

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

March 22nd, 2006

Mikula and Silverman were absent for this meeting. No press was in attendance. This Board of Ed Meeting was a "Committee of the Whole" meeting, intended for discussion. This meeting in particular was called by the Board to provide a more open dialogue format to hear from parents about issues at the schools. Each of the PTA presidents was asked by the Board to collect ideas from their parents about issues at their schools and present them to the Board.

Mary Podjasek, PTA Council President, presented to the Board a list of issues each school PTA developed, grouped by items most frequently mentioned ([click here to see the list](#)). She reviewed the top ten most frequently mentioned items and then called PTA presidents from schools that wanted to present to the Board ideas important to their individual schools.

Peggy Babcock, Willow Bend (former PTA co-pres)

Want to restore ethics and end micromanagement by the Board. Schools and principals know best way to run the schools. Don't want the Board to reinvent everything, don't want 2 meetings a month, Board doesn't seem to trust their administration and support staff to do their jobs. Bus routes are still a problem, more people driving, buses can't get through. Some parents have to drive their kids to school because the bus cannot get them there in time for "media" in the mornings.

Karen Ernst, Plum Grove Jr. High (PTSA pres)

Teachers are tired and need more resources to keep up quality. More social workers needed – we have homeless and hospitalized students, 3 crises in one day. Need psychologists for at-risk students and a 2nd student advisor for master scheduling. We need subs for the custodial staff, updated tech equipment and field trips. Where are we getting the money? When will these wish list items be resolved?

Rowden: This is not about getting all the things on all the lists, but more about understanding the needs of the different schools.

Millar: Trying to make a 3-5 year financial plan and helps to see commonalities between schools.

Ernst: We should be talking about mspace.com, not replacing carpet.

Carlson: Our duty as a Board is to look at how to finance this. The First priority is Health and Safety, second is education. Need to develop a plan now, not 3-5 years from now.

Boucher: What do we do about custodial absences?

Phillips (Oper & Maint): Each night we have 8-10 absences out of 56 custodians across the district. We are rotating, approving overtime for custodians across all buildings, not just within a building.

Carl Sandburg Jr. High (letter read by Mary Podjasek)

These meetings take up time, but the RIF affects faculty and teachers. Staff are hurried and anxious. Students are suffering information overload and not learning. We don't need more meetings, we need resources. Need to empower quality faculty to do their job.

Anita Jamnik, Whiteley (PTA pres)

Have had late start time for 6 years, told it costs too much to adjust bus routes but each year the bus routes have to be re-worked anyway. Time to start rotating again, maybe every 5 years.

Boucher: This is something we need to look at, revisit.

Carlson: This is an equity issue that has not been kept in the district.

McKanna: If we are going to change, we have to do it quickly so people can make plans. We can come back with information for the board in 2 weeks.

Robin Boisvert, Winston Campus Jr. High (PTA pres)

Want to retain rotating block schedules. Losing block scheduling means loss of 20 min per class per week. Longer classes positively affect teachers, students, more time for labs, in-depth investigations. Students think block scheduling gives them better learning environment.

McKanna: Because sharing staff between buildings, makes it difficult to have block scheduling. Want all 4 Jr. Highs on the same schedule for test performance and other reasons.

Debby Brauer, Virginia Lake (PTA pres)- letter read by Mary Podjasek

School Open House was scheduled at same time as this meeting. Must provide what is best for the whole district. More meetings are not going to change anything.

Steve Shipton, Grey Sanborn (PTA pres)

Want reduced class sizes, experienced teachers, full time asst principal, library LRC, more art (lose to non-attendance or holidays), more social workers (only 2 social workers together doing ½ time). Newspaper articles about bond refinancing – taking a long time to decide. How can we send our kids to school if we have safety issues? Public infighting in Board meetings, each board member with their own agendas – board needs to come together and work on priority issues.

Carlson: Please understand that we are going forward with Health & Safety.

Cheryl Raye Stout, Jane Addams (PTA newsletter)

Jane Addams is a small diverse, special school (bilingual, special ed, special need). Board needs to consider needs of all students, not just one side of town. Because LRC is not open all the time, kids have to sit in the nurses office instead of LRC. This year has been tough. Need referendum to keep schools from regressing. Please do something about the computers.

Carlson: Jane Addams works hard to embrace their diversity.

Millar: Equality doesn't mean the same for every school. There is a tech meeting tomorrow.

Boucher: We are in our 9th year with some equipment. We're putting together a 5 year refresh plan, but it's a big chunk of money to get us started. Everything could be solved with more money.

Rowden: Everything cannot be solved with more money. We are doing the best we can, we are all volunteers. Well aware of the challenges.

Peggy Babcock: You're spending too much time not listening to the administration, wasting time on things that are not important.

Rowden: we all have different things that are important – our agenda is to represent our community as best we can. Things have been done in the past that have led us to the tech problems we have now. We have open meetings so you hear everything that we have to discuss.

Peggy Babcock: Too much infighting, need to have a cohesive Board – all schools are saying this.

Millar: Discussion is important. Banned by law to meet behind closed doors. This is our opportunity to hash through our issues. It is a normal process, but different from what the district is used to – we just disagree and we have to do it in public.

Lisa Hanson-Braun, Lake Louise (PTA co-pres)

Thanks for providing forum. Keep in mind our uniqueness, diversity. 800 students, high mobility, 40 languages. Need extra time/staff, especially when kids are not even fluent in their own language.

Lisa Traina and Chris Connelly, The Learning Academy (PTA co-pres')

We are all special ed, early childhood to 8th grade – unique needs. Building case manager negotiates IEP meetings (300 students with 250 IEPs) – now principal and asst principal have to negotiate IEP meetings instead. Need more program assistants: classes with 14 kids, needing escort to the bathroom and in some cases change diapers – there are not enough hands. Kids need to be taught skills or they will not be able to integrate into society. Gym divider: Jr. High goes to gym every day, can't be in same room with early childhood because don't have gym divider. Need to support parents with parent liaison, to not have "us" vs. "them" attitude. Need more field trips. Disastrous bus situation – no "hookups" for kids – some kids are late by an hour on the bus. Need to have case manager to support Alternative Suspension Program (where suspended kids go to the Learning Academy) and 2nd Chance Program (where kids can get out of bad situations at other schools). We have very little special needs playground equipment. Need Board members to come to the school.

Keenan: I've been there 3 times in the last year.

Carlson: Good to keep special needs kids in district. Can bus problems be addressed for the Fall?

McKanna: Did not hear from parents that this was still an issue.

Traina: Bus routes were doubled and are still doubled. For the older kids, we just let it go.

McKanna: Need a process in place to make sure these get addressed. Not sure if 40 min bus ride is inappropriate.

Traina: For Early Childhood, routes should be shorter.

McKanna: In 2 weeks we should be able to address this and get a plan to show to the Board.

Carlson: 2 weeks ago, we had a new person in dispatch and transportation. If things are better in the last 2 weeks, perhaps because of new hires?

Traina: Yes, it has been better in the last 2 weeks.

Boucher: How much would gym divider be?

Phillips: Replacing is \$12,000.

Boucher: Building Case Manager – can we restore this?

McKanna: Cut \$25M out of budget in last 4 years. With restoring teachers, LRC, we are already back to deficit budget. Next meetings we will be presenting budget.

Sue Jedson, Sundling Jr. High (PTA pres)

Need additional social workers – 33% of general ed population have received some kind of counseling. Need improved tech, especially for enrichment classes. Need to encourage principals to stay. Need 2nd student advisor. Need increased hallway supervision – can't man hallways because teachers are dealing with kids that social workers used to do – maybe senior volunteers?

Anne Marie Johlle, Lincoln (PTA co-pres)

900 economically diverse students. Still using 386/486 computers – need to think creatively about partnering with businesses to take their old computers. What is the board going to do with this wish list? What is the urgency of processing these requests?

Millar: Using data for planning and prioritizing, so we are not in the same situation later on. Field trips don't have a great cost.

Boucher: Businesses sell old computers to 3rd world countries – can we convince them to donate to us?

Johlle: A parent at our school could be a contact with business

Boucher: Send the name to Dr. McKanna. Part of our budgeting process is taking input from parents about priorities.

Citizens to Address The Board

Mark and Patty Studman - Winston Jr. High parents: Daughter in band program, piccolo was stolen from storage room. Worked with Winston Campus

staff but they were too slow to file police report. Organization and security of locker area needs improvement. Requested letter sent to parents; want letter sent in the Fall.

McKanna: Room is not secured, but not really practical to do so.

Scott Sieben – Whiteley School parent: Thanks to teachers at Whiteley. Am an engineer and musician and worked in education and industry. Math and science are important part of education. Arts education (ability to think, feel, respond) shouldn't be secondary to science and mathematics.

Donna Polly – Resource center teacher at Lincoln and Sanborn: Thanks for increasing our positions to full-time. District made a commitment to literacy. We put a package together for the Board to show all the benefits that LRC can provide. Still need LRC clerical assistants to full-time so LRC staff can be available to provide a quality program.

Guiselle Businski – Winston Campus parent: Need help for children that don't qualify for IEP, but still need help. Gifted, average, IEP kids all get help, but struggling kids do not. My son was tested but did not qualify for IEP.

Boucher: Do not accept that he does not qualify – appeal up through the system to get your son the help he needs.

Hindman (Dir. Curriculum, special services): I would be happy to meet with this parent.

Victor Perez – Hunting Ridge, Conyers, Central Road parent: Board has to make hard financial choices. Special Ed is \$12M out of \$96 M budget – these kids need the most help but often get cut first. These children are at-risk for a reason. Will cost the parents and communities much more down the road. Please at least maintain and even better increase funding.

Alison Mahoney – Marion Jordan, Sundling parent: Sundling is very positive and friendly. District 15 website has very sparse school information. I had so many questions before starting at Sundling, but no information. As a PTA webmaster, learned so much from other PTA webmasters. We try to present timely information for parents on-line. Parents are craving information. The Sundling assignment notebook came home on the 1st day of school – why can't we have this info on-line? Could this info be made available at the district, school or with the PTA webmasters?

McKanna: We have a part-time webmaster for the District now. Should work with school principals to get school information.

Mahoney: It is good to hear you are willing to share information with PTA webmasters.

Rowden: Can we put FAQ on PTA websites for individual schools?

Boucher: As we print documents, there's no reason why we can't put these documents on the web as well.

Mahoney: PTA webmasters want to help and are grateful for information.

Boucher: Can our PTA webmasters meet with district webmaster?

Mahoney: PTA webmasters are willing to step up and help out.

Pamela Olander: Impressed by participants and ideas. Have no children, am neighbor, volunteer, substitute teacher. My tax bill is huge, but I supported the referendum. It is our failure that the referendum did not pass. Why not get brand new equipment from businesses? Should aggressively pursue corporate sponsorship and support. High school students can come in to tutor/aide. Need to get involved in the great resources that the City of Chicago provides. Like this meeting format – should happen more than once/year. Diversity issues need to be addressed – more reaching out to parents. Non-ESL kids are hurt by attention given to ESL kids – all students are suffering because of demands put on teachers.

