

## **The School Committees Report**

The School Committees are dedicated to supporting the school districts' educational goals for Concord, Carlisle and Boston students while maintaining a transparent public process related to policy decisions. This article is one in a series that is intended to update and inform the residents of Concord and Carlisle about the districts' on-going activities, initiatives and policies.

## **CCHS Homework Committee Report**

The School Committees, Administration and school site leaders are constantly working to promote student health and well-being as well as high academic achievement. As part of the effort to maintain the appropriate balance in that endeavor, this year's CCHS School Improvement Plan included a task to "engage in action-research on best practices of homework."

A Committee was formed that included teachers, administration and students as well as representatives from guidance and special education departments. The Committee researched current CCHS practices as well as practices at similar high schools, collected input from teachers and department chair groups, surveyed parents and students and reviewed research-based practices. The Committee shared its findings and recommendations at the Regional School Committee meeting held on January 26.

The student and parent surveys were excellent sources of information as 1,072 students and 544 parents participated. A key finding was that "tests" and "homework" were the two categories that were most often cited as one of the top four sources of student stress. Both students and parents reported that more than 51% of students spent three or more hours per night on homework with 19% spending more than four hours per night. Those times were consistent across all four grades of the high school.

The review of research-based practices found that the benefits of homework diminish after two to two and one-half hours for high school students. However, the removal of all homework decreases student performance.

As a result of these and other findings in their work, the Homework Committee made recommendations in three categories: essential school-wide practices, recommended practices, and for the future/next steps.

The essential school-wide practice recommendations called for homework to be announced before the end of a block, to be displayed on the board in class, and to be posted online in a single common place and platform for all courses, using Google Calendar. Others included no sport team practices to begin prior to 2:45pm to allow time for academic support, pilot a school-wide coordination of major assignments/assessments in weeks prior to vacations/end of quarter/exams as well as homework-free vacations in both practice and spirit so that no major assignments will be due prior to Thursday after a vacation. While some of these will be implemented immediately, others will be implemented in the spring.

The recommended best practices suggested that teachers differentiate homework practices, communicate expected time estimates for homework, direct students on what to do if they are having difficulties, consider 30 minutes per course per night as a guideline, explain the purpose

of the homework assignment and provide students with more than one day to complete longer assignments.

As for next steps, there will be professional development provided to teachers on Google Calendar and the differentiation of homework practices, further coordination with the middle schools in Concord and Carlisle regarding the transition from 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, and a review of home practices for consistency on a departmental level. In addition, school site leaders will seek feedback from teachers and students about the implementation of the essential practices and best practice recommendations and will pursue a Challenge Success grant, [www.challengesuccess.org](http://www.challengesuccess.org), to further explore the issue of student stress.

All agreed that there is more work to be done in this area and it will continue to be a focus for both school districts. For more information on this matter, individuals can view the CCHS Homework Committee presentation on the District website, [www.concordps.org](http://www.concordps.org).

### **Alternative Fuel School Buses**

The Advisory Committee charged with examining the possibilities for future purchases of alternative fuel school buses issued recommendations at the Regional School Committee's business meeting on January 26. This effort is the latest example of a recently adopted practice by the School Committees to study issues outside of their regularly scheduled business meetings by creating advisory committees comprised of school committee members and residents of Carlisle and Concord who possess subject expertise.

Members of the Alternative Fuel School Bus Committee worked to gather information regarding alternative fuel buses including the costs to purchase and fuel, environmental impacts such as greenhouse gas emissions, health impact on students, vehicle life cycles, and the infrastructure required to support an alternative fuel fleet. The Committee also considered the current fleet which consists of 36 diesel buses which annually utilize approximately 85,000 gallons of fuel resulting in fuel costs of \$260,000 and produces an estimated 1.9 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions.

The Committee recommendations included piloting the use of biodiesel fuel with the current bus fleet. The use of biodiesel fuels will not require changes to the current fleet infrastructure while significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Conducting a pilot program will allow the administration to monitor added fuel costs and fuel quality from suppliers as well as any impact on maintenance issues with vehicle parts such as filters and injectors.

Other recommendations that could be implemented over time include installing a solar canopy for buses to park under to protect them from weather while generating energy cost savings, and investigating the potential of an electric fleet that included a few diesel buses for long range travel out of town. Members of the Committee believed that the purchase price of electric school buses will be dropping in the near future and they hoped to secure a state grant (*see below*) that would allow the District to gain experience with an electric bus.

For more information on this topic, the Committee's presentation can be viewed on the District web site, [www.concordps.org](http://www.concordps.org).

### **CPS Applies for Electric School Bus Grant**

The Concord Public School Department has applied for a state grant that would supply the District with a free electric school bus and charger for a one year pilot program. The grant program is administered by the Massachusetts Department of Energy Resources. If the grant application is successful, the fully electric bus would be integrated into the District's operations during the 2016-2017 school year. It would also allow the Concord Light Department to participate in the program to study the vehicle to grid technology. Securing the grant would serve to further the District's on-going study of alternative fuel school buses and provide the drivers and fleet maintenance personnel with first-hand knowledge of vehicle performance as well as insight into operating and maintaining an electric vehicle on a day-to-day basis.

### **The School Committees Contact Information**

You can link to the School Committees' emails on the Districts' home page at [www.concordps.org](http://www.concordps.org). Or, you can email the Concord Public School Committee at [concordschoolcommittee@colonial.net](mailto:concordschoolcommittee@colonial.net) and the Concord-Carlisle Regional School Committee at [concordcarliseschoolcommittee@colonial.net](mailto:concordcarliseschoolcommittee@colonial.net). You can reach out to the Superintendent and the School Committees through the Your Voice Matters link on the Districts' home page. School Committee meetings are open to the public and the public is encouraged to attend. The meetings are broadcast on CCTV and are available on demand at [www.concordtv.org](http://www.concordtv.org). The district web site ([www.concordps.org](http://www.concordps.org)) contains updated reports, presentations and