

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

January 9th, 2008

This was a Regular Board of Education meeting. All Board members were present at roll call.

Citizens Address the Board

Erin Nicholas – Resident of Palatine, children at St. Thomas and CLA

Received a note home today with her St. Thomas children saying that the bus system was going to be changed to a 3-tier system and the early time of 7:30 a.m. would affect the parochial schools. Upset with late notice of meeting, lack of communication. St. Thomas has approximately 80 children who ride the bus out of a 210 enrollment. They have struggled with their enrollment and feels that this early start time would not attract new students. Would like to know why the elementary school children would be grouped with the junior high students, who would presumably be more capable of dealing with an early time change. We love our drivers, has had lovely experiences with the scheduling, although it was a challenge earlier with their CLA student. There is definitely a quality of life issue that has to be considered right up there with the budget issue. It is absolutely important for you to consider that if two of the 3 tiers are not that great – the early one and the later one where kids get out at 3:30 and not home until 4 p.m. Then how attractive of a system is that? Thinks it needs to go back to the drawing board.

Ed Walsh – Resident of Palatine, children at St. Thomas

Here tonight because of the quality of life issue. Will have a six year old next year when this might change and she would have to get up at 6:15 a.m. He is a Cook County probation officer and works with juvenile delinquents. Knows that the kids he works with specifically need a lot of rest. Thinks there have been studies done and the results come back that if a kid gets a good night's rest, they do better. Is here representing his school in particular but mostly the parochial schools. When you say public school junior highs and parochial schools as well (on the early start), you are talking about six year old kids getting up at 6 a.m. and having to be alert and ready to go in school. He will be sure to check the district's Web site and follow up on communication with his principal. Said that if there was more notice given, there would be more St. Thomas parents here.

Board Discussion and Reports

Options: 2008-2009 Transportation Plan

Proposed Transportation Options for FY2009 www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_FY09_trans_options.pdf

George Lingel, Asst. Superintendent for Business – Starting times are estimates only. The times/schools within each tier should be set based on the district's instructional program. Goals are to shorten the bus routes and reduce the number of students on each route. Before the Board approves the plan, the transportation department will work with the VersaTrans software system and set up simulated bus runs.

The proposal is to look at what would happen if the district went to a three tier system next year with starting times of 7:30 a.m./8:15 a.m./8:55 a.m. They are estimates and are designed with 40 minutes between the routes.

Transportation is looking at having shorter bus routes. Example: Sandburg JH has ten bus routes this year. The proposal for next year includes 16 bus routes. Going from 10 to 16 routes should create shorter routes. However there is still the distance that has to be dealt with because many students from the west side of the district travel to Sandburg which is in the eastern portion of the district.

There will probably be 30 to 35 students on any given route. Also trying to combine adjacent routes (areas) for example Thomas Jefferson and Whiteley. Hopefully, we are at 35 to 40 minutes from the time a bus leaves and starts a route until they actually dismiss at schools.

Having more routes in tier 1 vs. tier 2 allows for considerable flexibility. In tier 2, orchestra kids could be picked up; there can be shuttles between schools. There would be six or 7 drivers that would not be assigned to a tier 2 route. There would also be some standby drivers to assist. With less routes in tier 2, if the district had to have a long route in tier 3, a driver who does not have a tier 2 route can be assigned to that route.

With three tiers, there would be a reduction in drivers, less buses, less concern in finding a location to park all of the buses.

Disadvantages of the three tier system - A starting time of 7:30 a.m. is a concern. Another concern is looking at the traffic/train patterns within our district between 7 a.m. and 7:30 a.m. The biggest advantage of the two tier system we have been on this year is it is ideal in terms of the starting times. Schools are starting at around 8 a.m. and before 9 a.m.

Disadvantages of the two tier system - Size of the fleet. Had to expand the fleet and asking to expand again to get through the remainder of the school year. That means more budget dollars are needed to maintain the vehicles. Need to add a mechanic or two with a fleet of 160 buses, additional drivers and location to house the buses.

Don Skinner, Transportation Director – We are busing 5200 kids per tier this year and it requires more buses. With more tiers, you can divide the kids and use the same buses. Skinner was looking for a balance in the tiers by lining up the building/enrollment and geographical pairings of schools while still maintaining 40 to 45 minutes between tiers.

Didn't want to shift any school from a tier 1 to a tier 3. Wanted to keep the change in starting time to a minimum. Major change that we have proposed is the 25 minute earlier start for tier 1 schools (junior highs and parochial). He looked at the history of school starting times and subsequently the schools that started later two years ago, he put them in tier 3 because they have been used to starting later.

It became apparent that the parochial schools needed to continue to be grouped together – doesn't know what kind of answers we could give as to how to split them. Also wanted to continue grouping the junior high schools in terms of activities, competitions and keeping that age group together.

Lingel – Transportation has not yet considered changing the requirements for the current 453 paid riders. Some adjustments can be made to the length (distance from school). Another consideration would be to look at reducing the number of stops. These things would make it more efficient and shorten the length of the bus route. Could possibly look at those things but have not done that yet.

Skinner – Looked at this year and went back and looked at last year. In essence we were a three tier system last year when the parochial schools were starting at 7:15 a.m. Now we are incorporating them in this system. He looked at bus loads/ratios to construct the new system and projected a little further to reduce the size, number of student riders (per bus route).

Board discussion/questions/comments –

Board member Kelly Keenan – Asked if there was any way that transportation could do a dry run (of the proposed 3-tier routes) prior to the Board voting on it? Not a simulated dry run but an actual dry run with traffic patterns. And at what cost? If it is simulated on the computer, transportation would have to have the routes set up. **Skinner** – Suspects that could be done, the computer can run routes.

Lingel – And see if it is going to work within the timeframe because the biggest thing here is the 40 to 45 minutes between routes. If that could be brought down by 5 minutes, you could change the starting times possibly by 15 minutes for the first tier and get it to 7:45 a.m. Don't quote him but then you wouldn't have to impact the later dismissal time. Thinks 7:45 a.m. would be much more attractive to any of the schools.

Board member Gerald Chapman – Agrees that it might be more attractive but even more attractive is making sure everyone is getting to their school on time. Would hate to see us compact the timeframe to the extent that we are not meeting it because we have gone through that issue as well. Referred to last page of the Board report and the budget comparison. Asked questions regarding the revenue vs. expenditures for this year based on additional buses purchased to date. Further asked what that would be in future years.

If we purchase additional buses tonight, then this fiscal year we would be over our budget by \$1.4M. If we claim them, we would get roughly \$140K for the next five years. The report shows excess revenue of \$1.4M for the following year. So a loss in one year is offset the next year.

Board President Tim Millar – It is misleading because the other funds are the ones actually getting impacted. Transportation fund is getting all of the revenue but there are hits in the transportation IMRF and insurance funds which are non-claimable expenses.

Chapman – That is true, except we would have fewer drivers when going to three tiers. The reimbursement is spread over some period of time. Also, if we go to the three tier plan, and buy buses, we will have excess buses next year. Asked Lingel if the budget showed the revenue gained by selling buses (approximately \$2K to \$3K per old bus).

Lingel – We would try to accomplish selling 20 buses in the month of June so it could be booked into this fiscal year.

Chapman – Asked if we went to a lease/purchase plan, would the first year be payable this fiscal year.

Lingel – Replied yes, we have to pay upon delivery.

Board member Wendy Rowden – Wondered how Transportation could actually do a dry run. You cannot account for how long it takes to load the kids on the buses, kids being at the bus stop on time – those factors delay the buses. Which goes back to the two things that transportation said they never really looked at yet – reducing the number of bus stops and creating more efficiency within our own current system. You can do a dry run with the bus, but not really even with the traffic because you don't know what construction may come up next fall. But you can't deal with the human element. Doesn't see how we could do a dry run and have any reliable data.

Skinner – Practically speaking (dry run) would be tough to do.

Keenan – Understands the human element that cannot be accounted for but it is still not a reason to not try your best now to see if it works. See if the trains are on time, etc.

Rowden – Hates to rely on that information and then it proves to be completely wrong. Reticent of these kinds of things because of the past and thinking it would work, and then it didn't work. Asked questions regarding buses for elementary band/orchestra students (the shuttles back to the students' home school), kindergarten and after-school activities. How is that accommodated in the 3-tier plan?

Skinner – Believes that the administration is considering keeping band/orchestra within the buildings for next year which would eliminate the travel (shuttles). This year there were no buses for that. Next year, if we purchase buses and get up to 162 – then sell 20 – there will be 142 buses next year. We would utilize 125 for the first tier – and accounting for some buses being worked on in maintenance, it would leave some spares.

Rowden – Are we counting on those buses Skinner is defining right now to be the ones to pick up band/orchestra students if it doesn't change next year? Are those things accommodated by the spare buses, not by the current buses running?

Skinner – We will have 11 free buses and also buses from tier 1 that have shorter routes.

Board member James Ekeberg – One of the problems with our current two tier system is that we have dedicated parochial routes. One of the ways he has heard from transportation people is if you got rid of dedicated parochial routes and bus those children at the same time as we bus the public school children. Then take them on to their school. We could run fewer buses. Has that been considered at all?

Skinner – Yes, last year we considered it and it involved shuttling. The Board made a decision not to shuttle students and dedicated routes evolved from that. Skinner did reconsider that this year. It would involve drops that would extend the time.

Ekeberg – People in the community want to know the reasons why you are going to three tiers from two tiers. Thinks it is fair to consider all of the options. One of the options might be to shuttle parochial students. Ekeberg thought it would require fewer buses when we don't have dedicated routes.

Millar – D15 is not the norm for school transportation systems. We do a lot of unusual things. Has talked to school board members in other districts and they are surprised. Even our transportation consultants were very shocked at what we provide. We do want to keep up the quality of services.

Rowden – One of the advantages is that we do provide dedicated parochial school routes regardless of the time. Yes we have considered these other alternatives to accomplish things differently but we had all felt strongly that we didn't want the parochial schools to be different than our public schools as far as shuttling.

Millar – If we go to three tiers, a lot of these routes the kids may actually be getting up at the same time as two-tier because of the longer two-tier routes. Transportation is really increasing the number of bus routes by 50% - that is a huge increase.

Board member Sue Quinn – With declining enrollment over the next five years, we will need less buses no matter what we do and that includes two tiers. What we have right now is working; we are getting kids to school on time. As Lingel mentioned, two tiers have the ideal start times. Thinks that has to have a heavy weight in this discussion. The kids are going to school at the most advantageous time educationally speaking without getting up too early. Questions some of the numbers in the report as to how many buses we can get rid of because transportation is planning to use those buses to provide extra cushion. Doesn't see being able to get rid of a lot of buses and still be able to meet the 40 minutes between tiers. Seems tight to her – we have 50 minutes now. As was said, they are not truly independent tiers; all the buses do not go from one tier, then to second, then the third. Buses are being overlapped which means we have a lot of buses not being used at times during the day and the kids are going to school earlier. Asked Skinner if he was taking into account the fact that there is a projection of 600 less students over the next five years? With 30 kids on average on a bus, that's 20 buses over five years. It is slowly going to be declining. It doesn't necessarily seem to be linear but we are doing that with our classrooms.

Skinner – Stated that he ran his projections based on current enrollments. Didn't know what to project in terms of a loss. If we lose 200 students, that's 10 students per school. That probably doesn't correspond to a bus route.

Keenan – The buses are not working for her. Her children are on the bus much longer, they get up earlier even though they have a later start time.

Quinn – By working, she meant that the two tier system was working at least according to the parameters that were looked at earlier – kids getting to school on time and the number of routes over 45 minutes are less than they were last year. Those routes are less than 5% of total routes. Is sure that there are individual cases where the routes have not worked out to be better this year than last year. Asked Skinner if as a system, is the district meeting those two criteria? **Skinner** – Replied yes.

Keenan – The preponderance of people on the bus is longer, not shorter. Her son is on the bus less than 45 minutes but he is on the bus twice as long as he was last year. He is on the bus 40 minutes – it is a long junior high route.

Quinn- The consultant said that the average bus time is not twice what it was last year. The junior highs do have longer routes and that is one of her concerns with having the junior highs on the first tier where you have these kids who do not adjust their bedtimes having to get up earlier, especially your at-risk kids. They are going to school at 7:30 a.m. and have the longest routes on average because they draw from a larger geographic area. Knows there will be more routes for junior highs so transportation is saying that the total time is going to be shorter. But is it going to be 25 minutes less to account for the 25 minute shift in time? Concerned about when these kids are going to get up in the morning to get on the bus and how that impacts the instructional day.

Millar – thinks Quinn has very valid concerns and he voted for the two-tier system because of the start times. However the cost is a huge difference because transportation is asking for more buses on top of what we already have spent. We have 30 new transportation positions and we also contract for ten more (Laidlaw). This is not including the cost of buses which is well over \$1.5M and we are still not meeting the needs of all.

Quinn – Look at some of these numbers (in the report). It says we need 15 more drivers and buses. Obviously we need ten to replace the Laidlaw contract but then there are 5 extra. If you look at the

staffing report, we are already staffed to take over those ten routes. It shouldn't be another 15 on top of that – we already have a 12% spare rate.

Skinner – Wanted to respond to Quinn's question about our drivers taking over the Laidlaw routes. Said we would need 148 drivers and then we need 10% for substitutes, which is another 15 drivers – takes us to 163. Doesn't have that many drivers now. Using mechanics/office staff to drive.

Board member Nancy Lee Carlson – The district has always provided Mercedes Benz transportation. If a child is late or has forgotten something, the bus waits. D15 citizens have said that transportation of our children is the utmost important issue we have next to curriculum. At some point in time that may actually mean an increase in their taxes. Carlson has been on the Board for six years, gone through the numbers and has said many times, at some point we will have increase issues because the numbers are what they are.

Doesn't believe that the two tier system is working as adequately as it should. Thinks the 3-tier system, even though there is some cost issues with it, provides what the citizens want in terms of service for their students and safety. Projected decreases in enrollment may not be accurate.

Thinks the 3-tier system gives the most flexibility. Would like to stay with dedicated parochial school routes because their parents pay taxes also. Doesn't think the two-tier system has been working for the majority of people – it has caused problems. A decision has to be made fairly quickly because of childcare arrangements and other schedules.

The State will eventually reimburse us the money for new buses especially special ed buses, they are needed and mandated. The Board represents the citizens and going to a three tier system is the best. It won't be best for everyone that is impossible.

Rowden – Would like the Board to consider tightening up our efficiency and reducing the number of stops regardless of which way we choose. Agrees that safety is important and a priority.

Keenan – Said that the Facilities Committee has been talking about increasing the number of walkers by creating paths and bridges. In a couple of schools, there is a big population that is bused because there is no path.

Rowden – Has seen a bus go down a ½ mile strip and stop several times in a neighborhood with sidewalks. It stops at every block or even every three houses along the way. We should direct drivers to stop doing that and be more efficient.

Chapman – Agrees with Rowden that the expectation shouldn't be stopping at every doorstep. He has a concern that even when there are sidewalks, they are not always shoveled and then become a hazard. Judgments have to be made.

Millar – Wants to clarify one thing again regarding transportation reimbursements because a lot of numbers are thrown out. The 60% (regular ed) and 80% (special ed) are geared towards the qualified reimbursable expenses so the actual net reimbursement is less. Regular education buses are 50% or lower. **Lingel** – Yes, some things are not claimable. When you buy a bus, it is actually only 20% of the bus that is claimable for the first five years.

Millar – We don't claim IMRF and a lot of other costs. It doesn't show up on the transportation fund report because it is in a different fund.

Lingel – Agrees about safety. Transportation can look at where the bus stops are and still make sure the kids are safe.

Skinner – It is important for the Board to know that transportation gets frequent calls from parents who want the bus stopping at their house because they can't see three houses to the corner and want to see the child get on the bus. It makes for an interesting and emotional conversation.

Superintendent Dr. McKanna – The plan will be to come back and have the Board make a decision in February. The sooner we can get a decision, the quicker we can get the kids rescheduled, get the routes done earlier. Pointed out that Sundling would have 25 routes next year compared to 17 now. Carl Sandburg goes from 10 to 16 routes. Said that has got to be more efficient with fewer children on the bus, less time. There has to be shorter bus times. That will make it a better system. The children

are out earlier now (waiting for the bus) because of longer bus routes. The change in start times may balance out.

Quinn – Asked Skinner if he is going to run the proposed routes and we already have the routes that we have this year, and then he should be able to have the data of when kids are getting on the bus this year now in all of the schools vs. the planned 3-tier system. It could especially be done for that first tier, the first run of the day. Those numbers should be pretty dead-on for this year. Asked Skinner if he could come back with those numbers?

Millar – Said the data is already there. All transportation has to do is run the system. Thinks that is something that the Board needs to make a good decision in February in order to see what we are benefiting in terms of route times, pick up times. Similar to what we had before with VersaTrans when we decided on the two-tier. We need the data.

Keenan – Asked Skinner how long will it take to show the time everyone gets on this year and then the new 3-tier system?

Skinner – Doesn't know. We are talking about buying more buses, creating more routes. Will look into it and give them answers.

Chapman – Has questions. Are you talking about all of the students that we are currently busing and reconfiguring the routes? For example what McKanna said about schools going from 10 to 16 routes? Are you asking to develop all 16 of those routes based on current enrollment? Next year they are not necessarily the same kids.

Millar – Transportation has done similar projections. They didn't just throw numbers out. They looked at the routes to see how they could split them. They already have the data loaded from his understanding of the VersaTrans system.

Skinner – The routes would have to be created. **Chapman** – And then recreate them for next year?

Quinn – It was her understanding at the beginning (of discussion) that the transportation department was going to do this before the Board votes.

Lingel – We are supposed to be able to do this with VersaTrans.

McKanna – Stated that there is a variable here that has not been discussed. The administration has had some feedback (on the transportation plan) and we are going to hear more from our junior high staff. Doesn't think the change in time is going to be the issue but it would preclude a lot of morning curriculum sessions where staff get together before school - because it is going to be too early. There will also be a fair amount of lag time between when junior highs get out (2 p.m.) and when sports start. The children may need to go home and come back. Now you are also talking about staff staying at the end of the school day for that. As Lingel said in his opening comments, these are proposed times. We can take a look at any tweaking of five minutes. There are a number of factors that we haven't even gotten into tonight that the change is going to bring about that we will be hearing from our staff.

Carlson – Would like to suggest spending money to have VersaTrans figure this out because they say they can do it. They put the system on our computers; they have the ability on their staff. Ask them to come up with these mock routes – let them work it out.

Quinn – Would much rather see Skinner and people in house who know all of the issues do this, they have been living with this for months. Thinks they have a strong grasp of the situation.

Skinner – Says he hasn't picked up all of the VersaTrans skills yet but has people in the department with strong routing abilities. Would like the department to take a swing at it and at least come back and tell the Board we are unable to do it or here is what we were able to do. The VersaTrans system does have the capacity to set up routes and run them. What the system sets up will tell us the time parameters.

Millar – Let's charge Skinner and Lingel with getting this done and let us know if there is a cost.

First Reading – Board of Education Policies

Discussion took place on several policies that were presented for First Reading. The following policy generated some debate between several Board members. It provides background for the discussion that took place later in the Committee Reports section of the agenda.

Policy 4:10 – Operational Services: Fiscal and Business Management

Reference: **Proposed policy** www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_policy_4_10_fiscal_bus_mgmt.pdf

Dr. Jean Sophie, Asst. Superintendent for Personnel – Since there is a Board Finance Committee, we rely on the committee to recommend policies to our Policy Committee and then it is discussed at our Policy Committee usually by Bob Strande, George Lingel or both. Then the procedure is to bring it to Policy. Asked if there were any questions?

Keenan – Thinks that the issue of what the district wants its Reserves to be (presented in the policy) should be a financial philosophy discussion not part of a policy discussion and should involve the entire Board not just Board members on the Finance Committee.

Rowden – Thinks that the Board puts members on the Finance Committee to come forward with proposals. This is the policy that the committee developed and they are asking whether the Board likes it or not. Says that this is her opportunity for input and thinks it is a good policy.

Chapman – Said that as a general guideline, if one of our committees is going to review a policy, other than the Policy Committee – that the Board ought to give them the authority to do that. Doesn't think that was done in this case. Gave an example of the Facilities Committee, the consensus of the Board at the last meeting was for them to look at the life/safety issue. The entire Board gave that direction. Chapman is not speaking against the policy; he is talking about the procedure.

Quinn – Commented that she brought a proposal to the Board earlier in the year about a Financial Strategy Plan for the District. Everyone on the Board looked at it, said okay and said send it to the Finance Committee to discuss/figure out. The plan was dismantled, some put into policy, some of it into just a way of doing budgeting. That is where the original mandate came from and this (policy) grew out of it. Then the committee sent it to the Policy Committee because that is the procedure and now it is back here. It is a philosophical discussion and there were a lot of those types of discussions in committee about this policy. She understands wanting to have discussions about it and that's why it is here.

Keenan – If the Finance Committee wants to do something like this, that's fine. Thinks there needs to be a finance conversation about this, not a policy conversation. Once the Board decides on what the reserve numbers should be, and then put it as part of a policy. Says this is a financial philosophy that Keenan thinks requires a deeper discussion that the Board has time for right now as part of policy.

Sophie – Suggested doing that at the next Board meeting, put it on as an agenda item for discussion and then also under First Reading for policy.

Keenan – Finance committee is coming up with reserve numbers, which is completely outside the normal general policy range. This is a philosophical way of handling budgeting, forecasting and finance.

Millar – This is a good discussion. The key is to facilitate these discussions and get policies accomplished. Wants to make sure that the Board is not dragging these out for 6 months to a year.

Keenan - A reserve philosophy is different than a policy. Needs to see a history of a lot of other things.

Chapman – Says the Board should set the direction before the policy is developed. The parameters came back to the Board without the Board determining what they are. Doesn't think that was ever the intent of Board committees. The committees are not to take a small group of this Board to make a decision relative to how the district ought to operate. The entire Board should make a decision and they should decide, okay this is the direction we want to go as a Board – then we need wording, or a policy or whatever we need. Chapman doesn't have any trouble taking that to a committee because the committee has the parameters established from the Board. They don't establish the parameters.

The fact of the matter is that this is a decision (amount of reserves) that the Board can make on a year-by-year basis. By making a policy, in effect we have two Board members - and he's not criticizing because he's not saying if he agrees or disagrees – coming in with a proposal that we don't allow this Board to make a budget decision unless it meets these parameters. The Board never talked about these parameters.

Rowden – Agrees but looks at it differently. The Board agreed to form committees to look at certain things and she believes that any one member of the Board can put together a policy before this Board to be considered. Looks at this as not the committee making a decision for the Board but the committee putting something down for the Board to have the opportunity to look at and see if it agrees with. Rowden is concerned that the Board often talks about doing something and a policy is never created. Appreciates that two Board members and some district Cabinet members are on the Finance Committee. They have come forward with a suggestion, it (policy) doesn't have to be what they said but the Board had this in our packet (Board packet). If it is a philosophical issue for some, there is the opportunity to discuss whether you agree or not because this is a First Reading.

Ekeberg - Says Rowden is missing the point because you have allowed two people to have the information to come forward with it. You are saying vote it up or down. Well he would vote it down because he doesn't have the information. That's the only reason. They may be very good and he may come to the same conclusion but hasn't been given the information to arrive at this conclusion. That's the point.

Chapman – Wants to take this policy off the table until the Board has had an opportunity to talk about what basis we have for even considering these as parameters.

All Board members agreed.

Committee Reports

Finance Committee

Chapman – Thinks it would be helpful if the committee meeting minutes were in the Board packets. If we had that information in there, then if there is an issue we think is appropriate for Board discussion then we can have discussion.

Reference: **Minutes from the December 5th, 2007 Finance Committee meeting**
www.fcwpta.org/pdf/d15_finance_12_05_07.pdf

Quinn – At the December 27th Finance Committee meeting, they talked about the budget for next year. Have been working on the budget and trying to find a way to balance the budget which is wrapped up with our transportation discussion as well. The committee is meeting again tomorrow to look at the budget and how the consideration of ways to balance the budget work out over the next five years. Will try to weed through some of that and it will be coming to the Board next month.

Millar – The staff is coming up with the options. We (Board members) are not developing any plans, any cuts, which was all staff developed. Committee is trying to make sure there are accurate criteria, going over the contracts, making sure the number of retirees is correct, etc.

Keenan – When looking at minutes from the Finance and Architectural/Facilities committees, she sees Finance has items A through F. Keenan was not aware that the Finance was going over any of these items. Direction needs to come from the Board so we know what is going on and not the direction coming from the committee. Gave an example: Review of Transportation Bids. Asked why is that going to the committee at all? It is being dealt with at the Board level. Review Preliminary Sectioning. That needs to be a Board item and the Board never directed the committee to look at it.

The two things that Architectural/Facilities is looking at now were Board directives – park district contracts and the 20 year life/safety. Feels out of the loop with the Finance committee. If that committee wants to look at these things, thinks that is great, helpful and helps to shorten the meetings. But says the directive has to come from the Board to look into it so we know what is going on.

Quinn – Wants the entire Board to be fully informed, no question about that. The Finance Committee is not really making decisions. The administration brought these items to the committee. To a large extent, the administration decided what the committee should look at. The Board knows that we have to look at the budget for next year.

Keenan – Looks at that as putting the budget together not reviewing transportation bids. Understands that sectioning is part of the budget. It is like the committee is figuring out the sectioning, how it is going to figure into the budget without getting Board directive. How can sectioning be part of the Finance committee?

Millar – The sectioning is how you get to a forecast. We are going over what the criteria is that has been given to make sure that what you are forecasting is a reliable forecast. Said that the information was in the Board packet, in the back, it was charts.

Chapman – Received the five year financial plan and projections but doesn't see anywhere as to what the parameters were, the assumptions that were made that went into that.

Keenan – Referring again to the Finance Committee meeting minutes. Doesn't think the committee should be looking at item A: Change on non-union new hires for dental/health insurance and B: Review of transportation bids. Gave an example of the curtain wall issue (life/safety amendments). Keenan feels the Finance committee doesn't want it as part of next year's budget so have taken the money out.

Chapman – When we talked about creating Board committees, it was stated that the committees had to have a specific charge. The charge told the committee what it is that they were going to deal with and that charge was supposed to be coming from the Board. It looks to us like that charge has been expanded (for Finance) without direction from us.

Quinn – The way she thinks the committee has been operating is that the administration has been bringing to the Finance Committee various issues as sort of a first flush to take a look at, get feedback. Then bringing it to the full Board just as they bring things to us every month. It originally started out as a mandate to look at the Financial Stability Plan that Quinn proposed, which had several different components to it. One was five year financial projections. The other part was the genesis of the reserves policy and how to manage that was a whole philosophical discussion. The committee hashed through those two pieces for about two months. It evolved into where the administration started bringing lots of information to the committee to go over and consider.

Keenan – the reserve issue was never a charge from the Board either.

Quinn – It is in the original proposal that Quinn wrote. It was a lengthy document. The Board said fine, take this to committee, we don't want to hash this all out right now. A lot of these other items are an expansion of what happened.

Millar – Said that these items can be put on the Board meeting agenda and the Board can go through them. Some are going to take a long time. Thinks it is important that everyone is involved. Has no disagreement with that. We can put the budget process on the agenda and go through it. Three hours were spent in committee. Going to be difficult to do in this environment but will do it.

Quinn – The Finance meeting (tomorrow) was planned to talk about the budget and look at a couple of different projections, ways to make it comprehensible to the Board. Having Board members that know what members are going to want to know, to pre-anticipate some of the questions so that there is better information given. Without the meeting, Bob Strande will come up with a presentation to bring to the Board without input from the committee ahead of time. If that is preferable by the consensus of the Board, she has no problem with that.

Rowden – Thinks all committees should develop what they think their charge is and then have the Board look at it. Thought the Finance Committee was put there for a reason, not to be decision-makers but the people who were selected were put on the committee for a reason – because of their backgrounds, experience, interest level, availability. They could offer that layer of working with the business managers as they are developing the next proposal to the Board. Rowden said that her role on the Policy Committee is to give input as to what she thinks the Board may be concerned about. It would be disappointing to her if the Finance committee was abolished.

Keenan – Doesn't want to abolish the committee. Agrees with Rowden's concept of her role to anticipate Board questions, ferret through the material, etc. Thinks the difference is that the Finance committee is taking on things that the Board had no idea it was doing.

Ekeberg – Said that clearly the two-tier dental issue was something that was talked about (in the committee), about bringing in newer employees on a less costly basis. As far as Ekeberg knows, the Board has never taken a vote and it was one Board member who was interested in that. That was not a Board directive. That was a thought, it was a good thought but the Board did not direct that. That is where the problem lies. The community is thinking that the Board is going to do this to new employees. The Board never directed anybody to ever do that to new employees. This is the idea of one person but it is coming from a Board committee. That is what makes us look bad. It was never considered by the Board. **Millar** – Understands that perspective, can work to refine that. Maybe it is better to have conversations directly one-on-one instead of having a committee.

Carlson – Thinks the perception is that there is an Executive Board and then there is a Board. People perceive things that may or may not be accurate that the Board does. We don't have an Executive Board; we have a Committee of the Whole.

Millar – The committee is trying to find a way to facilitate getting things done. The past few years it has been frustrating getting progress made because things drag on for months, or never get done. It is difficult because we meet once a month. Budget is time dependent and we did pass the budget calendar. That wasn't a concern. The committee will get the guidelines.

Facility/Architectural/Real Estate Committee

Keenan – The business department has the direction on where to go with the five park district agreements. They are going to take them to the committee meeting next month, look at them, then take them to the different park districts and they will be here (full Board meeting) hopefully in March.

Millar – Asked if the Board could see those contracts as well

Chapman – They are consistent with what we have talked about here – looking at a five year agreement that would be substantially the same terms but we would have some limitations in there based on concerns that had been expressed by the Board to us (committee).

Keenan – Craig Phillips, Maintenance is working with the architects and will bring the full contract to the Board for approval. The Board will see the contract beforehand.

Keenan – Stated that she and Chapman went to Winston Campus with Phillips today to see one of the curtain wall areas that need to be done. That will be discussed later in the agenda.

Action Items

Personnel Report

Vote tabled until after Executive Session.

Bids – Buses, Including Purchase or Lease for Remainder of 2007/08 School Year

Carlson – Made a motion to purchase 14 buses, doesn't want to lease buses.

Quinn – Doesn't think the Board should purchase buses because of how many buses have been purchased this year. We are now two years ahead of our 10-year purchasing plan. The plan said that we were going to purchase 12 a year for ten years. Twelve were purchased in '07, and then another ten (in July) and now we are going to buy or lease ten more. That puts us out to FY2010 in the plan. Plus the fact that we may not be using them next year if we go to three-tiers. Favors a one-year lease.

Millar – Agrees with not purchasing because what will happen is that we will have a large number of buses that will be dated at the same time – there will be a big replacement schedule in one year. That would be problematic plus will put a crimp in cash flow long term. It is not our best option to purchase at this time given our deficit and how we are going through our reserves.

Would rather lease short-term because the Board hasn't decided yet on two or three tiers next year. If we go to three-tiers, we won't need the additional buses. To sell our buses for \$3K each (used) and to pay \$70K for a new one is a big jump. We could use the ones we were going to sell for spares – thinks that is a better alternative.

McKanna – The business department recommended a lease/purchase for five years.

Lingel – At the end of the five years, you own the buses.

Millar – It is basically the same as keeping them for ten to 12 years.

Keenan – Would still have a glut of buses in the same year.

Chapman – If we lease for one year, that lease money is just lost. We would be selling old buses that are in the range of 11 to 13 years, we have already incurred maintenance on them. We went over before about the maintenance issues with old buses.

Chapman – Stated that earlier he asked about the impact the three-tier plan would have on the transportation fund. It shows that this year, we are spending about \$300K more than we are taking in. But next year, we are going to be gaining about \$1.4M. If we buy the buses this year, that drives our deficit to about \$1.4M. Estimating that \$85K will be reimbursed from the State next year and that reimbursement will about double for the next four years because it is spread over a period of time. We will also have some revenue from the sale of old buses. So that \$1.4M that we are spending (this year), we are going to get back. In terms of the relative position of our reserves, any money that we spend, we will have gained back within a year not including the State reimbursement and sale of old buses. And in the process of doing that, we will have upgraded our fleet. Just doesn't believe that as a Board that we want to spend \$150K on a bus lease for a year because there will be no equity built on that lease. That is why he is suggesting that the Board purchase buses. The other thing relative to whether or not this is an accelerated purchase plan, Chapman thinks that it gives us the opportunity to look at the following years. We may be able to go two years without having to buy buses. At least now we are getting rid of the ones that are old in the fleet which is the plan that we had adopted on the replacement cycle. All we are doing is replacing them a little bit earlier.

Millar – but with three-tiers, we are using substantially less buses.

Chapman – by getting rid of old buses, thinks it is a tremendous advantage in terms of safety.

Quinn – Most of the very old buses are gone already because we have been replacing buses.

Chapman – Recalls that when the initial ten buses were purchased, the buses turned in were 13 years old. We still have buses that are 11 to 13 years old now. Per the transportation department verbal report, there are maintenance issues with old buses.

Keenan – still hasn't seen a report looking at the cost of maintenance vs. buying new. Not saying she is against buying new buses, saying we never got the data to see whether we need to do it or not – or whether it is a smart financial decision.

Lingel – Confirmed that maintenance costs are reimbursed by the State in the following year that they are incurred. Had the report Keenan was referring to but pulled it off tonight's agenda. The report does show that the district does have some 1994 buses with lots of miles. District spends an average of \$5K to even \$10K on maintenance for them, which includes a lot of bodywork.

Skinner – Has a mechanic that works full-time on bodywork. Thinks we have about 40 buses that are 10 years or over.

Chapman – So we are not replacing all of them. If we accelerate the purchase, then he assumes that when transportation looks at the replacement plan for next year, and the following years – that the number of buses to be purchased will be reduced. This would impact the overall replacement plan when we buy them now.

Rowden – If we are getting all of these new buses at the same time, we are going to have to replace them at the same time down the road. That is why we had a 10-year vehicle replacement plan in the first place so we would gradually purchase over time, in a systematic way so that we were constantly replenishing our fleet without having to purchase 20 or 30 buses at one time.

Motion to purchase 14 buses at a cost of \$906,562

Failed 4:3 (No: Keenan, Millar, Quinn, Rowden; Yes: Ekeberg, Carlson, Chapman)

Motion to purchase 14 buses on a five year lease/purchase

Failed 4:3 (No: Keenan, Millar, Quinn, Rowden; Yes: Carlson, Chapman, Ekeberg)

Motion to approve the lease of 14 buses on a one-year basis

Approved 4:3 (Yes: Millar, Quinn, Rowden, Keenan; No: Carlson, Chapman, Ekeberg)

Consent Calendar

Item F: Authorize 2008-2009 Health/Life/Safety Amendments Lake Louise, Winston Campus, Hunting Ridge Schools

Chapman – Recommendation from the Facilities Committee is to move all three curtain wall system amendments from a “B” priority to an “A” priority. Whether an amendment is an A or B, it must be submitted to the State. We have to wait for approval at the State level before we can use any of the life/safety funds on any of these issues. “A” makes it a higher priority for review by the State. Looked at the curtain wall systems today and there is certainly a need to do this. By sending it to the State, it does not mean that we have to expend the funds to do it, which comes back as part of the budget process. It does not mean we are making the decision to do it. By making it an “A”, the Board believes that it is important enough to get approval to expedite it through the State so we would have the option to using life/safety funds if we decide to fund it. If it is submitted as a “B”, we are not going to get a response as quickly as we would it was submitted as an “A”.

Phillips – If not an “A”, thinks it is doubtful that it would be approved by the State in time for the Board to give him direction to go out to bid, and come back to the Board with bids for it to be done this summer.

Motion to approve all three amendments as “A” priority

Approved 6:1 (Keenan voting no)

Quinn – Wanted to backtrack and get a consensus of the Board as to whether the Finance Committee should hold its scheduled meeting tomorrow. The agenda topic is preparing for the budget presentation next month and the five year projections.

Rowden - Good with that, asked that the agenda include defining your charge.

Millar – Yes, will refine that working with the Finance Committee staff as well to what issues they would feel most comfortable with addressing. Will give a summary of topics discussed as soon as the meeting is over including assumptions. Important for everyone to understand what the assumptions were and that they are realistic.

Consensus acknowledged. Finance Committee will meet January 10th at 12 noon.

Executive Session

The Board went into a closed executive session to meet with representatives from the Superintendent Consulting firm of BWP Associates at approximately 10:45 p.m. and to discuss other items, including an item from the Personnel report. The Personnel Report would then be voted on after the session.

For additional information on items not covered in these notes, check the district’s Web site at:

www.ccsd15.net/AboutDistrict15/BoardofEducation/HTML/BOEMeetingDates.html

Minutes for all Board committee meetings, as well as a Summary of Board action taken at Regular Board of Education meetings can be found on that webpage.

By: Jennifer Mondy

Posted: January 15th, 2008