

Spring 2014 School Improvement Advisory Committee Minutes

The East Union School Improvement Advisory Committee (SIAC) held its annual meeting on Wednesday, April 30, 2014, in the Middle/High School Library. Those from the community in attendance were: Roxanne Walter, Kristie Nixon, Ed Cheers, Ben Walter, Elizabeth Waigand, Marian Davenport, Del Davenport, Desiree Thornton, Jill McKnight, Rick Paxton, Sarah Long, Denise Riley, Ron Kelly, Loretta Kelly, Lisa Thomlinson, and Shannon Harper.

Dr. Pam Vogel, superintendent, welcomed guests and staff and explained the purpose of SIAC. Every school district is to have a Board approved School Improvement Advisory Committee that meets at least annually, for the purpose of communication between the school and the community. SIAC membership is to represent those groups that make up the district, with membership from parents, community members, and students. To the greatest extent possible, SIAC membership shall have balanced representation of race, gender, national origin and disability. At SIAC meetings, student programs and achievement data are shared. SIAC is to help make recommendation to the Board on major educational needs, student learning goals, and long range goals that include, but are not limited to, state indicators that address reading, mathematics and science achievement. Also addressed is information on harassment or bullying prevention goals, programs, training, and other initiatives. Our goal is to receive feedback and ideas from the community, in order to continuously improve the educational opportunities provided to students.

Mrs. Kit Mostek, Gifted/Talented teacher and Elementary Counselor; Mrs. Sheila Chenoweth, Kindergarten teacher; and Mr. Mark Weis, Secondary Principal led a discussion regarding the Elementary and Secondary Mathematics programs and the changes that have been made. Table discussions and feedback were that the standards seemed challenging for students. This is what the Iowa Common Core states should be learned. Also, that the “real life” experiences that involve mathematical problem solving are important for students to know.

Mrs. Gail Thatcher, Business Education teacher, and Mr. James Hardy, High School Social Studies teacher, along with Mr. Weis shared coursework opportunities for students. They explained the Independent Studies, Competency Based Education (CBE- our district is one of ten in the state that was invited to be in the CBE Consortium), and Acceleration programming. We have a number of students who have participated in these areas and have shown success in learning and earning credits in a timeframe that is most suitable for their individual schedules.

Extra-curricular programs have been expanded at East Union. Mrs. Sandy Donner, Second grade teacher; Mrs. Naomi Sharp, Junior Kindergarten teacher; and Mrs. Lisa Hensel, High School English teacher discussed the addition of drill team, archery, East Union’s own cross-country team, and some other clubs that may begin, after district negotiations are complete. Expanding extra-curricular programs was a goal established when SIAC met in 2013.

Mrs. Joan Gordon, Elementary Principal, and Dr. Vogel discussed the East Union Teacher Leadership Program. Our district was one of 39 schools in the state selected to begin the statewide program. In the fall and winter, we formed a committee comprised of parents, teachers and administrators to discuss 1) if our school wanted to apply for the first year of funding, and 2)

which type of teacher leadership program would best enable our staff to learn and grow. After a series of meetings, it was decided to apply for the first year and to select the Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) through NIET, the National Institute for Excellence in Teaching, as the program we would follow. This is a national program and is currently being instituted in two other Iowa school districts. It is a very prescriptive program that involves stages of development for teachers, as each teacher is assessed in different domains through a rubric. The program involves using master and mentor teachers who observe their colleagues on a regular basis, then provide feedback and train in those strategies that improve instruction.

Mrs. Hope Hall, the East Union Early Childhood Center Director, discussed new things taking place in the Center. The Center served 65 students this year. NAEYC accreditation was just awarded to the Center and this is the highest standard that a Center can receive. Many staff hours were committed to achieve this goal. A number of grants have been written and received that have helped the expansion of the wooden outdoor playground and equipment and learning supplies for the classrooms.

In February of this year, the Iowa Department of Education conducted a three-day visit to East Union, as a part of their five-year review for state accreditation. Dr. Vogel explained the process to SIAC members and how information is obtained through a document review and interviews with a variety of stakeholders, including teachers, parents, community members, administrators, and the Board. After two days of document reviews and interviews with constituents, the team compiles all of the data and provides a report to the district. Within 4-8 weeks following the visit, the school receives a more detailed report citing areas that are going well, recommendations to consider for improvement, and also cites any areas that are not in compliance with state rules. We have received the final report. Our overall report was very positive. Specific areas that need attention were discussed. Formative assessments and the changes in the grading systems were one topic. Some parents and students did not understand or agree with the changes in grading practices. It was explained that formative assessments are work from students that enables teachers to monitor student progress to provide the teacher information regarding what specific instruction and support is still needed to help students continually improve. Formative assessments are not to be graded, as these demonstrate the learning process. The final summative assessments at the end of the unit (project, test, etc.) are those that are assessed. Also, we are moving towards standards based grading and away from letter grades. Standards based grading provides more specific information about the work that is assessed and the student's progress.

Table discussions from the Site Visit also included the district's Student Led and Student Involved conferences. Some parents stated that certain conferences were more structured and showed more preparation than others. The district will take this information and discuss this with all of our staff, to ensure that there is consistency from all teachers with future conferences.

Some parents, at the site visit, expressed frustration at finding information on the district website. The district will be addressing this and a revision of the website is planned to take place this summer.

The Site Team also did not find evidence of an overarching vision statement. Dr. Vogel suggested that we enlist the staff, students, and SIAC to help develop this in 2014.

There were two areas that were non-compliant and will be changed. One is to ensure that all Board policies and any information regarding employment in the handbooks, website and newsletter contain language include “age”, so that discrimination does not occur on this basis. The second was to develop and adopt a formal plan for Equal Employment Opportunities. Dr. Vogel stated that both of these areas would be completed by the fall of 2014.

Mrs. Gordon shared student achievement data, from the Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) data for grades K-11. We must report data from the Iowa Assessments to the state for grades 3-11, however, since we conducted Iowa Assessment testing in the spring, we have not yet received results from Iowa Testing Services to share. Last year, SIAC agreed that MAP testing, since it shows learning growth several times each year, would be the means to measure student learning and achievement, versus solely relying on the Iowa Assessments.

Mr. Weis helped lead a discussion regarding what the district’s annual student achievement goals should be set at for 2014-2015. This past year, the goal was for “75% or more of the students in each of the grades K-12 to reach their RIT (ready to learn) score on the MAP assessment by the spring testing period”. While we showed gains, we came short of reaching this goal in all grade levels. Therefore, it was decided to maintain this goal for 2014-2015. This goal will be presented for the Board of Education’s approval.

A final point of discussion was the number of times that SIAC meets. For a number of years, SIAC has met annually. The question was raised as to whether or not meeting twice a year would be more beneficial and enable us to gain more detailed information about programs. Also, by having a fall meeting in 2014, we would have the Iowa Assessment data to share and discuss. The group felt this was worth considering. The next meeting will be in the fall and the administrative team will meet to determine a date.

Dr. Vogel thanked those in attendance for their dedication and service to the school and shared that their interest in our district and their feedback to us is vital for us to understand community perception and to ensure that we are providing high quality programming that best meets the needs of our students.