

## Quincy Public Schools Curriculum Committee Minutes

Board Office Conference Room #231

October 10, 2011 – 5:00 p.m.

### ATTENDANCE

**Committee members present:** Zigrida Brown, Mary Christensen, Jan Cory, Cindy Crow, Steve Krause, Jeff Mays, Jody Steinke, Patricia Viniard.

**Committee member(s) absent:** Ann Behrens, Jim Rubottom.

**Board members, staff and others:** Anne Cashman, Jody Cooper, Christie Dickens, Mickey Elliott, Stephanie Erwin, Laurie Fiorenza, Heather Friday, Diane Glaub, Ed Husar, Jeff Kerkhoff, Lonny Lemon, Luan Sandberg, Linda Saunders, Julie Schuckman, Linda Steinbach, Scott Stone, Cheryl Vogler, Kathy Womack.

#### 1. **Call to order**

Steve Krause, committee chair, called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

#### 2. **Information provided to Committee**

##### ***Conversation with Educational Consultant/Leader Dr. Joseph Murphy (Vanderbilt University)***

Dr. Murphy came to Quincy in December 2010 and met with a group of approximately 50 educators and community members. This invitation was extended after Trish and Lonny heard him speak at a LUDA (Large Unit District Association) conference and were impressed with his insights regarding how communities and schools can address the achievement gap and improve school systems. Because there was a request to have his message reach a wider audience, Dr. Murphy was scheduled for today's Teacher Institute. He also met with the administrative team on October 11. Since the Curriculum Committee meeting fell on the evening of the Institute, it provided a unique opportunity for the Committee and Board members to have a conversation with Dr. Murphy. Trish noted that following consultation with Dr. Murphy last December, the District made some shifts (e.g., approach to summer school and the "9<sup>th</sup> hour" program at QHS) which are leading to positive outcomes.

The following topics were discussed, based on Committee and Board member input.

Retention/Social Promotion: Dr. Murphy stated that the effect of retention is almost always "incredibly negative" and it is a predictor of the likelihood of a student dropping out. He said that in the vast majority of cases, it is best if a child is kept with his/her age group or "cohort." He noted that individual practitioners (teachers or other educators) are sometimes absolutely convinced that retention works, but the data does not support this thinking. He noted that social promotion is "not helpful either." Instead, he suggested: At the end of each quarter, identify the students who are not meeting grade level expectations and intervene aggressively (e.g., extended-day schooling, summer school, during-the-day intervention, mentoring, etc.). Dr. Murphy noted that national data reveal that 50% of ninth graders fail one or more courses, and this is often referred to as "the ninth grade problem." The place to address this problem and the achievement gap issue, he contends, is in a child's early years.

Prioritizing services with limited resources: When faced with needs that are greater than the available financial resources can provide, Dr. Murphy stated, "Ethically, we need to support the most disadvantaged students." Data show that interventions and support for young children (early childhood programs, summer school and extended day for elementary students, for example) should be priorities.

He added, “If 50% of the achievement gap already exists on the first day of kindergarten, it is infinitely better to address problems and issues earlier.”

Co-curricular/extra-curricular activities and at-risk youth: According to Dr. Murphy, a good way to get students to take the path of engagement in school is through participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. He cautioned against excluding students from participation who are not passing, particularly students from low socio-economic status, stating “for low socio-economic students, the last thing you want to do is exclude them from extra-curriculars. The job of

schools is to ensure that every kid engages in serious work, and one way to bond them to the desired values is to get them into a co- or extra-curricular.” He also noted that there is a need in most district for “more client-customized or client-centered extra-/co-curricular activities.” Specifically, he suggested that schools should “expand the opportunities” to provide relevant activities and clubs that interest and engage the diverse student population.

The need for ongoing intervention: Sometimes there is a question about the need for *ongoing* intervention services for students—from the early childhood and primary level on up through high school. Occasionally, district members will be hear, “If the interventions at the primary level are effective, why is there a need for intermediate level interventions? If the intermediate level interventions are effective why is there a need for secondary level interventions?” Dr. Murphy emphasized that one of the general tenets for addressing the achievement gap is “you need to keep interventions *ongoing*, providing a cocoon of support” for students through an organized system of effective interventions coupled with the “academic press” that allows and requires students to work hard.

Grading Practices and Meeting Mastery: When asked if a student’s grade should be lowered or adjusted for a “retake” or a multiple attempt at mastery, Dr. Murphy said, “No.” When it was suggested that giving full credit or not adjusting the grade sends the wrong message to students and doesn’t teach responsibility, he replied, “That’s not accurate. [The fact that you allowed or encouraged the retake or additional attempt] is teaching students that you won’t accept poor quality.” He went on to say that a district should establish “a standard bar for all kids” that represents “competent performance,” and it then must become a “non-negotiable” that all students will do quality work. Further questions and comments prompted Dr. Murphy to state that allowing a student an unlimited number of retakes (which QPS doesn’t) is not practical; he also suggested a consideration of retake limitations, such as not allowing a retake if a grade of C + or greater is obtained on the first try. (QJHS and QHS has other, but not that specific, retake limitations.

#### Other Topics and Quotes:

- In response to a comment regarding the rapidly increasing costs associated with special education, he commented that “delivery and how best to help” are key issues. He supports inclusion and stated that often what special education students need “doesn’t have to be different.”
- Regarding coaches (e.g., literacy, instructional), Dr. Murphy values coaches/coaching, and he emphasized the importance of a coach being viewed by his/her colleagues as a teaching peer. When asked his opinion regarding smaller class size vs. having a coach, he responded that he would opt for smaller class sizes at K – 1; beyond K – 1, possibly 2, he would chose to have a coach over smaller class size.

- When asked about Vocational Education, he validated the importance of these programs and stated that many are still embracing “a traditional education for an industrial world that doesn’t exist anymore.” Vocational education is important in our “technology-grounded, post-industrial view of the world.”
- Trish asked, “If someone tells you that their district is moving towards excellence, what questions would you ask the person that would tell you whether or not they actually are on the path to excellence?” Dr. Murphy responded, “I would ask, ‘Where’s the stake in the ground? That is, where are you going to be? What are your specific and measurable goals, by school?’ Then I would ask, ‘How do you think you’re going to get there?’”
- How can we build parent engagement? Dr. Muphy said the answer lies in the “connections between home and school *around the academic mission.*” He further stated that “the real question is ‘How can we help parents help their kids at home?’” He suggests starting by “going out to them.” Instead of (or in addition to) a “back to school” night, have a series of “back to the community” events where you reach out to parents/guardians in their churches, community centers, etc.
- “About 75% of the achievement gap is poverty. Socioeconomic status is *the* contributing factor.”
- “Your job is to push and pull kids to be successful. Ask yourselves, ‘Can you do more?’ It’s about forcing the system to act on behalf of the child.”
- “This is not a science. We’re in an applied field. It’s about values. Where does the district believe resources should be allocated? These are important conversations.”
- When asked about “value-added student growth,” he noted that Tennessee’s value-added model is considered an excellent model and it has been successful. The Value-Added analysis takes the gains each student makes from year to year and compares it to the gains made by a normative sample for that same subject between those same grades.
- “All of the answers can be found in primary and pre-primary programs. It’s about taking those ideas—such as *personalization*—and moving them up the grades and applying them.”

3. **Recommend to the Board of Education for Action**

n/a

4. **Consider any other matter relating to the Curriculum needs or concerns of the District**

5. **Questions and comments from the Public**

6. **Adjourn: 6:50 p.m.**

**NEXT MEETING: Monday, November 7, 2011**

