

Breakfast with Brad

September 30, 2011

Notes by Margaret Dennis, CHS Parent Representative

Mr. Brad Schneider, Warrick County School Corporation (WCSC) superintendent, welcomed parent representatives from all schools. He introduced his team:

Todd Armstrong – Assistant Superintendent/Business Manager

Rick Reid – Director of Human Resources (includes personnel hiring, management, etc)

Jane Wilhelmus – Director of Curriculum and Instruction (incl. ISTEP, Professional Development, etc)

Paul Gunn – Curriculum Supervisor

Jim Hendrickson – Federal Programs Supervisor (includes Title programs, writing grants, etc)

Tad Powless – Director of Special Education

Guy Gentry – Manager of Transportation

Rick Madden – Manager of Custodians

Terry Raider – Manager of Technology (Includes PIV, web site, wireless access, interactive white boards, etc)

Shenae Rowe – Manager of Food and Nutrition

John Stucker – Manager of Maintenance (includes building and grounds)

Mr. Schneider depends on his team and they work closely with each other to provide the best services possible to WCSC. This is his 9th year as superintendent and 15th year in WCSC. He had previously taught and been an administrator in other school corporations and believes that WCSC is the best school corporation. His philosophy is to keep things simple, always put kids first, and to work as a team with all involved to achieve the mission of giving each child the best education possible. Mr. Schneider believes WCSC is such a strong school corporation because of the quality and dedication of the staff, highly involved parents, the support of the community (businesses, government units, and residents), and students who rise to the high expectations we have of them.

Ms. Anne Rust, President of the Warrick County Teacher Association, explained that the WCTA represents all 580 teachers at monthly meetings with the administration. Each school has a representative and meets regularly. In addition to their primary duty of educating students, the WCTA supports our community through donations (in 2010-11, they donated \$3,000 to county food pantries), scholarships (currently, they award 3 scholarships to graduating seniors attending college to study a “helping profession”), and helping keep the public informed of legislation affecting the students in our area.

The national and state economies have obviously affected WCSC, which is the largest taxing agent in the county. The 2012 budget is lower than the 2008 budget while expenses such as utilities and supplies are

higher. WCSC has always been fiscally conservative, keeping spending in line with income. WCSC continues to try to reduce class sizes but is limited by availability of resources.

This is a challenging time in public education. Mr. Schneider expressed that the reason we are such a strong nation is that we educate EVERYONE, regardless of race, gender, or ability. Many other countries select who to educate and for what. While public education is great, especially in WCSC, there are always opportunities for improvement.

Mr. Schneider is looking forward to a great year, and working with parents to improve education in WCSC.

Some issues we discussed:

Teachers: WCSC has a great working relationship with the WCTA with open lines of communication. The contract is settled through 2012-13. They will be meeting in November to start developing evaluations instruments as required by recent state legislation. Under the current system, teachers are evaluated annually for their first five years, and then every three years on a rotating schedule. With the new system, part of Senate Bill 1 and House Enrolled Act 575, teachers will be evaluated annually. The evaluations are done by building administrators (who in turn get evaluated by central administrators). The staff is rated “highly effective”, “effective”, “needs improvement”, and “ineffective”. In the latter cases, an improvement plan is developed with measurable goals and timelines. The goal is to improve classroom instruction. The evaluation instrument will be developed this year, piloted in 2012-13, with full implementation in 2013-14. Per state legislation, part of the evaluation will be based on standardized testing and student improvement. There is concern about how administrators will have time to do annual evaluations of all teachers (in addition to their regular duties of curriculum and budget management, professional development, student discipline, school improvement committee, athletics, and more). Teacher pay structures will also be modified with the new legislation. While experience will still be factored in, “academic need” and “leadership” will also be considered.

Budget: Of the \$90 million budget, 90% of expenses are personnel-related. WCSC currently has over 1,000 employees (teachers, administrators, custodians, bus drivers, aides, food service, etc). After the state cut WCSC’s budget in December 2010 by \$2.6 million, the number of staff positions was reduced by attrition. Since then most of those have been replaced. The state has not announced further cuts at this time though statewide there are 3,000 fewer teachers than in 2009. Some school corporations have had to start charging for bus transportation and athletics. School budgets are determined by the number of students enrolled on September 16 plus a complexity formula which takes into account the number of students on free and reduced meals.

Enrollment: We have close to 10,000 students in WCSC, a corporation-wide increase of 30-40 students over last year’s enrollment. Only 4 students in Warrick county requested and were granted vouchers for private school. (Private schools have selective enrollment, unlike public school which educates all students.) The state funds approximately \$5,000 per student. One of the public misconceptions of enrollment is that parents can choose which school their children will attend. Non-resident transfers

(students living outside of Warrick county but wanting to attend WCSC) are few and must be applied for. WCSC only accepts non-resident transfers after reviewing their academic, disciplinary, and attendance records. Transfers are only accepted into certain schools and grades where space is available. Parents must pay tuition and provide transportation. Of the approximately 80 applications received annually, only 30 are accepted. By state law, an exception is provided for residents who attend a school corporation for at least 2 years and then move to an adjacent county. There is also a 30-day conditional enrollment process which is dealt with on a case-by-case basis. For example, a family who is living in an adjacent county while their house is being built in Warrick county (proof and progress is required) can enroll students in WCSC. Third party custodial arrangements are also an exception for non-resident students. Inter-corporation transfers are dealt with individually. By Board mandate, some schools are closed to transfers because of high enrollment. There are also several areas that are considered "choice" because parents and students may choose which middle school and high school to attend (Chandler, and parts of Yankeetown and Tennyson).

Staffing: This summer was busy with 391 personnel moves, including 220 new hires in many different roles. These were a result of retirements, the addition of Special Education to WCSC from the Coop, and new positions for additional classroom teachers.

Full day kindergarten: The state increased the grant to fund full day kindergarten, so financially, WCSC is able to cover the program. Teachers and administrators worked very hard over the summer to develop a well-rounded curriculum for full day kindergarten.

Reading: The state made changes to the instructional requirements this year in the area of reading. It is now mandated to have 90 minutes, uninterrupted reading blocks for students in grades k-6. It has been a challenge to implement the mandate in addition to all the other state requirements but WCSC teachers, administrators, and students have risen to the challenge. The IREAD3 tests will be administered in the spring to all 3rd grade students. Students who do not pass the test will not be allowed to advance to 4th grade. Summer remediation will be made available to students in need of help with reading.

Highway 261 widening: WCSC administration met with INDOT to discuss plans for the widening project which begins in the next few weeks. INDOT will begin with improvements to the SR 66 and 261 intersection, and then start working on widening Hwy 261 to 5 lanes. This will have a huge impact on WCSC traffic with 5 schools impacted. Ingress and egress plans for those schools are being evaluated.

Tecumseh Junior/Senior High: Improvements are being made to the school (athletic fields, drainage, etc) though conversations are on-going regarding the changes needed to implement middle school.

The next Breakfast with Brad meeting will be held on Friday, November 18, at Elberfeld Elementary.