

## Report on the East High United Meeting held on April 12, 2007

*Budget Cuts.* Mr. Harris reported briefly on the cuts mandated by the schools' continuing budget crisis. In all, a total of 26 staff members were surplus or had their jobs changed as a result of reduced allocations. There were reductions of two teaching positions and ten special education assistants. The staff of librarians was reduced from two to one full-time position. Two clerical support staff positions were cut. In the reduction that has elicited the most comment, East's German offerings are being eliminated and the German teacher, Mr. Brandl, surplus. This will reduce East's language offerings to Spanish and French, which amounts to more limited foreign language offerings than are available at any of the other three Madison high schools. Mr. Harris explained that it became too much to continue classes that had only 15 or 16 students. Staff is meeting with the students who are currently taking German to explore options of continuing the classes at another Madison high school, or perhaps taking German classes on line. Mr. Harris stated that he and Assistant Principal Krause, who was also present, were available to talk about the German situation with any parents after the meeting.

*Code of Conduct.* Dean of Students Martha Olsen gave an update on the positive behavior intervention plan that is currently being developed. The plan is based on what is known as the Kronenberg "Above the Line, Below the Line, Bottom Line" behavior management system. The system includes the use of common language and a process for identifying the level of response appropriate to various forms of misbehavior. As part of this process, Ms. Olsen distributed a list of various infractions to those at the meeting and had them rank each as a more severe or less severe infraction. Other groups of parents and students will provide their own rankings and the results will be taken into account in developing a draft of a positive behavior intervention plan, which should be completed by early May.

### *The District-Wide High School Re-Design Study*

The principal focus of the meeting was a presentation by Pam Nash, the district's assistant superintendent for secondary schools, on the district's high school redesign study.

The purpose of the study is to take a deep look at the way Madison's high schools are structured and to explore what changes might be made to better equip students for the workplaces of tomorrow. Since the study is just getting underway, Ms. Nash was not able to be very

specific about the kind of changes that may emerge from the review. She did mention that the types of issues the group will look at might include whether there should be a mandatory service obligation for all high school students, or whether all students should be required to complete a major senior project during the last semester of their final year.

Ms. Nash said that the way high schools are organized has remained virtually unchanged since the 1920's and 1930's. Redesigning high schools is now a hot topic, and apparently has been the focus of grants by the Gates Foundation and others for studies and pilot programs. Ms. Nash said that the district will actively seek outside funding for the study, as well as for any training of teachers that may be necessary as a result of changes that result from the study.

It appears from what Ms. Nash said that the high school redesign study team consists of the following eleven members:

- 0. Ms. Nash
- 0. Mr. Harris
- 0. Ed Holmes, the principal at West
- 0. Loren Rathert, interim principal at LaFollette
- 0. Bruce Dahman, principal at Memorial
- 0. Sally Schultz, principal at Shabazz
- 0. Steve Hartley, Director of Alternative Programs for the District
- 0. Lisa Wachtel, the Director of Teaching and Learning for the District
- 0. L. Alan Phelps, a professor in the Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the UW School of Education and Director of the [Center on Education and Work](#)
- 0. M. Bruce King, a faculty associate University of Wisconsin-Madison Department of Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis at the UW School of Education; and
- 0. Diana Hess, an associate professor in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the UW School of Education.

Ms. Nash said that the group also intends to involve MATC and Edgewood, as well as existing apprentice programs.

The group will spend the 2007-2008 school year studying the issues and current thinking on the structure and design of high schools. The group anticipates issuing quarterly reports laying out its thinking and progress to date. Ms. Nash said that the goal is to have a clear direction in mind of the changes the group will recommend by about June of 2008. Assuming the group comes up with a plan that is accepted by the School Board, the 2008-2009 school year would likely be devoted to training and

transitional issues. The changes themselves might then be implemented during the 2009-2010 school year, when this year's freshmen will be seniors.

Ms. Nash said that the group recognizes that each of Madison's high schools is unique in some respects and that the redesign program would try to avoid trampling on each school's distinctive traditions. She said that she would expect some level of continuity across the high schools by the end of the process, but she does not anticipate strict uniformity among the schools.

Whatever changes the group will recommend will not be self-executing. The group will have to convince the new superintendent, whoever that turns out to be, as well as the School Board to agree to implement any changes, all within the confines of whatever magnitude of budget crisis is pressuring the district at that time. The district has also apparently resisted the requests that were made by Board members and others when the high school study project was announced to include a broader range of participants than district administrators and UW professor-types. Ms. Nash seemed to recognize that this background makes it crucial that the group operate as transparently as possible and that it seek and respond to public feedback at every step of the way. Consistent with that approach, Ms. Nash concluded by saying that she expects to be back to report on the group's progress.

The next meeting of East High United will be on **Thursday, May 10**. This will be the **final meeting** of the school year. If you have been telling yourself that you really should come to one of the group's meetings this year, this will be your last chance. At the meeting, we'll take stock of the year and try to follow-up on the issues we've discussed over the course of the year. For example, what do we know about the effects so far of the changes designed to reduce freshman truancy rates and failing grades? Was there improvement over last year in the freshmen's first semester grades? What is the status of the safety concerns and hall sweeps? How did the lunch period controversy ever work itself out? What's happened with the academic support and intervention committee, advanced program and curriculum committee, behavior intervention committee and literacy commission since we talked about in December? How have the numbers of AODA referrals been since Pam Herman talked to us in February? Has there been any progress on the plans for reorganizing the guidance department since March? Come to the meeting on May 10 and find out. We hope to see you there.