

## Minutes of School Health Advisory Board Meeting February 25, 2015

**In attendance:** Lori Balaban, Lisa Brown, Erin Callas, Michael Craddock, Jason Crutchfield, Eileen Gomez, Leanne Knox, Tom Pajewski, Wendy Phillips, Christina Pitsenberger, Michelle Rindos, Dean Tistadt

**Guests:** Debbie Baker, Judy Gardner, Matt Haas, Lani Hoza, Ashby Kindler, Rolf Mann, Meghan Parsons, Lori Reaser, Jay Thomas, BJ Santos, Julie Strong, John Werner, Amy Wright

### Homework

After welcoming and thanking all for attending, Dr. Haas explained the history of the homework issue with the health advisory board.

This has been an ongoing discussion due to concerns about the health impact of too much homework and student stress, related sleep deprivation and the fact that high achieving students have no time from the end of eighth grade until graduation from high school without an assignment looming over them.

The goal of this discussion was to bring teachers, principals and the health advisory board together in an effort to set the stage for the development of division-wide expectations regarding homework including summer assignments. The ultimate goal is to develop guidelines for reasonable amounts of homework that will both foster optimal learning and be health promoting. Committees have already been created to work on establishing best practices. This discussion was to help inform the committees of the various perspectives of stakeholders.

Dr. Balaban explained the perspective of pediatricians who are seeing children and adolescents with symptoms of stress and are concerned about the deleterious health effects of sleep deprivation.

Points made include:

- There needs to be a balance in the needs of the amount and quality of homework for students to be academically successful with consideration of students' overall health.
- Too much structured homework leaves little time for exercise and creativity.
- European students have as much or more homework but shorter school days.
- The amount and pace of assignments for AP courses are standard and determined by the College Board. Syllabuses must be submitted for quality control and accreditation. Some courses dictate 10 hours a week of homework.
- There seems to be great variability across courses but also for the same course with different teachers.
- Teachers feel competing demands with other subjects.
- Some teachers feel they take into consideration other subjects and are flexible with timing and volume of assignments, but feel other teachers are less flexible.
- Some teachers give loose deadlines, which seems to help students budget homework time across different subjects.
- There has been a noticeable push to offer more AP and higher level courses with more students taking these classes.
- Is anybody looking at the big picture of the total amount of work and pressure on the whole student including life outside of school?
- Is there any tracking to determine the yield from assignments? For example, is there a demonstrable gain from history outlines?

- Guidance counselors try to advise students to not take too many AP courses, particularly if they are involved in other activities.
- Different students take different amounts of time to finish assignments.
- Teachers are concerned that they have to cover more content with decreased instructional hours.
- Teachers are teaching more classes with more students without more time.
- Not all AP courses are alike. There is variability in the number of credits. AP History is particularly dense.
- The input of the gifted resource teacher ought to be enlisted to help decide appropriate course level placement.
- It is not just the AP students who are stressed by school and homework. Many students across ability levels need help learning to cope with school stress.
- There are health concerns associated with students being forced to sit for 8 to 9 hours a day between travel, school and homework.
- It seems like students in both the lowest and highest level courses get support, but the majority of students in the middle do not.
- ACPS is often compared to highly regarded schools like Maggie Walker and Thomas Jefferson whose school day is 7 periods versus ACPS's 8.
- Need to develop best practice standards with what works.
- The College Board does not recommend AP courses for 9<sup>th</sup> graders because they may not be developmentally ready for the workload.
- Should schools be held to standards such as 10 minutes of homework pre grade?
- What is the overall goal of homework?
- What is the cost benefit of summer homework?
- What is the return on investment?
- Where is the optimal point beyond which increased homework produces diminishing returns?
- How valid is the philosophy that increased homework at each grade level prepares the student for the next level?
- What is the developmental and age appropriate amount of homework?
- How can we ensure homework is relevant and meaningful as opposed to busy work?
- Homework itself does not cause stress; it is work with mysterious feedback.
- Students and their families need homework holidays.
- Should out-of-the-box concepts be considered such as year-round school and eliminating grade levels to allow students to allow to progress at their own pace based on mastery and skill level?
- Students need rejuvenation periods such as those in the European model.
- Find the success stories and try to model those.
- Students spend 9% of their lives in school, but they are learning in less formal ways all of the time.