

Fox Chapel Area District Forum Public Meeting
Tuesday, September 19, 2017 9 a.m.
Dorseyville Middle School auditorium

Welcome

District Forum Vice President, Susan Buchman, welcomed parents to the first District Forum public event of the 2017-2018 school year. Based on an informal poll conducted by Buchman, the audience responded that roughly half of the attendees were first time attendees. Buchman explained the purpose of District Forum as, "a tool to filter up parent concerns that affect all of the elementary, middle and high schools to the administration. Tackling broader issues of concern for all." She added, "District Forum welcomes feedback on the website. Concerns can be posted anonymously. District Forum is currently circulating a survey to get feedback from the school community on present day topics. District Forum can also be found on Facebook with a link to our website."

Buchman explained the meeting's agenda including speakers, tour and the Q & A. She acknowledged speakers and guests including the superintendent, other administrators, and school board member Eric Schmidt.

2017 PSSA & Keystone Results

Dr. G. Daniel DiDesiderio, director of student achievement & instructional verification

Formerly employed by the Seneca Valley School District, in March, DiDesiderio joined FCASD. Addressing the audience, DiDesiderio said he would be focused on student achievement and growth update, specifically targeting data on the progress over the last three school years. He explained, "the data obtained looks through varying lenses of multiple factors for administration strengths and areas of need to reach the highest potential of the student." DiDesiderio showed a PowerPoint presentation using "draft" data as, "Fox Chapel Area School District has obtained preliminary results from the state, however, the final numbers will be sent out in about a month."

The data DiDesiderio presented focused on the school years 2014-2015, 2015-2016, 2016-2017 in the subjects of math and algebra, English language arts (ELA) and literature, and science and biology. DiDesiderio noted areas of strength: FCASD saw gains in math and algebra and ELA and literature. He commented, "Science and Biology stayed level." DiDesiderio said, "This points to the broad subject of science, and the need to hone down the district's curriculum of which the district is aware. In response, the District has started to implement the new elementary curriculum/text."

Superintendent Dr. Gene Freeman ensured attendees that the curriculum does not just "hammer" away at math and reading, but rather, remained focused on producing a well-rounded student. "We are dedicated to teaching the arts, history and foreign languages, too," Freeman said. "The district has made progressive incremental increases and looks toward more continued sustainable growth."

DiDesiderio highlighted the following information in his PowerPoint presentation. (See attached to the minutes.)

- Grades 3-8 have made significant gains in student achievement on the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) over the past three years.
- English Language Arts PSSA- 85% of students Proficient or Advanced
- Mathematics PSSA- 73% of students Proficient or Advanced (across the state of PA only a 50% pass rate)
- Science PSSA- 87% of students Proficient or Advanced
- Literature Keystone- 96% of students Proficient or Advanced
- Algebra Keystone- 91% of students Proficient or Advanced
- Biology- 92% of students Proficient or Advanced
- All FCASD Buildings demonstrating growth as good as or better than our like peers in the region
- Keystone Performance Ranks among highest in Pennsylvania
- Increase of 13% in pass rate for historically underperforming sub-groups in English Language Arts
- Student Benchmarking Results and PSSA/Keystone indicate that the initial academic starting point for students is increasing each year
- Increases in PSSA student achievement levels in 29 of 35 reporting categories (example 3rd grade math is a level)
- Notable improvement in Text Dependent Analysis in English Language Arts
- Increase in achievement in Math at Hartwood- 12%
- Increase in achievement in Reading at Kerr-10%
- Increase in achievement at DMS, 7th Grade Math-13.4%

As noted by DiDesiderio, “The overall achievement gains in each building are positive and reflective of our benchmarking process and response to data. Dr. Freeman is driving home this process. Benchmarking gauges student knowledge, or lack thereof, immediately, and can assist immediately in teacher instruction. The district utilizes the Star 360 Benchmark, whereas the State pays \$55 million to administer the PSSA’s which produce year-later results. Assessments should not be cumbersome or punitive. The teachers in the district have been in favor of using the benchmarking system to guide their students’ achievement.”

DiDesiderio explained that the superintendent believes in growing each student, “a year or more, whether that student is in a ‘basic’ level or ‘advanced.’” He said, “If there is a student that may struggle to learn or is underachieving, the school district is striving to close the gap of student learning.”

According to DiDesiderio, FCASD was ranked in multiple school rating communities, including the following:

- Niche.com: #2 Best District in the Pittsburgh Area, #6 in PA, #45 in the country
- All school buildings with an “A” rating or higher (factors other than grades weighed)
- Pittsburgh Business Times: #7 in Pittsburgh Area, #13 in Pennsylvania
- Greatschools.org: District rating 10 out 10!
- Newsweek: Fox Chapel Area High School ranked among the nation’s top high schools
- US News and World Report: Fox Chapel Area High School, Silver Medal Recipient multiple years.
- Don Eichhorn Schools to Watch: Dorseyville Middle School

- U.S. Department of Education Blue Ribbon Schools: All FCASD schools have been designated, some multiple times.

Other Topics for Discussion:

School Start Times

Dr. Gene Freeman, superintendent

Freeman spoke to the audience about his meeting several weeks prior with the Western Pennsylvania Chapter of Start School Later, a group interested in changing school start times. Freeman explained that according to the group the traditional school schedule follows the “adult model.” The group told Freeman that the body clocks of teens are not subject to the “adult model.” Teens are oftentimes not able to fall asleep as easily and, therefore, in the morning require extra time to sleep. The superintendent said that the North Allegheny School District is currently in the process of considering changes to their school start times. In regards to FCASD, Freeman cites busing schedules as one of the main challenges to implementation. At this time, Freeman’s approach is to investigate the challenges associated with changing school start times. For instance, Freeman said, “Many high school students pull out of class for athletic contests and that needs to be balanced with how many hours of student instruction are required by the state.” Freeman encouraged parents, if they are passionate about pursuing this issue, to get involved with their legislature and the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU). Freeman is also open to hearing parent’s ideas on how this might be implemented. “In reality this would put the elementary schools starting prior to the high school. Schools PTO’s/PTA’s and the site based teams can explore this topic at every school.”

School Construction Update

Dr. Gene Freeman, superintendent

Construction is ongoing at many district buildings, according to Freeman. In addition to DMS renovations, Fairview received a new entrance, air conditioner in gym and renovated teacher space. Renovations at O’hara are still ongoing, but the most recognizable update, explained Freeman, has been the new playground, which can now accommodate the larger student body. Kerr will be getting the much-needed new building. Freeman stated that he will ask for the School Board to fix the sidewalks and parking lots in the district in the near future, which will cost the district approximately \$5 million. He believes, “A campus worth about \$150 million needs to be kept up to shape to help our home values and in regards to the real estate market in our area.”

Rethinking Sex Education

Michael Hower, lead principal FCAHS

John McGee, program principal FCAHS

Hower told the audience, in the past few months, students and parents have brought concerns regarding the current sex education curriculum to the school board and administrators. Hower explained that there are two approaches to sexual education: Sexual Risk Avoidance (SRA) and Sexual Risk Reduction (SRR). “The state of Pennsylvania encourages SRA but there is room for local control.”

But to better inform the student body, the other viewpoint of Sexual Risk Reduction, SRR, is also taught, Hower said. The sexual education curriculum is not just a high school issue but also a middle school issue as well. According to Hower, the SRR viewpoint teaches a comprehensive approach to helping high school students navigate sex education.

McGee said they met with consultants and teachers and other professional speakers to work with students on trial lessons. McGee explained the state requirements regarding sexual education are vague and do not specify clearly how to address. Currently, the district offers sexual education classes in health/safety/physical education. "The district teaches about HIV/AIDS and about communicable sexually transmitted disease prevention, testing and what to do if there is a positive result. However, the only way to do this is through the SRA, abstinence only method." McGee noted that a health class typically consists of about 20-24 students. "If a student finds themselves pregnant, there are counseling services available at the high school. However, the school district does not hand out birth control." McGee reviewed two charts from the American Sexual Health Association and Centers for Disease Control showing the birth control methods, rates, advantages and disadvantages, OTC, prescription.

"Sex education covers additional encompassing topics such as risk factors in relationships, the emotional part of the breakup, the physical part of the breakup and dating violence," Hower said. Speakers from Action Against Rape, Woman's Choice Network and the Alle-Kiski Area Hope Center have spoken at the high school, he added.

Drug Prevention Programs

Dr. David McCommons, deputy superintendent

According to McCommons, the district is being proactive about the overdosing culture and, "getting the teachers and support staff educated in the use of NARCAN." The District. McCommons explained is also using the "Stop the Bleed" program, which teaches bystanders to become trained and equipped to help with a bleeding emergency before first responders arrive. The district is also working with the RAND Corporation to update some of the materials that have become outdated in the current drug education curriculum. The existing DARE program will also be used. Updates to the program may even be implemented in the middle school. Lastly, McCommons added, "The ALICE (Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate) training is also being utilized by the District."

Legislative Update

Susan Buchman, vice president District Forum

Senate Bill 76, which was a means to eliminate property taxes as a source of funding for school districts has had "no movement." Currently, House Bill 1285 would allow the Homestead Exemption to be restructured. The Bill will go on the ballot in November. "This could be a backdoor way to eliminate property tax funding for school districts," said Buchman. "However, the legislature needs a revenue source."

Fab Lab

Megan Cicconi, director of instructional & innovative leadership

"The high school students' created the mobile Fab Lab as a way to bring digital fabrication and the STEAM curriculum into the elementary community," explained Cicconi. Cicconi showed a video that demonstrated the core components of the program and the hands on learning the students appreciated at Fairview Elementary. Teachers from any district can attend a two-day seminar at Fox Chapel to teach the lessons incorporated into the mobile Fab Lab. FCASD is now able to charge a fee for the use of the Fab Lab now that the terms of the grant have been met, explained Cicconi.

DMS & Mobile Fab Lab Tour

Moderated Q&A in auditorium

1. Are you looking at changing start times this year? Freeman said, "No, there are many unanswered factors yet to consider." In order for school start times to be implemented, the superintendent would have to recommend to the school board to flip times. "They would get final approval," said Freeman.

2. Is there precedent for [school start] time flips? What can we learn from other districts who have tried this? North Allegheny School District is studying changes to school start times. Quaker Valley has adjusted their time slightly and State College is attempting a change, according to Freeman.

3. What kind of support/accountability to (mobile) FabLab collaborations for teachers who aren't comfortable/interested to ensure equity across classes district wide? Megan Cicconi stated that all educators get two days of training or inquiry of the mini STEAM curriculum. "Even the high school engineering students are able to lend a hand. It is the same experience for any teacher."

4. Does the sexual education curriculum address LGBTQ? Hower answered, "While the curriculum doesn't address a specific lesson, it focuses on the lesson of a healthy relationship."

5. In sex-ed do you discuss the following: emotional issues for boys and girls? How life will change if you get an STD or become pregnant? Including boys' responsibilities if they father a child? Hower explained that the curriculum emphasizes, "even for boys," healthy relationships. "There are guidance counselors for specific needs."

6. Is there a student survey of the efficacy of sex-ed or drug prevention courses? Hower stated that would be useful to engage the boys and girls.

7. What kind of birth control resources are offered in the high school? What can the school nurse do to provide these resources? Hower stated that no birth control is available at the high school. The state does not forbid. The school board could "include" a policy. The superintendent interjected by thanking parents for being realistic in "wanting a better sex education curriculum."

8. During test score talks, Dr. Freeman mentioned that not all children learn the same. How do we plan in the future to help children with different learning styles?-balls to sit on, sensory rooms, etc. Principal Kristy Batis, O'hara answered that a team including the homeroom teacher and the principal make a decision to have a RTII, Response to Instruction and Intervention, and then provide support to that student.

Please note that these meeting minutes were recorded from handwritten notes as the meeting was not electronically recorded.

Follow Up Questions:

Due to time constraints, some questions that were submitted at the public meeting were not answered immediately, but have since been answered by district administrators. Questions received on 9/17/17 and subsequently answered in writing follow:

1. Is the district currently planning or developing plans to open a charter school? If so, what is the rationale behind this? The district has begun to explore the potential option of creating a Charter School in order to provide students with different pathways and educational opportunities. The development of a Charter School also affords an opportunity to generate revenue for the district. At this time, the Pennsylvania Department of Education will not allow this option for any public school in the Commonwealth. Until the legislature is changed, this will not be a consideration for FCASD.

2. Please shed light on the current 5th grade class size at O'Hara. How did this happen? How can we fix it? How will we prevent class sizes increasing in the future? Since August and through the start of school, the district had 10 students enroll for 5th Grade at O'Hara. Over the last eleven years, FCASD has not experienced this type of enrollment influx at 5th grade for the start of school. As always, the District will monitor the student enrollment and adhere to District Policy and Practice.

3. We are at max in some 1st grade class rooms and all 5th grade classrooms at O'Hara. Do we have enough room to add additional classes? If not, why are we remodeling the school versus adding on? The class size maximum in first grade is 25. First grade is not at the maximum of students. O'Hara Elementary has the space needed to accommodate the needs of our students.

4. Please update us on what is being done about class size/resources at O'Hara fifth grade? The O'Hara administration is providing the additional instructional assistance with an education support teacher or an instructional assistant in each of our fifth-grade classrooms during the English Language Arts and math blocks.

5. In talking with teachers, it appears that the introduction of the Journeys curriculum was dysfunctional and the teachers seemed unaware and no teacher wanted to defend it over the old curriculum. Can you outline the process used to select the curriculum?

A thorough plan was crafted and implemented in order to ensure the smooth and comprehensive roll out of Journeys at the elementary level. Below, please find the steps we took to ensure consistency and clarity with implementation:

- An English Language Arts Curriculum Committee (ELACC) was established to include over 30 representatives from all four elementary schools and had representatives from K- 5
- A team analyzed curricular resources and presented findings to the ELACC
- The ELACC team explored the curricular resources.
- The team also had trainings directly from consultants from Journeys.
- An Academic Specialist from Quaker Valley met with the team to discuss resource use from the practitioner's point of view.
- All K-5 teachers had professional development days devoted to deepening their understanding of Journeys.

- In addition, a series of separate professional days were provided for E-ELA, reading, and educational support teachers to support them with implementation.
- Moreover, the E-ELA, reading, and educational support teachers all had a training with the Journeys consultant personalized to their needs.
- A team of teachers met over the summer to design common curriculum based assessments and develop our assessment protocols for the upcoming year.
- All teachers had access to materials and resources in May of this year.
- The year began with professional development days devoted to the implementation of Journeys.
- During this time, all classroom, E-ELA, reading, and educational support teachers engaged in a “refresher course” professional development workshop.
- At this time, all teachers had access to district word lists, scope and sequence documents, assessment protocols, and lesson planning tools.
- Two additional professional development days were provided for our E-ELA teachers to continue to develop novels and text sets.
- An additional professional development day was provided for our reading and educational support teams to refine our intervention assessment system.
- All teachers were well-equipped to present information to parents during the building- based curriculum nights.
- Information about the changes associated with Journeys was shared with families within the district’s “What’s New” publication.
- A group of teachers and administrators presented changes to E-ELA during the September PAGE meeting.

6. *Are students surveyed about courses, the way college students are? Some students post comments on RateMyTeacher but it might be helpful to have feedback on the curriculum itself rather than (or in addition to) the teacher’s performance.* This question may refer to professor evaluation during college classes. The supervision model in place at FC is compliance Act 82 of 2012 which requires multiple measures to assess teacher performance, however, student evaluation of staff is not one of these measures.

7. *Why will the district have students in school this coming primary election day in May 2018, rather than schedule a clerical or teacher in service day?* The district engages a group of stakeholders to review and develop a proposed calendar for our Board of Directors to adopt. As you can imagine it is very difficult to accommodate every request. On at least three separate occasions, the district has petitioned and been denied by Allegheny County the request for the polls not to be located in our schools.

8. *Has the district been contacted about the potential housing development to be constructed near the intersection of Dorseyville Road and Fox Chapel Road?* The district has not been contacted about the potential housing development near Dorseyville Road and Fox Chapel Road. While the District is aware of the potential development, we cannot begin to make plans for the future homeowners and students until the contractor and local authorities finalize their plans.

9. *I understand that Mayor Peduto has put a team together to bid on attracting Amazon's new HQ to the city of Pittsburgh, creating 50k jobs and attracting highly-paid technical staff. Is the district in communication with the Mayor's office about this opportunity, sharing our district's scores, technology instruction and innovations? I suggest promoting Creative Literacy Programs for young children, inquiry-*

based learning, maker spaces, etc. Has this district solicited feedback from families from tech companies (Google, Uber, etc.) to learn what they value, to solicit donations, partnerships and to build social relationships. For example, Google parents might enjoy an invitation to tour tech and maker labs and to consult about technology curriculum, mentorship, etc. The tech community is highly networked and likely to promote what they value.

The district has not been in contact with the Mayor's office. However, we would welcome the opportunity to work with him to attract potential business and homeowners into the FCASD area.

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District Forum Public events are open to all parents and residents of FCASD. Children welcome.
For more information, visit foxchapeldistrictforum.com, <https://www.facebook.com/foxchapelfd>, or
email
fcdistrictforum@gmail.com

Next meeting November 14th, LGI Room at the high school.