

Local

Parents protest new math

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Merrill said, “Morgan is very active in our school. He is involved in FFA, choir, 4-H, National Honor Society, soccer, golf and mock trial just to name a few. I don’t know how he has any time. He’s a very well-rounded individual, and has excellent leadership skills. Any time anything is going on at our school, Morgan and his parents are always there.”

After accepting his award Morgan said, “Upon graduation from high school, I plan on going to college to pursue a degree in Animal Science and Production Agriculture.”

Lynda Thomas was then recognized as she prepared for retirement. It was noted her career as a Para-Professional with Baker School District had spanned 31 years, 26 at Brooklyn. As the Board recognized her, she hugged each one, whether she knew them or not, even Superintendent Mark Witty.

“I just wish I’d written a journal of all the different happenings. There has been lots of laughter,” said Thomas.

Next was to approve and modify, if necessary, the agenda. All members approved after adding a discussion regarding meeting dates. Cassidy moved down the agenda next, asking for approval of Board minutes from the last regular meeting of September 15, and retreat notes from September 18. Those were unanimously approved. They then heard information regarding new hires, evaluation of the Superintendent’s timeline and administration reports.

Bryson Smith gave an update on BHS with statistics of the sports teams, and updated the board on Pep Week, Pep Night and Homecoming. He noted the FFA BBQ held Friday, October 16 before the Homecoming game and was a huge success with a lot of positive feedback.

He said walk-through evaluations were being done at BHS and gave information about PSATs and SATs. He then spoke about the Color Run being held this Saturday with proceeds benefiting a local family in need. He also noted that on Halloween the senior class would be hosting a haunted house at the High School with those proceeds going to the senior class party.

Cassidy then moved on with discussions on the OSBA fall regional meeting. Board member Andrew Bryan attended the meeting and advised discussion included a cradle-to-career movement, the promise of program and legislative issues.

Doug Dalton gave a financial/maintenance/transportation report that was all positive telling the Board everything looked good financially for the district, and the boiler at the High School is in need of replacement.

Superintendent Mark Witty addressed the Board concerning Innovate Oregon, putting together a committee regarding facilities, communications about the 2015-16 budget, and the implementation of a summer academy for

students with community partners such as the library, museum and YMCA.

“We have the buildings, let’s use them,” Witty said.

Assistant Superintendent Betty Palmer spoke of tours she had taken recently in the Bend area observing schools and curriculum built on a concept called expeditionary learning.

She indicated she was able to visit an elementary school, a middle school and a high school. The expeditionary learning model is project-based, schematic units, incorporating reading writing social studies and science into one thing.

Palmer said, “It is a program that has been around for over twenty and years now, and it is very well established. This is a model that we have researched and really like—it’s a balanced program.”

She also spoke of a high school math class she visited and was impressed by how it was presented as a team approach. She noted that time was taken to talk about weaknesses seen across the board there and asked for examples, universities where they were seeing issues with students sent to them and ways they could fix those issues.

Palmer said, “The State of Oregon has not yet put out a list of adopted and approved materials in the areas of reading and mathematics.” That opened up the door to the Public Comment portion of the meeting that had the room so full of energy.

Cassidy said, “I am going to ask first if there is somebody that has public comment other than Parents for a Math Curriculum Change to speak. If there is, I’d like to let them speak first.”

Amanda Miles, third grade teacher said before anyone spoke, “On behalf of the teachers and the school district I would like to say thank you for coming out and supporting staff and your children. For parents to come together on a night like this and sit for an hour and a half is a pretty amazing thing.”

Speaking to members of Parents For a Math Curriculum Change, Cassidy said, “I appreciate that you contacted the board ahead of time, and what I’ve asked the group to do is provide a small group of representatives to speak for about 10 minutes each.”

A letter was given to the Board prior to the meeting, which Cassidy stated had been given to Witty and he advised he would respond back to that letter.

Members of the group said they had three separate parents and a student who would be speaking.

The first to speak was Marcy Osborn. She said, “I, like a couple others I know, was told I was the only one complaining about the math curriculum that my child was having to struggle through every night.

“I graduated from Baker High School and many of the math teachers that were at the High School then are still there. They instilled a love of math in me. I chose to go to school and I earned a Bachelor’s degree in Mathematics and I have a Master’s degree in education, so I do have a background.

“We are a group of parents, grandparents, community members and taxpayers that want the best education for the stu-

dents of our district.”

She continued, “We are going to address concerns many parents have with the open educational resource program, Engage NY Math. First of all, the Common Core State standard is not a curriculum but a clear set of shared goals and expectations for what knowledge and skills will our help students succeed. Common Core demands automaticity, which is memorization based familiarity with basic math facts mastery of standard algorithms and understanding of critical arithmetic. These essential math skills are not only required but given high priority particularly in the early grades. The math standards focus is in depth on fewer topics and ones that is coherently build on one another over time.

“The Middle School and High school standards call on students to practice applying mathematical ways of thinking to real old issues and challenges. They prepare students to think and reason mathematically. The Baker School District has stated their plan is to move toward conceptual mathematics. There is nothing wrong with conceptual math in fact we believe it is a strong component to ensure our children become college and career ready. Conceptual student math is the ability to understand which ideas are key and be able to use those ideas strategically to solve problems. In conceptual fluency we need to also focus on procedural fluency. Procedural fluency built on a foundation of conceptual understanding, strategic reasoning and problem solving.

“All students need to have a deep and flexible knowledge of a variety of procedures combined with conceptual knowledge, students need to solve problems many different ways. A quality curriculum should have both conceptual and procedural fluencies. Engage NY fails in both of these categories. It does not allow students to gain a strong foundation before moving to conceptual strategies. There isn’t enough exploration for students to become conception ally or procedurally fluent.

Engage NY uses a mathematics language unique to itself and the program uses terminology that is introduced at prior grade levels and in some cases vocabulary is not consistent. Instead of allowing student to solve problems in many different ways the program requires the student only get the answer using the Engage NY method. At some grade levels Engage NY introduces a number of strategies. But students do not have enough practice to determine which strategy fits their problem solving need.

“Bottom line, Engage NY is poorly written, poorly sequenced and does not engage our children the way it should. This is frustrating for teachers, parents and students so we have to ask ourselves. Is this program instilling a love for math for our students or is it creating frustrated, students?”

Speaking next was Julie Gentry, who is the mother of two students currently enrolled in 5J Schools. She stated, “I have been here a couple of times and people likely know I am a firm believer that silence is consent and if I have to use this meeting to get

the publicity I believe is needed, I will.”

She began by asking for a round of applause for teachers and students because she found upon review of last year’s Smarter Balanced math test results, 43% of 11th graders either met or exceeded state math standards.

Gentry went on to say that this was accomplished without Engage NY or another debated curriculum, Eureka Math. She claims that these results were yielded from textbooks “that were abruptly shredded this past spring.”

She asked, “Doesn’t the elimination of those text books reek of other historical events we all find to be unsavory?”

She also expressed concern over the results of intermediate grade level test scores. She stated, “The results show a range of 9-16% below the state average. Those results are from students instructed exclusively by the Engage NY math curriculum.”

She questioned why students exposed to that curriculum didn’t yield more positive results. She also noted that South Baker’s state report card was very low and said she felt the only conclusion to draw was that this particular curriculum was not effective for the students, and called for the immediate removal of use for the sake of the children.

She cited some other statistics that Cassidy questioned, and he asked her to if she would be willing to supply her information to the Board so that they could research it.

She agreed.

Coby Mastrude also spoke. She stated she had students in 5th grade, and 9th grade. She said, “We’ve been told we are limited on the number of speakers we can have and put on a time limit so given the situation we gathered some of the concerns and comments to share with you this evening.

“A parent of a freshman says, ‘We have had frustration and tears which we have never experienced over school work. Our daughter is very discouraged. She has a love for math and has gone from loving it to hating it with in two and a half weeks. We transferred her to a different level of math that is not doing Engage NY instead of changing her whole schedule or transferring to a charter school.’

“A parent of two elementary students says, ‘last year I stated my 1st graders level of math wasn’t as much of a concern as my 4th grader. However, this year my son is a second grader and cannot tell me what 4+4 is and does not know any strategies to solve it. This is deeply concerning.’

“A parent of two elementary and one middle school student tells me, ‘The tears and arguments in our household over this math is horrible.’”

Mastrude continued, “Parents are being taken out of the equation as far as being able to help our kids and that is beyond frustrating. Another parent of a Middle School student said, ‘I’ve talked to other school districts that are claiming to be teaching Common Core, none of them are having the difficulties like our kids are experiencing.’ We shouldn’t have these tears or have to resort to YouTube videos.

There has to be a better way. A sixth grade student said, ‘Even the smartest kids are having difficulties with math. I can get the right answer but if I don’t use the correct strategy then I have to restart my math. This makes me depressed and angry and I feel like a failure at math.’

“A parent of a middle schooler says, ‘We have been strong believers in the public school system and supporters of Baker School District. However, the Districts decision regarding Engage NY and the poor choices made by the Administration have made us seriously consider moving to another District. This is in no way a reflection on our amazing teachers or staff but directly due to policies and choices being made by administration in what appears to be a complete lack of respect from administration in relationship to their teachers or parents’

“As you can see, Engage NY is not creating a love of mathematics. In fact, it is doing the opposite and it is beyond frustrating. We know our kids deserve the best education and this means access to the best curriculum.”

She went on to tell the Board she felt a curriculum was needed that truly engaged and built confidence in kids—not one that creates fear and dread.

She indicated this needed to be done now—there was not time for trial and error.

She asked that effective immediately, teachers be allowed to use other resources to “fill in the gaps” that Engage NY leaves without being reprimanded.

She said, “We demand that the Baker School District follow the Oregon Department of Education best practice recommendation. We know that Engage NY and Eureka Math will not be on the approved list.”

She finally asked the Board to give respect to the teachers so they are comfortable enough to voice concerns over the curriculum without fear of reprimand and parents be given the respect they deserve for being engaged active parents in their children’s education.

Mastrude’s son, Dylan, a freshman at Baker High School, said, “I’m currently taking geometry with Engage NY. I don’t think Engage NY is a very effective way to teach.”

He cited vocabulary differences from what students have been taught in the past, and no textbooks to introduce what they are learning or to refer to when a question arises.

Dylan said, “We are forced to use the internet to help us figure it out.”

He stated that just the previous day the problem students were working on had four separate errors—a common occurrence.

He told the Board within the first few days of school his class size dropped considerably due to the new curriculum, saying many he knew were looking at Web Academy or some other alternative.

“We are getting lower grades but our teachers are not allowed to teach us what they know,” he said.

He asked the Board to please remove the mandate that the teachers are not allowed to teach what they know.

Speaking in support of

the Engage NY program was only one parent: Loren Joseph.

Joseph said, “The things I heard tonight are really hard to ignore, but the complete misrepresentation of test scores and statistics to support that side is ridiculous.”

He had his own test scores of local schools that use Engage NY that show the scores well above the state average in both math and English.

He said that the only correlation he found was if a class was doing poorly in one subject, they were likely doing poorly in others as well.

Joseph said, “I think the best talk tonight was from our student Dylan Mastrude; he addressed some very real concerns that there are, but as a parent of a second grader who has been through Engage NY for two years now, I can’t find very much wrong with it. I am really impressed with the different strategies he is learning. The concepts that he has a grasp on are well beyond where I was at his age. And I’ve heard nothing but positives from the staff at Brooklyn about Engage NY.”

He stated he did not feel throwing this curriculum away was the best choice, although he admitted it may not be the best curriculum.

He indicated that he realized a process may have to be gone through to find the best curriculum. Throwing it away without a review of what is out there was “not a good idea,” he said.

Joseph also cited cost as an issue. Engage NY is a free program and he said he was afraid many felt it might be a bad program just based on that fact.

Cassidy asked if there was more public comment before adjourning for a break. The room was instantly abuzz with activity but most of the crowd dispersed at that point and did not return when the meeting reconvened.

After the break, the Board approved a three-year bus lease that will include delivery of a new bus to the district, District goals, and the Superintendent Evaluation format.

They amended the Board/Superintendent working agreement, and approved the first reading of policies concerning truancy, discipline and nondiscrimination.

They accepted extra duty resignations from Tim Greene, BHS assistant Track and Field Coach and Warren Wilson, BHS Assistant Girls’ Basketball Coach and approved extra duty new hires Matt Sands, BHS Girls basketball head coach and Lisa Ensworth, BHS Thespians/Drama Coach.

They adopted resolution 16-05 regarding bus routes, which really did not change much just designated pick up spots differently.

Will Benson, Head of Baker County Parole and Probation was appointed to the Budget Board and a memo of understanding from Innovate Oregon was approved.

The Board also addressed concerns over the meeting day for the Board, citing numerous conflicts with the current members’ schedules. It was agreed that the meeting day for now would be changed to the third Thursday of the month in an effort to work better.