

ROTH PARENT GROUP/BURGER PARENT GROUP
MINUTES OF JANUARY 4, 2016 MEETING
Burger Middle School - Library

I. Welcome & Introductions

Greg Lane, Burger Middle School Principal, welcomed the joint Roth and Burger parent groups. He then introduced Dr. J. Kenneth Graham Jr., Rush Henrietta Superintendent of Schools.

II. Session Goals

Dr. Graham offered that the session be a dialog on topics of interest to the parents. He offered to speak on Common Core, state assessments, the opt out process, and whatever topics parents would like to discuss. Dr. Graham offered that the session be aimed at:

- explaining some of the terms being interchangeable used around the topic of common core and state assessments
- sharing what these things “look like” in the Rush Henrietta School District, and
- discussing the state’s role in testing, it’s design, and general use of data.

Dr. Graham began by sharing that learning standards aren’t new. He shares Rush Henrietta as a district is in favor of the Common Core and believes it can add benefit when properly implemented. He says those watching the movements in this should be careful to not interchange Common Core, state assessments and other terms when dialoging about the topic of learning standards.

The tools used for the assessments are key, Rush Henrietta believes that those could be better. Dr. Graham reflected that those that went to school in New York – in the 80s took the PEP and PET exams. He says those tests are similar to the state assessments our kids are taking today.

Dr. Graham also shared that, “we need to have tests and take tests to measure our children’s learning and our instructional programs.” He says, the “assessments serve the purpose that they are designed to. That’s where we have work to do. We need tests to help evaluate our programs to ensure that we are competitive with other neighboring districts. We need our kids to leave us prepared for the work. If we don’t validate their learning we cannot have confidence in our instructional programs.”

He also shared that more than 20% of students in the district opted out of testing/state assessments in 2015.

III. Background

The Federal government programs that affect where we are today:

- **Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)** is the nation's national education law and upholds the commitment to equal opportunity for all students. Signed into law in 1965 by Lyndon Johnson.
- **No Child Left Behind (NCLB)** was enacted in 2002. It shined a light on where students were making progress and where they needed additional support regardless of race, income, zip code, disability, language or background.
- **Race to the Top** This initiative offers incentives to improve teaching and learning in America's schools by raising standards and aligning policies and structures to the goal of college and career readiness. In 2008-2009, NYS like the whole nation was in an economic slump – many districts, including Rush Henrietta took the federal governments "Race to the Top" finances and then the rush began.

The ESEA was reinstated by the Obama administration on December 10, 2015. It's now called the **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)**.

IV. What is Common Core

Common Core in New York is aimed at getting the students the skills they need to succeed in today's world. It can however be restrictive on teachers. They need to learn different ways to deliver learning.

Common Core can help us better focus on our children's success, we just need to watch the implementation. For example, teachers learned in August 2015 what was on the state assessment. Getting that information sooner can help everyone prepare better.

- English Language Arts (ELA) focuses on complex reading, procedure approach to reading process, focus on non-fiction, proof using factual evidences.
- Math focuses on conceptual learning and fluency. One needs to be able to solve problems in more than one way, be flexible in figuring out problems, and show one's work.

Some issues the district's hearing about the tests:

- They are too long, too complex. In the future, computer assisted tests may be in place and help with this.
- What you hear from your teacher and what you see on the test are not the same. Suggestion – side with the teacher and the administrators. They spend the time with your child and know his/her level of work/commitment.

V. Going Forward

Now that ESEA is reinstated, look for new buzz words around the topic of Common Core Learning Standards. We may hear new terms like “New York State Learning Standards”.

It will likely be 5-6 more years before the implementation is fully honed in and providing data that is fully usable by districts.

VI. What Parents Can Do

Going forward, Dr. Graham says, “We have a continued opportunity to be proactive and advocate to help get these test items in teachers’ hands earlier.”

Rush Henrietta fully expects to see a state moratorium on using the new state assessments for teacher evaluation. Recent news and some opinions appear to share that New York State Governor Cuomo is backtracking on Common Core standards and offering that the exams won't factor into teacher evaluations or student-promotion decisions until the earliest 2019-2020. Given it's an election year next year – we should watch movements closely.

Dr. Graham asks that parents “stay with us.” He offers that if you are concerned that you write to your legislators and let them know your stand on teacher evaluations and the need for those to make evaluation with need and purpose. He offers that in the meantime, parents should “keep the dialog open with school administrators and your child's teachers.”