

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

January 11th, 2006

The Board of Ed meetings were videotaped for broadcast on local public television. Board meetings are now conducted twice a month (one meeting nominally for recognitions and action items, one for Board reports and discussion). January will have meetings on the 11th “Regular Meeting” and 25th “Committee of the Whole”.

Life Safety

The Board approved the Life Safety study with some reprioritization to reduce the number of “Urgent” items (which are est. at \$1.4M). Total Life Safety costs projected at \$25M over 10 years. The Board discussed again the 4 funding options (1: Operations and Maint Fund; 2: Restructure Long Term Debt; 3: Referendum; 4: Levy 5 cents in Life/Safety Fund, which just takes from Ed Fund). There was serious contention between Board members on how to fund the “Urgent” items which must be completed in the next 1-2 years. All agreed there were no funds in Op&Maint and that option 4 is the same as option 1, due to the tax cap limitations. Carlson is a strong proponent of restructuring the debt, while Keenan strongly opposes, saying that restructuring the debt actually costs the District more, shifting the debt out to later years. Keenan favors covering the “Urgent” items with the 2006-2007 Budget, and figuring out how to fund the remaining Life Safety items after the Facilities committee has finished assessing all buildings to determine if cost savings can be made there. Millar pointed out that while negotiating the teacher’s contract, they should not be trying to restructure the debt until they know what the budget for future years is going to be. Boucher wants to restructure the debt so we have flexibility to raise more money (now, while bond rates are “favorable”), and wants to use the “Urgent” item funds in 2006-2007 for teachers. Millar commented that the tax anticipation warrants provide emergency funds and that restructuring the debt shifts the burden to the future. Rowden was also in favor of waiting for the Facilities report before upgrading a facility that may get sold. Dr. Sophie commented that decisions on building closings should be complete by June 2007. Boucher asked Nolte to provide concrete numbers for the 4 options by the next meeting.

Personnel Report

A request was made to the Board to approve posting for 2 new positions (one teacher, one program assistant) for an Early Childhood Autistic classroom. The class started the year with 5 children (1 teacher and 3 program assistants). Since then, 6 more children have joined the class, and the request was being made to facilitate splitting into two classes (5-6 children each, 1 teacher, 2 program assistants). Rowden made a motion to approve the teacher, so the classes could be split, but not the additional program assistant (so there would be 1.5 program assistants per class). Carlson strongly argued that the teacher knows best in these situations, and the Board should approve their request. The state requires 1 program assistant per 10 kids, Deb (Administration) says it is “standard practice” to have 5-6 kids in a class with 1 teacher and 2 program assistants. Keenan, Millar and Rowden voted “yes” to amending the personnel report to only hire an additional teacher; Mikula, Silverman, Boucher and Carlson voted “no”, so the amendment failed. The original personnel report (for a teacher and an assistant) passed with Mikula, Silverman, Boucher, Carlson and Millar voting “yes”, Keenan, Rowden voting “no”.