

## Souderton Area PAGE Meeting

24 May 2005

Meeting began at approximately 7:30 PM. There were approximately 12 people in attendance and PAGE President Jill Vizza opened the meeting with a discussion of the purpose of PAGE and the need for continued involvement by parents. Information regarding gifted resources was distributed. She also noted that Pennsylvania is now putting some money/action behind monitoring compliance of Chapter 16 regulations. A central issue with Chapter 16 has been the lack of enforcement and/or sanctions for not complying with the regulations.

Dr. Amuso, superintendent of Souderton Area School District arrived at approximately 7:45 PM. Dr. Amuso was hired away from Boyertown School District in February of this year to replace outgoing superintendent Lowell A. (Art) Tinner. SASD PAGE was one of the first groups to request that he come to speak at one of their meetings.

Each person in attendance provided a brief introduction. Dr. Amuso expressed his intention to provide an open forum to hear concerns from PAGE members and to provide his vision and understanding of the challenges and need for gifted education.

Dr. Amuso indicated that, based upon his short time in the district, he was pleased thus far with the challenge program provided at the high school. As it was explained, the HS program uses the curriculum with specialization to satisfy the GIEP.

He also acknowledged the need for these students to be challenged in their academic pursuits. By way of an example he related the story of one of his HS classmates who was brilliant (#1 in his class), yet was never really challenged enough and his subsequent difficulties reflected on that lack of initial challenge and expectation.

Dr. Amuso then opened the meeting up for questions and concerns. <These will be related as issues raised>

Issue: How do we get teachers to understand the need for challenges? As I recall of the discussion, this is an ongoing effort to educate teachers to the needs of challenge students.

Issue: A comment was made concerning standards creating rigidity in educational programs (teaching to the test, in essence). This led to a discussion of the No Child Left Behind regulations and how this drives everyone to minimum acceptable levels for each student rather than at a school level. Standards in the past had taken into account the existence of a range of abilities and the average of these abilities was used to match against the standards – now all students must meet the standard. A comment was made that setting a goal is one thing, how we get to the goal may be different for different students and curriculum rigidity does not take this into account. It was also noted that a single paper and pencil test to determine proficiency is not necessarily appropriate for all

students. There are students who may 'freeze' on tests or not do as well in that pressure situation who nonetheless are able to do the work and do it well.

Note: Dr. Amuso also explained some of the impetus behind the formation of gifted programs in the mid-1970's. Their original purpose was to address the needs of those students who were obviously academically talented, but did not do well in the traditional classroom environment (the aptitude without achievement conundrum). It was also noted that the problem of gifted underachievers cannot be overlooked.

He also noted that original legislation had gifted education come under the auspices of Special Education (SE). Regulations regarding SE are codified under Chapter 14 of the Pennsylvania School Code. Recent legislation pulled gifted education out of SE and into its own area – Chapter 16.

Issue: Concern was expressed over the 'vacuum' in the area of science teaching at the non-secondary levels. The emphasis seems to be primarily on the language arts in the challenge program. This can be frustrating for those students whose special talents are in the sciences or mathematics.

Issue: It was brought up that the junior high / high school program has a single teacher (Mrs. Louisa Abney-Babcock) to address concerns of challenge students. As part of the gifted task force that was formed in the beginning of the year, a recommendation was put forward to the school board for the hiring of an additional teacher for Indian Crest. This position is in the budget proposal to be voted upon on 23 June 2005. This is a welcome addition to the resources available to students.

Issue: It was pointed out that at the junior high level there is not specific challenge program as there is in the elementary and middle school levels (honors courses essentially take over after middle school). There exists a resource room in at Indian Crest to which students are encouraged to go. Because it has been voluntary, concern was expressed about its use.

Issue: There was comment regarding the apparent 'watering down' of the Personal Exploration Project (PEP) done in grades 2 and 3. The PEP has been replaced by a PEG where a game is created. It was felt the diversity of ideas generated by doing a PEP in each elementary grade was lost, to some degree, by having a game done.

Issue: A general point was raised as to how we can continue to have our children interested and involved in learning. Some concerns were raised about pushing our children too much or being too involved in *their* learning. It was noted that parental involvement and concern for learning is important throughout our children's time in the district. Mrs. Abney-Babcock made special note encouraging parents to stay involved.

Issue: A question was raised regarding the International Baccalaureate program offered at other schools. Dr. Amuso was familiar with the program, as Boyertown had considered the program in the past. He went over some of the requirements for participation in such a programme (it's based in Wales). This is a different (and many would say more

difficult) track than the Advanced Placement programs. There are only 15 I-B programs in Pennsylvania recognized by the IBO ([www.ibo.org](http://www.ibo.org)), and of those, only 12 are Diploma Programmes (ages 16-19).

Dr. Amuso was very open to the discussions and made several notes regarding items which he wanted to address further. Additional 'small group' discussion occurred after the meeting.

Special thanks to Jill for the cookies and to her daughter for keeping us mindful of the future.

Meeting concluded at approximately 9 PM.

These minutes were created based upon my personal notes of the meeting. They will necessarily reflect some of my own bias in reporting. Additional research was done on the International- Baccalaureate program.