

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

May 12th, 2010

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

Citizens Address the Board

Jane Van Wolvelear – Has been speaking for over a year now requesting the Board have a dialogue with the residents. She has a new proposal. The way the agenda is currently set up, the Citizens Address the Board prior to any Board discussion or reports that have any “meat” to them - That somebody might want to respond to. No response is available from the Public. Knows the Board’s concern about the length of the meetings and limits the citizens to 3 minutes. Would like to propose that at the beginning of the meeting the “Citizens Address the Board” (portion) is “new” ideas, things to think about, maybe we will talk about them next month. Then at the end of the meeting, you can keep it to 3 minutes, but let the citizens respond to what you have discussed during the meeting. That gives the people of the town at least the feeling that they have been heard and that they have the beginning of “dialogue” with this Board. She sincerely doesn’t understand why the Board is so hesitant to engage in dialogue with the citizens of the town.

District Elementary Recess Update

Superintendent Daniel Lukich – This was a Board discussion item that was asked to be brought back. District leadership team has given the Board something to review with regard to our position. We would certainly like to keep recess as a site based decision.

Board member Sue Quinn – Her understanding was that the administration was going to come back with an evaluation of the change that occurred at the beginning of the year at Virginia Lake. Then we would have a discussion after we had some benchmark information and feedback. The information provided in our packets was the same information given to us back in January. We are not getting an evaluation just an reiteration of the position that the administration holds that they want to keep it a site-based decision. Why don’t we have some kind of evaluation? Do we need to have the administration provide us with one and revisit this in June? Her other point is to talk about the merits of what was done. She wants to give administration an opportunity to actually come forward with an evaluation if they have one. If this is all the administration has, then we can proceed with it.

Lukich – Is this simply about the Virginia Lake building? Or recess across the district?

Quinn – What originally wanted to evaluate was Virginia Lake because of that event. Reasons given, why it was done, what is the affect now that kids are inside, what is the benefit? Also the larger issue that she thinks the Board was discussing – do we want to have a Board policy that mandates a minimum (amount of recess) but not the particulars for a school. That’s more of a Board level discussion. **Lukich** – We are in the middle of a transition at VL between principals. He will ask both and Mary Zarr (Asst. Super for Curriculum) to work with him in doing an evaluation of that particular building and trends they see, some of the pros and cons and bring it back in June.

Board member Tim Millar – Stated that instead of just focusing again on the lunch hour, perhaps the overall picture of getting enough exercise, physical education. He appreciates the site-based decision making process because they have to make it work. From a Board policy, we could set a number of minutes and they (school) decide how to fit it in to the day.

Board VP Mark Bloom – Two different issues here. He proposed that this be tabled until the end of the year. He wasn’t really proposing for a particular evaluation from the administration about that (VL) school and how it works. He knows that a number of different schools are changing lunch hour for next year, they saw how it (VL) work, getting recommendations and modifying it for their new populations for next year. Doesn’t even know how valuable taking a look at how effective that was (at VL).

Obviously there are a lot of things we can look at and set policy on. Administration knows that recess is good for kids; they know that recess is tied to better behavior and health for the kids; they want them outside as much as possible because it improves discipline in the schools. If there is a reason why they limit recess, it is because there are other mitigating factors they have to deal with in the schools. No one disagrees that we want as much recess as possible but it begins to tie the hands on all of these other issues the principals have to deal with when making these decisions. We are going to see change in a number of these areas. We have to be careful about setting too many specific guidelines on things because they have impacts.

Quinn – Disagrees with what Bloom is saying. But he does mention other schools proposing to change their policy. If there are proposed changes from other schools to go along with the Virginia Lake model or something else, she would like that information brought to the Board as a part of this discussion so we can understand where other schools are headed.

Lukich – The discussion Bloom is talking about Lukich had in leadership (meeting) with principals two weeks ago. There are principals who are in the process of considering and getting ready to make adjustments to accommodate the population that they are going to have next year. We will be happy to bring that (to the next meeting).

Role of PACEE and the Requirements for Attendance at PACEE meetings

Quinn – PACEE (Parent Advisory Committee for Educational Excellence) is our current committee.

Board President Gerald D. Chapman – He would change “our” to “superintendent’s” committee.

Quinn – You are right; it is not a Board committee.

Quinn – (continued) PACEE grew out of the DACEE committee. We have a policy that governs the DACEE committee. We don’t actually have a policy covering PACEE. DACEE was for parents and community leaders. It was split up because those two groups have different purposes. Policy really just focused on a yearly meeting for DACEE.

Quinn – PACEE meets quarterly, has a stated purpose. First she thinks that there should be a Board policy covering PACEE. Thinks quarterly meeting is great, the idea of having parents bringing their concerns to the superintendent and he responds is a great model. The thing she would like to see different than is offered currently is to expand participation and the inclusiveness of that meeting. Right now it is very tightly controlled, only certain people who are nominated to the committee. It is not an inclusive, welcoming environment. She would like (the Board) to model that behavior (inclusive/welcoming). Parents should be able to come whether they are in PTA or not. Quinn thinks it is reasonable to limit total number of people. Attendance so far, even with 3 per 20 schools, has been low, about 20 (per meeting). We are not even getting the participation and don’t know if that is because we are limiting the people that can come. We have room to have a more inclusive environment. What does the Board think about this?

Board member Richard Bokor – Is this Board policy, or superintendent/administration policy.

Quinn – Right now we have it as a Board policy. **Chapman** – We do? **Quinn** – Policy 2.15

Chapman – Oh, DACEE **Quinn** – Which is what PACEE is supposed to be.

Babcock – If you have a hot issue and have people come and you can’t accommodate them, then you are sending people away again. And to intimate that there has been a problem on a regular basis of people being asked to leave a PACEE meeting is a little misleading.

Quinn – It certainly has not been something very inclusive.

Babcock – Yes and she remembers it from being on PTA as well. She has no problem with opening it up but we have to be careful with making sure we have the right facility so as not to aggravate people just as much. If there is an issue, whether it is bonds or recess, where we could pack a room and we can’t accommodate people. That may have to be incorporated; she doesn’t know how to limit should that arise.

Chapman – No matter how you do it. Do we select, does the superintendent select? Fact of the matter is that committees are committees based on their membership. He has having a little trouble as to how to open up a committee. **Quinn** – We have Bilingual parent committee open to anyone in district, they encourage attendance by holding raffles to get more people. If there are more people (for PACEE), we can move it.

Bloom – Do we set policy? Do we say if they can hold raffle to have people attend?

Quinn – Actually it is controlled by State law, we are required to have (meeting).

Bokor – PACEE meets quarterly right? **Quinn** – PACEE is not mandated by law, so we left it to be whatever it was. She thinks by putting it in Policy we are saying it is important.

Babcock – Since it was originally set up by Dr. McKanna for PACEE, she would like to hear from our superintendent, you have been to several meetings – what is your opinion?

Lukich – He thinks that they are very effective meetings. Cabinet attends with him, they put together agendas. It strikes him that Dr. McKanna was trying to improve and increase communication across the district. Lukich has bought into that. What bothers him about “drop in” meetings where you are not quite sure who is coming in - is how do you prepare an agenda? How do you conduct the meeting? And how does the people who attend it regularly, get something out of that meeting? And they do - the people who come, come back regularly – we have 20 to 24 people. What concerns him by putting a sign on the door saying “everybody come” – is that you have just taken a meeting that is intended for people who have a specific purpose there – and said “everybody and anybody is welcome”. He doesn’t want to not welcome anyone but thinks it changes the nature of the meeting and his agenda preparation.

Babcock – So there are specific topics? **Lukich** – Yes, we meet with a purpose.

Babcock – You set the agenda so it is your communication?

Lukich – We listen to PACEE, we accept their ideas, they funnel it through our executive assistant, and principals help us in the event that there are particular topics. We do not fall into an agenda, we form one. During his time there, he thinks we have gotten better each year. It is not 4 (meetings) – we meet 5 or 6 times a year. (Asked his assistant for verification) It is only 4 & includes DACEE? That’s okay.

Lukich – We look for input from those particular people representing their building. We are looking for increasing two-way communication. “Drop ins” at that meeting – he thinks - number one - they would find themselves “out of place”, it would not be a great advantage in terms of the discussion that we have. Meetings limited to an hour. It would change the nature of how we would prepare for that meeting if we have to have ten other people just wander in looking for discussion. He is a little concerned with Dr. McKanna’s original intention of what this might plug into.

Millar – You won’t have people packing the room unless there is a hot button issue because the timeframe itself limits a lot of people since it is the mid afternoon. Don’t get huge crowds typically. Bigger crowds when there was a free lunch. (By opening it up) You may get more opinions then you would have otherwise. In some buildings . . . it would open communications.

Lukich – It is quite open we has to say from his two years experience. He has no choice about whom – it is either PTA or the principals who nominate and set members of the committee. It changes annually; it is not always the same two or three people.

Babcock – If a parent would go to the principal and say “I am really interested in joining this and would like to be a part of this” – would they have that opportunity to do that?

Lukich – He doesn’t see why not. **Quinn** – But what if they already have three people?

Babcock – Yes, we try to set a limit to some extent or we have done in the past. But if someone is that interested and wants to come – above and beyond that 3 or 4, she doesn’t see a principal saying “no you can’t be there”.

Quinn – Thinks that maybe could also change. As you go along and you have your agendas, whatever they may be whatever the current topics or concerns being brought - there will be different people interested in those topics. There may be a PTA rep who always reports back to the building (about PACEE). In some schools, it is an effective communication tool. In other schools, PTAs are not as strong and it is not an effective communication tool. By opening it up to people - who may on a topic by topic basis - may be more interested or motivated. She doesn't see a reason to restrict that, and doesn't see a reason to make sure we only have the same 20 people there at every meeting. It goes against the idea of openness and free communication.

Chapman – This is an administrative deal, doesn't think the Board should dictate. However based on this conversation here, we can give some direction to the superintendent. We have raised a concern. The superintendent can reflect back on how this is operating and make any changes. Doesn't think we should dictate makeup of committees that are administrative in nature.

Quinn – We already have a Policy for an administrative committee. This is now different than that.

Chapman – Are you requesting a policy to address PACEE? **Quinn** – If the Board wishes.

Bloom – This was a committee not set up by the Board, but by a superintendent who was trying to expand communication with the community. The long term danger, whether he agrees or not if this particular committee should be more open than it is – you can say a superintendent goes and sets an initiative and creates something to increase communications, then we step in and say "great job, now we are going to tell you how we want you to do it differently." That is different than if we feel that there should be some vehicle out there that can be open for all parents to attend – that is a separate issue to somehow increase communication. But to say that this vehicle - not created by the Board, but a superintendent to do a specific thing – to say you have to do this differently – we are trying to insert Policy where maybe it shouldn't be. Bloom does agree with the point that we need/we are struggling with this in a lot of ways – maybe we do need to set something up or see if the superintendent can come up with some ideas on how we can have a more open and attendable and available type of communication. Maybe it is different than the PACEE meeting; maybe the PACEE meetings do change. Bloom does worry about stepping into all of these areas.

Lukich – One idea he can introduce to the Board to consider - he would like to leave membership to the building, would not attempt to control membership, we will take all "comers". One thought maybe a couple of "members at large" from the district that might come from the building or some other organization, not associated with the school. A "member at large", however many that may be, that he (Lukich) might want to consider as they come forward and say they would like to be a part of PACEE that year. And with the right reasons, he would like to nominate somebody to be a member at large.

Chapman – If you believe that addresses the concern that is a decision for you to make.

Policy Regarding Publishing Information on our Website Prior to a Board Meeting

Millar – We don't have a Policy for this (topic). (In the past) the reason we didn't publish information for the community – the excuse was that we didn't have a Policy. We should have a Policy of what we are going to publish so that there won't be any politics or withholding information that is inconvenient. We should be getting as much information as possible (online). Other districts have actually lessened their FOIA requests (by doing this). Thinks it is positive for the community. They (community) should know as much information as possible unless it is confidential or ongoing negotiation or personnel issue – in general we should strive to put as much information as possible online.

Chapman – Unless he misunderstood, it is addressed on page 3 or 4 of Policy 2.00 – posting on district website. So we do have a Policy.

Millar - We didn't publish information, we chose not to publish or somebody chose not to. When Millar requested why bond information wasn't on website, somebody got the attorneys involved to say we don't have to. (They said that) we don't have a Policy that states that we have to.

Quinn – We have in the past put substantially more than is mandated by law. Thinks we need a Policy to post everything on the agenda unless it is personnel, closed session items - not the sensitive political items – just the things we can't (legally). **Chapman** – Thought we had that discussion and agreed to that. Maybe it wasn't reflected in Policy. We need to give our Policy Committee the direction. Thinks that was the direction we had given. We need to rewrite the Policy. **Garwood** – Yes can do. Thinks that there may have been a slip up, it is more of a mission than a Policy.

Chapman – It is essentially reflecting the Policy that we are doing. Put as much info as we can.

Draft Policy Regarding Contact of District Attorney/Firm by Individual Board Members

Chapman – He is comfortable with the Policy that we have, which says that there is a difference between getting written opinions vs. other opinions. **Millar** – What is your interpretation of a Board member who asks - under retainer - questions to our attorney which doesn't cost the district anything (more)? **Chapman** – We do have an obligation as Board members to share when we do that, as we indicated that we would do – thinks we are a little lax on that but other than that, he is comfortable.

Millar – As it reads right now, only the Board President can call or unless the Board authorizes.

Chapman – The restriction here is to provide "written" opinions.

Millar – Are emails written opinions?

Board member James Ekeberg – No, explained that but if you file a legal opinion, then there is going to be a charge. **Millar** – The concern he had in the past was not for something that was charged – it was whether or not a Board member had the right to ask the attorney a question.

Ekeberg – Mike (attorney) said he is happy to answer questions, as long as you don't get into an opinion. **Babcock** – Mike (attorney) said we were starting to cross that line.

Millar – He understands that, if we can put in here (Policy) that any Board member can contact the attorney under retainer so that this issue doesn't come up again. It has come up in the past.

Babcock – Doesn't our contract with our attorney says something different (then what Garwood provided in the packet)?

Millar – What Garwood is referring to is in other districts, again this is why we are getting this opinion, is that they (other districts) can't contact. When you contact those districts that is not always their practice. That is why he asked for the list (of districts). Those districts' attorneys are not on retainer. Wants to make sure there isn't any problem in the future. They (BOE members) should be able to as long as it doesn't cost a fee.

Babcock – We should all let each other know what we are asking.

Millar – Exactly - the challenge is that a lot of times issues come up right before meetings. If you can't do it and you are voting on something at a meeting – so if you are saying that the attorney can't give you an answer until after the Board gives you approval – but you are voting on it beforehand. Regarding the bond issue, he needed information before the vote on some of the legal issues as well as a couple of other issues that came up. You need to know beforehand.

Babcock – Thinks we have our own separate, unusual agreements from our lawyer standpoint.

Bokor – Doesn't think it allows for unlimited calls.

Babcock – And it is not the norm.

Quinn – She would like (language) to refer to our current practice in the Policy. You don't have an objection to our current practice. To put it in and make it more firm. So can we have some language like that in our Policy?

Chapman – Per our agreement with the attorney - he thinks it provides that all Board members be apprised of such contacts.

New Business – Change to Citizen Participation at BOE meetings

Quinn – Jane Van Wolvelear’s comments (during Citizens Address the Board) reminded her that we had a discussion last month about changing the format of our Citizens Address the Board and we were all to think about it and come back. Anyone else remember that?

Bloom – He was going to bring back some materials to start a discussion.

Chapman – Thinks it is important to recognize the fact that the State defines the nature of our meetings and the nature of the interaction that occurs. We did get some information from State Association of School Boards that clearly defines that. That might be worth all of us reviewing.

Quinn – IASB is to help, not govern. She wants to make sure it (topic) doesn’t go away.

Babcock – Part of what we discussed tonight was one of the points that came up – where we could have a Citizens address the Board before and after - one of the options that we should be looking at.

Lukich – Restate purpose of discussion for the June agenda.

Chapman – We are going to discuss the policies for Citizens Address the Board along with that information from IASB, recommendation from professional organizations and School Code.

Bid Award – Asphalt Pavement Remediation (Capital Projects)

Chapman – He recommends that this bid award be rejected.

Quinn – Would like to discuss. Back in February, before we had the bond issue – we asked for this to be put in the budget and we asked them to proceed (with bids). Thinks we should go ahead - particularly since we don’t even have a budget for next year. If we yank this, it feels like retaliation to the public and doesn’t think we want to go there.

Chapman – In response, when the board initially gave approval to these capital items - subsequently we directed the administration to cut a significant amount of money from the budget which included capital which otherwise would have been funded in another way. Doesn’t think the decision in February is in black and white number.

Babcock – She doesn’t think either, thinks we will be dammed if we do, dammed if we don’t. It is not punitive. We have been asked to make some tough decisions and we have to do that. She is prepared to do that.

Lukich – The administration discussed this and at some time you need to draw a line in the sand. Obviously these 3 or 4 buildings are necessary but we also received input that we can get by for another year. Until we can get our budget straightened out, he is all for getting by another year.

Millar – Frustrating year for financial planning, without using five year forecasts and going back and really laying this stuff out. We have guaranteed income; we know where we are going to be, frustrating that we can’t have an even keel every year planning these projects out.

Roll Call – Motion to reject the bid –

Chapman AYE, **Ekeberg** AYE, **Millar** No, **Quinn** No, **Babcock** AYE, **Bloom** AYE, **Bokor** AYE

Motion passes 5:2 Bid rejected.

Adjournment

The meeting concluded at approximately 8:40 p.m.

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