It is not helping the students learn better. It is one more thing that they have to worry about, and it is a big thing. Mr. Bocaccio talked about test security. Every year we have had to deal with disciplinary issues because it is a major housekeeping nightmare, and it is not yielding anything for them. Thirty-four thousand plus exams were distributed last year. This is \$1,000 in paper alone. M. Ferguson asked if the middle school would also eliminate their exams. The answer was yes. He has done much research and has contacted universities and professors and other districts that have done this. He said that although there are many pros and one con, it can be broken up into several different parts. He feels the stress of midterms prepares students for college exams, and for him, it is all about preparing for college. He feels that the experience of taking a midterm or a final helps with college testing. Dr. Bocaccio said there is no way of knowing if a student would be just as well prepared had they not taken the midterms and finals. It is what people feel and think. The reality is that they are taking a lot of high stakes tests, such as the ACT, SAT, etc. K. Molinaro asked if we would get a pushback from the State and Dr. Martins said we would not. R. Hawley said he agrees and disagrees with what G. Bocaccio and M. Ferguson have to say. He said within his major, he generally had a presentation or a research paper, whereas within his General Study Courses, he had a midterm or final exam. Dr. Pascarella said what he is being told is that we can give the students the skills to learn how to learn and attack the problem in a way that will put them in the best position. He said two-thirds of the students drop out. One-third is moving forward. By the first year, second semester, students understand that they need to organize their time differently. Eric Williams, Social Studies Department Head, said he understands M. Ferguson's point of view. He said it has almost become redundant with the implementation of benchmark exams. He gave the example that the second week they came back from the December Holiday Recess, students took the benchmark exams and the following week was midterms. Most groups took an EOY Assessment and turned it into a presentation piece to fit it into the exam. A discussion ensued with regard to benchmark assessments and the time it takes for each subject area. Dr. Martins said she has been in communication with S. Atanasoff and J. DiNardo and they are in support of this. Dr. Martins talked about preparing students for college and what types of colleges students are attending. She said that "Fifteen weeks are affected by the midterms and finals. If we talk about how many days are touched by the assessments that either we have to give or we believe are better and more informative, it is an average of 89 days. This is the one area that, after a really hard look at everything we know about education, is not giving us the proverbial bang for our buck."

Chairperson Alberts said she has listened to many people and complimented G. Bocaccio and Dr. Martins for a great job. She gave credit to all the Department Heads for all their hard work. Statistics show that 78% of last year's class went on to college. G. Bocaccio said across the country, 50% of the freshmen in college are failing. He is asking if we are doing the right thing.

“Are we giving them the study skills that they need? Are we preparing them appropriately? Is this test really helping them if 50% are washing out?”

The Board took a consensus to see who was in favor of eliminating the exams.

In favor: E. Alberts, G. Cooper, R. Hawley, A. Fluskey-Lattin, D. Metrena, K. Molinaro,
R. Taborsak, P. Tranzillo

Opposed: M. Ferguson

Absent: R. Jannelli, R. Pietrafesa

The meeting was adjourned at 8:04p.m.

Richard Hawley, Secretary