



Updates from *Marcia Asdal*, a Chester Representative to the West Morris Regional Board of Education

April 22nd & May 14th meetings
marcia.asdal@gmail.com

Note: This document is not an official record of any meeting; it is an informal dissemination of information by a private citizen. This information is a matter of public record and any views herein are mine alone and not necessarily those of any other Board member.

In this issue...

- Read about the **board's self-evaluation**—pages 2 and 3.
- View the results of Newsweek's and US News' **rankings**—page 4.
- Check out some quick school **labor stats**—page 5.
- Read a provocative **article** about how schools can stretch their tax dollars—page 6.



- Starting in September 2012, the Board will conduct **committee work session meetings** in the months where it is scheduled to meet twice—September, October, February and April. A public comment period will be included in these work sessions.
- The ad hoc Communications and Curriculum committees have been made standing committees, joining the existing Negotiations, Finance and Policy committees. The **Strategic Improvement Plan** is a new ad hoc committee. These will be in force until the reorganization meeting in January 2013.
- The Board approved 108 hours total at \$39.18/hour for guidance counselors to conduct a **longitudinal study of our district's recent graduates**. The work will be completed before June 20, 2012 and will gather data about college achievement, and subsequent employment. This information will be gathered mainly by phone conversations with district families.

The Board works with a representative from the *NJ School Boards' Association* every year to set their **district and board goals**. The following points were developed at the May 14th meeting.

District goals:

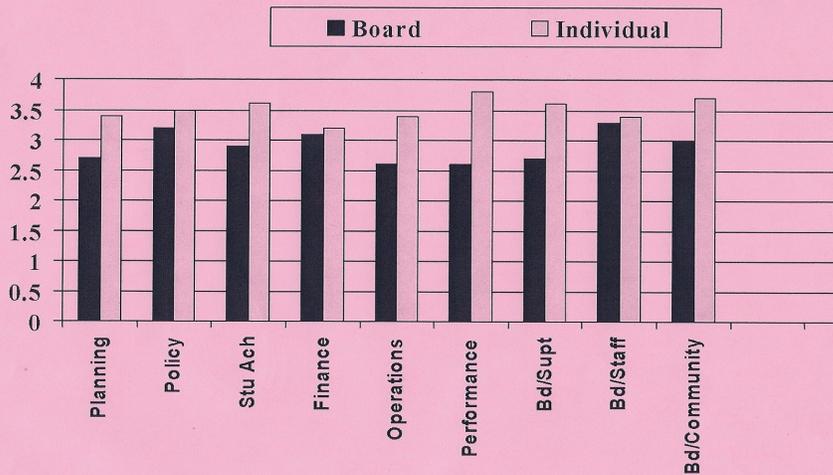
- Define student achievement and work toward those metrics.
- Define state-mandated staff evaluations and implement them.
- Update the curriculum to align with core content standards.

Board goals:

- Reorganize committee structure to support district goals.
- Develop strategic improvement plan.
- Evaluate the superintendent by April 30, 2013.
- Communicate with legislators and municipal governing bodies.



West Morris 2011-2012 Self-Evaluation



Our Board recently underwent an online **self-evaluation**; all nine members participated. The aggregate results show that individual board members rated themselves more highly in each category than they did the board as a whole, leading to the conclusion that the **board does not have a sense of trust in each other**. (See the next page for selected results.) Board members were allowed to add clarifying comments to their responses during the self-evaluation; a sampling is listed below.

I recognize that in the following comments I am perceived as one of the troublesome board members. This is disappointing that my propensity to question the status quo in hopes of a better regional district is viewed as a roadblock. I hope that going forward my work ethic and goal of increasing student academic achievement will be viewed as an asset.

Read the entire self-evaluation [here](#).

General comments:

- Mutual trust and respect are virtually non-existent on this board.
- Agenda based board members (2) are always on the ethics violation line. Boards of education need a positive way to control the out of control board members.
- The board's review of district performance amounts to little more than anecdotal, self-congratulatory hyperbole. There is no objective analysis or real focus on opportunities for improvement.
- Our job is not to run the district, but to make sure it is run as efficiently as possible. Micro-management should not be a role of the board.
- We have two board members whose personal agendas interfere with the board and the district.

“Recognizing that our board’s highest priority is to improve student achievement, what are the three major challenges currently facing our district?”

- Successfully implement new state-required **teacher evaluation systems**
- Identify areas of **curriculum weakness** and address them in a timely manner
- Monitor **student achievement goals** and progress at the Board level.
- Interference from narrow minded, self-serving politicians in league with some members of similar ilk.
- **Consensus-building** and collaboration on the board
- **Responsiveness** to the community
- Adjusting to the **financial climate** in the state
- Collecting, analyzing and utilizing **data**

2012 Board Self-Evaluation (selected results)

	Commendable	Good	Adequate	Unsatisfactory	Not Observed
--	-------------	------	----------	----------------	--------------

Board Performance

Board as a whole: Works together in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect.

0	1	2	5	1
---	---	---	---	---

As an individual board member: Is respectful of everyone at meetings and listens with an open mind.

7	2	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---

Board Operations

Board as a whole: Develops and uses skills in teamwork, consensus building, collaborative problem solving and decision making.

0	2	1	6	0
---	---	---	---	---

As an individual board member: Recognize the importance of teamwork.

8	0	1	0	0
---	---	---	---	---

Board and Community

Board as a whole: Has an effective community relations program.

0	3	5	1	0
---	---	---	---	---

As an individual board member: Make decisions based on what's best for every child in the district.

7	2	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---

Planning

Board as a whole: Reviews action plans developed to support the goals & regularly monitors progress.

3	2	1	3	0
---	---	---	---	---

As an individual board member: Support the district's vision.

7	1	1	0	0
---	---	---	---	---

Student Achievement

Board as a whole: Requires systematic evaluation of and feedback on the instructional program.

3	1	1	4	0
---	---	---	---	---

As an individual board member: Focus on improving student achievement.

9	0	0	0	0
---	---	---	---	---



U.S. News & World Report released their [annual list](#) of the **Best High Schools.**

They independently examined 21,776 public high schools, using data from 2009-2010.

- **Reading and math results** for all students on their state’s high school proficiency tests were examined.
- **“College readiness” index** was computed based on AP or IB participation rate and how well the students did on those tests. The test that was taken by the most students—either AP or IB—was used to calculate the index.



Newsweek’s national [rankings](#) consist of self-reported information from public high schools using **2010-2011 academic year data.**

About 15,000 schools were contacted; 2,300 responded. In 2012 Newsweek listed 74 ranked schools; in 2011 there were 36. There are 485 high schools in NJ.

The ranking consists of six components:

- 25%—Four-year on time graduation rate.
- 25%—Percent of 2011 graduates who enrolled immediately in either a 2- or 4-year college.
- 25%—AP/IB tests taken per student.
- 10%—Average SAT and/or ACT scores.
- 10%—Average AP/IB scores.
- 5%—AP/IB courses offered per student.

School	 NJ (national) 2010-2011 data	 Avg. AP score (2010-11)	 Avg. SAT score (2010-11)	 NJ (national) 2009-2010 data	 AP/IB participation (2009-10)	 AP/IB pass rate (2009-10)
Millburn	#4 (#83)	4.3	1851	#12 (#214)	63% AP	91% AP
Ridge	#8 (#140)	4.0	1750	#8 (#174)	65% AP	93% AP
Bernards	#12 (#169)	3.7	1705	Unranked	51% AP	80% AP
Chatham	#14 (#183)	3.7	1748	#7 (#173)	64% AP	96% AP
Mtn. Lakes	#17 (#207)	3.6	1764	#22 (#388)	55% AP	86% AP
Central	#20 (#226)	3.6	1659	Unranked	39% AP 39% IB	86% AP 88% IB
Summit	#22 (#251)	3.8	1720	#25 (#425)	55% AP	83% AP
Livingston	#23 (#253)	4.2	1725	#32 (#605)	44% AP	93% AP
Madison	#25 (#276)	3.9	1700	#29 (#502)	52% AP	82% AP
Mendham	#30 (#291)	3.3	1703	#33 (#632)	31% AP 45% IB	89% AP 87% IB



Quick School Labor Stats

April 2012, as compiled by NJ School Boards' Association

Salary Guide Averages, New Jersey		
BA Minimum, 2010-11: \$47,564	BA Minimum, 2011-12: \$48,341	BA Minimum, 2012-13: \$48,828
BA Maximum, 2010-11: \$77,539	BA Maximum, 2011-12: \$78,517	BA Maximum, 2012-13: \$78,952
# of steps, BA, 2010-11: 16	# of steps, BA, 2011-12: 16	# of steps, BA, 2012-13: 17
MA Minimum, 2010-11: \$51,218	MA Minimum, 2011-12: \$51,888	MA Minimum, 2012-13: \$52,342
MA Maximum, 2010-11: \$82,200	MA Maximum, 2011-12: \$83,042	MA Maximum, 2012-13: \$83,554
# of steps, MA, 2010-11: 16	# of steps, MA, 2011-12: 16	# of steps, MA, 2012-13: 17

Board Achievements

Percentage of NJ districts reporting:
(contracts covering 2011-2012)

- Any type of giveback/achievement: **75%**
- Health insurance cost containment: **48%**
- Achievements in work time: **19%**
- Achievements in compensation/salary guide: **27%**
- Participating in School Employees Health Benefit Program as of 4/1/09: **39%** as of 12/1/2011: **53%**
- Offering the option for employees to "buy-up" to plan other than base plan: **20%**
- Offering a different level of coverage and/or a different health plan for new employees: **35%**
- Offering a monetary incentive to waive basic health coverage: **64%**



Percentage of NJ districts
(contracts covering 2011-2012):

Average length of contract work year: 185 days Shortest: 182 days Longest: 190 days

% of districts offering payment for **unused sick leave**: 98% % with capped payments: 71%

% of districts offering payment for **unused personal leave**: 79% % with capped payments: 67%





“Stretching the School District Dollar”

Michael Petrilli, Exec. VP at *Thomas B. Fordham Institute*, April 19, 2012

“Tight budgets should encourage districts to spend smartly and stretch funds, rather than harm education with shortsighted cuts.”

In his article excerpted below, Mr. Petrilli outlines some ways school districts can dramatically **increase productivity and cut costs**.

Aim for a leaner, more productive, better paid workforce.

It’s next to impossible to cut costs without letting some people go. But the answer isn’t just to lay off teachers and let class sizes rise. In the last two decades, school systems have hired instructional coaches, teachers’ aides, program administrators, support staff, counselors, psychiatrists, specialists. Redefining these roles—and those of classroom teachers—provides great opportunities for increased productivity. **Districts should consider:**

Asking classroom teachers to take on additional responsibility in return for greater pay. Can they do without aides? Handle larger classes (or student loads)? Take on mentoring roles along with classroom instruction? Where these additional responsibilities enable the system to operate with fewer staff, the system can justify higher pay while still realizing savings.

Eliminating some ancillary positions. Can districts manage with fewer specialists, instructional coaches, teachers’ aides, support staff, and the like? If classroom teachers can take on some of these jobs, not only will this save on salaries (some of which could be reallocated to bonuses or salary enhancements for teachers), it will save dramatically on benefits.

Redesigning their approach to special education. Many of the specialists that districts have hired in recent decades serve special populations—mostly students with disabilities but also English language learners. Districts should consider whether their approaches to educating these high-need students are as cost-effective as they could be. For example, if a district uses a “co-teaching” model with regular teacher and a special education teacher in the same classroom—which is hugely expensive—could it try a pull-out approach instead? Or if the best model has these students staying in the classroom, could the extra services be provided over the summer, or after school?

Pay for productivity. The best way to increase productivity is to ask fewer people to do more work in order to get better results. And they should be compensated fairly for it through a **more aggressive salary schedule**. Teachers improve dramatically in their first few years on the job, and their salaries should rise dramatically along with their effectiveness—reaching the maximum base salary much sooner. This would help with retention of young teachers, and with raising student achievement, while eliminating the spiked pay at the end of a career that drives up pension obligations.

Prioritize salaries over benefits. Every dollar going into health insurance is a dollar that can’t go into higher salaries. Plans should be redesigned so that employees have more skin in the game—and incentives to keep their own healthcare costs down. Co-pays, employee premiums, out-of-network fees, and the rest should be brought into line with what workers in the private sector expect.

Rather than hope for revenue increases that are unlikely to materialize, smart leaders can turn the present budget crisis into an opportunity.

The entire article can be viewed [here](#).

