

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

January 25th, 2006

This Board of Ed Meeting was a “Committee of the Whole” meeting and is designed to provide a more open opportunity for discussion and not for action or voting. Boucher and Silverman were absent.

Citizens Address the Board

Palatine Firefighters – Capt. Alrecht, Kevin Piesecki

Firefighters were advocating the return of the 5th grade fire safety field trip to Station 17 (which was cut this year along with all other field trips). They outlined the fire safety training they do at every grade level, culminating in a trip to Station 17 (Illinois Ave) in 5th grade to teach window exiting, simulating fire in a tower and provide hands-on fire safety training. They emphasized that this training cannot be moved to the schools as it uses facilities on-site at Station 17. They were concerned about disrupting the continuity of the training program by leaving out the 5th grade component. Firefighters said they were willing to help find funds to cover the program costs and already invest in providing double duty firefighter coverage for 3 weeks during the fire safety field trip. McKanna emphasized that he highly appreciates the good work they do, but that he has uniformly said “no” to all field trips this year. McKanna asked if the firefighters could come to the schools this year and make up for the field trips next year with both 5th and 6th graders. The firefighters said that it would be a burden to do double the field trips in one year, but they would do that if necessary. Keenan asked if the field trip could take place after school, but the firefighters were concerned that they would not get all the kids through the safety training, and that the ones that most needed to be there would be the ones least likely to come after school. Carlson agreed that the district needed to make sure all kids were served, especially kids in high density housing. McKanna asked if we could borrow Rolling Meadows mobile equipment. Firefighters said all Rolling Meadows and Palatine kids come to station 17 (but not Hoffman Estates). Rowden asked if the Administration could provide an estimate of costs and problems, and put it on next meeting’s agenda. She did not view it as a field trip, but part of the curriculum.

Personnel Report

McKanna presented a number of items for the Board to consider, including the cost of the options for the 2006-2007 budget (see 2006-2007 Budget Options).

2006-2007 Class Size

McKanna proposed reducing K-6 class sizes by 1 or 2 students per class, at a cost of \$.7-1.4M. Rowden wants to differentiate between grade levels for goals for class size. Although district average is 28 kids per class, classes range from 20-35 kids per class. Rowden proposed a goal of grades K-3 (average 24 kids per class), grades 4-6 (average 26 kids per class). She said that actual sizes and averages would vary depending on the overall budget, contract negotiation and individual school, but that these numbers would give the Administration guidance now as the Principals start their student assignment plans. Carlson was not in favor of differentiating between grade levels, she was not convinced that class size mattered that much and thought interruption level was more important. Carlson wanted the Administration (Hindman) to present their opinion about “ideal” class size. Keenan noted that the Curriculum Advisory Committee had addressed some of that issue. Rowden thinks quality of instruction is much more important than class size, but wanted to give the administration some direction as they prepare for next year’s scheduling. McKanna agreed that direction would be helpful and that the principals agreed that differentiation was important and

needed guidance in setting up their classes. McKanna also emphasized the need to start looking at Job Fairs for hiring new teachers, as we will be hiring at least some teachers to replace retirements and that process needed to start now to get the best candidates.

Learning Resource Center

McKanna proposed increasing the LRC instructor back to one full-time LRC per school (currently ½ time) at a cost of \$0.95M. McKanna said the kids are not able to get into the library and it is seriously inhibiting instructional ability. McKanna said the ½ time clerical assistant that is currently in the library would move back into the front office to provide clerical support there. Rowden agreed that we should reinstate all LRC, but didn't know what we could really afford. Keenan also agreed with LRC clerical returning to the front office.

Buses

McKanna proposed replacing 15 school buses (we have a total of 138) at a cost of \$1.05M. McKanna said the past 3 years we have not been keeping up with a reasonable replacement schedule of 10% per year. McKanna said you generally do not want the buses to be older than 10 years. Rowden asked why this was the year to replace. Keenan wants to see the ages of the buses. McKanna said he will bring the ages of the buses to the next meeting.

Technology

McKanna proposed replacing the 21 servers in the district at a cost of \$141,000. He said this was an urgent need. The servers are 5-6 years old, are not under warranty, have hard drives and memory that are too small and need better specs to handle today's computational needs. McKanna also proposed replacing 200 computers&software (cost \$170,000) and 840 computers/hardware in labs (cost \$714,000). There are currently 6000 computers in the district. Millar said the Tech Committee is trying to determine the curriculum needs and develop a 5 year and 10 year plan so we don't have to replace all the computers at once in the future (as we currently are in the position of needing to do). He said the older grades have greater technology needs and the math and science curriculum should be driving the technology needs. He noted the Tech Committee was meeting the next day. Carlson wanted to make sure the cost was going to be covered because it was very important to have the technology for the kids.

Assistant Principals

McKanna proposed increasing 4 elementary schools from ½ time asst. principals to full time (cost \$180,000) or increasing 8 elementary schools (cost \$360,000). He noted that some schools have greater needs than others and he is trying to sort out which ones have the greatest need.

Student Advisors

McKanna proposed restoring Jr. High student advisors at all four Jr. High schools (cost \$380,000).

New Teacher Employment

McKanna proposed having more flexibility in hiring not only new teachers (step 1), but also more experienced teachers. The district has been only hiring BA-1 new teachers for 2 years (this is the third). Hiring BA-1 teachers saves \$10k per year per teacher. Need to know what kind of teacher we will be recruiting at the job fairs. Rowden commented that first year teachers are eager, with new ideas, but also wants flexibility to hire more experienced teachers.

Board Reports

Social Studies and Math (Gr 4-6) Curriculum Committees: Rowden and Keenan attended these. Karen Hindman will bring the curriculum recommendations to the

Board in 2 weeks. Materials are available at the schools for the Social Studies curriculum for the parents to see, and the math curriculum will soon be available for the parents to see.

Facilities Committee: Keenan attended this committee. The Facilities committee is studying a wide range of possible changes to facilities in the district, including: changing school configurations to K-3 or K-5/6-8; changing school boundaries; going to year round schooling; having full day Kindergarten; using magnet schools. Keenan emphasized that any decisions about these issues would have lots of community input and that this is a multi-year project.