



BHEA on Independent Study

This is a transcript of a BHEA speech delivered at the June 19, 2007 Board of Ed. meeting:

Speech by BHEA Certificated President Christopher Bushée

Good evening. I will abbreviate independent study as 'IS.' Our district's single IS teacher holds a credential only for social studies and has been given an impossible task. He is listed as the teacher of record for no less than 25 different courses, including biology, algebra, piano, English, French, and so on... He is responsible for delivering the same instruction, holding students accountable to the same state standards, and issuing grades for all of these courses...no different than a regular classroom teacher. An IS student is required to come onto campus only one day per week for only 60 minutes to meet with our IS teacher for any and all IS courses the student is taking. Some students have seven IS courses, so they basically meet with the IS teacher for 9 minutes per week per subject. I guess these students are at home the other four days of the week, right? Contrast this with a student enrolled in the same courses in the traditional classroom environment, where the student meets with the classroom teacher for 250 minutes per week per subject, or a total of 1,750 minutes weekly for seven courses. Does our Board really believe that, for example, a physics course delivered by a non-credentialed teacher for 9 minutes per week with no laboratory facilities at all is equivalent to the regular classroom environment and therefore worthy of a Beverly diploma? BHEA has learned that some IS courses are appearing on transcripts as UC-approved.

Some very capable students whose classes include Honors and AP courses, have been put into IS mid-year for just one single subject because they were weren't earning a high enough grade. Although our Alternative Education Director says that teachers and counselors have referred students to IS, this is simply not the case in all instances. BHEA has had conversations with several teachers that say that students have just disappeared from their class rosters and reappeared in IS, without the teacher ever being involved in the process. Three of my students ended up in IS this year and at no point was I ever asked for my professional opinion. This program has no credibility among our teachers and counselors. Two students who live in Ventura County have been enrolled in our IS program this year and have worked toward earning a Beverly Hills High School diploma without ever setting foot on our campus. What is our district saying? "Earn a Beverly diploma from the comfort of your home?"

Over the next few weeks, BHEA will do the following. We will contact the federal Department of Education to inquire about possible violations of the No Child Left Behind Act that requires teachers to hold credentials in the subjects they teach. We will contact the Western Association of Schools and Colleges that accredits our high school to find out if they fully understand the two-tiered system that is available to students to earn a Beverly diploma. We will contact the undergraduate admissions offices at select universities to inform them of our ever-expanding IS program.

The independent study program the way it's currently being run is an embarrassment to our district. It is an affront to the 99% of the student body who is following the rules, working hard, and having to occasionally confront and accept the difficult realities of life. This program cannot continue in its current form. The integrity of a Beverly diploma is at stake. I look forward to continuing this discussion in the fall. Thank you.