

Board Still Working Its Way Through Improvement Plans

BY SUSAN USHER

Plans by the Brunswick County Board of Education to complete its review of individual school performance plans by early April were stymied last week.

Board members spent much of a two-hour meeting Friday evening set aside to discuss the plans instead revisiting their own ideas of how to achieve system-wide goals.

However, the board did approve plans from the three county high schools with only minor revisions, and subject to availability of funds to carry out the strategies outlined. Revisions include requesting a waiver from the state to exclude trainable and educable mentally handicapped students when calculating the percentage of those receiving high school diplomas.

The board will meet again Monday, April 19, at 5 p.m. at Bolivia Elementary School to consider the remaining plans, and also will meet Thursday, April 22, at 6:30 p.m. at the central office.

Plans for each school, the central office and school system are required for participation in the state's Performance Based Accountability Program. Achievement goals in the plan are tied to 52 indicators set by the State Board of Education and covered on the system's annual "report card." These include student performance on standardized tests, attendance, drop-out rates and similar items.

Each plan details student achievement goals, requests to the state for waivers from certain rules, and a plan for providing teachers differentiated pay.

A key element of the county plan that has drawn criticism within the system calls for using 10 lead teachers to help coach peers to improved teaching in subject areas where Brunswick County students are weakest.

The school board also thought it had sent a message to school employees that it expected extra pay for teachers and other certified staff to be linked directly to reaching student achievement goals. However, most schools submitted plans similar to their previous ones, or with only minor changes after being asked to redo plans.

A third concern arose that some schools had set achievement goals lower than the county's, which isn't allowed.

At Friday's meeting with members of a countywide committee of educators that had already helped develop the county plan and review the individual plans for consistency, discussion was lively regarding all three issues.

Committee member Debbie Lemon pointed out that some schools

cannot possibly make sufficient gains in one year's time to achieve the county's minimum level of achievement.

As for lead teachers, the committee first proposed pulling exemplary teachers from their classrooms for a one-year appointment. Then it decided to pull the teachers out of their own classrooms on an as-needed basis during the year, paying a substitute.

Either way, the proposal didn't please all concerned, sparking professional jealousy on the part of some teachers and concerns from principals as well. Superintendent Ralph Johnston said some principals objected to having their best teachers pulled from the classroom. School board members reached no decision Friday on what to do.

"If we're going to be so professionally jealous we're not going to improve our performance," cautioned Gloria Talley, staff development director and chairman of the countywide accountability plan panel. "We've got to get beyond that."

"There's no right or wrong way to do it; we're just looking for a template."

Disappointment with pay plan specifics was evident on the part of some committee members and some board members. Bill Fairley said his original idea about differentiated pay was to test students at the start of the year and at the end of the year, then calculate the average percentage of improvement for the class as a whole.

"It seemed reasonable for plans to be tied to that kind of improved performance," said Fairley. "But none of the plans I've seen do that."

He noted part of the blame was the school board's because the school system hasn't selected or designed the tools it will use for pre- and post-testing.

Given lack of an evaluation system, said committee member May Moore, schools could choose to use the money for staff development, which the staff at her school, South Brunswick Middle, "was not ready to do" or for "things the teachers believe will help improve student performance."

Some committee members and board members questioned plans that rewarded teachers extra pay for certain behaviors, such as good attendance or scheduling conferences with parents.

"I thought that was part of the job," said member Polly Russ.

However, Talley urged the board not to make drastic changes in the plans this year, in part to show support for the schools' first efforts at site-based management. In reviewing the plans, she said, the county

committee "was very careful to respect site-based management."

"We've got to have the teachers help us get there," she said. "This is where we have to trust the integrity of the school administration and the staff. I predict we will see different plans next year, more tied to student achievement, more willing to take risks, knowing that the board is serious."

Typical examples were of "extra duty for extra pay" serving as a lead teacher, mentor or department chairman; tutoring students after school without pay; participating in a professional book club; earning credit toward an advanced diploma or certificate renewal; attending professional workshops; serving on committees; sponsoring student activities; and not using all available sick leave.

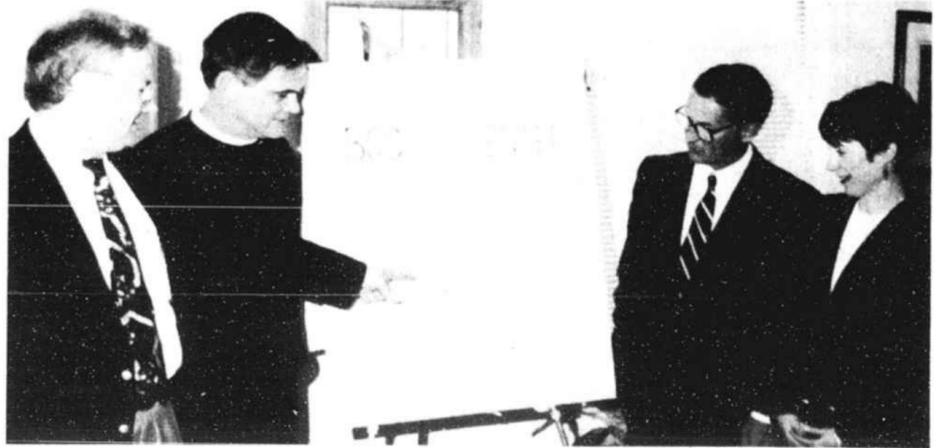
An incentive not to take unnecessary sick leave already exists, said Finance Officer Rudi Fallon. North Carolina allows teachers to credit unused sick leave towards retirement up to a year early.

Talley said the county schools expected no problem in obtaining an extension for submitting its plan to the state, if needed, because of the change of administration during the school term and its subsequent late start, after Superintendent Johnston's arrival, in developing a county plan.

Trustees Meeting Tonight At BCC

Brunswick Community College trustees will meet today (Thursday) instead of Wednesday, April 21.

The meeting will begin at 7:30 p.m. in the board room, which is located on the second floor of the ALS Building on the main campus north of Supply on U.S. 17 Business. The meeting is open to the public.



BCC PHOTO BY ANNE MARIE BELLAMY

Community Drive Launched

Brunswick Community College Foundation board members, community and business leaders and BCC faculty and staff kicked off the foundation's annual Community Fund Drive with a breakfast meeting April 8. Under the leadership of Foundation Vice President and Fund Drive Chairman Dr. Lee Langston (left) three teams will visit individuals and businesses throughout the county with the goal of raising \$40,000 for the BCC Fund for Academic Excellence. Also pictured reviewing the South Brunswick Islands team area are (from second left) BCC Vice President for Administrative Services Ben DeBlois and BCC Foundation board members and team co-captains Marshall Woodard and Sheila McLamb.

School Would Begin August 30 Under Proposed '93-94 Calendar

Students would begin school Aug. 30 under a proposed calendar for the 1993-94 school year being considered by the Brunswick County Board of Education.

After a Sept. 6 Labor Day holiday, all students would participate in two days of pre-testing, to establish base lines for determining improvement by the end of the year. Post-testing would be conducted June 7 and 8.

Additional holidays would be scheduled Nov. 11, Veterans Day; Nov. 25-26, Thanksgiving; Dec. 18-31, Christmas and New Year's Day; Jan. 17, Martin Luther King Jr.; April 4-8, Easter; and May 30, Memorial Day. Students would attend a full day of school Dec. 17 and April 1 before the start of the Christmas and Easter holidays.

Students would also be out during teachers' workdays Sept. 17, Nov. 5, Dec. 20, Jan. 28 and March 4. Additional teacher workdays are scheduled before and after the start of classes.

As proposed each high school could set its own graduation date from three options: June 10, 11 or 12.

The calendar includes 180 instructional days, 10 holidays, 10 annual leave days for eligible teachers and 17 teacher workdays. Teachers are not required to work seven of the workdays; the others may be taken off as annual leave time.

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