

WEST HAVEN BOARD OF EDUCATION MINUTES
April 28, 2011
Curriculum Committee Meeting

The Meeting of the Curriculum Committee was held in the Harriet North Room of City Hall, 355 Street, West Haven, CT on April 28, 2011. The meeting was called to order by Chairman Sean Maher at 6:00 p.m.

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

PRESENT

Sean Maher, Chairman
Dorinda Borer
Toni Paine
Mark Palmieri

COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

ABSENT

OTHER BOARD MEMBERS

IN ATTENDANCE:

Cebi Waterfield
Eric Murillo
Rob Saley

ADMINISTRATORS PRESENT: Dr. Anne Druzolowski, Assistant Superintendent
Ann Valanzuolo, Language Arts Coordinator
Alan Belchak, Food Service Director

Chairman Sean Maher opened the meeting at 6:00 PM with a pledge of allegiance to the flag. He stated we are here to discuss FRESH LINK

Dorinda spoke about Fresh Link which is Schedule A and is attached to the end of the minutes. She made a listing of the grant opportunities and had the soil tested at Molloy and it is in decent shape.

Dorinda talked to Barnard School personnel because they are a magnet school and this is their focus. They have a garden that they developed which is part of their curriculum. The children are a part of the maintenance, growing and decision making. They even have the opportunity to try and grow something they know wouldn't grow in the soil so they could experiment and see how the soil levels affect the plants and not let them grow. They invited us for a tour of their garden and they can sit and talk to us about all their challenges so we don't have to reinvent the wheel. We can look at their curriculum.

Sean asked Dr. Druzolowski to attend because it is the curriculum committee that is meeting and we need to see:

1. How this would associate with our present curriculum\
2. If it doesn't associate with our present curriculum how we would adjust our present curriculum to accommodate something like this
3. The feasibility of this project as a whole within the academic structure that we now use

Dr. Druzolowski prefaced her presentation by stating she thinks it is an admirable activity that we can benefit from in a lot of venues and there are different types of curriculum which we can link into this. However, from a financial perspective she is very saddened that we couldn't move ahead with the reading curriculum because we didn't have enough money in our budget for the new materials that we require. These materials will have to be put on to next year's budget so everything had to be postponed a year. Anne is truly looking at this from what is feasible not that this is not a good exercise.

Anne Druzolowski and Ann Valanzuolo talked about the curriculum. From a curriculum perspective grades 1 and 2 do minimal amount of exploration with the plants and that is in alignment with what the standards are across the state in order to prepare kids for that first CMT. They have kits where they are growing plants in the classroom and they are doing measurement, they are doing watering and understand the differences in the soil. Within the curriculum needs of a 1st and 2nd grader especially in the area of Language Arts (kids begin to read at this age) and conceptually put all those thoughts together. The amount of time available right now to address the given curriculum that we just revised is extensive and I don't know where the time would come from. As it is social studies is getting the short end of the stick and we are trying to integrate the factual information into non-fiction reading and writing and are trying to cover it through Language Arts.

Science we do have partnership activities through Yale which Raffaella Fronc has talked about in previous board meetings. There is one that we are participating in next year that has to do with plants and plant life and growth. She doesn't know what it looks like yet but knows that Yale has been working on for 4th graders. There is a little bit of a bend but not a lot because the state standards are going to be revised and that is where our staff has been working with the State Department of Education in prioritizing the national standards which will be prioritized for our use by September in Language Arts which is English, Reading and Mathematics. Science is coming out in two or three months which will give us a whole other group we have to prioritize.

We are a head of the 8 ball in West Haven because we have done a lot of the work but we also have to review our curriculum and either add or take away. In Ann Valanzuolo's situation with Reading/Language Arts most of it will be massaged. We are pretty much on target. In mathematics there will be big changes in grade levels. Teachers are going to teach skills that were normally taught at an upper age; teaching those pre-algebra skills at

a lower age. The amount of necessary time spent in this will be phenomenal; this is my time piece right here. In Science I have said to Social Studies that non-fiction needs to be moved into English/Language Arts. In Science I say to Raffaella the kids are sufficient right now we can't get any bigger because I need to have 90 minutes for math and I need to find it. Ann Valanzuolo said usually it is only 60 minutes. Those two pieces for our 1st 2nd and third graders are critical. To have specials in our kindergarten area when I could have Language Arts becomes a question even the teachers are asking me. When they get time away from the kids which is their planning time with me I need to capitalize on that time with my reading consultant so I'm going to be pushing them.

Anne Druzolowski said our evaluations from the State Department for our entering kindergarten kids show that they are better prepared than they have ever been so we are on the right track in trying to weed out extra stuff.

Anne said she is real hesitant to force anything else into the curriculum. She is also hesitant because of the budget. She would give anything to be able to update the ten year old resource which doesn't really align very well with our curriculum right now we need to spruce that up. She could see it working if she had the luxury of time in her schedule but she doesn't we just don't. A further discussion ensued.

Alan Belchak said food is at its best source when it is freshly picked, prepared and used. Barnard School does do this but they don't do it at the scale we are going to try to attempt. The section they use is 30' by 40' and it is really for the culinary arts program. Because Connecticut has such a short grow season they plant what they want to put on their menu in the school because it is on the school property or in their culinary arts program because they also help to prepare the foods. They use less than 1% of their total budget of fruits and vegetables that are grown in this garden just for that particular school. He also purchases local grown foods that are less than 500 miles away like we do. They are really not producing for the schools.

Toni Paine and Alan visited North Branford's massive operation. They are going to use sustainable foods in the cafeteria. Because it is the first year they are running into problems. The weather isn't cooperating; some of the equipment wasn't ready and the organizing of the classrooms. They use the Special Ed student classroom and use the science program but that involves 7 or 8 teachers so what will 7 or 8 teachers cost. They have this huge greenhouse where they start things under special lights, keep it properly watered and fertilized before transferring things to their farm. Hopefully this year they will probably get some lettuce for the first year but they calculate it might cost \$20.00 a head.

Toni Paine said yes anywhere from \$16 to \$20 a head for lettuce. You can't take away from the learning experience though. Alan had applied for grants a few years ago but didn't get any. There are always small grants we can apply for.

Cebi said the New Haven School System uses the farm to school program that we use and she thinks it is run by the State of Connecticut. Alan said we are in the same program;

they merchandise everything that way. We use Bishop Orchards when the apples are in season. We can get all the squash we want but Alan doesn't see the children eating squash. A further discussion ensued.

Toni Paine said do we know exactly what is going to happen to Molloy School? If somebody bequeathed us money and we set this up which is a noble endeavor and we decided we needed to go back into that school now where will we put this farm. What if somebody wants to rent the school and wouldn't want to rent it with a farm on it. Is there an alternate source to use? Yale West has a lot of property in West Haven and Orange and they do a lot with it with our science department; maybe we should look at that as well because once it is designated and you put all that money and work into it you don't want somebody to pull that rug out from under you.

Alan said the grant he wrote for Molloy did include a classroom teacher for three hours a day after school and cost for irrigation and stuff like that. He was disappointed because we didn't get the grant. These grants are tough to get. Anne Druzolowski said right now they will be tougher and if they are state funded they won't be there.

Mark Palmieri said the 3 to 4 acres of land area is a lot of space. We can start smaller and gradually get larger. The back portion of the grass area at Molloy is being used by the Girl's Lacrosse Team and they have been using it for a number of years and have the nets up. He wouldn't want to take away this land from them.

Cebi stated that it is very hard to schedule gym and field time and nearly impossible to have volunteers you can always count on and for something as critical as this you need to depend on them. Anne Druzolowski said this is a responsibility we would have to own.

Dorinda stated that Toni had a good point about Molloy saying if we made this investment and something happens with the property where can we do this? Ann can say to her that you could start something very low level like herbs and those types of things that spread very quickly or you could use the high school roof.

Toni said when they say you have to do it this way because if you are going to fertilize any thing it better be natural etc. because don't forget we are on school property. Rob said absolutely what I am saying is if we were to go this way we could sell vegetable plants to the PTA's etc. and this could make it self sustainable by itself. You can grow lettuce, onions, garlic asparagus etc.

Alan said he has a graph from the State Department showing the grow season and for a lot of the things we use in school the grow season is over with or we are just going into the grow season for strawberries and blueberries that is plausible that you can grow but the thing is what can happen in the grow season. Alan said you need teacher supervision because if you think someone is going to do this for free; unless somebody is going to volunteer. Rob said he never said that. Alan said you need a certified staff person if you have kids involved and you have to get the unions to sign off and there are a lot of other technical things so if you start small maybe it can become larger.

Rob said where he was going with this is to look at two schools that would really like to take this endeavor on and get a plan together and look at what it would cost for greenhouses if that is where we are going. You can grow asparagus today but can't eat them for three years because it takes that long for the roots to grow. These are all things you have to take into account. He loves the idea and maybe some kids out there rather than play chess would like to play in the dirt.

Dorinda said it is a nice idea to sell the plants. Rob said you can also sell cucumbers and peppers there are a number of things you can sell at plant sales

Sean said lets try to keep this conversation to the point at hand. What we are here to discuss is whether or not it is feasible as far as the curriculum is concerned. If anyone becomes involved or anything if it doesn't have an educational component it is really not working towards what our goal is and that is education.

Ann Valanzuolo wanted to reiterate what Anne had said earlier and that is at the elementary level so much time has to be given toward reading and writing; especially reading hours really a day ideally. You are not just talking about straight instruction you are also talking about guided reading when the kids are reading in small groups on their ability level and independent reading. Studies keep showing that the more children read the better they get at reading and even in small groups some time is spent on reading. In shared reading where the teachers instruct a lot of time is spent on reading; in reading skills but not the actual act of reading. Giving time for independent reading is crucial. Non-fiction writing which is what we mostly do has been shown to be one of the most effective of the strategies. To give time for gardening at the elementary level would be difficult; it would be better at the high school level.

Dorinda stated she doesn't want to modify reading or writing but maybe there is a way to modify science. Anne said but that is why it is set up that way because of the state standards and consequently the national we packed it in. Right now Raffaella is going nuts because she wants to make sure that our fifth and sixth graders get sufficient science so when they take tests they will be all set. We have been asking an awful lot of the teachers to maximize the amount of time and make sure they are covering all the areas it is not as easy as it sounds to change the curriculum will affect all of that.

I can look at the possibility of something at the high school level linked to culinary. Culinary is one of Anne's strengths from the perspective of a technical high school. If you continue to talk about the brand new high school my push would have been culinary is a service area that our kids would benefit from. To go bigger on that the way we had outlined the design would have allowed for a garden area just for that. That age group is where you really inform kids. You do talk about teaching them eating habit now but lets face it when they get to be of age they make their own choices so you want to start teaching them the right choices. That she sees as more plausible and that would work well with the culinary curriculum that she is currently working on and can start massaging it but with the other grades she is real hesitant. She has too large a percentage

of kids not performing where she wants them to be in Reading Language Arts in the Middle School. They know how to read but do not comprehend what we need them to comprehend. When you get to the technical reading of a text book they lose it; that is what you call non-fiction reading. Dorinda said she doesn't think anyone wants to take anything away from our efforts in the reading and writing area. Ann Valanzuolo said this also pertains to math. Anne said and that is what would happen. Dorinda asked what other areas or times do they have or what other classes. Anne said there are no other classes that would allow for that. When you get to the high school they do have health which I am looking at also next week for a couple of days going over their curriculum that they have been revising and there is the culinary. The high school has much more flexibility. We have environmental sciences which may or may not lend itself to this. Sean said but none of those as I'm aware of had an agricultural component within the curriculum. Anne would see this as something that is integrated she wouldn't make a whole class. There isn't enough to do a whole class with a garden unless it was tied directly to vitamins, minerals and how it grows. Dorinda asked if it could be a piece from various aspects at the high school like we have the nursing program; because everybody is involved in the importance of nutrition. Anne said all kids have to take health so health could be something you could fit it into. There could be a nutrition course developed. Again it would mean a teacher that would have to be trained to do it or want to do it. There are more possibilities at the high school level than there are in the elementary or middle school level.

Toni said it seems logistically and financially an educational part is not going to be feasible at this point but we have sports clubs, we have chess clubs; why can we not have a garden club. We have garden clubs in West Haven and I bet they would mentor this club and you can do it at the high school and that could be the seedling for this program. Anne said that is a great idea.

Eric said he was just going to bring that up but Toni beat him to it. The high school has CREC which does all the stuff with planting and seeding and recycling. I think the high school is ideal. I don't think we are talking about taking over four acres of land either. To start small is not bad. If it grows it will be great and you can have field days for grammar school kids so they can check out the garden. This is just an idea and we are here to discuss ideas. The most important factor is who is willing to be in charge and take control of this. You can start something today and six months from now it is dead if you don't have a group that wants to get together and has passion about doing this and wants to get involved with the assistance of the school district and teachers. There are many teachers who like gardening and would be willing to give an hour or so to teach it; you need someone with a certification. There is never going to be enough money because we are not hungry enough to do it. If we felt it was important to us and to our well being then we would get it done but we don't feel that way so we will just drag it along. If we search for people who want to get involved in it then it is possible. Sean interjected but there has to be an ownership. Absolutely if there is no ownership forget about it.

Toni Paine said if it is done as a club then they don't need anybody certified but for the school you do.

Cebi wanted to go back to the whole growing season thing and the school year calendar which is based on the agrarian calendar because the school kids would not be in school during the harvesting time. Cebi stated that the proposed idea is sort of at odds with our school year calendar because the students are not in school during the summer. Mark Palmieri said this was just on the History Channel.

Rob Saley said we have greenhouses. There is a guy in Branford that grows tomatoes for Stop and Shop and starts them in the greenhouse in January. There are ways to do this. I can see it is not part of curriculum because of no money in the town and I hope we are doing all the stuff we are saying we are doing because I really want to keep the kids reading but I really think this is an opportunity and not only because I like doing that stuff. If we could start out as a garden club I would be willing to jump in there.

Rob said lets see if we can get a grant to build a greenhouse. Greenhouses are not that expensive. Alan said you have a state code and because it is on a school building area. It is not like if we do it in our back yards. The sprinklers aren't for the plants they are for fire codes. Rob said you can still hook those into a cistern under the ground that will pump out the water for anything.

Cebi stated that unless it is free then we will have problems with getting people. If we are going to have problems with money and have less money than we thought we were going to have with a greenhouse; it is easy to plant seeds in the ground and have them grow naturally according to the calendar but.....everyone began talking at once; the library and the new high school were mentioned and Sean said these items are for a whole different meeting. Mark said he wanted Sean to know that the library has 1.8 million in the kitty and Sean said he thinks he did read that the Mark said if we move forward with the high school then we can build a greenhouse and that could be part of the 79 million dollars we get. He just wanted to bring this up. Further anecdotes took place.

Dorinda said there were many great ideas and she thinks a garden club is a nice idea. Even though it doesn't necessarily fall under curriculum she wants to make sure it is an educational piece and it is not just a garden club. It doesn't sound like the use of Molloy's property is feasible but she wants it to be educational and wants us to start thinking about revolutionizing the way we think about nutrition in our schools. She knows this is not free but there will be a cost to anything; nothing is free.

Sean said clubs certainly are educational and our clubs are subsidized within the budget. Each club advisor does get a stipend. If it is \$2,800.00 for a club advisor I'm sure that is not a major issue at hand. On top of the club advisor though maybe the club raises the funds to get the plants. I heard that Van Wilgens just donated some plants. The other clubs don't get any other funding but the stipend for the advisor. In Theatre Workshop Margi gets a stipend and everything else comes out of what Theatre Workshop generates. The only ones that do get minimal amounts of money are the band and chorus because it is a class. Sean said if it were to be a club and he doesn't see a problem finding \$2,800.00

for an advisor but anything over and above that would have to be generated by the club itself.

Eric said this could be done very easily through the culinary courses at the high school. They can grow herbs and use them in their food and it will all be connected. Sean said one area will help the other.

Dorinda said the club idea is a good one but we still have to resolve where they will do their gardening. Different ideas were exchanged about having a greenhouse or using the high school for this.

Sean said it is still the funding over and above. If you can get a grant to build a greenhouse on our property that is brilliant. Dorinda understands but as a board we can't just say to the club here is your \$2,800.00 for your advisor, come up with a plan and raise all the money. We should be able to provide some assistance and direction. Sean asked on what level? Sean said if we knew of a grant we could tell them about that is brilliant. We have grant people that could assist them if they did that. A further discussion took place. Dorinda said we can say here are some ideas maybe we do a greenhouse at Washington School or do something at the high school. I don't just want to have a club I want it to be significant. Sean said everything would be looked into of course.

Dorinda said this would be a club and an extra curricular activity and if it is not The Garden where can we bring more nutritional education into our curriculum?

Anne Druzolowski said all 9th graders have to have health and next week they are showing me where they are with their curriculum. She will look at it and see what we can do.

Toni Paine said we are assuming that they are not getting any of this education and I'll bet there is a portion of this built in. I would be interested to know what they are planning. Sean said the curricula is on line and if it is not there it certainly needs to be there. Anne said she is sure it is because they were asked to do some major changes. What you may be seeing is not where I want it yet so there is room and flexibility there. Anne will touch base with the board after she sees it.

Cebi said she knows that Seth Haley had a whole day about healthy habits and they had a set up where they could taste all different fruits and vegetables to see if they would like them. An exercise program also came in for all the classes. If this is not mandatory they are doing it willingly. Maybe we can encourage more of these types of things. Her child benefited from this and will now eat many different things which she tried at school. Peer pressure helped a lot with this. Sean talked about paper towel beans as another idea. Another teacher at Seth Haley grew lawn grass.

Rob said different plants provide different nutrients and as a kid I didn't care about it but as an adult I do. If students listen to an adult say if you eat more leafy lettuce rather than head lettuce because it is better for you that would be a good thing. He mentioned that

asparagus can be grown now while the kids are still in school and are very healthy for you.

Eric asked if we have a nutritionist in our schools. Anne Druzolowski said we have our health teachers who teach all aspects of health. Eric asked if they are certified nutritionists. No the closest we have would be Alan Belchak who has a lot of background knowledge in this. Anne said you will find your certified nutritionists in institutions. Further discussions ensued. Sean asked if there were any more questions or comments regarding this.

Dorinda asked how we are going to move forward do we have to vote to establish a garden club. Sean said this doesn't happen at this level it happens at the teacher interest level. If a teacher shows interest in a club or something they would then approach perhaps Mrs. Gardner.

Anne will talk to Pam about this and discuss the way she sets up the clubs and what the possibility is. This will not die so you don't have to worry. I will get back to you after I review that health curriculum.

Sean said we have to find teachers who are interested. Dorinda said a lot of people in the community have come forward saying they would help etc. Eric said any help or financial assistance from the community would be welcome and is important. If this starts to take off and go forward the school system will be behind it and then people will believe it and accept it and it will probably be something great. He knows that everybody is very busy but he is willing to participate. Dorinda said we have to make it a priority to focus on the health and the nutrition. We can take the lead and we really have to make it a priority. I know some people don't think this is a priority that the quality of education is a priority but it very much is tied into the quality of education; what they are learning sets a tone for the rest of their lives and what they are eating helps their ability to focus in school.

Sean said he thinks a club is a wonderful idea. He is a pseudo-advisor in a club with Theatre Workshop and things like that you can have everybody in the community come in and help but without the organizational component of a teacher or a staff member at the high school it is not going anywhere.

Toni said Dr. Druzolowski said she will talk with Pam and Pam may know of someone who would be interested. Anne said she had to start a wrestling club in an affluent community and she had to go through three years of showing support and jumping through hoops to finally get the district to assume responsibility for it. This would be the same type of thing; once we show the interest and what can happen we will get it because it is laden with resource needs.

Toni said each city is different. North Branford has a lot of children that grow up on farms because there is a lot of farm country there. We have a lot of children in West Haven that unfortunately who leave school and have to go to their part time job to help

support their family; this is a fact and it is sad. If we start this as a club it will happen; we need to start somewhere.

Anne will talk to Pam and has some culinary people she wants to talk with.

Dorinda said she is a little disappointed because she has a vision and wanted to make use of the Molloy land and start to grow things that we could put into our food services department but I understand because of these obstacles...Sean said this could turn into something like that...Dorinda said it could but giving somebody \$2,800.00 to lead it and letting them do it on their own I don't know...Sean said they won't do it on their own. Anne said they won't be on their own. You can't just have a club and not have goals. Sean said a product has to be shown. Anne said it really does absolutely.

Toni said before they begin to organize it don't they have to come to the board for approval. Anne said yes they have to do all that. Sean said he knows that Dorinda wanted the Molloy landscape turned into a farm but perhaps some day it will happen bit starting it at this level is better than not starting it at all.

There were no more questions or comments.

Sean Maher asked for a motion to end this meeting.

Toni Paine made a motion to adjourn

Mark Palmieri seconded the motion

All present were in favor

Meeting adjourned at 7:10 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Marylou Amendola
Board Clerk

