FOCUS ON JERICHO TEACHERS AND THEIR ISSUES

April 2009

President's Message for April

By Maryann Risi

Can you believe that spring has finally sprung? (Heavy April showers in May not withstanding!) A time to begin preparing for that last burst of good teaching time before "senioritis", "fifth grade slump" and summer camp dreams. We all know that this may be our last chance to drive home the lesson or prepare for the test or squeeze in that review. Then it's all down hill from there. Summer plans are coming into view for us, too. You should be hearing, or have already heard from your CAs, the district's interest in what do we want or will we be willing to teach this summer. If you have any ideas, please see a CA as soon as you can. The sooner we get them our in-service needs, the sooner they will have them out for us to register. I have spoken with Barbara and we hope to have plans in place for next year to make this a simpler process for everyone.

Plans are also being made for next year's two Superintendent's Conference Days. Again, if you have any ideas or suggestions for topics please see your CA, building administrator, or even email them directly to Barbara. She is looking to have open communication with the faculty in order to meet our needs as much as possible. This year's conference days were well received and we would hope that this will continue in the future.

Enjoy the rest of the spring and please make plans to join us at the End of Year Party. It is always such a fun evening for all who attend. Please come, if only to wish our retirees well and to welcome our newly tenured….we look forward to dancing the night away with all of you!

Research and Development Overview

By Denise Ryder

Phase I and Phase II proposals have been handed in. The Curriculum Committee's all day review of Phase II proposals has taken place. Now that it's all over, let's take a brief look at the process and possibly gain a little insight and an understanding about why some projects are funded, some are not, and why some days seem drastically reduced.

Faculty members, both new and 'seasoned,' have questions about this whole R&D *thing*, which I admit is sort of complicated (and seems to have gotten more so over the years). Next year the Curriculum Committee will be publishing a separate document closer to the time when proposals are due, but a preview with some reminders and explanations wouldn't hurt.

Disclaimer: This viewpoint is my own however, it is written from a number of *perspectives*: as building rep., as faculty member, and as Curriculum Committee member.

A colleague asked me (me, the building rep.) if there was anything written in our contract about R&Ds. There is, sort of, and I showed her the pages. She thanked me saying she would *never* have thought to look under Leave of Absence. Leave of Absence? Yup! On pages 14-15, Article X, section H, Leave of Absence. Why? Because *many moons* ago we "traded" sabbaticals for R&Ds.

The wording in the contract is vague (surprise, surprise). You can and should read it yourself, but here's the what it says:

"Such assignments, if granted, shall be

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DID you know…

By contract, all Jericho teachers must be members of both the AFT (American Federation of Teachers) *and* NYSUT (New York State Union of Teachers). The Union manages these memberships for us which accounts for nearly $500 of the dues we pay!

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used as follows:

1. For research and development and curriculum projects as determined by the administration (or staff may suggest areas of concern for study)..."

That's pretty much it, research and development and curriculum projects as determined by the administration, and if a staff member has an idea, go for it. That's basically it, but doesn't really help with a proposal.

So we ask the question again, "What is an R&D?" Here is *my own* explanation/description, and *not* an official district definition (because there really isn't one).

I'd first say it's a creative endeavor - a great idea. It's a project that is worked on, outside of school, that will *really* enhance something you teach. It could be collaborative or interdisciplinary. A good R&D is time consuming to plan and to do. It should be "above and beyond" what you could accomplish during the course of your regular teaching assignment. It must be unique from existing projects or commercial programs. An R&D proposal can be written to develop curriculum for a new course, or it can be used to address a mandatory and significant change in your curriculum. It doesn't *have to* be creative or collaborative, it could just be necessary ("...as determined by the administration").

Where does the money come from? R&D money is negotiated for the purpose of funding projects. Jericho is one of only two districts on Long Island that offers their teachers R&D funding (the other is Commack).

In days gone by, the faculty was provided with a list of district and building goals, which was administration's way of suggesting areas of concern for study. We stopped receiving these lists of goals, and are now supposed to meet with our curriculum associates for "direction" (see subtle comment #5 at the end of the article).

Another change was made a few years ago in an attempt to make the process more "equitable," (don't get me started). This change was the creation of "phases." Phase I is the non-competitive phase. Two thirds of the total number of days available is divided between the faculty members that express interest by completing a "Letter of Intent to Participate." Phase I R&Ds are *non-competitive* but not 100% *guaranteed*. Seriously, if you propose something less than worth while or are really unclear, your proposal *will* get denied. This year, quite a few proposals were given back for "clarification purposes."

Phase II is the competitive phase. One-third of the days are available for creative, collaborative, interdisciplinary, mandated, or necessary proposals. The key word here is competitive. Teachers who are submitting proposals should *really* keep that in mind. There are *proposals* and there are *PROPOSALS*. Also remember that as a result of our last contract negotiation, a portion of the money allocated for R&Ds is now going towards offsetting our increased health insurance contribution, thus effecting the overall number of days available for projects. There are less days to begin with. Subtract the Phase I non-competitive days and the total number of Phase II R&D days the committee has to award is *greatly* reduced. For the last two years, the total number of days requested is *twice* the number of days we have to award.

If the committee could fund all the proposals, we would (within reason, of course). But we can't because there simply are not enough days. What to do? Thin the herd, choose the best, and try to fund as many as possible.

The process

Committee members receive copies of all of the proposals which we must read, take notes on, and be ready to discuss in an all day meeting starting at 7:30 a.m. and lasting until we are done (this year we were there until after 4 p.m.).

As a committee member, the first thing I do is check to see that the application is complete. Are all colleagues who are necessary to complete the project included in the proposal? If not, I will make a note to ask. There may be a good reason. There might not. I need to know. Did all the participants sign it? The CAs? The principal? Do the days add up? Do overall number of days requested match the outline of the plan in letter B of the proposal? Incomplete/sloppy applications usually have other issues as well! If you have lots of typos and grammatical errors in your proposal, what does that say about your project? I am also considering the proposal's "uniqueness." Is this proposal unique from existing projects or commercial programs? Will this project produce something that is not currently available?

Round 1

In the first round we are looking for clarity, usefulness, and originality/creativity. Letter A of the proposal is your opportunity to convince the committee why your proposal should be funded. Having read letter A of the proposal (statement of objective/expected learning outcomes and application to curriculum, including grade level(s) and/or subject area(s)), the committee should have a *clear* understanding of what you plan to do and why it is *very important* that you do it. You may also want to explain why you need additional time out of your normal preparations if you think it might be clear to someone who is not familiar with your particular grade assignment or specialty area. Why should your proposal be funded *and not* the next one - after all, this *is* the competitive phase. Your proposal should also state

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which classes/grades the project will be used in and when it will be implemented.

Letter B of the application calls for "a brief description and/or outline of your plan, and the specific timeline (e.g. 2 days for research, 2 days for compilation, 1 day for word processing and 1 day for editing, etc.) necessary to achieve the project's objectives/expected learning outcomes." Honestly, two days to compile, one day for word processing, and one day for editing *is too much* (that phrase is probably left over from typewriter days, before word processing and e-mail and spell check). And for goodness sake, don't multiply those days by the number of applicants! If possible, designate one person to prepare the document for submission. And, unless there is some *unique* reason why your project will take more than a few hours to compile, I wouldn't suggest asking for more than a half a day. But that's just my opinion. One more thing...MAKE SURE THE DAYS OUTLINED IN LETTER B ADD UP TO THE TOTAL REQUESTED!

Letter C should contain a brief description and/or outline of the specific information which will be contained ultimately in the final project which you will submit for payment. What materials, lessons, exercises or tests will result from the project? Be specific. How many lesson plans? How many tests? What exactly do you mean by a "unit?" Does your unit take three days or three months to complete? If you are using a term or word that may not be universally clear, define it. For example, I might promise a "pathfinder" as a specific item that will be included in my final submission. Since pathfinder is a word that might not be widely understood (like lesson plan) I will explain that a pathfinder is a detailed, very visual, step-by-step guide and, depending on what is being taught, could be 5 or 6 pages long.

Round 2

Still with us? Good. Now we go back to the beginning.

From what you have outlined in letter B and promised in letter C, the committee must determine whether or not the requested days and the timeline are reasonable for the completion of the project *and* will the completed project be worth its costs? No easy feat. Big discussions. Hard to describe.

As I said before, if the committee could fund all the proposals, we would (within reason, of course). I promise, we are trying to fund as many as possible. This is teacher money that we want to award to teachers. In the olden days, if applicants asked for what the committee determined to be too many days, the proposal was out. Honestly, that would make the committee's job much easier. Consider this: four people put in a creative, innovative proposal. The committee agrees. The applicants promise lots of tangible materials. On days 1 and 2 all four participants will be very productive and will produce lots of lesson plans and other resources. On day 3 they will compile and on day 4 they type and edit. That's eight days of working on this great projects, but then eight days of word processing, compiling and editing. Maybe they didn't mean to write it like that, but they did, so, depending on the details of the project, we would subtract six or seven days and see if they were still interested. The total days was cut in half which looks drastic, but really, it was mostly the paperwork that got eliminated. I promise, the reduction of days is not random. *The reduction of days is never random.*

If your proposal goes through "untouched," good for you. If your proposal goes through but with a reduction in days, please try not to be insulted and understand that we didn't come to that decision without deliberation. You can refuse to do the project and the days will go to your colleagues on the wait-list. If your proposal was not funded, consider asking a committee member to review their notes with you. This can be very eye-opening and can help greatly the next time you submit.

I hope this has been helpful. I will re-run this article (or one similar to it) at the beginning of "R&D season" (around February).

-- *DR*

Here are a few other points to be taken into consideration when submitting your next proposal(s):

1. No single teacher will be awarded more than ten days overall. If you put in two projects that add up to 19 days, you, and anyone involved in the projects you have submitted, have serious problems. You may have to back out of one of your projects.
2. Generally speaking, new full year courses will not be awarded more than ten days; new half year courses will not be awarded more than five days. Look on the bright side, in other districts you are expected to prepare for a new course *without* additional compensation!
3. Phase I R&Ds are NOT guaranteed.
4. Phase II R&Ds are COMPETITIVE.
5. According to the contract R&D ideas can come from administration. Just be careful that your proposal isn't someone's future doctoral thesis (was that subtle?).
6. Each building has three members on the committee. Have them read your proposal before you hand it in. And don't wait for the last minute!

Happy Mother's Day!

You are cordially invited to attend the

JERICHO TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

End-of-Year Party

To celebrate and congratulate our newly tenured teachers and retirees

Thursday, June 11, 2009

4:00 - 7:30 p.m.

Tenured

Anne Frischer
James Lawlor
Jennifer Parlante
Lia Walters- Sciarillo
Melissa Xenakis

Retirees

Cathy Deans
Barbara Hammerman
Peter Horvath
Randi Skeats

Fox Hollow

Winter Garden Room
7725 Jericho Turnpike
Woodbury, NY 11797

$50.00 per person

Open Bar ♦ Hors d'oeuvres

Dinner ♦ Dessert ♦ Music to follow

RSVP by May 26, 2009

Please send checks (made payable to JTA) to Maria in the JTA Office