SBDM Council Session

Date: December 12, 2011

Location: McNabb Library

Members Present: Russell Halsey
Tracey Miller
Patricia Kilbourn
Arleen Vice
Glen Greene

Members not in attendance: Shelly Roberts

Also Present: Mr. Josh Powell
Staff members
Parents

Call to Order

The McNabb Middle School Site Based Decision Making Council met in regular session Monday December 12, 2011. Mr. Halsey called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. Mr. Halsey made an announcement that we want everyone to have the opportunity to speak and be heard.

Approval of Agenda

Call to Order
Set Agenda
Hearing of Parents/Citizens/Community members
Review of minutes from November 17, 2011 meeting

Old Business
- Activity budget update
- Board budget update

New Business
- Builders Club is hosting a retired McNabb teachers breakfast Dec. 13, 2011
- The youth service center needs donations of clothing in all sizes, especially jeans
- Bookfair update – total profit was $1516 (down $700 from last year)
- Choir had 8th grade veterans day concert
- New policies in effect (calling home when absent)
- Dress code
Set Agenda

Mr. Halsey made a motion to set a special meeting session of the SBDM council to approve the new schedule changes at some point before we return to school on Jan. 3, 2011. The council decided to set that date and time after the hearing of parents and citizens. Mr. Halsey made a motion to add “schedule changes” to the agenda and a motion that the council officially request some personnel positions. Ms. Vice made a motion to accept the agenda with the changes, Ms. Miller seconded the motion. The motion was approved by consensus.

Approval of Minutes

The council will review the minutes after the hearing of the parents and community members.

Hearing of Parents/citizens/Community Members

Mr. Halsey stated that he was going to talk and explain some things that he would like to see us accomplish as a school and a community and then we will open the floor up for discussion. Mr. Halsey said he will stay as long as needed to meet with parents one-on-one after the meeting and give you the opportunity to voice your concern. He made his cell phone and email known and stated that he wants to be accessible to the parents. He said that he knows you guys (parents) have heard we are looking at schedule changes – and we are looking at some adjustments – and nobody likes to make schedule changes in the middle of the school year. This has been a year of changes and there have been several versions of the schedule and we did the best we could at those times. He made an announcement to please not take anything he says in a negative way – everybody did the best they could with the perimeters they were given to work with. We can do a lot better for our children and that is what he is most concerned with and he is glad you are here this evening and you come right after your children (in importance). The best possible decisions we as a council and we as a community can make for our kids is what has to happen. Some of what we are currently doing is not in the best interest of the children and that has to change. There are 1100 children in age range from 11-15 and the way we are dealing with transitions right now is we ring the bell and we turn 1100 students loose to change classes – that is similar to a high school type schedule. There needs to be some type of control. Example: two kids, one larger kid was studying for his drivers test and right beside him there was an 11 year old playing with his Pokémon cards. That is too much difference. Class sizes are important and we have not gotten class size down enough – if you don’t get it to 17 or 18 then it does not make much of an impact. You have to trust us – you send your most precious thing in the world to us every day. The other thing and probably why most of you are here is because maybe something I said was taken out of context – but that we are doing away with accelerated classes. I do not personally like the term acceleration. There are some students that can do deeper, broader, and faster than others and there are some kids that need extra support. We all would not progress through material at the same rate. I am all for flexibility and
regrouping people with like interests and similar abilities so we can make some progress. My son is an 8th grade student in geometry at Johnson County – why are we not offering that in our building. Acceleration is NOT just giving more homework. That is a punishment for being intelligent. Acceleration is NOT saying, well you are a 7th grader but we are going to give you an 8th grade book – you create gaps in knowledge. Acceleration is challenging the children to problem solve and foster higher level thinking. We have to do what is in the best interest of every single child. All the students have different needs – we have some students that are talented in math and struggle in other areas. When I look at the grades among our students I see that we have students that are on the “accelerated” path that are not being successful. That means one of two things – that we didn’t do a good job of identifying those children and they truly were not ready for success at that level or we are not doing a really good job providing the education and support to ensure their success. How do you have a “D” on an accelerated track? We have a number of those and that can’t happen. We the staff have to provide the support but what we have is not working for the children. I am trying to choose the words very carefully because when speaking to a group sometimes things get taken out of context. I want you to leave here and tell your neighbors and friends that I will talk to you. From what I have seen and what the kids have said to him, he thinks we can do a lot better. In the new schedule – basically we don’t have it all worked out yet – but we have worked to come up with the best possible scenario for the children. I work for you guys – the parents – that does not mean we will always agree. In looking at the test scores we are one of the bottom schools in the state of Kentucky. We are going to be great together, we are not going to get everything right and sometimes you will be aggravated with me, but we as a group – the council – are making the best decisions possible for the kids. The schedule will provide 4 core classes per day (math, language arts, science, social studies) and 2 co-cur classes (band, art, music) and what we will call an enrichment period RTI. For students who are on a “college bound” track and help foster higher level thinking – our airport has a direct connection to this building and it is the 5th busiest airport in the state of Kentucky – why are we not putting kids on a school bus and taking them to the airport or bringing pilots here to talk to the kids. We are spending 40 minutes per day just during transitions – we are going to get that time back and use it to help foster higher level thinking or use that time to help students who need a little extra help. It will work and it can work. I don’t want us to be the school I can from – we are McNabb. We have so much to build on. I came out of a school that was the #3 middle school in the state of Kentucky. I am telling you what I am saying we CAN do is what they do every day. Those children are no smarter than ours. I went through all the numbers and it hit me last night that I needed our explorer scores. Explorer is a test given at the beginning of 8th grade – it is the beginning of the ACT test. I have the results right here. At the end of that test the students filled out a survey that asked what kind of classes they are taking now and what kind of classes they will take in high school. The questions group the students results based on those answers – basically those students on an accelerated track and those students not on an accelerated track. Which group do you think has the best ACT scores? The NON ACCELERATED students outperformed our so called accelerated group on every content area except math and in math the accelerated group only outperformed by 2 points.

Mr. Powell wanted to add a little bit to that. Accelerated classes is the equivalent of gifted and state averages are around 3-5% of students but in this district and this school we have 35% of students on an accelerated track. The way to get into these classes in the past has varied from testing and the majority from parent recommendations. When you have that (from a teacher’s perspective) we
have some validity problems. We are trying to present high level instruction to a wide range of ability levels in one class and what happens, and it is the worst thing that could happen in education, is the material gets diluted to the “middle” or average ability of the class. The big question is why has this happened for so long and I don’t want to answer that but I can say that we have new leadership here and the council has the courage to stand up and do what is right.

Mr. Halsey – the kids are going to have transitions and most of their questions have come back to friends and socialization. Socialization is a big deal at this age and I understand that. The way this schedule will work they will have more structured time to socialize. What you send them to us for is an education and to be productive members of society. If we didn’t think we could make some serious academic gains between now and May then we would just wait until summer.

Parents and community:

1. I have a question – how is the plan you are going to implement compare to higher performing schools? It is very similar to the school I came out of Johnson county and very similar to Union county. Union county did a change mid-year and I have had in depth conversations with them as well. Mr. Powell: We have not labeled ourselves as a Title I school – but if we were labeled that way then we would be a tier 5 school and we would be legally required to make changes. We did not meet one academic goal for the no child left behind program. If we were going to wait until the end of the year that would tell you we have personnel problems.

2. Are we going back to teams? We are going back to a team type concept. We must have teams in middle school and we are going to do it the right way. Teams concept are how you eliminate the kid with the drivers manual and the kid with the Pokémon cards hanging out together.

3. Will they have new teachers and will they have their new schedules before Christmas? I hope so and we are trying our very best. I would love to do a trial run testing the last couple of days before break. I cannot promise we will have the schedules but if not there will be a day over the break when the schedules will be available for pick up. What I can promise is if you have a particular request I would love to hear it.

4. Last year we had teams – what is going to be the difference between last year and this new schedule? What is going to be different is I am here and the teachers are empowered and it will work. Every high performing middle school has some concept of teams. The grown-ups have more ownership of that group of children and the children feel more ownership of that group of grown-ups. We cannot continue to fail the kids in Montgomery County.

5. Where will the teachers start? That is a good question and we are going to have gaps, we are setting up for failure instead of success. As hard as it is going to be, we can’t say we are not going to do it. It won’t be easier to do it later and we have to get it started.

6. Are students are going to be mixed – every level in class from low to medium to advanced – with that being said my child is advanced and I don’t want to see my child being a tutor in those classes. I agree – I am good with group work and mixed ability group work but I will not put up with children teaching other kids. I am good with collaborative learning. Also those college bound students will be regrouped throughout the day to work on higher level thinking.
7. How are the teachers trained to teach at a higher level? Will they be doing PD? They will have intensive PD. We have wonderful teachers and given the training and support they are going to do great things for your children.

8. College professional students need typing skills and note taking skills and we don’t currently offer that. Can you give me to Jan. 3rd (to get these things started)? I agree that students need these skills and we are working on providing this type of training. The teachers expect the kids to take notes with the Cornell method. Every child needs note taking skills. It would be nice to have some of these skills taught so all the children start with the basic knowledge they need.

9. Since we are downsizing “accelerated” and we will be challenging every student appropriately – are they going to be starting the correct way to accelerate the kids in elementary? We are all on the same there and I was in meetings with elementary school principals all day. We are having conversations daily. We are identifying this group in 4th grade and once you are in – you are in – and not just math but all accelerated programs and that is not true for almost anyone.

10. How are you going to determine who is in accelerated classes because it does not seem fair to only base it on tests, some kids might not test well or they may not feel good that day. I understand and I will consider a parent recommendation – that does not mean just parent recommendation – I also realize that if we don’t train that child to test well then they will not do well on the ACT. We can test again.

11. Parents need to be involved but you continue to have meetings at 5:00 p.m. and parents work and we cannot get here and some people work in Lexington – and the meetings need to be held later in the evening. I understand schedule conflicts and we will consider this in future meetings.

12. Lack of information is a huge problem and my child was very upset about not knowing what is going to happen. We will do a better job of communicating. I am big about communicating that is why I wanted my information written on that board. Parent: you want our support please tell us what you are doing and why you are doing it as long as I understand. Whatever happened to communication? Halsey: Teachers and I talked about it and I would not have addressed that until the letter went out but children in the accelerated classes were all upset and I wanted to address the students. That is why I made sure the one call went out and if it doesn’t get better call me.

13. You should have had the meeting before you told the students – why didn’t you do that? I would have loved to and I did not want to talk to the students until tomorrow. However the students found out – the students found out Friday – it had to come from a teacher but I am not looking to point fingers. I found out Friday afternoon that students had concerns and had problems. I did not want to send the students home and have kids thinking “well Mr. Halsey won’t even talk to us about this” – in theory this meeting would have happened first and I would have talked to the students tomorrow.

14. For the students that are in accelerated classes that really don’t belong there, the parents know and the teachers know and by doing it that way it has watered down the content being taught to the whole accelerated class to the middle level. For those students that are distinguished, how do we not water that down for those students? In the enrichment time we can regroup those kids and during one of their co-cur classes we will provide opportunities. Parent: how do we do that if they already have co-cur classes? Halsey: Ok, band, chorus,
orchestra will not change. Some kids might have to make a choice on the second co-cur.

Parent: I have already invested several hundred dollars for these. Halsey: That will not change then. If your child is accelerated in math then we can pull them out of math class and send them to Algebra I. We may do something different for her child than we do for your child. If you are in band and chorus those are important and we are going to find a way to meet the needs. Why not do some things in small groups and even let some students work out in the hallway in groups?

15. Since we are doing major changes will central office be bringing over people to help to get this off the ground instead of limping around until the end of the school year? And regrouping during the day, does that mean all math classes will go on at the same time? Mr. Powell: these things that we are talking about are all ideas from really high performing schools. We don’t want to be in this situation but we are in the bottom 20% in the state. It will not be perfect because we are doing it mid-year but we can teak it at the end of the year.

Halsey: None of our co-cur classes’ support core content and we need to change that. (a parent mentioned how great the engineering class was)

16. Were those explorer scores last year or an average of a number of years? These were last years and it goes back to 2010 and the trend is exactly the same. There was a discussion again about the accelerated classes’ content being watered down with our current situation.

17. A parent spoke up and wanted to hear the teachers’ opinions about all the changes. Vice: she is all for it and she thinks that is the #1 reason that our school has not succeeded in the past. If we truly have 35% accelerated students then our school should be #1 in the state. If they are not ready to be there then we need to put them where they need to be and take it from there.

18. How much input are the teachers going to have? I have tried to involve the teachers as much as possible, and tomorrow morning they will be a lot more involved. We won’t let any teachers hand pick their group of kids. They are professionals and we need to trust them to make decisions.

19. Ms. Kilbourn had a comment “As a 6th grade teacher I am in a different situation because I have the new students that come in from the elementary schools. I have two accelerated classes. I truly have children that belong in there – they do very well and they are extremely bright and gifted and they will get it. On the flip side of that I have a large number of students who don’t get it very well who struggle and then get very upset because they have never gotten below an A in math and all of a sudden they have a C in my class and their parents are going to kill them according to them. It is a tough situation. When you have those students who are coming from 5th grade and going into a 6th grade accelerated math class is put them in a class where we are going to teach them 7th grade content. The state of Kentucky tells me that I have 6th grade core content that I am supposed to teach these children and they are not getting it in the elementary schools and they are not getting it in the 7th grade content. They are missing an entire year of math, then when they do go on they get more and more frustrated and they could have been the brightest math student all along but there are so many gaps and missing content some of them are ready to pull their hair out. I truly believe the best answer is to teach the content that the state of Kentucky recommends and if they get it then that is up to me to dig deeper into what they need to learn for higher level thinking. I have an activity that I have done with students that they have to figure out what is the best buy of French fries, you may not think that is higher level thinking but it is.
They have to bring them in and count and measure and what is the best value for their money. To go into those activities in greater detail is more beneficial than putting them in a class that is accelerated.

Mr. Halsey stated that he will stay as long as needed if anyone would like to speak with him or has any concerns they would like to voice.

Mr. Halsey spoke with community members and students for a bit while people were leaving.

**Old Business**

(Activity Budget)

Mr. Glen Greene made a motion to accept the budget – Ms. Miller seconded. The motion was approved by consensus.

**Board Budget**

Mr. Glen Greene made a motion to accept the budget – Ms. Miller seconded. The motion was approved by consensus.

**New Business**

(Set date for special session)

The council agreed to meet on Monday December 19th at 5:00 p.m. in special session to review and approve the new schedule.

(Personnel)

Mr. Halsey stated that with the creation of the alternative program that we need some additional staff. We need two things to meet the needs of the alternative program and today Mr. Powell agreed that we could have two different people to fill positions that will be half time at McNabb and half time at the alternative school. This will be at zero cost to McNabb and will not come out of our allocation but we need to formally request the positions. Mr. Greene made a motion to request these positions, Ms. Vice seconded the motion. The motion was approved by consensus.

Also, Ms. Day has accepted a position in Indianapolis to be closer to her family. Her letter of resignation is effective Friday December 30, 2011. Mr. Halsey fully supports the release from her contract because this is truly what is best for her. Mr. Greene made a motion to accept Ms. Day’s resignation, Ms. Vice seconded the motion. The motion was approved by consensus.
Dress code

Mr. Halsey said we will address the dress code at a later time; we just have issues that are more pressing at this time. Informational purposes only.

New policies

There is a new procedure that when a student is absent we are having a person make a phone call to the home to find out why the student is not at school and keep logs of this information. It is good to call home but really the system needs to be a little more focused on the students that need that support. Informational purposes only.

Adjourn

Ms. Arleen vice made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Glen Greene seconded the motion. The motion was approved by consensus. The meeting was adjourned at 6:55 p.m.