

A workshop session of the Dover School Board was called to order by Chairperson Marjorie Fisher on Monday, April 18, 2005, at 7:00 p.m. in Council Chambers.

**A. ROLL CALL:** Members present were Carolyn Mebert, Dorothea Hooper, Audra Lurvey, Marjorie Fisher, Kara Winton, and Doris Grady. Heather Orion-Hindle was absent.

Also present were Superintendent John O'Connor; Garrison School Principal, Dennis Bentley; Woodman Park School Principal, Anne Watson; Horne Street School Principal, Barbara Szabunka; Curriculum Director, Dr. Murray Ingraham; and Marcus Weisgerber, *Foster's*.

**B. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE:** Marjorie Fisher let the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**C. CITIZEN'S FORUM:** No one addressed the Board.

**D. GRADES 1 & 2 REPORT CARD APPROVAL:** Superintendent O'Connor explained that Dr. Ingraham had been laboring for over a year, working with elementary teachers and principals, to develop report cards for grades 1 & 2 that are reflective of "the kinds of things going on in the classrooms." He explained that the impetus for this review were comments from teachers who felt "the existing report cards were not reflective of the curriculum." The draft report cards being presented this evening are currently being used in grades 1 & 2. Dr. Ingraham is collecting feedback in order to fine-tune the final product.

Dr. Ingraham stated that his goal was to align the K-4 report cards with the curriculum adoptions (Scholastics and Everyday Math). He noted that Anne Watson provided a report card template from her last position in Connecticut that had been recently updated. One piece of feedback Dr. Ingraham has already received is that teachers feel it might be better to use the Everyday Math quarterly report as an attachment to report cards to report mathematics achievement. This quarterly report uses the symbols B (Beginning), D (Developing), and S (Secure) to record student performance and includes an area for teacher comments.

Kara Winton asked what would happen if a teacher did not complete all of the skills designated for a quarter in time for report cards. Dr. Ingraham stated they would enter "N/A" (not applicable) and explain in the comments section that the skill was not covered during that term. Ms. Winton noted that her school enters "see attached" to refer parents to the Everyday Math quarterly report and asked if the Dover report cards (or the envelopes in which they are sent home) would provide a definition for B, D, and S. Dr. Ingraham stated that they had talked about putting the definitions on the report card. Ms. Winton stated her opinion that "you need to do that."

Doris Grady questioned whether new kindergarten teachers would be provided with a skills list to indicate what would constitute a B, D, or S? Her concern was that teachers might interpret those benchmarks differently. Kara Winton explained that Everyday Math provides a rubric for B, D, and S and then she provided a brief definition for the use of each one. Ms. Grady asked if the definitions would be explained on the report card so parents could understand. Dr. Ingraham stated that would be done and explained that teachers also meet with parents at the end of Term 1 to go over the child's first report card. At that time, they answer any questions parents might have. Ms. Grady asked the elementary principals if they have had any issues or parent concerns reported to them. All three principals stated they had not and that there have not been any problems. Ms. Winton stated her belief that the definitions need to be in writing, as well as

discussed during the Term 1 conference. She cited the possibility of a student transferring to a district that did not use the B, D, and S rubric and that they would need that information.

Dorothea Hooper noted that the Grade 2 report card showed studied topic areas in social studies and stated her opinion that the Grade 1 report card should show those topic areas also.

Marjorie Fisher asked if the Grade 1 & 2 report card was being piloted at Horne Street School this year or if it was being used at all three elementary schools. Dr. Ingraham stated they were being used at all three schools. Ms. Fisher asked whether the draft report cards should have come before the Board prior to being implemented in all three schools. Dr. Ingraham and Superintendent O'Connor explained that, in the past, principals have been responsible for report cards as an administrative function. Dennis Bentley added that he had worked on many report card committees over the years and noted that people get very passionate – they get bogged down in their individual agendas. He stated that the School Board did make a policy on grading but that he did not recall any dialogue regarding the forms. Ms. Fisher stated that it would have been nice to know these changes were being made and again asked if any parents had reported questions or comments. All three elementary principals responded “no.” Ms. Lurvey noted that her daughter’s report card had come home with a letter from the teacher explaining the changes and that she had a parent/teacher conference one week later.

Doris Grady referred to a memo written by Dr. Ingraham dated September 7, 2004. It included an item to “Survey Dover parents concerning perception of the kindergarten program” and asked whether that survey included questions about the new report cards. Dr. Ingraham explained that the parent survey had not yet been sent and was in the draft stage. Ms. Grady noted that Dr. Ingraham’s timeline stated this would be done in November of 2004 and it is now April 2005. She asked how the Board could approve the new changes if there was no feedback or comments from administrators. Dr. Ingraham stated that during his time with the District, report cards have never come before the School Board for approval.

Carolyn Mebert asked if any Board member had received a parent complaint regarding the report cards being used. All Board members reported that they had not.

Superintendent O'Connor explained that Dr. Ingraham was working with a diverse group whose opinions “range from A to Z.” While working with these extremes, he is trying to capture things that are important in Language Arts, Science, Math, and Social Studies to convey information to parents in an effective way. Dr. O'Connor then suggested that Dr. Ingraham work with the principal’s help to get feedback from teachers who have used the report cards for 3 marking periods. He added that it might also be a good idea to send a note home to parents to ask for feedback. That information could be shared with teachers and all of the feedback could be brought back to the Board. He stated they could also work to revise the two drafts so that there are similarities between all grades, K-4.

Doris Grady stated her opinion that the new report cards were “not new and innovative.” She added that she has seen approximately 12 revisions of report cards to accommodate “every new fad.” Ms. Grady then asked if testing was being done to prove a child is where the report card states academically. Dr. O'Connor stated that every teacher should be able to show a parent evidence that their child is working at the reported level.

Dr. Mebert questioned whether it would be helpful to include “effort” for all categories to help the District better pinpoint problem “sub-areas.” Anne Watson shared her view that it might be tedious and frustrating for teachers to report at the sub-area levels and that she felt effort was “pretty consistent across each subject being reported.”

Kara Winton noted that there was no comments area under Term 1 on the Grade 2 report card. Dr. Ingraham agreed and stated he had feedback indicating grades 2 & 3 like the way the first grade report card is set up so theirs will be changed to add Term 1 comments.

Doris Grady asked whether the report cards could be formatted in the same way for all grades, printing subjects in the same location on the cards from grade to grade. She stated she felt it would be easier for parents to read them “from year to year” if they were consistent. Dr. Ingraham stated that was a good comment/idea.

Ms. Fisher asked what drove the changes from using “VG” (Very Good) to the new format. Dr. Ingraham explained it was primarily due to Everyday Math and the use of B, D, and S.

Dr. O’Connor summarized what he felt the Board was looking for as a next step:

- Dr. Ingraham will continue to work with principals
- They will deal with form issues (similarities)
- Teacher anecdotal information will be collected
- Feedback will be solicited from parents
- A report will be brought back to the Board this July for Grades 1 & 2 & samples of 3 & 4
- Dr. Ingraham will continue to work on the Grade 3 & 4 report card changes and present it differently in the future

Kara Winton asked if the new report cards were computer generated or multiple carbon copies. Dr. Ingraham stated they are computer generated.

**E. GRADES 3 & 4 REPORT CARD STATUS REPORT:** Dr. Ingraham reported that Grade 3 & 4 report cards are also being reviewed for revision. He will meet with principals to create a draft and bring it before the board in the future.

**F. KINDERGARTEN REVIEW/REPORT:** Dr. O’Connor explained that during the annual School Board goal setting process conducted over one year ago, kindergarten curriculum concerns were identified. Board members indicated they felt there needed to be continuity of the program between schools. The Board also talked about meeting curriculum objectives versus “actual activities.” He had asked Dr. Ingraham to review the kindergarten program and, in September 2004, Dr. Ingraham had submitted an outline of the process he would follow to achieve the Board’s goals.

Dorothea Hooper asked if the handout provided by Dr. Ingraham this evening included what the kindergarten teachers had been doing or what was being projected for them to do. Dr. Ingraham stated the outline was put together with what teachers are doing today. He went on to explain the four goals with which he began the curriculum review process and his findings:

1. What should our kindergarten program be like? – He reviewed state and national literature and found the consensus is that kindergarten should be closer to a pre-

- school environment than grade 1. Kindergarten should include a learning center environment.
2. What should curriculum be like? He found that there should be a comprehensive curriculum with structure, with a strong emphasis on Scholastic and Everyday Math, including other subjects as well.
  3. How should we treat a child at the kindergarten level? A 5-year old chronologically can be a 3 or 9 year old developmentally. We need to look at individual needs. Dr. Ingraham explained that he observed classrooms to see how students reacted to the curriculum and found them to be “active and engaged.” He did not observe frustration or high anxiety. “Are we looking at the individual child? It appears we are.”
  4. Are we helping our most at-risk students at 1<sup>st</sup> grade? Dr. Ingraham worked with Jackie Adams and Sandra Crosson to discuss how to reduce the number of students in the at-risk category by 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The District is currently running at 12-14% of students who are still struggling in first grade. Using PAL’s, students are tested at regular intervals and the District is working to identify and support those students earlier.

Kara Winton questioned what sources said kindergarten should look like a pre-school more than a first grade; she noted that she had a hard time with that. Given the current environment of No Child Left Behind, she said she felt there is too much play going on in kindergartens, trying to keep it looking like a pre-school. She added that most students come to kindergarten from daycare situations filled with playtime and they are ready to grow academically. Dr. Ingraham explained that, in terms of pre-school, he was referring to the classroom environment – using learning centers with different levels of activities; using theater-stage areas for role-playing. What happens in these learning centers depends on the individual students who are participating. Dr. Ingraham then referenced the daily plan for kindergarten classrooms that was contained in his presentation:

Meeting, Calendar, Shared Writing, News	8:15-9:00
Snack	9:00-9:15
Story & Literacy Discussion	9:15-9:35
Centers or LA Instruction	9:40-10:30
Math or Science Instruction	10:30-11:00
Dismissal	11:00-11:15

Ms. Winton asked if Dr. Ingraham had any more feedback on how teachers and parents feel about a moving to a full-day kindergarten in Dover. Dr. Ingraham stated there was around a 1/3 split: 1/3 would like whole day, 1/3 would like half day, 1/3 are unsure.

Ms. Hooper noted that the daily plan seemed aggressive and asked Ms. Fisher if her grandson brought home assignments for homework. Ms. Fisher stated that he did not. Ms. Hooper stated that, “if it’s in the curriculum, it needs to be done.” Dr. Ingraham cited examples of homework for kindergarten students that might include Everyday Math handouts or an early reader book.

Ms. Grady stated that the Board’s concerns had been that the District “come up with a kindergarten curriculum that every building would follow so that all of our students see the same things.” She then referenced meeting minutes from the School Board Workshop held on July 26, 2004. Board members had discussed concerns about the lack of consistency of curriculum being taught between schools; the lack of consistency in teaching the “basics”; the lack of tools

for assessment of students; and the lack of a system by which teachers progress may be measured to ensure all skills are being taught consistently throughout the district. After those discussions Superintendent O'Connor advised the Board that he would meet with Dr. Ingraham to prepare a more comprehensive kindergarten document providing curriculum objectives and benchmarks. Board members asked at that time that the review address questions such as, "Are we offering the type of academic rigor appropriate for 5 year olds?" "Are we preparing kindergarten students for successful entry into first grade?" "Are there additional assessment tools beyond PAL's?" "Is there some way to better manage the implementation of the curriculum?" "Is there an opportunity for all kindergarten teachers to meet to determine what skills they believe are important and all teach 'on the same page'?"

Ms. Grady went on to express her concern that Dr. Ingraham's timeline was not being followed and that she did not feel as though she had yet received a curriculum guide. She added that she had hoped to have a curriculum in each building clearly indicating "September to June; this is what you're expected to accomplish," but felt what she had received was too general. "In math, each kid accomplish these 15 specific skills; there's no way, in 2 hours, with art, music, and PE, that a teacher can do all of these. To me, it's too general."

Dorothea Hooper, using Social Studies as an example, stated her belief that the benchmark skills could be incorporated into everyday events (discuss the importance of school and community rules/laws) while others could be integrated into the daily life of the student (discuss how conflicts are resolved between individuals).

Superintendent O'Connor explained that the colored pages included in Dr. Ingraham's presentation reflected a broad picture of what the district was trying to accomplish. He added that teachers follow adopted math, reading, social studies, and science curriculums to fulfill these goals. Dennis Bentley noted that the Curriculum Standards Committee made sure kindergarten was added to all curriculums and that Dr. Ingraham came up with curriculum quick guides that are given to each new teacher.

Superintendent O'Connor reminded Board members they had been provided the kindergarten curriculum some months back. Dr. Ingraham stated that the document had contained objectives and activities. Dr. O'Connor reminded Board members that how these objectives were met might vary from classroom to classroom (citing worms and butterflies as two separate ways to achieve a science curriculum objective in third grade).

Ms. Grady stated that the curriculum Drs. O'Connor and Ingraham were referring to appeared to her to be "five sets of textbooks and what their objectives are. Everybody's not on the same schedule. I want to see something that says, 'these are our expectations as a kindergarten teacher if you are able'...Dover has had kindergarten for 6 years now and every year we've asked for this and we haven't seen it yet." Dr. O'Connor asked the Board to clarify what it was they were looking for, and noted that Dr. Ingraham had pulled out all of the kindergarten objectives. Ms. Grady stated that parent complaints that not all children were being exposed to the same things in all three buildings brought this about. "There's an instance where Everyday Math just started, so we're not doing the same thing in each classroom."

Kara Winton stated the Board was looking for accountability and asked if the Board could see what principals review with their teachers to ensure the curriculum goals are being met (curriculum quick guides).

Superintendent O'Connor clarified the questions he believed the Board wanted answered:

1. Are objectives and skills consistent at all schools?
2. Are they using Board approved materials?
3. Are they following approved curriculums?
4. Principals need to conduct an end-of-school-year teacher conferences, audit kindergarten teachers plan books, and report findings back to the Board.

Dorothea Hooper stated her belief that this was no longer a curriculum issue, but, rather, a management issue at this point.

Ms. Fisher referred again to Dr. Ingraham's September 7, 2004 timeline, commenting that items numbered 7 and 10 had not yet been completed:

7. Survey Dover parents concerning perception of kindergarten program (due November 2004)
10. Complete analyses and report of findings (due February 2005)

Ms. Grady stated, "We were also going to check with other schools to see if we were comparable." Dr. Ingraham stated he had done that and the information he had collected was back in his office.

Superintendent O'Connor stated that the administration would conduct a curriculum audit to help clarify issues; Dr. Ingraham would extend his timeline; Parents would be surveyed or focus groups set up with PTA's to get the information the School Board wanted. He ended by stating that Dr. Ingraham, the principals, and he would work together to develop a teacher audit.

Carolyn Mebert questioned whether the District was following student assessment data to identify if the 13% at-risk in kindergarten are the same 13% at-risk in grade 1. Dr. Ingraham stated that was being done now and showed Dr. Mebert a sample tracking of individual students. Ms. Grady stated her concern that the District was not using the full complement of the PAL's testing. Dr. Ingraham stated that all PAL's tests were being administered except COW's (Concept of Word) because experience has shown the children already know the information.

Kara Winton asked if there was any alternative to the current procedure of canceling kindergarten for two days in order to perform new kindergarten student screening. She added that the 2 days of cancelled school occurred the week after a school vacation and that the students only go to school for ½ day as it was. Dr. O'Connor stated he would check into other possibilities. He added that the kindergarten curriculum would come back to the Board in the June or July workshop.

**G. ADJOURNMENT:** Kara Winton moved, Doris Grady seconded, to adjourn the meeting at 8:30 p.m. An oral **VOTE PASSED 6/0.**

Respectfully submitted,

Audra Lurvey, Secretary  
Dover School Board  
AL/kgb  
4/19/05