

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

January 28th, 2009

This was a Committee of the Whole (COW) meeting scheduled to discuss the district's facility study and educational program initiatives. Board member Kelly Keenan was absent.

Board of Education candidates for the April 7th election were in attendance. They are Incumbents Nancy Lee Carlson, Tim Millar and Wendy Rowden; Challengers Peggy Babcock, Mark Bloom, Richard Bokor, Steven Miller, Matt Taylor and Vicki Wilson. Kelly Keenan is not seeking a 2nd term.

Board member attendance rate since May 2007 (46 Regular and Special meetings)
Carlson 61% (18 absences), Chapman 93% (3), Ekeberg 98% (1), Keenan 85% (7), Millar 100%, Quinn 98% (1), Rowden 87% (6)

District Capacity Analysis for Future Initiatives

Architect Pat Callahan – Presentation is for the Board's future discussions on how the district's facilities might react to future decision making. They are not making any recommendations, merely taking the data, crunching the numbers and bringing back a snapshot of what the district might look like given the certain scenarios with respect to changing programs. The three areas were all day kindergarten (what impact would that have on facilities), convert the junior highs to middle schools (thereby inheriting the 6th grade and what that would do) and then a couple variations of grade level centers (K-2, 3-5 & 6-8 or K-3, 4-6 & 7-8).

Benchmarks used: 1) Existing boundaries were maintained, 2) Overlays were maintained (special programs), 3) Current Student Assignment Plan, 4) Elementary schools remained within their JH cluster, 5) Guidelines for class size and 6) Only instructional space not core space.

They believe that programs should be the drivers for how students are educated, not the buildings. They wanted simply to provide the Board more information so when they have the discussions regarding programs, the Board has some idea of the impact those decisions will have on the district as a whole.

Architect Steve Nelson – (Went over the report utilizing PowerPoint presentation – A copy of the presentation (slides) was not made available to the audience.) It was pointed out that the full report given to the Board has a capacity analysis summary sheet for every school building.

All Day Kindergarten - Schools were arranged by existing JH clusters. The first column indicates the # of classrooms currently being used for kindergarten in each elementary school building, then a column indicating the # of classrooms needed for All Day Kindergarten. They also looked at spaces identified as Core in the facility study and looked at which ones could be reclaimed for classroom space and what their current use was (in each elementary building). The last column (on the slide) indicates the # of net classrooms that would need to be added to the facilities' instructional space if you did reclaim all of the classrooms.

Board member Sue Quinn – Asked for an explanation on the # of classrooms needed. For example, Jane Addams (slide presented) has 3 sections of kindergarten with about 20 students each. Now JA has two classrooms for the 3 sections because it is ½ day kindergarten. So, if it is all day kindergarten, you would need 3 classrooms but four classrooms are listed on the slide (for JA). Is Nelson projecting that JA will need an additional section of K students? Why is the extra classroom in there?

Nelson – He is not projecting what the enrollment will be for JA. That is there because of the existing # of students is above the 20 (district target for K). If the # was above, instead of going by the # of classrooms actually being occupied now, the architects went by what the district would like those

classrooms to be. If there was any remainder (over 20 students), an additional classroom would be added.

Board member Wendy Rowden - She asked about differentiating between the bilingual kindergarten classrooms in the facilities projections vs. regular education kindergarten classrooms. Do the architects know how many of these projected needed classrooms are bilingual vs. regular education?

Nelson - No. They looked at everything the way it stands now in the district.

Quinn - Asked about the ECDEC programs, they are mobile and the district places them wherever it can. Right now, the district busses the bilingual kindergarten students all over the district to 4 different locations where we have clusters of bilingual kindergarten classes. It may or may not be the best for those students. She would like to see those numbers. **Nelson** - They did just take a snapshot of where those programs are right now in the district. **Callahan** - Would ask if there would be an offering for all day and ½ day kindergarten in the district? There are many variables to be considered.

Quinn - She wanted to comment that the district does have more than just ½ day and full day options for kindergarten. One would be offering both so parents have an option. She would also like the administration to at least consider and bring back to the Board the benefits of an expanded ½ day kindergarten of 3 to 4 hours vs. 2 ½ hours (current ½ day) or 6 hours (full day). Some children may not be ready for six hours but 2 ½ hours seems low for almost everyone. Keep an open mind about the options. Regarding bilingual kindergarten thinks there are a lot of advantages for at-risk kids to have a longer day. So getting the data and breaking those numbers out a bit more would be helpful.

Middle School Concept - By moving 6th graders into a middle school concept, you will need extra classrooms in the junior highs and you will gain classrooms in the elementary schools when the 6th graders vacate that building. Referring to the chart, it shows instructional capacity based on the size of the building, student enrollment over the years and then the # of available classrooms. Next to that (on the chart) is the # of spaces needed at the elementary level for all day kindergarten. The Board can compare as the 6th graders vacate a building, how full day kindergarten could be accommodated in that building or not. The chart further shows in the 6th through 8th grade, what the instructional capacity is and what the student enrollment would be, the # of reclaimed space for classrooms and what would be needed. The chart further shows how many classrooms would be needed by junior high cluster, which nets out to be 55 additional classrooms. Ten could be gained from reclaimed space at the junior high level, so that would be 45 additional instructional spaces needed.

Quinn - Wanted to comment about the additional classroom spaces. This (chart) is the architects' snapshot of today (enrollment), it is not taking into account the district's declining enrollment. If you vacate the 6th grade, there would be 45 empty classrooms spread out through the elementary schools. Quinn said that even if the district did the all day kindergarten to the maximum, but there could also be options - the extra space needed could be as low as 20. There would be a lot of empty space in the elementary schools. That does not even account for over time (declining enrollment). Next year the district is already losing nine (9) sections of classrooms at the elementary level. It is predicted that over the next two to three years to lose another 23 sections. That is already getting to the point of being able to take care of all day kindergarten without moving any 6th graders. We should be thinking of the merits of middle school. Facilities wise, Quinn thinks the district can separate the decisions. We can do all day kindergarten or some modified version over time without having to do the junior high move along with it. If we are going to do the junior high move that would impact what is going on in the elementary schools.

Board member Nancy Lee Carlson - Asked the architects if there was a ranking system for the junior high buildings of which ones would be better equipped to handle a middle school concept from a facilities standpoint? **Callahan** - They thought that would be step 2. The reason they said that is because they want to make sure that is what is being assessed in the first phase compared to what is projected in five years. For example based on enrollment projections, less space would be needed (in a building) in five years.

Board member Tim Millar – Asked the architects if they have seen any demographics, with the way the economy currently is, that maybe parochial students may be coming back to the public schools?
Callahan – They are seeing some of that in the West Aurora School District. It is having an impact because the private schools (in that area) are no longer being supported and the dioceses are closing schools. Three additional classroom sections were being projected for next year at the third grade level.
Nelson – He is seeing that trend in his school district as well. Parochial school students are joining the public school system in the 6th grade. **Millar** – Is concerned about planning for the peaks and valleys.

Nelson – It is effective to plan your buildings to never be over 80% of capacity so you have that flexible space to add an additional section if needed. A little extra classroom space is good. With the extra classroom space gained by pulling the 6th graders out, it allows for program expansion and to evaluate aging facilities and how you want to restack them as far as keeping them online. It could also allow for changes at Winston Campus, maybe that became all middle school and elementary students were at other schools. Not recommending that but if you look at the numbers right now, there are some choices to entertain that (idea).

Quinn – Thinks it is good to build in flexibility into the buildings especially when the Board starts to talk about 21st century learning. There may be a need for additional computer rooms or just different types of space. We would want to plan to have that flexibility in there. We don't want to have it too tight but her main point is to separate those topics (all day K and middle school). Quinn says that we do have 20 individual buildings. Two buildings in particular – Jane Addams and Lake Louise – continue to grow even though the district as a whole has declining enrollment. We need to keep an eye on that and plan for that particular future and trend that is not going to stop.

Nelson – Said that there are individual building sheets/charts for each junior high cluster for the Board to review. They are set up the same way as the all day kindergarten analysis. The architects outlined the buildings that feed into that cluster, looked at instructional capacity, the existing student enrollment and the total # of 6th graders that would be added to that building. There are charts for each elementary feeding into the cluster and how their enrollment would change without the 6th graders.

Quinn – She noticed that on the junior high analysis that the only junior high building that is over capacity right now is Plum Grove JH. It is not projected to decline next year or significantly enough to even get under capacity. Even though our junior highs might be under capacity overall, it is a building by building issue. That has to factor in. **Nelson** – Agreed, that goes towards a future discussion on boundaries. We just looked at everything on a building by building basis where you can gain space, how you can gain space by moving 6th graders.

Grade Centers – The architects looked at two concepts for grade level centers. The real difference in each concept is the grade arrangement. **Concept A** – we are looking at K – 3rd, 4th – 6th and then keeping the current 7th & 8th grade arrangement for junior high. This was looked at with a ½ day kindergarten scenario and also full day kindergarten. A number of things factor into grade centers that overly complicate things. The difficulty was in figuring in ELL and bilingual, there were so many different overlays. It should be pointed out that if the district pursues grade centers, the boundary overlays where ELL and bilingual kids go now would have to be looked at in detail. It will dramatically change, potentially for the better, but it will change. They looked at the total #s for those grade breakdowns based on the current enrollments. The chart also shows the # of classrooms required to accommodate the enrollment and the # available including reclaimed spaces.

Quinn – What is the benefit of grade centers? It seems like it would be a bussing nightmare. She asked if other Board members or administrators could explain the plus side of considering this option.

Asst. Superintendent for Curriculum, Mary Zarr – She said that she had been in a district where they had to go to this option (grade centers). It allows you to efficiently use your space and it helps the budget. Class sizes equal out a little more because you have a greater concentration of similar grade levels. Obviously there are Cons – splitting up families. Some districts go to grade centers for different reasons.

Rowden – It would be a transportation challenge. The benefits are when we have discussions about class sizes, resources and how we utilize them – you have a greater equalization of class size. If you had K through 2, you would have more equal classrooms rather than the disparities we have now because of how boundaries are and how the community grows. You also have the opportunity to be more cohesive throughout the district in planning and working together in your clusters. Then the resources – enrichment, special education and others can be more focused rather than having staff travel around to provide services. Grade centers is something she would be interested in learning about, but again any decision that the Board makes has to be based on what we know is best for children academically.

Board President Gerald Chapman – This is the dialogue that we need to have. In his view, this puts it into perspective relative to space considerations. In some cases, space can become the confining factor. You just have to know that is the situation. Sometime we will hear the pros and cons.

Nelson – Concept B – A common configuration of grade centers is K - 2nd, 3rd through 5th, and then 6th/7th/8th. Then the district would have to go to middle schools. He showed the Board how the enrollment number adjusted based on all day vs. ½ day kindergarten and how the elementary schools would be affected. They didn't yet determine if any buildings could hold an entire grade level. That could be looked at later; it would affect the way the clusters are arranged right now. The district would see the biggest change in clusters if it went to grade level centers. That really complicated things on how the architects could present the data to the Board. Nelson thought the grade levels could be accommodated at the building levels but it would be a very selective choice as to which ones would be looked at first – K through 2 or 3rd/4th/5th.

Quinn – So you are saying that you have to change boundaries in order to do this (grade centers) so you would make it so it all fits? **Nelson** – Yes

Callahan – Said that one of the more common additions to grade centers is PreK (early childhood) to the K – 2 building. There are more resources and it would allow greater focus for that population which would mean that additional classrooms would be added.

Superintendent Daniel Lukich – Commented that the architects did spend some time with the leadership team (including principals) to run their presentation by them a week ago Thursday, just for the sake of verifying numbers. They did not talk about middle school vs. not, all day kindergarten vs. not. We haven't gotten there yet.

Five-Year Financial Projections

Asst. Superintendent for Business, Rebecca Allard – In the projections are the assessed value of what the district thinks it will realize through 2014 in this economy with declining house prices. It is the administration's best guess based on historical trends. As soon as additional information is received, the projections will be revised. The same can be said with new property which is part of the component for the tax extension and the dollars that the district can receive under the tax cap model.

CPI factor. As a school business official, she was celebrating that it was **.1%** - not a negative number – and money would not be taken away from the district's entitlement for next year. She continued and said that a **.1% CPI factor**, from previous projections made, is pretty devastating (for the district). They used a 2 ½% factor for property taxes and in the future, they will go down to a .1%. That represents a probable \$2.6M decline from the actual extension. So the CPI factor of .1% (point 1%, *not* 1%) is for December 2008. The economy continues to suffer but the hope is to see a 1% factor in December 2009 and then 2.5% after that. That is a best guess; even the best economists don't have a handle on this (CPI factor).

Ref: **Wilmette Life, 1/29/09 – "Schools project deeper deficits next year"**

www.fcwpta.org/pdf/schools_deeper_deficits.pdf

News article with Wilmette schools' business official (Kevin Noehlty, formerly with D15) explains the CPI factor of 0.1% for 2008 and how it will affect property taxes in 2010 and revenues for local school districts.

Anticipated TIF revenue. The Village of Palatine most likely will declare a surplus on the Rand Road TIF. Based on the latest estimates from last fall, she expects the district to receive the revenues as stated in the Board's document. The district expects a loss of \$2.6M (due to the low CPI) but will add revenue from the TIF. It is not a complete "wash" but stated it will "soften the blow" to some of the difficult conversations that we are going to have in the near future.

Certified Staffing Levels. As was mentioned with the facilities and the declining enrollment, there are declining needs for certified staffing.

Salary increases for teachers. The numbers provided to the Board are just looking at the current staff on the current salary schedule and moving everyone forward in that step movement. It would be 2.77%. Allard stated that it is no secret that the district is going into negotiations with the teachers' union.

Other salary increases. Many of the district's other salary increases are driven by current negotiated agreements. The SEIU (custodians) and ESPA (program assistants) agreements call for a 3% increase. Some employees not covered by a negotiated agreement are food service staff, transportation and some secretarial/clerical positions. She applied a factor of 3% (to the projections) because it is consistent with other employee groups.

Capital Projects. Allard stated that there are no increases in purchased services or capital outlay – Life Safety and capital projects. At the last BOE meeting, authorization was given to proceed with about \$7M worth of projects. There is funding for some of them. They hope, through the stimulus package talked about in Washington DC that D15 might be able to see about \$1.6M (of that package). But that all still needs to be finalized. D15 has forwarded its "shovel ready" projects up to Rep. Susie Bassi today in hopes that Bassi can help D15 get to the right people to fill out the right applications so it can get that money.

Student Fees. They are not recommending an increase in student fees for next year because of the economy. They have seen an increase of families in need within the district.

State Aid – This is based on the district's average daily attendance rate. Since D15 is experiencing declining enrollment, those monies will also decrease.

Quinn – Asked about the TIF revenue and given the dire straits that all of our local governments have in terms of revenue, is there any danger of D15 not receiving that whole amount?

Allard – The Village of Palatine is obligated to dispense the TIF to those governmental bodies that would have received the funds had the TIF been retired and came on the tax rolls.

Millar – They are talking about not retiring the TIF so we will have continued revenue.

Allard – The village has not finalized that decision yet. There will be some March through June meetings to discuss that decision. In her conversations with the village, that is the direction they are planning to take but it could change.

Carlson – Asked about the transportation fund and if there were any discussions in Springfield about changing the transportation reimbursement program? **Allard** – She has not heard anything lately.

Lukich – The State Superintendent didn't mention it Monday night.

Chapman – Commented that the State Superintendent did say that his priority was to increase capital. So that would be significant to D15 because of the size of our district. Added that it remains to be seen. That may be the State Superintendent's wish list but it doesn't have to impact the legislature.

Chapman continued that he thinks that the Board can pick and choose and find some fault and some agreement on this (5 year projections). The bottom line is that we do our 5 year plan, it at least gives us an idea, we know what the parameters are. Parameters change as we go through each year, then we can be smarter about how we do our projections. Chapman thinks that the Board should just say fine, let's go ahead unless somebody has a major objection. We do know that these will be refined as we get closer to the next school year. Asked Allard what her timeline was for developing the projections? **Allard** – Plan is to bring projections back and Financial Report Card on February 25th.

Draft Agenda Committee of the Whole – February 25th

Lukich – Discussion items will include: Expanding educational opportunities to include all day kindergarten or combinations thereof (option for full or ½ day; possible extended ½ day); Spanish

maintenance program and 2nd language instruction for all. The agenda will also include a total staffing projection for school year 2009/10.

Zarr – These preliminary conversations will include the purpose of why the administration is bringing this initiative (program) forward at this time, background information on any laws or codes that could affect the initiative and some research. It would be a summary of the highlights of what the latest research on this initiative. During these conversations, the administration would answer the questions of: Does this initiative exist in any form throughout D15 right now? If it does, what does it look like? What ways do other districts implement this initiative? How might this initiative look in D15 if it was implemented? What are D15's options? What are our next steps? What does the Board need from the administration in order to talk about this initiative again? Facilities will not be discussed during these initial meetings.

Chapman – Hopes that once the Board goes through these first sets of presentations, it will give some response to the administration as to the approach it wants to see. Thinks the Board has to go through it once and then get back together (to discuss). **Quinn** – Agrees, although already has something to add. Regarding the all day kindergarten initiative, asked Zarr if information can be brought back about what the district has today with ECDEC/early childhood PreK. What are the possibilities? What do other school districts do? Quinn said that the district's bilingual kindergarten is an issue and would like to see more information about it. She would like to see some data similar to the Student Assignment Plan summary, that locates those children so the Board knows what areas they are coming from and where are their home schools in order to get a sense of where the district is right now. It would tell them a lot in terms of growth, there is growth in certain areas, would like data on that.

Lukich – The plan for the next two Committee of the Whole agendas are:

April 1st – Middle School and Grade Level options; *Late April/Early May* – 21st century classroom including both teachers and students with some emphasis on Science, Math and Technology.

Carlson – All of these discussions have to be tempered by the cost issue. What can we afford?

Chapman – Thinks that will fold in pretty well when we get our five-year projections.

Lukich – The administration sees these discussions (expanding educational programs) as beginning the conversation. We see this as raising more questions than having final answers in these initial discussions and then charting a course as we go from there.

Carlson – She has a question about that, doesn't want to put a damper on everything. It is great to chart and have all of these great diagrams but our staff also has their day to day responsibilities and we are not paying them overtime. There are a lot of different ideas here, thinks the Board has to decide how many different ways it wants the staff to go. If we are doing certain things, we won't be doing other things. We have to be very realistic with a timetable instead of coming up with 27 different ideas and have all the information on 27 ideas. Realistically maybe we only need a list of 5.

Chapman – Said that one of the advantages that we have with the Committee of the Whole meetings on a monthly basis is that we are able to split it up so we are not overwhelming on any one topic. He believes that there are other administrators also involved with these topics.

Lukich – This has been mainly the district's leadership team's responsibility – Cabinet and principals. We have not taken the step to involve the teaching staff. Not to leave them out but for the concern that Carlson mentioned. So it falls on the shoulders of about 25 to 30 administrators right now.

Rowden – Doesn't this go along with constant conversations administrators have about how to improve things in the district? The Board might be making these ideas topics for a Committee of the Whole and becoming more educated/more interested than Boards of the past. But these types of conversations must come up naturally, not even Board directed.

Zarr – Appreciates the Board's awareness of the type of effort that staff put in, that is why they went with mini-presentations that so that we can heighten Board awareness of the potential initiatives/program enhancement coming in the future without being overwhelming so one topic has to be picked over another. As a team, they feel that it is their job to keep the Board abreast of where the district needs improvement, what educational opportunities are out there to support these initiatives.

Millar – Asked if the administration would give the Board an idea of what initiatives they thought would have the biggest return on investment (for the district).

Zarr – Will do that through the research that will be presented. She further stated that as they have been working through the process, the Board will see that the district already has the framework already built in for some of these programs. It doesn't have to be all or nothing propositions. There can be phases of different pieces. One program wouldn't necessarily cancel out another.

Quinn – Likes that approach. She said that what we are trying to do is set some decisions for long term planning in these different areas. Where do we see our district going in the next 5 to 10 years? Then we can make the road map of how to get there with the resources that we have, the economy that we have and everything else. We may not be able to get there right away and certainly won't but it all should be coordinated and have some kind of a plan.

Adjournment

The meeting ended at approximately 9 p.m.

Summary of Board Actions

For this meeting and most past Board of Education meetings can be found at:

<http://www.ccsd15.net/AboutDistrict15/BoardOfEducation/HTML/BOEMeetingDates.html>

Official minutes, including vote counts, are posted after they have been approved at a Regular Board of Education meeting.

Board Meeting DVDs Available to the Public

A DVD of the Regular and some Special meetings will be available for checkout typically the Monday following the meetings. To request a copy of the meeting DVD, please contact June Becker, Board of Education Secretary at beckerj@ccsd15.net or 847-963-3208.

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Posted: Monday, February 2nd, 2009