

O'Rourke Middle School Building Council Retreat
Friday, June 25, 2010 – 8:30-2:30 - Library Classroom

1. *Attendance:* Don Germain, Kevin Ahern, Judy Brinkman, Shauna Bryk (for Karen Shipston representing staff development), Penny McDonnell, Amy Clark, Suzanne Rayome, Janet Bianchi, Pattie Rakvika, Nancy Pearse, Valerie Wadsworth, Dianne Alois, Tracy McCarthy, Lindsay Armbruster
2. *Welcome and Introductions:* Members were welcomed to the Council for the 2010-2011 school year. A revised membership chart will be shared with the representatives in September, as well as a reexamination of the SDM protocols to insure that the history of shared decision making is valued and preserved.
3. *Review of Shared Decision Making Protocols and Mandated District SDM Checklist:* The District Guidelines for Shared Decision Making were reviewed in detail. The SDM checklist items were evaluated and approved unanimously by the members. Specific items of related discussion led to an open dialog regarding SDM and the generation of many questions regarding its state. A concern arose regarding the eroding power of the LEA's to actually influence effective educational practices and progressive educational changes:
 - Representation of and for Constituents – How can we continue to improve communication to the masses to get pertinent feedback on the topics addressed at the meetings, while providing for better representation and more concrete decision making outcomes?
 - Dissemination of Information - Continue the comprehensive publication and distribution of the minutes and other related materials and resources, while periodically upgrading the web as a vehicle for information dissemination.
 - Power of Teams - Continue the ongoing collaborative relationship and dialog with Cabinet and the teaching teams to maximize the decision making potential and effectiveness of the organization. Due to the loss of teacher leaders and the restructuring of the Middle School Cabinet and Administrative hierarchy, it is imperative that these two decision making-bodies work more closely together. It may also be prudent for the Council to take a more active role in the curriculum, instruction, and program development phases of our decision making process, a role held primarily for the Cabinet in the past.
 - Philosophy and Mission - We continue to examine the questions related to the role of the Council with regard to the decision making process. Are we a broad clearing house for information; or do we exist as a comprehensive decision making body? What decisions are to be made at the Council level – policy or curriculum, or other? Are these lines being muddled of late due to the overwhelming amount of information and reflective decision making taking place throughout the entire BHBL organization? How can we effectively improve the decisions we make to strengthen the organization and better serve children, while not making decisions in isolation?

- Long Range Planning - How has building and district long range planning changed with the imposed parameters of Culture, Team, and Data? How do Council decisions get made based on these goals? Has the bureaucracy of State and Federal education mandates forced us into a rubber stamp decision making body?
 - Mandated Education - How has the increased influence of the State and Federal Governments on local decision making changed the role of Council and tied our hands with the development of visionary educational initiatives?
 - Theory vs. Practice - How has the role of shared decision making district wide changed? Where does theory meet practice in the decision making process? Have we lost the interconnectivity of the vast array of decision making groups to make aligned, informed decisions that are both vertically and horizontally articulated?
 - Staff Development - Should we provide staff development opportunities to further our growth as a collective, effective decision making organization?
4. *Standing Committee Reports and Final Recommendations:*
- a. Class Night: Updates this year to the program, rules, and venue have improved the Class Night Awards Ceremony and Dance. This year's program proved to be a resounding success. However, attendance at the dance was down considerably this year due in part to the change in protocols for the use of electronic devices and the lack of desire on the part of students to attend, for a variety of reasons. The PTA, staff, and administration were praised for their support and comprehensive organization of the program. The following recommendations made by last year's committee were completed for this year's event:
- Improved the lineup process,
 - Utilized fans to improve the air flow at the ceremony,
 - Updated the electronic device policy for this event and related school activities,
 - Improved the coordination of sound and lighting at the awards ceremony,
 - Re-evaluated which awards are appropriate for this ceremony and added a few pertinent awards,
 - Improved the ceremony signage and seating, but still need to resolve whether we can seat the honored class on the gym floor for the future to accommodate more guests and formalize the program.

Recommendations for next year:

- Review all building requirements including fire, evacuation and safety codes to insure that the decorating committee does not violate any or all acceptable use protocols...
- Recruit more committee members, especially staff to help to distribute the workload more equitably...
- Request that the Teacher's Union consider a stipend for the Class Night Chairpersons in their negotiations for the future...

- Reduce the dance set up to one night only due to the logistical problems it created during the school day...
 - Provide better seating accommodations for senior citizens who attend the ceremony...
- b. American Education Week: The AEW program continues to run each year with fluctuating participation numbers, averaging about 50 - 7th and 8th grade parents per year. 6th grade parents participate in a number of interdisciplinary activities throughout the year so they are not directly involved in AEW events. This program will be placed on the September agenda for further review. Parent volunteers will be solicited by PTA Council representatives to help organize and implement the program for the future. It is important to the members that we continue to run this immersion event to showcase our programs and practices, while providing opportunities for parents to take an active role in our educational process. However, with the expanded workload of the staff and the reduction of the number of staff members available to develop such programs, it is essential that we find support from other quarters.
- c. Committee for Academic and Personal Excellence: Progress toward fulfilling the recommendations for this current school year was reviewed. They included:
- PDA expectations were reinforced with the staff, students and parents at the fall orientation meetings and followed up with periodically throughout the year,
 - The PDA rubric developed last year was placed on the web as a source of information,
 - The Committee began a review of the current research on homework, as well as the District and building homework guidelines, to make future recommendations. This included staff development workshops presented by Tracy McCarthy to both the Middle and High School staff. It also included research on homework, protocols for best practices, and a homework survey.
- Recommendations for the future include:
 1. Continue the homework dialog as a part of a future comprehensive staff development initiative.
 2. Continue to reinforce best practices for the use of homework,
 3. Emphasize the use of homework as a tool to improve learning – Quality vs. Quantity.
 4. Compare data from both the Middle School and High School homework surveys to develop common threads, identify common anomalies, and provide for continuity of practice across the grade levels and departments.
 5. Determine if the block schedule negatively or positively influences the delivery of homework through the use of guided practices and why.
 6. Evaluation of the new grading policy over the last several years has established that its application has positively influenced student achievement by making grading, particularly with regard to homework more objective and less subjective. Continue to monitor this format.

7. Review report card comments in the fall to cull them and align them to better suit our expectations and practices.
8. How will the future of on line grading influence the parent's, teacher's and students' role in the homework process? Review this process as it unfolds.
- d. Health and Safety: The Health and Safety Committee did not meet regularly but did influence changes in the following areas highlighted from last year's agenda, as well as those brought up throughout the course of this year:
- Security - The impact on reductions or elimination of front door security on the health and safety of the population was reviewed. Although no concrete evidence exists that this reduction negatively impacted the building security, there were more incidents of random wandering by guests, less supervision of students during arrival and dismissal, and more hall traffic than usual. There was a pervasive feeling that this situation presented a less secure atmosphere in the building overall this year, despite efforts to change protocols and procure security equipment that would compensate for the change.
 - Efforts to monitor air quality were extensive and recommendations to improve the overall climate of the school facility were stepped up throughout the year utilizing local and subcontracted personal to troubleshoot and rectify potential concerns.
 - Volunteers to replace the door monitors were not considered due to inconsistencies posed with their reliability, contractual concerns with displaced work, and other related factors.
 - A tabletop exercise was conducted to insure that H&S committee members were up to speed with the implementation of safety protocols and could administer them effectively and without compromise to insure the security and safety of the school community members.
 - Safety protocols were reviewed and recommendations were made to the District regarding potential improvements, particularly in reference to the emergency flip charts.
 - Fire drill procedures were reviewed and updates will be added to the staff handbook for the fall.
 - Construction calendars for the summer were planned and implemented trying to account for all contingencies for school operations during this period of time and into the fall.
- e. School Climate and Character Education: The Student Sunshine Committee was developed and students participated in several activities that were designed to bolster the morale of other students. The Character Education Committee put their work on vision, philosophical, and core values statements on hold due to the administrative transition. The Capturing Kids Hearts program has been transformed into a localized program called CREST. Several staff members helped to write a local curriculum and were trained in its implementation over the summer. It is the hope of the committee members to carry on this valuable work through more student related initiatives and more staff development on CREST methodologies. The School Climate

Committee sponsored many staff events designed to boost morale, infuse fun into the workplace and build community.

Recommendations from last year were addressed by the Council:

- Work on the philosophy, vision, mission, and core values statements was placed on hold due to the administrative transition in the building. Preliminary ideology statements were drafted, but never completed or acted upon.
 - The “Capturing Kids’ Hearts” mentoring program was transformed into the localized CREST program and some staff members were trained. However, it is recommended that this work continue due to the powerful nature of the program and the results achieved with students. Professional training on CREST protocols for the entire staff is warranted and should be completed in a timely manner.
 - The Breakfast of Celebration for the 2nd and 3rd quarters of each year was continued under the same criteria for the 2009-2010 school year with active monitoring of the selection of students, as recommended by the Council. There was a significant rise in the number of students who qualified this year due to their willingness to go the extra mile to improve their academic achievement and the staffs’ willingness to support them. These students were duly rewarded for their efforts with higher achievement and a belly full of wonderful breakfast treats.
- f. SASI Committee: The District committee to review new administrative software superseded any localized building SASI initiatives. However, building functional operating support for SASI continues until such time as a new software package, Power School is implemented.
- g. Transition Committee: Extensive work was completed by the Transition Committee to upgrade current practices directly related to student transition from grade level to grade level, while providing for more continuity in practices across the grade levels. Articulation was improved, more continuity in expectations for students across the grade levels was initiated, and more study and organizational strategies were infused into the daily classroom routines of all students and teachers. The student agendas were upgraded to reflect some of these changes and support student developmental needs. The committee called for more members next year to help complete this important work. The work of the Guidance Department to create a series of documents, programs and initiatives related to transition were highlighted. It was noted that a Kentucky School District, while researching best practices in Transition, recognized our school for its exemplary, comprehensive measures and asked permission to utilize some of our work.

Recommendations from last year that were addressed were:

- Work to refine continuity in expectations across the grade levels was completed in the development of common color coding of notebooks, common headings, the development of expectations for a polished product, study hall protocols, the after school agenda appointment process and other similar commonalities of practice.

- More articulation between the grade level teams, particularly 6th to 7th and 7th to 8th was generated through staff development initiatives.

Recommendations for the future include:

- Aligning the polished product with 21st Century skills so that high standards of performance are maintained across the grade levels and disciplines was recommended. A rubric will be created to memorialize these practices. Posters outlining expectations will be developed for each classroom for student and staff utilization.
- h. Sunshine and School Climate Committees: These committees were instrumental in supporting the members of the learning community this year through a variety of activities, events, and personal connections. They are to be congratulated for the support they lent to our members and their families.
 - i. Disconnected Kids: This committee did not meet this year, but its past initiatives were carried out including extensive data analysis on student performance with comprehensive progress monitoring, improved PAT protocols, more rewards and incentives for students, the development of the OASIS program, and other intervention and prevention measures to engage students in learning and foster their success in the educational setting. The results of the foundational work of this committee have translated into fewer students at risk of failure. The committee recommended last year that the following items be addressed:
 - That all opportunities continue to be explored that help to track the performance of all students and support initiatives to positively engage them in their learning through innovative programming and other researched based methodologies.
 - It was also suggested that teachers become more directly involved in the PAT student performance review process when an identified child they serve is brought to the team.

Both of these recommendations were addressed with the addition of the OASIS program and more direct teacher involvement in the PAT process.
 - k. Construction: A complete review of the potential construction project elements to improve the infrastructure of our buildings and grounds was completed. Construction has started and will be carried out throughout the summer and into the early fall.
 - l. Wellness Committee: The Wellness Committee in its first year completed two comprehensive projects. They hosted a series of professional development workshops for High School and Middle School staff members on suicide and depression this spring. They also created and presented a Health Education Award to a deserving 8th grade student. The committee hopes to continue its work next year with projects proposed on student advocacy, staff wellness, and diversity.
 - m. Medically Fragile Students: Extensive work was done this year on evaluating the growing problem of students with long range medical issues that prevents them from attending school. The committee studied the problem and made recommendations to the building shared decision making groups for

improvements in our procedures to help handle these concerns. These recommendations will be memorialized this summer in a document to the Superintendent for review and consideration, attempting to influence proactive changes in policy, practice and protocols that will address these concerns.

5. *Review of Building Goals – 2009-2010:* An overview of the building goals was presented to the members. Highlights of this review were:

- a. Concentrated Areas of Focus: Globalized areas of middle level focus modeled after the research based 7 Essential Elements of a Standards Based Middle School were reviewed. These areas of focus form the fundamental foundation of our middle level education program.
- b. SMART Goals: Progress toward achievement for the two building SMART Goals was presented. Initial results from quarterly data reviews indicate that we continue to make progress toward achieving our goals in all areas of focus. A final review of yearly data will be completed this summer and included in a report to the Superintendent. This information will be shared with the staff and Council in the fall. Building SMART Goals will be carried forward again to the 2010-2011 school year with some slight modifications to the achievement percentage parameters.
- c. Council Goals: The Building Council goals for the 2009-10 school year were reviewed in detail. Although the agenda was ambitious, most of the goals that were outlined in the retreat minutes from June of 2009 were met or exceeded. These are highlighted in the text below.

➤ Goal # 1 - Culture: To improve and maintain the quality culture and climate of the O'Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will oversee work on the following initiatives:

- ❖ *Develop a student supported Sunshine Committee and create a Middle School chapter of the Giving Tree program, modeled after the High School program. Both of these programs were started this year and achieved measured success in helping to implement activities to support others in a time of need. The Giving Tree program was instituted around the holidays to help provide needy students with some practical gifts to make their lives more pleasant and comforting. The Student Sunshine Committee made cards for students who were ill, welcomed new students to the school, and provided other forms of cheer and respite to support the needs of those less fortunate.*
- ❖ *Continue the work on defining strategies to support the growing needs of disconnect students and make recommendations there of. Evaluate the impact of ancillary support programs: AIS, Academic Support, OASIS, etc. on student connections to school and resulting academic progress; or lack there of. Extensive work is being done to help students to connect with school, value their education, and respect each other. We*

are identifying more and more students who exhibit comprehensive developmental concerns which result in an inability to compete in a rigorous academic setting or meet the social challenges of a complex society. Despite these demographic changes the building continues to make great strides in improving overall academic achievement, reducing the number of students who are failing or are disconnected, and maintaining high standards of excellence. Data indicates progressive, measured improvements in all targeted areas of performance. The collective, consistent approach to support for students and high expectations for excellence promoted by all staff has contributed to this success. Investment in the personal needs of each child has paid significant dividends toward helping them to succeed. Some of the contributing factors to this success are: The comprehensive student placement process, staff articulation, ongoing assessment, rewards and incentives, progressive, layered support programming, transition activities, parent partnerships, common expectations, positive, child centered school climate, mentoring, well articulated goals, open dialog, rigorous and relevant teaching standards, innovative teaching, the infusion of higher order thinking and 21st Century Skills, responsiveness to individual needs, and a balanced educational program, to name a few.

- ❖ *Revise existing or develop new statements for guiding and operating principles: Vision, Philosophy, Mission, and Core Values.* Research was completed on this goal and draft statements for each were developed. However, with the extensive administrative reorganization of the school, revisions to these statements were never completed and presented to the Council for review.
- ❖ *Research the negative and positive factors of the Cyber influence on the learning of students, and the school climate; and make recommendations to the Council for deliberation.* The Cyber world presents a new set of problems to schools that significantly influence the social and academic development of middle level students. Social networking, legal clarity, and other factors make this problem a difficult one for schools to translate or control. Research on the law was started this year, but clear direction from the legal system for schools to follow and adhere to has not been articulated. Therefore, decision-making on matters related to the cyber world that influence education is pretty much left up to local jurisdiction. Through town meetings, Learning Lab and FACS cyber workshops, parent forums, staff development and the extensive work of our SRO we have tried to educate students and their parents on the value and pitfalls of cyber interconnectivity. We continue to enforce strict rules at school regarding the use of electronic devices, while consulting with our legal council on how to resolve the growing number of problems related to the cyber world created outside of school. We will continue to investigate appropriate intervention and prevention measures, as well as provide expansive educational

opportunities to the members of our learning community regarding the cyber influence on learning and life.

- Goal #2 – Team: To further the growth and facilitation of teaming at the O’Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will:
 - ❖ *Continue the work of the Transition Committee and Grade Level Teams on organization and study skill initiatives for all students.* As highlighted in the committee notes, the Transition Committee, teaching and Guidance teams did a significant amount of work to improve activities, practices, and programs that support the developmental needs of transitioning middle level students. The strength of these initiatives helps solidify our learning community and establish commonality that builds relationships and fosters student connections. This comprehensive work has made us a leader in targeting our strategies toward the whole child. The combined work of these groups, along with comprehensive programming from the departments and student groups, such as Career Day, Community Service Day, a well articulated curriculum, and other related projects provide our students with an exemplary foundation from which to build and maintain their personal growth. To improve on these initiatives for the future the Council strongly recommends that more professional development take place to help staff continue to improve their skills to better serve the needs of a diverse student population. It is also recommended that comprehensive, common team planning time be created and maintained to foster more articulation about effective teaching and student developmental needs.
 - ❖ *Explore the possibilities of creating more common planning time for all staff to work on building grade level team driven goals and initiatives, PGP’s, SMART Goals, and department primary team initiatives.* This was a challenging goal to accomplish this year. As we redeploy our teaching staff to meet budgetary reduction requirements, we have had to redesign the master schedule to accommodate more traveling teachers and other related changes. Therefore, common planning time has been lost to a great degree. To compensate, the following measures have been taken:
 - Team 8 voluntarily meets once a month after school to plan and organize their team initiatives.
 - More embedded professional development has been offered to staff to work on team projects.
 - Dedicated District and building staff development time has been deferred to team initiatives.
 - Special Area teachers meet quarterly with the administrative team after school to address their concerns and update them on student, program, and building matters.

- Goal #3 – Data: To continue to improve the growth and development of O’Rourke Middle School students and staff, the Building Council will utilize data to evaluate the following items:
 - ❖ *Deliberate on the potential impact on learning of the proposed State Assessment schedule changes and make recommendations to improve the continuity and delivery of high quality instruction within the confines of the mandated testing schedules for exam preparation, administration, and scoring.* A superficial evaluation of the impact of state assessments on high quality instruction was developed in the spring of 2010 by gathering initial data from the component middle schools of the Capital Region. This information was synthesized into a report to the BOCES Superintendent Charles Dedrick over a 24 hour period. He subsequently presented that report to the Superintendents, Board of Regents, Assessment Committee, and other related organizations for review. We will continue to advocate for positive changes in administration of statewide assessments that support an effective, comprehensive educational model that meets the developmental needs of all middle level students.
 - ❖ *Research and deliberate on the potential benefits and drawbacks of homework on learning and make recommendations there of.* As indicated in the report of the Committee for Academic and Personal Excellence, a significant amount of research was completed on the topic of homework. It is the recommendation of the Council members that this work continues throughout the 2010-2011 school year with particular emphasis on staff dialog about this important topic.
 - ❖ *Evaluate the impact of current budget cuts on the delivery of an effective educational program and the maintenance of a safe, healthy, and productive school climate.* The administrative team continues to evaluate the overall delivery of services we provide to students based on the budget cuts implemented over the last several years. Significant restructuring of services has taken place to accommodate these changes, but long range analysis is warranted to determine the overall impact of these changes on student achievement and the school climate. Ongoing analysis and dialog about this topic will take place with timely recommendations forwarded to the appropriate decision making bodies as information is gathered and deliberated upon.
- 8. *Recommendations for and Prioritization of 2010-2011 Goals:* The constituent representatives presented the following goal proposals for consideration for the 2010-2011 school year:
 - a. 21st Century Skills: Evaluate where we are in the delivery of comprehensive 21st Century skills to our students through innovative curriculum and instruction measures. The following items should be considered in that body of work:

- Staff Development: The staff should receive comprehensive training on 21st Century skills with an emphasis on how to infuse them seamlessly into their teaching and curriculum, for the benefit of students.
 - Student Relations: As a part of global learning, students must possess comprehensive personal skills. Therefore it is imperative that we continue to develop and implement programs and practices that target areas of character development including tolerance, diversity, and respect. It is recommended by the Council that the staff explore more opportunities to teach these through parent forums, cyber classes, CREST training, staff development, summer curriculum development, and program development.
- b. Dress Code: The Council recommends that the changing, diverse nature of society requires that we periodically reevaluate and update our dress code policies and protocols. Items that need to be considered when evaluating this complex matter are:
- Societal Influences
 - Fashion Choices
 - Community Culture and Values
 - Civil Rights and the Law – Education and Civil
 - Viability and Consistency of Enforcement
 - Broad Range of Moral and Ethical Values
 - Discrepancies in Interpretation and Editorializing of Personal Values
 - Timeliness
 - Staff Dress in Relationship to Professional Conduct and the Student Code
 - Student, Staff and Community Education
 - Health and Safety
 - Cost
 - Harassment and Other Related Personal Conduct Concerns
 - Sustainability
 - Educating the Masses: Dress for Success – Developing a Positive Personal Image
- c. 50th Anniversary: The original construction was finished on O'Rourke in the summer of 1960. The building was officially opened in February 1961. The Council recommends that we plan a thematic celebration to honor the school's 50 years of exemplary middle level service to the community.
- d. Flexible Scheduling: It is imperative that we explore and implement a flexible schedule that meets the diverse needs of developing adolescents while maximizing our potential to deliver a comprehensive middle level program. Therefore, it is the recommendation of the Council that we move forward with this project and see it to its completion in a timely manner.

9. *2009-2010 Goal Development:*

- Culture: To improve and maintain the quality culture and climate of the O'Rourke Middle School, the Building Council will oversee work that fosters the building of community and the development of personal relationships.
- Team: To further the growth and facilitation of teaming at the O'Rourke Middle School, so as to maintain a cohesive, well articulated approach to teaching and learning, the members of the Building Council will engage in an open dialog about best practices that support the comprehensive development of Professional Learning Communities.
- Data: To continue to improve the growth and development of O'Rourke Middle School students and staff, the Building Council will utilize data to evaluate personal and organizational performance and make recommendations there of.
- Goals:
 - ❖ To support the need to provide our students with comprehensive 21st Century skills, as defined by the District Strategic Framework Committee, it is the Building Council's intent to spearhead the development of visionary educational initiatives that infuse these skills into the curriculum and instruction...
 - ❖ To maintain a code of conduct that reflects the ideologies and values of society and the greater BHBL learning community, the Building Council will evaluate the current dress code policies and practices and make recommendations there of...
 - ❖ To honor the glorious history of this building and the community it has served, the Building Council will oversee the organization of a 50th anniversary celebration to take place in the spring of 2011...
 - ❖ To improve the organizational structure of the master schedule to maximize our potential to deliver effective, meaningful instruction under current fiscal constraints, the Building Council will charge a committee to develop and implement a flexible scheduling model for all grades in a timely manner.

