

**Communications Committee of the Region 9 Board of Education
Special Meeting
Joel Barlow High School ~ Administration Conference Room
September 19, 2011
9:00 a.m.
Minutes**

Attendance: Abrams, Karvelis (Chair), Macchio, Rosenthal,
Administration: Cram, Josefsberg, McMorrان, Pin
Guests: Jen Wastrom, PTSA

I. Call to Order

Mr. Karvelis called the meeting to order at 9:04 am

II. Approval of Minutes

The minutes of May 23, 2011 were reviewed. Ms. Rosenthal moved for approval of the minutes and Mr. Karvelis seconded. Two voted in favor and one abstained.

III. Public Comment

Ms. Wastrom stated that the PTSA has three volunteers to organize the communications function for next year. Dr. McMorrان asked the group if there have been any comments on the parent's portal opening on Power School. He said that it will open soon. Ms. Wastrom said she has not heard anything. Mr. Karvelis asked that Power School item be on this committee's agenda in the future.

IV. Discussion and Possible Action

A/B. Website Upgrades and Change in Vendors

Ms. Cram reported that both the Easton and Redding Boards of Education (and administrations of the lower and middle schools) were given a presentation on the Finals site website. The webmasters of the Region 9 district schools supported Finals site. Although duly impressed, the Easton and Redding boards requested to review two other web companies (Edline and PowerIT) and have additional time to study the attributes of all. All three website companies provide services within schools throughout the tri-state region. Mrs. Cram is setting up demonstrations of Edline and PowerIT for any Board, committee or community member interested in attending. (see attached Update on Websites by Mrs. Cram)

C. Review Communications Plan

Dr. McMorrان recently fulfilled a request to attend and make a presentation about JBHS at a Ridgefield Board of Realtors meeting. Discussion ensued on communicating with local employers and senior citizen centers in the region. Mr. McMorrان discussed that he and his staff have been studying different concepts of what constitutes a "learning" environment (not exclusively classrooms). He said he has begun identifying key resources 5, 10 and 15 miles from JBHS that

can be tied into particular classes. Ms. Wastrom suggested that the League of Woman Voters be tapped into to identify or make contact with these learning partners in the corporate and non-profit settings. There was also discussion on job shadowing. Ms. Rosenthal said she would look into possible arrangements with local healthcare institutions and report back at the next meeting.

Finally, the group discussed having JBHS administrators meet with the parents (perhaps through a PTA event) of children in 4th or 5th grade, as well as continuing to meet with the middle school, to better understand the needs and types of students matriculating forward.

V. Public Comment

None.

VI. Committee Member Comment

Mr. Karvelis asked how the three districts can collaborate more fully on communications issues. Dr. Josefsberg suggested creating a Tri-Board Communications Committee. This would require an organizational change and vote by each of the three Boards and possibly, other legal agreements. A Tri-Board committee will allow more collaborative communication planning within the district and more efficient decision-making. The committee thought it was a great idea. Dr. Josefsberg will introduce the organizational proposal to each of the three Boards, beginning with the Region 9 Board at its BOE meeting on September 20th.

Ms. Wastrom agreed to attend this committee's meetings, per Mr. Karvelis' request.

Mr. Karvelis asked Drs. McMorran and Josefsberg to review the current communications plan and report back at the next meeting.

VI. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

Update on Web sites – Review of Programs for Future Purchase September, 2011

Where are we now?

At a joint meeting of the Easton and Redding Boards of Education in June 2011 following a presentation of Finalsite, Board members expressed they would like to have more time to look at Finalsite and other Web site programs. Members of the Easton and Redding Boards of Education met with some school administrators; Peggy Sullivan, Director of Finance & Operations; and Vicki Cram, Central Office Human Resources Coordinator and Webmaster for an additional presentation by Finalsite at the end of June. Board members asked Vicki Cram to investigate other vendors and develop a product and cost analysis for future consideration. It should be noted the Region 9 Board of Education approved the purchase of Finaliste at their May 2011 Board meeting but will be included in the review of other products.

Over the summer, several vendors were contacted and reviewed. Area schools were contacted regarding their experience with their Web site service provider, and the field has been narrowed to three that meet our needs: Edline, Finalsite and PowerIT. Web demonstrations of Edline and PowerIT will be set up by the end of September. Board members, administrators and Webmasters will be invited to attend. If anyone would like to see another presentation by Finalsite, it will also be set up.

What are we looking for?

1. A web-based product that will allow easy access for updating and will allow assignment of various pages of the school and central office Web sites to other staff members for updating. This will eliminate dependence on the school and central office Webmasters for updating. All Webmasters agree this is a need and welcome the change.
2. A product that will address parent concerns for a unified, professional look across the K-12 schools that will allow more ease of navigation. Current frustrations are that parents have to re-learn how to navigate school Web sites when their child moves from elementary to middle school and then from middle to high school.
3. A product that will be technologically sound, reliable, secure, compatible with all types of users (Macs, PCs; mobile devices), and will offer solid support and training.
4. A product that will also include communication tools that will upgrade our current Listserv. A product that will include e-mail, text messaging and voice reach in sending communications to parents, students and staff members.
5. A product that will replace our current K-8 teacher Webpage program which is unreliable (freezes, limited in functionality).
6. A product that will allow teacher Webpages to include blogging, messaging to parents/students; posting of online lessons/learning capabilities
7. A product that will allow password-protected pages for posting of bus routes, curriculum documents and lesson plans, human resources communications and forms.
8. A product that will be integrated with PowerSchool.
9. A product that will include an improved calendar feature that will send alerts when events are added, changed or cancelled.
10. A product that will allow posting of videos and other types of multimedia without compromising server capacity.

Next Steps:

1. Web demonstrations by vendors to audience identified above.
2. Completion of product/cost analysis to be presented to the Communications Committees of each of the three Boards
3. Presentation at the October/November Board meetings for discussion and possible action
4. Design and implementation - all three vendors state that it will take approximately two months to launch.

Prepared by Vicki Cram