

MINUTES OF BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMITTEE-OF-THE-WHOLE MEETING
Homewood-Flossmoor High School, 999 Kedzie Avenue, Flossmoor, Illinois
December 16, 2024

Mr. Pauling called the meeting to order at 8:34 a.m. The following Board members were present for all or part of the meeting:

Mr. Anderson	Mr. Legardy
Mrs. Hoereth	Mr. Riedel
Ms. Jackson	Ms. Turnquest

Mr. Pauling was in attendance via Zoom video conference due to an out-of-town work commitment.

The presence of a quorum was noted and the meeting declared duly convened. Superintendent Wakeley, Principal Alexander, Communications and Community Engagement Director Erdey, Curriculum, Instruction & Professional Development Director Hester, Director of Student Supports Rudan and Assistant Director for Curriculum and Instructional Equity Ross-Cook were also in attendance.

A representative of the Homewood Chronicle was present. No members of the public were present.

Comments. No comments were made.

Policy 6:300 - Graduation Requirements. A lengthy and fulsome discussion regarding amending Policy 6:300 – Graduation Requirements took place. Specifically, a recommendation to change the current language regarding the graduation requirement for Social Science from 3.5 to 3.0 units of credit starting with the graduating class of 2026. Dr. Hester noted that the district previously approved a semester-long course to meet the state requirement for consumer economics (the state of Illinois requires 2 units of credit in social science). She added that this change keeps HF’s requirements above the state requirement while meeting the mandated needs. Students will still have the opportunity to take a year-long economics course if they so choose. Dr. Hester added that changing the graduation requirement in Social Science will help create space in students’ schedules for anticipated new state requirements as well as completing Career Pathways. It also opens a door up for student choice in elective credits. Mrs. Rudan stated that the communication/execution plan around this includes continued conversations with the Teaching & Learning Council that began last year. Dr. Alexander will meet with the Social Science Department prior to moving this recommendation to the board for approval at the board meeting on December 17. This item will be on the December 17, 2024 board agenda for approval.

Class Rank. Dr. Wakeley stated that class rank is a topic that has been discussed for the past year and a half with today being an opportunity to share thoughts and finish the discussion on class rank. Mrs. Rudan noted that they are proposing to eliminate class rank at H-F and replace it with diploma distinction awards that recognize more students’ outstanding academic achievement. Dr. Wakeley added that this change actually will raise the bar for all students. He stated that currently, only the top ten senior students are given recognition as the best of the graduating class based on their class rank and this change will allow more students to be recognized for their outstanding academic efforts. A 4.0 grade point average (GPA) scale will be used, but students earn higher GPAs when a course is worth more classified as weighted because of its difficulty. These weighted courses are primarily Advanced Placement (AP), International Baccalaureate (IB) and Dual Credit courses. Diploma distinctions would include: Cum Laude (with praise) to students with weighted GPAs between 3.75 and 3.99; Magna Cum Laude (with great praise) to students with GPAs 4.0 to 4.24; and Summa Cum Laude (with highest praise) to students with GPAs 4.25 and above. The students would wear stoles at the graduation ceremony that designate the type of honor distinction they received. Mrs. Rudan stated that colleges are not necessarily looking at class rank as much as they are looking at a student’s transcript that shows the courses taken by the student. This change, if approved, would be implemented for the graduating class of 2028. Dr. Alexander pointed out that changing to a weighted grade system will benefit students by encouraging them to think about how their course selection will impact their ability to learn and how it will be a benefit for their future college or career choices. He added that this proposal complements the district’s strategic plan - to sustain and increase rigorous course enrollment. Mr. Legardy expressed his concern that there is an abundance of schools that still take class rank into consideration. Mrs. Rudan responded that any college will accept class rank, however, by not providing class rank it will result in colleges doing a deeper dive into the student’s resume’. She reiterated that colleges will accept a class rank if it is provided, however, it is not a deciding

factor for colleges. Mr. Legardy expressed that he is not sure what will be achieved by taking those achievement ranks away. Dr. Wakeley responded that our students' resumes will stand on their own and they will still get into the highly selected schools to which they apply. Dr. Wakeley added that he believes that class rank may be doing a disservice to our students because they are not always taking courses they may want to take because they are often playing the rank game. He also noted that Bradley Bourbonnais has not had class rank in some time and their students are attending Notre Dame, University of Illinois and other renowned Big Ten schools. Mrs. Hoereth pointed out, as a college admissions person, that they do not care about class rank, however, on the Common Application a student's class rank is still required. She added that colleges will dissect everything that is given to them. Most schools do not use class rank and they look at the courses that students have taken. Mrs. Hoereth stated that colleges will be looking at level of rigor; how many AP courses were taken; and, how many IB courses the student has taken over four years. It was also noted that there are still some scholarships where class rank is needed. In addition, the question of whether students would have access to their class rank if requested was also raised and discussed. Mr. Legardy voiced that he does not want to be premature on making this decision since the Common Application and a variety of scholarships still require class rank. Agreement was also voiced by a majority of the board that moving to diploma distinctions would perhaps incentivize more than class rank and diploma distinctions would be seen as an incentive to try harder. There was a consensus of the board to move to the diploma distinction system while making available to students their class rank if requested. Dr. Wakeley noted that this item will be on the January 21, 2025 board meeting agenda for approval. Mrs. Hoereth requested that before the end of the school year, she would like to have discussions on other areas where resources can be implemented for students who want to go to college and feels that there is much more that they can be doing with the same amount of energy and effort that went into this recommended change.

Early College. Dr. Hester provided a presentation on an Early College initiative that falls in line with the district's 5-year goal that by 2029, 80% of HF students will meet the state of Illinois College and Career Ready Indicator making them eligible for the Illinois Distinguished Scholar distinction. Currently our students have an opportunity to take Dual Credit courses and can earn college credit at H-F with properly credentialed teachers. This opportunity for students is in partnership with Prairie State College (PSC), Illinois Institute of Technology (IIT) and Lewis University with classes that are taken at H-F. The early college initiative would provide an opportunity for students to enroll and take courses at college while attending high school. The recommendation is an early college initiative with PSC starting in 2025-26 with H-F graduating seniors. Dr. Hester noted that they will target 15 students for the 2025-26 school year; students will earn up to 30 transferable college credits during their senior year; students will take four courses per semester at PSC (and return to take an additional course at HF); learn from PSC faculty on their campus; HF post-secondary and PSC counselors coordinate to ensure student success; and the district and families share the cost. A list of courses with transferrable credits within the state of Illinois have been decided on with PSC. College Counselors Brad Kain and Kevin Coy will watch over progress and communicate with families. Dr. Hester also spoke on the benefits of the early college initiative being proposed: it is a rigorous college level curriculum; it offers early transition to college; transferable college credit hours; increase independence and responsibility of students; and the potential to reduce overall college cost. This initiative will provide an opportunity so more of our students can go to college, stay in college and benefit from the affordability. H-F students will have ability to get an Associate Degree whether they plan on pursuing a college degree or immediate employment after they graduate high school. Bus transportation to PSC will be provided to students at 7:30 a.m. A very lengthy discussion ensued regarding a number of comments, concerns and questions voiced by board members including but not limited to: student profile, the level of maturity of the student, psychological/social supports, attendance issues, and measuring the success rate of this program. Mr. Riedel asked if the tracking of the students post-graduation would be done to see how well this opportunity prepared them for their next stage in their college journey. Mrs. Hoereth commented that eight college courses can be very difficult for students who have never taken a college course. Dr. Alexander expressed that he is confident that our students will transition well with rigor and attendance not being an issue. Mr. Legardy requested the percentage of students going to in-state schools and a list of out-of-state institutions accepting credits earned at PSC. Dr. Hester will provide this information to the board. Mr. Anderson suggested that from an equity point to look at the possibility of subsidizing this program to take the burden off the parents. Whether the district or parents would cover some or all of the cost of this initiative was raised and discussion ensued. Mr. Anderson stated that he supports this program and from his finance chair perspective does not feel like it is a budgetary problem. Dr. Wakeley pointed out that college and career counselors will need supports as well. Ms. Jackson suggested pausing discussions on this until Dr. Norrell arrives giving her an opportunity to make a full assessment. Dr. Wakeley added that Dr. Norrell would provide a lot of insight on this and the way she would like it implemented. Mr. Riedel suggested continuing conversations on this, perhaps in early fall. Ms. Jackson added that she feels a broader picture of all financials is needed as a separate conversation. Mrs.

Hoereth stated that she is more interested in the program side and the equity of it. She added that this initiative would affect a tiny percentage of our school and she asked if there is something available for the larger majority of our students to ensure that our bases regarding equity and access are covered. The board agreed with Ms. Jackson's suggestion to pause and wait for Dr. Norrell's input on this initiative and not bring this item forward to the board for approval at this time. In addition, conversations on this topic will continue in the future.

Adjournment. The Committee-of-the-Whole meeting was adjourned at 11:20 a.m.

President

Vice-President/Secretary