

**Wyoming School-University Partnership  
Governing Board Meeting Minutes**

**April 7, 2011**

**Present**

*Board Members:* Dave Barker (Platte #2), Debbie Bovee (WEA), Bob Bryant (WDE), Diana Clapp (Fremont #6), Joel Dvorak (Natrona #1), Paige Fenton Hughes (WEA), Kathy Hitt (Fremont #1), Rick Luchsinger (Niobrara #1), Kay Persichitte (UW College of Education), Ray Schulte (Goshen #1), Audrey Shalinsky (UW College of Arts and Sciences), John Weigel (Converse #1).

*Calling in by Telephone:* Joe McCann (Wyoming Community College Commission)

*Partnership Staff:* Audrey Kleinsasser

**1. Welcome and Introductions**

President Dave Barker convened the meeting at 10:03 a.m., welcoming those in attendance. Dave asked each to introduce him or herself and tell what they do. Also, he asked each to comment on his or her favorite or pertinent quotation, or a word that describes you, your philosophy, or your thoughts of the day and explain why that's on your mind at the moment.

**2. Minutes and Financial Report**

The first order of business was to review and approve the meeting agenda, along with consent agenda items including the January 20, 2011 meeting minutes and the January – March Partnership bills. Joel Dvorak moved to approve the minutes and financial report; Bob Bryant seconded.

**3. Partnership and NNER Grounding Activity: Shared reading of "After Arizona," an op-ed from *The New Republic*, February 3, 2011**

Dave Barker introduced Audrey Shalinsky who facilitated the one-hour discussion. The summary below is not intended to capture every remark but will provide highlights of a rich and complex discussion. She began by suggesting that the author of the op-ed really didn't define civility or incivility almost leaving the reader with the thought: "I'll know it when I see it." Among the comments evoked by the reading was the importance of feeling passion about our beliefs, with the need to do that civilly. Another board member emphasized that the important thing isn't agreeing or disagreeing, it's about trying to respect multiple histories, belief systems, and values. This prompted one participant to counter, "I'm not buying it. We should be teaching people to be civil with each other." At this point, another board member stated that anyone should be able to speak strongly and passionately for a particular point of view, but that for everyone else, critical thinking has to kick in.

Audrey Shalinsky asked the group to consider the core American principle of freedom of speech, illustrated by a recent U.S. Supreme Court case involving Fred Phelps, the Kansas minister whose group has disrupted the funerals of people who are homosexual, including that of Matthew Shepard in Casper many years ago. Phelps, of course, is feeling and articulating

extreme passion about a view point, one many of us would characterize as indecent and profoundly unkind. That led one board member to articulate, “You can have conflict and you don’t have to surrender your humanity.”

This prompted another board member to claim that we have lost the art of conversation, debate, and argument. We must remember that people have differing opinions, but we don’t have to agree. The current environment might be fueled by the media and a good, even great story that’s boils down to “attack, attack, attack.”

Then, a governing board member reminded the group about one of John Goodlad’s principles, the value of civil discourse and its importance to a democratic system. “I hope we’ve not lost it, that it’s just buried. We create more problems through incivility. We need to show respect for diversity of beliefs and perspectives.”

This prompted another board member to build a connection to a biological perspective. He asked if as a species, can we evolve quickly enough to not destroy ourselves with technology, especially technology around weaponry and communication?

Audrey Shalinsky asked board members to think, again, about the classroom. What are the connections between classroom and democracy? Is there a role for teaching civility? Have you seen incivility in the classroom? One participant offered the example of at-risk students, students who have had few or no role models, “Absolutely, we have to focus on this. Kids don’t know how to be civil – there are no examples for them.” Another board member suggested a book titled, *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success at Work and in Life, One Conversation at a Time*, by Susan Scott, published in 2004. The author shows how to have tough conversations, to confront situations rather than avoid them. “They don’t know how to do that. That’s a skill you’d better have. It’s a social skill, but it’s [also] a citizenship skill.”

A board member posited that incivility in schools is called bullying. He continued, “Right now, bullying is the biggest thing for lawyers – so at a pragmatic perspective, we’ve got to teach civility/anti-bullying. It’s huge. It’s fundamentally our responsibility to get them there. If kids are connected to adults who demonstrate and model that, kids will have models. It’s our responsibility to say it’s not okay.” Several examples were cited, including one regarding special needs children and increasingly diverse classrooms. Said the board member, “... we talk about their beliefs – [and that] helps us understand where they’re coming from.”

A small school superintendent suggested that such discussions might be a little hard in small schools as just about everyone knows everyone else, or thinks they know about them. Starting a class with a norming activity was suggested by one person. Then, when a difficult topic comes up or tensions arise, the teacher is able to say, “At the beginning, we agreed about ways to disagree with one another.” At the university level, Audrey Shalinsky explained that the College of Arts and Sciences has created a document “Students and Teachers Working Together,” though she allowed that it’s probably more about cell phone behavior than creating a safe environment for honest disagreement. As the discussion closed, a governing board member

suggested that a teacher could build those norms for each class; use the UW documents—the covenants—but the important thing is the process, also the relationship-building.

Audrey Shalinsky wrapped up the NNER grounding, thanking everyone for a wide-ranging, deep, and rich discussion, one that spanned the classroom, country, and world and offered some specific suggestions in our daily lives.

#### **4. 2011-2012 Budget**

After a short discussion and several questions to clarify, Ray Schulte moved for approval and Bob Bryant seconded a motion to approve the 2011-2012 budget, as presented in the board packet.

Key goals for the coming year are to a) maintain the current members; b) add 2-3 district members; c) look toward co-sponsoring the 2012 NNER conference in the Denver-Boulder area; and d) launch a community engagement project with help from NNER colleague, John Anderson who will be moving back to Pinedale, Wyoming, after completing work at the University of Nebraska-Kearney as a professor of political science.

#### **5. Updates around the Partnership and the NNER.**

Board members in attendance were interested in feedback from participants in four high school to higher education transitions meetings. The following questions and comments were posed: How do we get more teachers to go? The role of sharing student work across levels creates a real conversation—keep doing that. Except for mathematics, community college participation has been light. Joe McCann, Wyoming Community College Commission suggested that college leadership is focused on the completion agenda. He agreed that there was a need for richer dialogue between community college and high school faculty to make completion work better, especially around the developmental needs of students (e.g., math, English, reading intensive courses). He thought that community college leadership will be seeing that the transition effort is more of an issue than less of an issue. He also noted that many are teaching overloads, 15 to 20 credits.

The discussion of materials was concluded with the director and several board members highlighting several items, in particular upcoming events.

#### **Adjournment**

With all business items completed, Chairman Dave Baker adjourned the meeting at 12:15 p.m., inviting board members to complete their meeting feedback forms and enjoy lunch and continued discussion.