

Meager Turnout At School Board Forum; Board Accepts Language Arts Curriculum

Only two people took advantage of the Lansing School Board's pre-board meeting "open forum" last Thursday evening to provide informal public feedback about school issues.

Parent Cindy Lion asked the Board and school administrators about efforts to improve students' math performance. Citing a recent Newsweek article which states that Americans have lower math results than many foreign high school students despite the fact that our youngsters have more homework and spend more classroom time studying math, Lion asked if our school was reviewing its approach to teaching math.

The question couldn't have been better timed as far as middle and elementary school principals Mary Bente and Shari Dempsey were concerned. The two had just been evaluating new state math performance tests that will alter the way math will be taught and evaluated in Lansing and throughout the state.

"A lot of the time, testing shifts teaching," said Mary Bente. "The new 4th, 8th and 12th grade performance tests are going to move away from calculating abstract computations to higher level thinking skills that stress analysis rather than regurgitation."

"The complexity of the tests is quite a challenge," explained Dempsey. "There's going to be much less concentration on computation and greater emphasis on interdisciplinary teaching that helps children integrate math, science and technology to solve real problems."

Ted Laux was the other resident who spoke at the open forum. He questioned the Board's policy of asking residents to fill out a "Freedom of Information" request before receiving copies of Board minutes. Laux also asked the Board to review policy 1550 of withholding minutes for four weeks in light of a state statute that, he asserts, requires minutes to be released within two weeks of a public meeting.

The next public forum is tentatively scheduled for Thursday, January 23 at 7:00 pm in the high school cafeteria. It will follow the state's January 3 release of a report evaluating Lansing and all other school districts in the state. The open forum will allow residents to ask questions about Lansing's performance on the state's "report card."

Language Arts Curriculum

Concluding a two-year effort to develop an integrated K-12 language arts curriculum, Letha Henry formally presented the curriculum to the Board of Education for its approval. As the Board voted its approval, Superintendent Andrea Price thanked Henry and her colleagues for developing a prototype system-wide curriculum. This approach will now be applied to other subject areas.

"We wanted to develop standards that meet or exceed state expectations," explained Henry as she discussed the coop-



SEWER UPDATE - Town Engineer David Herrick (at right) informed School Board members Steve Colt, Barbara Bills, Andy LaVigne, Kathy Miller, Joni Geiger and Glenn Rick about the status of the South Lansing Sewer project. Herrick reported that the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation communicated Wednesday that, subject to collecting additional scientific data, a discharge permit could be granted if the town proceeds with the project.

eration between language arts teachers in the three buildings. The 66 page document outlines the overall learning outcomes for Lansing graduates and defines specific skills that are to be required at each grade level of every student's K-12 educational evolution.

The elementary school curriculum emphasizes an introduction to reading, writing, listening and public speaking. Though specific course outcomes are set for each grade level, the K-4 program has an over-arching structure.

Students are taught expressive writing skills that incorporate technical instruction in grammar, punctuation, capitalization, etc. both within the writing process and in mini-lessons. Reading instruction will be literature-based and include phonics instruction on an on-going, regular basis. Daily reading to the students, guided reading, self-selected independent reading and elementary literature response activities will be coordinated to help our youngest students develop critical thinking and analytical skills.

In the middle school, students are asked to make the link between what is taught and how it relates to their lives. To encourage the development of students' ability to observe, reflect, analyze and make critical decisions, faculty use a combination of teaching strategies within and between subjects.

The middle school language arts curriculum presumes that students have learned the basics at the elementary level. Its primary focus is on the mastery of the English

language as the essential element to success in all subjects. This prepares students for the state language arts requirements they will later face in high school by emphasizing reading comprehension, analysis and writing skills.

Discussing literature is not seen so much as a technical process, but as a tool students can use to evaluate others' knowledge and experiences. Listening and conveying information through writing and public speaking are the two sides of the critical thinking process that enables our adolescents to reach mature, independent conclusions.

Once in high school, students should be ready to fine-tune their academic language arts skills into lifelong communication tools. That's why reading and writing skills are demanded not only in language arts, but in all subject areas.

Teachers use "start-to-finish" process-oriented techniques to help students further develop their writing and oral communication skills to seek information, to express themselves, to entertain, to inform and/or to persuade others.

Students are required to read a broad range of literary styles, including many forms of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, etc. These readings often expand beyond primary texts and force the students to use secondary sources to hone their skills in acquiring and evaluating information for adult problem-solving situations.

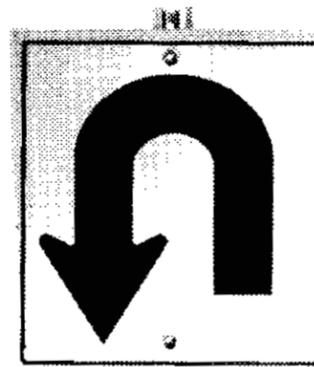
"After reading (the report)," said Board member Kathy Miller, "I clearly knew what is expected of children at every grade level. It may be necessary to make (the curriculum) available to all parents," she concluded.

A New Varsity Sport

In other business, the Board of Education acted favorably on Athletic Director Ed Redmond's request to approve boys and girls winter track as a new varsity sport.

"This request was driven by the students," said Redmond. Currently, the only girls winter sports are basketball and cheerleading. Winter track will resolve this inequity in seasonal sports for girls and give the kids something to do, explained Redmond. Because winter track requires no new facilities and even uses uniforms that are already on hand for spring track, the costs are very low.

Meets will be held every Saturday for 8 weeks, beginning Jan. 4, at Cortland State or at Cornell University. Certified coach Jason Eade will serve on a volunteer basis.



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