

Strategic Plan Community Forum September 30, 2015

Comments and Questions from the Members of the Public in bold (responses from Mr. Hunt in italics):

Enrollment

Do we have information on kids who go to private schools?

We do not have exact data. We do get requests for transportation, and textbooks; but not all private school students make such requests. There is data from the NYS Education Department that we may be able to access on private school students who reside in our district. Further research is required.

Are private schools changing over time as well?

We don't have hard data on that at this point, but we may be able to gather data on that by doing some additional research.

Can we interview the families who choose private schools as to why they are choosing them?

It would be difficult to do that in a comprehensive fashion due to the time required. It would be interesting to know the reasons families choose private schools if they are willing to share them. We may be able to gather some anecdotal information on that topic.

With the new housing coming, building, new construction-will this effect enrollment?

The Capital Region Planning Data projects potential growth, but cannot predict everything, e.g. types of families, families who choose private, and/or homeschool.

Do we have data on the growth of building permits?

We do not, but may be able to get it from the town. That would include the entire town of New Scotland, some of which is not in our school district.

What types of families are moving in to the district?

We do not have definite information on that.

Could the large developments change enrollment?

They certainly could. There are several significant housing developments either planned or underway in the district. If those are built, it could increase enrollment.

Can we check building permits year to year?

Yes, but that would include the entire town, some of which is not in our district.

Could we find out about approvals for townhouses versus single family homes.

That data could be obtained from the town.

Is something changing within the community? A community member just moved into new development (Quail Run) was originally thought to be for retirees. 75% of the people who moved in have children; some are grandparents who are raising their grandchildren. He sees the neighbors all have children of similar ages.

Isn't homeschooling a factor too?

Homeschooling families are required to submit educational plans to the district. If all homeschooling families comply with this, it would give us data on that trend.

Test Data

What percent of our student population does not take tests due to disabilities?

Less than 1% of students statewide do not take the tests due to disabilities. There are very specific requirements as to who is exempt. They must be students who are identified as having certain specific disabilities.

What is the standard deviation between the averages?

That data is not provided to us by the state in a way that allows us to compare the standard deviations of averages for particular districts.

Isn't there a sizable amount of students who opted out? How do they affect the data?

Yes we did have a significant rate of opt outs in 2015. That could have skewed the test data, and it is difficult to determine how that impacted our results.

What other measures do we use to assess a student's acceleration?

We do use Fountas & Pinnell assessments in ELA at the Elementary school.

Do we look at grades in the classroom?

Yes we do look at teacher assessments and grades. We use multiple measures to assess the progress of our students.

Does each school get to determine the level of disability needed to not take the tests?

The committee on special education makes that determination. They identify the child's needs that would justify an alternate assessment.

Are we using growth models, or value added models to see a years' worth of growth, particularly for the stronger and/or weaker students?

There is an attempt to do this through the use of pre and post testing connected with APPR. The state has an initiative to make the NYS tests better measures of student growth.

Could we look at these growth models, and possibly develop a more sophisticated process to assess our students? We did look at growth from year to year several years ago under the old tests and it was not favorable to the district, possibly because our students started so high to begin with, the growth wasn't as great as it could have been.

Do our current assessments of measuring a years' worth of growth have potential impact between the end of the year and the beginning of the year?

The state does calculate a growth score for grades 4-8. They look at the student's score from the previous year, as compared to the score this year, as compare the individual student's score to the scores of the students from the rest of the state.

The timing of the tests and turnaround of results is problematic. The tests are given in April and the scores do not arrive until August.

At a recent forum, the NYS Commissioner of Education, MaryEllen Elia, explained that NYS will be transitioning to computer adaptive testing, which may be more valid and reliable, and more useful because scores will be available more quickly (weeks rather than months).

In terms of us as a district how much emphasis do we place on preparations for tests?

Teachers should not spend an excessive amount of time on test preparation. It is not effective and is not a good instructional practice. Sound instruction throughout the school year that builds students skills and knowledge is best for students.

How much emphasis do we place on results?

By state law we are required to use the scores in some decisions we make, such as remedial services. The NYS tests are one measure of performance, and we do use other measures to gain a fuller picture of how each student is doing.

A comment was made that it is difficult as someone who works in a major company where they do score these tests to see these scoring rubrics that run the gambit, and are all over the place. The scoring is not a tight process, so there is concern in taking so much emphasis on these tests.

How are teachers seeing test results effect evaluations?

We are now operating under the 2011 APPR law that requires the use of NYS test scores as well as local measures for teacher evaluations.

One principal said the test prep will not take away from regular school day, but reality week of test there was no homework, they had extra recess, etc. Children were taught to the test,

first half of year focused solely on math and ELA and when tests were done, focused mainly on social studies and science.

Is there a lawsuit against the APPR system in New York?

Yes there is a lawsuit against the APPR law, but the provisions of the law are still in effect as of now. There has already been one revision of this law, and there may be further revisions. There is currently a waiver process that almost all New York school districts will apply for, including Voorheesville. This waiver will allow our district to continue to use the APPR process that has been used in the past few years.

A comment that there is hope that we look at good standardized assessments with no politics attached to it; our results are skewed with all of our opt-outs.

Electives & Advanced (AP) Classes

Could we have more foreign language electives such as Latin?

This is an idea that we could pursue. We would have to see what staff is available, but other languages would be a great option if we are able to provide that.

Could we add more STEAM courses to the middle and high school?

This is a good suggestion; we need to look at our high school scheduling to open up more possibilities for electives.

I highly support the idea of introducing Engineering, students usually don't choose that field because they do not know what it is, and exposure is a good thing. Give them information to make informative decisions.

This would help our students to be aware the sub-fields of engineering, students may not be aware that there are so many different sub fields, and two year degrees that are available to prepare them for good careers in engineering.

We are exploring the Project Lead the Way program to provide more Engineering based courses. Mr. Hunt plans to present ideas on additional electives to high school students later this year.

Bethlehem does a Lab School, could we do that?

It would be challenging in a small high school like ours; we do have a 9th grade team approach.

Could we have a career exploration option for seniors?

The district is interested in exploring career based exploration options for students. It will be very beneficial for our students to have that exposure to the workforce.

Would we be able to offer distance learning?

We did have that program 15 years ago, but it was eliminated due to expense. It could be perhaps done in a different way now, with more on-line learning and video-conferencing.

Exposure to courses such as computer science is important; could we have computer science as an elective?

We did have that in the past, and it is an important subject area for our students to have as an option.

Isn't long distance learning less expensive now?

We will have to look into the costs.

Would we be able to have a n elective that would promote social work, hone certain skills in students, we need good citizens; possibly a peace studies course?

Peace Studies or Global Community could be considered as electives.

We need to build tolerance and have our students gain some insight on experiences outside of Voorheesville, possibly a conflict management course.

I would suggest a communications or public speaking course.

We will take these suggestions into consideration.

Would it be possible to bring language down to the Elementary school?

That is a staffing issue. It would certainly be beneficial, but the additional staff would be a cost consideration.

Could we use a technology grant from the state to focus more on long-distance learning?

We are using some technology bond money for tech upgrades, such as ipads, etc. and also security upgrades in all of the buildings. The Smart Schools Bond money is available for specific purposes such as instructional technology and security upgrades. It is possible Distance Learning could be part of that.

We have a strong Odyssey of the Mind team in Voorheesville, especially in the Elementary school, but this dwindles off in Middle School. Could we somehow incorporate this into the curriculum, possibly instead of a study hall students could take a section of the Odyssey of the mind?

We will look into that. We do have Mock Trial and Model UN as clubs currently, which involve some of the same skills and interests.

We should look at clubs to see where we are being socially active, and are engaging in service learning.

We do have some service learning opportunities for students, but could certainly consider more options.

I believe public speaking is important for our students, as well as persuasive speech.

This is another good suggestion for us to consider.

Have we looked at why we are “above average”? What are we doing right? I think it’s important to look at that as well.

This is one of the underlying ideas behind doing the strategic planning process. The process we will go through this year will help us understand our strengths and how to build upon them.