



BEVERLY HILLS EDUCATION ASSOCIATION

Educational Employees Working Together

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CONSENSUS

A Newsletter for BHEA Members

June 25, 2007



Board Confronts Mismanagement of Independent Study Program

- Board members criticize administration for lax oversight. District says future changes are needed.
- BHEA led the charge for reform. Still, Board adopts new policy that will allow program to continue.

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At their June 19 meeting, the Board of Education attempted to take charge of BHUSD's independent study (IS) program after coming under heavy criticism for sanctioning, according to BHEA and others, the devaluing of a Beverly Hills High School diploma. The issue came to a head as BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée and former BHHS Head Counselor Vivian Saatjian-Green openly addressed the Board (Bushée's speech is available online at BHEA.org/News). Both contended that the IS program has lost credibility among the staff, in large part because of the open-ended process of selecting IS students and the lower academic standards in IS. A week earlier, as criticism began to mount, Alternative Education Dir. Twila Cook staunchly defended her management of IS at the June 12 Board meeting. Some of Cook's support among Board members appeared to evaporate, however, at the June 19 meeting. Cook was absent on June 19; Pupil Services Dir. Amy Lambert and Asst. Supt. of Ed. Services Ilene Straus had to respond to Board members' questions about IS. Interestingly, the Board adopted a new IS policy on June 19 that will allow the program to continue in 07-08, although it will presumably be managed differently.

On June 21, the BH *Weekly* newspaper ran a front-page story on IS in BHUSD (www.bhweekly.com/pdfs/403.pdf).

[com/pdfs/403.pdf](http://www.bhweekly.com/pdfs/403.pdf).

There was much discussion of IS at the June 19 Board meeting. Board VP Myra Demeter said that 'abuse of a policy' is easy when there's no oversight and 'lack of definition of process.' She said that the academic rigor of IS should be the same as in the traditional environment. She said that it is a huge issue that IS's instructor is not credentialed to teach all of classes offered in IS, regardless of what the law says. She said that BHUSD needs to maintain the 'quality' of IS and called on the administration to better monitor IS. She told Straus that the Board will hold her accountable for IS.

Board Pres. John Millan asked how the IS instructor knows if material is being learned if the instructor is not credentialed in the subject being taught. Straus responded that this is achieved by meeting with the student for one hour per week and by rigidly following timelines with homework. Straus also said that some current IS students would be better served by BHUSD's alternative high school, Moreno HS.

Board member Alissa Roston said that she is concerned about how students are being selected for IS. She said she does not support moving students from the traditional environment to IS in 'Week 17,' meaning late into the semester. She said that concerns about opening up IS too

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Comparison Chart

Independent Study

Differences:

- 60 minutes of student contact per week.
- Instructor has *no* credential in subject matter being taught.
- Instructor issues grades for 25 different courses (see list on reverse side).
- Science labs done at student's home.

Similarities:

- Courses receive UC and Cal State credit.
- Courses lead to BHHS diploma.

Traditional Environment

Differences:

- 1,500 minutes of student contact per week.
- Instructor *has* credential in subject matter being taught.
- Instructor issues grades for 2-3 different courses.
- Science labs done at school in a laboratory.

Similarities:

- Courses receive UC and Cal State credit.
- Courses lead to BHHS diploma.

Standing Up for Standards

Commentary by BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée

So often today, teachers and educational support staff are held accountable by the public for the success and failure of our students. We are held to minimum standards of performance. Frequently, we go above and beyond the minimum.

Our district's mismanagement of the independent study (IS) program touches a nerve. The high standards that the public expects teachers to maintain—credentials in the subjects we teach, ample contact minutes with students, adherence to curricular standards, providing necessary resources (like science labs)—have been roundly ignored by our district administration with the IS program. Yet, amazingly, IS students earn the same BHHS diploma as all other students.

This behavior is inconsistent with the high academic standards we strive to maintain and is dangerous for the reputation of our general academic program. Once our administration starts lowering standards for any course that ultimately leads to a BHHS diploma, it does a disservice to our mission

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(INDEPENDENT STUDY, Continued from page 1)

much and not having sufficient quality of lessons in IS are 'legitimate.' She was critical of an administrative regulation that states: 'Students who are interested in IS should contact their principal.' She called for a report of all students who were enrolled in IS in 06-07. On June 12, Roston asked the administration if there was any substance to claims that IS has become a program for students who don't want to work hard. The administration said 'no.'

Board member Myra Lurie said that BHUSD should 'personalize' the learning experience for all students. (On June 12, she said that some students have 'specialized learning needs' that can be addressed in IS.) She asked if students in IS receive a different kind of diploma. Straus answered that IS students receive a regular BHHS diploma. Lurie said that IS courses should be indicated as such on BHHS transcripts.

Board member Nooshin Meshkaty said that the administration needs to look at how BHHS designates IS courses on transcripts. On June 12, she said that IS helps collect revenue, that one-on-one mentoring is good, and that IS is needed for students not willing to sit in classrooms. She supports expanding IS to the K-8 level as a way to 'save' students with special needs so BHUSD does not 'lose' these students to other schools.

Straus said that BHUSD is more active in IS than in the past. She said that the administration will meet with staff in the fall to review IS selection procedures. She said that selection involves looking at 'specific cases' and does not include factors such as 'not liking a teacher.' She said that BHUSD's IS program follows state guidelines.

Straus said that IS 'processes haven't been clear.' She said that academic 'rigor' in IS is an issue. She said that BHUSD will 'look at' the science lab aspect of IS. (IS students are receiving credit for lab science courses for doing experiments at home rather than in a school laboratory.) She said that 'acceptable' reasons for entering IS include: school-phobia, being out-of-town, and needing 'incredible' credit recovery. She said there are 'many ways' that students may be recommended for IS.

Lambert said that IS can bring back students who have already dropped out of school. She said that IS can serve as an alternative to home schooling. She said she did not know how IS courses appear on BHHS transcripts. She said that IS is not alternative education, but rather a different 'educational model.'

Over the summer, BHEA will contact the federal Dept. of Education, the Western Assn. of Schools and Colleges (the HS accrediting agency), and undergraduate admissions departments at select universities to call their attention to our district's IS program.

(STANDARDS, Continued from page 1) of excellence.

BHEA speaks with authority when it defends the integrity of our curriculum. Teachers develop and deliver the curriculum. Teachers are being held accountable when students do not learn. So when teachers are cut out of the administrative decision-making process on how IS operates, we need to speak out. Why? Because the public will ultimately hold teachers accountable when students don't succeed, even if a student's failure is the result of mismanaged programs and educationally unsound decisions by our administration.

Stand up for standards. Let your voice be heard.

List of Courses Taught by Lone Independent Study Instructor

Although our district's lone independent study instructor holds a credential only for social studies, BHUSD makes him responsible for issuing grades for all of the following courses. Can you find a course that you teach on the list?

- Algebra
- Piano
- Senior English
- French
- Economics
- U.S. History
- Art
- Physics
- Spanish
- Health
- Geometry
- Computers
- Film & Cinema
- Chemistry
- U.S. Government
- Physical Education
- Photography
- General Math
- Junior English
- Biology
- Sophomore English
- Physical Science
- Geography
- Freshman English
- World History

Seamless Transition from Unum Provident to Standard

BHEA members who currently have either disability or life insurance with UnumProvident will be moved to a company called 'The Standard' starting this fall. The change is occurring because CTA chose to change affiliates for these types of insurance. BHEA has spoken with CTA and confirmed that the transition will be seamless. Current enrollees will not need to fill out any new paperwork.

Payroll and Benefits Specialist Melody Voyles drafted a statement for members regarding the transition and asked BHEA to distribute it. Her statement appears online at BHEA.org/News.

Final Ratification Results

Below please find the detailed, certified results from the June 13 ratification of changes to Articles IV, XXI, and Appendix B of the certificated contract. BHEA members ratified the changes by a vote of 116-29. The Board of Ed. voted to approve the agreement on June 19.

High School/District Office:

YES: 36 NO: 3

Beverly Vista:

YES: 31 NO: 3

El Rodeo:

YES: 12 NO: 10

Hawthorne:

YES: 6 NO: 3

Horace Mann:

YES: 31 NO: 10

BHEA thanks all members who exercised their right to vote.

BHEA Pres. Speaks in Support of Affordable Housing

BHEA Pres. Chris Bushée submitted a statement supporting efforts by the BH City Council to approve a mixed-use housing development that would create subsidized affordable housing within the city limits for public sector employees of Beverly Hills. The proposal being considered would create two 750-square foot townhouses. The maximum qualifying household income for these units would be around \$60,000 annually.

Bushée's statement is accessible online at BHEA.org/News.

BHEA Meeting Dates for 07-08

Dates for all regularly scheduled BHEA Executive Board and Representative Council meetings have been set. All meetings start at 3:45pm at the high school. The exact room location is yet to be determined. The schedule is accessible on the home page of BHEA.org.