

Task Force on Student Alignment Meeting — January 26, 2010

Present: Rich Girard, JoAnn Heath, Kathleen Kamveris, Marina Skaperdis, Katherine Labanaris Sister Francis Marion, Christine Telge

Chairman Labanaris called the meeting to order at 4:00pm and called the roll.

She then introduced Dr. Charles Littlefield, Superintendent from SAU 15 who was to share his experiences converting the Methuen MA school district from a k-5, 6-8 system to a k-8 system.

The following remarks were made by Dr. Littlefield.

He believes transitions are tough for children and that a k-8 system can minimize anxiety for both children and their families. Research indicates that student achievement is linked to a sense of school community, stability and it is proven that after 9 years in the same building there is a strong sense of community achieved. In the k-8 system there is shared responsibility for learning across all grade levels. In his experience the 8th grades stayed younger longer.

One thing Dr. Littlefield stressed was **form follows function**. You must first have the vision and then see how the form fits into the function. While visioning these k-8 schools one needs to realize what both the curriculums and classrooms will look like, how to coordinate the curriculum and instruction and develop a clear vision of teaching and learning.

In Methuen, the k-8 transformation took 10 years, one new school facility was built and there were additions to the other existing schools. The city had strong parental support and they always put the children first. They also staggered the openings of these buildings. The larger facilities provided younger children with greater opportunity to regulation sized gyms, art studios, media centers and the use of computers at a younger stage in life.

The students were bused k-5 and then 6-8. Full day kindergarten was also provided transportation.

School set up was also an important factor. The administration at these schools was going to be, one supervising principal and then two associate principals. The two associate principals would be broken up into k-5 and 6-8.

As the school year progressed it was clear that discipline was down and student achievement was up.

Dr. Littlefield had a few warnings about changing the current system; you must get it right the first time. It is not about herding cattle, it's about intellectual development. The children factors are that all schools must be equal; there must be a balance of free and reduced lunch programs, a balance of special education as well as economic levels.

After Dr. Littlefield's presentation the group decided this is a very large task. Ms Labanaris decided she would ask to meet with the Mayor and discuss with him the notes she took during Dr. Littlefield's presentation. She will report to the group next week.

Before the meeting adjourned the task force held its vote for Vice Chair. In a unanimous vote Committeeman Rich Girard was elected vice chairman of the task force. Committeeman Girard then stated that he would like Chairman Labanaris vote also be unanimous in the records.

Ms Labanaris informed the task force that next week Sister Francis Marion will present her experiences in a k-8 system and the group would also hear from Dr. Brennan, Superintendent in Manchester.

Chariman Labanaris adjourned the meeting at 5:30pm.