

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

May 10th, 2006

This Board of Ed Meeting was a “Regular” meeting. Silverman and Boucher were absent until approx. halfway through the meeting.

New Principals

The Administration announced two new principals, Brian LeCrone at Kimball Hill and Earl Overman at Winston Campus Jr. High.

Department of Instruction Budget, 2006-2007

Karen Hindman, Deb Zech and Kevin Nohelty presented the 2006-2007 budget for the Department of Instruction and Student Services. They reviewed the 2005-2006 year accomplishments, including adopting new math curriculum for grades 3-6 and social studies curriculum for grades 7-8. A variety of other programs (InStep, AMP, Read180, Rosetta, World of Difference) were also initiated. Math consultants and coaches were used for staff development, and staff received other training in writing, reading and vocabulary instruction. The district tested 8,582 students via ISAT, IMAGE and IAA. The 2006-2007 budget includes social workers, nurses, therapists, purchased services (including occupational/physical therapy and staff development), supplies (including texts and software) and equipment (including assistive technology). The 2006-2007 budget is \$56,095,472, including a \$2M increase over 2005-2006 to hire new staff to lower class sizes. Revenues include grants from the federal and state governments for staff development, technology, science inquiry, and various block grants. Every year the district must apply for these grants and show data about how the money was used. Rowden asked why revenues from grants were going down; Hindman replied these were conservative estimates of the grants we will receive, they may increase. Millar asked if field trips were in this budget; Nohelty replied that they were in the Transportation budget.

Board Committee Assignments

One of the duties of the Board President is to make all Board committee appointments. Last May, Board members volunteered to be on 11 different district committees, including Technology, Curriculum, D15 Ed Foundation and others (see Board Notes from May 11, 2005). Carlson, as Board President, said that she wanted to see a change in the way Board members participated in these committees by having the committee meetings held during the Committee of the Whole meeting each month, rather than having Board members attend the regular district committee meetings. The exceptions to this were the D15 Education Foundation committee, to which she appointed Mikula, and the DACEE committee, to which she appointed herself. Carlson said she only wanted one Board member going to these committees. Rowden said she also wanted to be on the D15 Ed Foundation committee; Carlson responded that Rowden could be an alternate.

McKanna suggested that the Board should employ a consultant to do a demographic study to address the issues of the Facilities committee. Carlson noted that this had never been done in D15, that many other districts do this regularly. Carlson wanted McKanna to put together a list of things the district wanted the consultant to look at. Rowden pointed out that the Facilities committee, which she has been attending, already has a proposal from a consultant to do a demographic study and that the proposal was in the Board packet. Rowden moved that the Board authorize the proposal. Carlson and McKanna were unaware of the proposal. Carlson directed McKanna to bring information back to the Board at the next meeting about a list of things the district wants a consultant to look at, and to see if the district needs to do bids.

Board Policy Readings

Dr. Sophie and others presented various changes to Board policy for First Reading. Keenan asked how often the Policy committee met and how often a Board member was there (Silverman has been attending the Policy committee). Sophie replied the committee met once per month and that Silverman was at most of the meetings. Keenan was very concerned that a Board member was not going to be present in future Policy committee meetings, noting that Policy was the main function of the Board. Keenan did not understand how all the committees were going to meet at the Committee of the Whole meeting each month. Carlson said she wanted policies to be brought to the Committee of the Whole. Keenan said she thought a Board member should be present when the policies were drafted, not just at the time of public reading.

Several policies were cited without public explanation of what those policy changes were and without comment from the Board.

Rowden objected to one policy authorizing the Superintendent and Board President to consult the district attorney. Rowden wanted to know if individual Board members were prohibited from consulting the district attorney. Millar said communications were an area of concern, since some Board members had been frozen out of attorney contact. Keenan suggested that in negotiations, there are situations when there is a need to contact the attorney. Mikula said all on the Board should know if a Board member is consulting the attorney. Carlson said she read this as not prohibiting anyone, but wanted a legal interpretation. Sophie said she would have the attorney help her re-write the policy.

Rowden objected to another policy that said no item may be added to the agenda unless by unanimous vote. Rowden wanted any Board member to be able to put something on the agenda. Carlson said this was a legal requirement, to provide notice for agenda items. Boucher commented he thought these were Roberts Rules, and Sophie agreed to check Roberts Rules because the Board was supposed to follow them.

Keenan asked if it was in the School Code that the Board members could not listen to verbatim recordings without approval of the full Board. Sophie said she would check.

Millar was concerned about items taken out of a policy regarding Principal duties. Sophie said this was to shorten the duties to the bare essentials, so Principals can spend 50% of their time in instructional leadership. Boucher commented that the Principals should have to perform the duties prescribed by the Superintendent.

Policy 4.760 empowers the Superintendent to oversee contracts for the district and requires full Board approval for contracts greater than \$1000.

Policy 4.150 makes the Superintendent responsible for management and maintenance of facilities.

Policy 5.90 regarding reporting of abused/neglected children: Sophie commented that the district needed some reminder training for staff, but that the district was already following this policy.

Policy 5.100 regarded the inclusion of defibrillator training during teacher institute days.

The new Wellness policy was still in progress. The Wellness committee (that Keenan has been attending) was looking at school based activity to promote wellness. Sophie commented there was still a lot of work to be done on this policy.

Personnel Report

Boucher inquired about the job-share requests. Sophie said last year the district had 25 pairs, next year there would be 29, possibly more with some additional social workers. The personnel report was approved 6:1 (Keenan abstaining).

Bids

The Board approved several bids for equipment including general, paper and art supplies; TI calculators; PE Equipment; cafeteria tables; gymnasium divider for Conyers Learning Academy. The Board approved 6:1 the bid for 2006 Life Safety Improvements (Keenan voted "no").

Consent Calendar

Keenan noted the April Budget Ed Fund was 20% under Budget, asked why? Nohelty said the budget was conservative and revenues higher than anticipated. All items except the Illinois Energy Consortium (IEC) Contract were approved.

Millar was very concerned about the IEC Contract, a \$6M contract for 3 years of energy (gas and electric) through the Consortium. Nohelty brought up a representative of the IEC to answer questions from the Board. Millar said he appreciated the \$60k in savings in the short term, but was concerned that the contract was open ended, with no limit on rates that could be paid. Millar noted that the premise is that rates will go down when deregulation occurs in October, but if rates go up the District could pay a lot more. The IEC rep said that predictions are that rates will go down, but that the IEC's competition wants to sign school districts up for 3 year contracts at current "high" prices. The IEC rep gave an overview of what the IEC was and how they operated, saying:

- IEC was a not-for-profit consortium with a 12 member Board of Directors co-sponsored by the Illinois BOE and Superintendents Association
- The IEC's goal was to lower energy costs for school districts
- Any public or private business could join, currently 200-300 school districts participating
- The 12 member board of directors has 2 BOE reps, 2 Superintendents, and 2 school business associates
- The IEC handles all energy contracts, using IEC bulk purchasing in the wholesale marketplace
- All costs are in the bill, no additional fees, penalties
- IEC also seeks legislative changes to save schools money

Rowden asked if all our previous contracts were only 1 year. Nohelty outlined the history of energy contracts for D15 as follows:

- Spring 2003 D15 issued an RFP to ComEd
- Spring 2004 D15 issued an RFP to Constellation Energy
- Spring 2005 D15 issued an RFP to Constellation Energy
- Fall 2005 D15 issue an RFP, received quotes from 4 vendors, but did not want to lock in rates because prices were higher

Nohelty noted the district was checking prices on a monthly basis. Rowden asked if Constellation was given an option to bid; Nohelty said yes. Rowden was very concerned about locking in a 3 year contract, with so much uncertainty about rates; if the district had a 1 year contract they would then be in a position to renegotiate. Boucher asked what the rules were to terminate the contract, if there was a penalty. The IEC rep said that within 45-60 days of the end of the contract there was no penalty to cancel. Boucher asked if the IEC was going to get worse rates than the district could get on their own. The IEC rep said the IEC has been saving the school districts money, that they are always below market. Keenan questioned who was on the payroll at the IEC. The IEC rep said the IEC Board of Directors were compensated, they had 2 consulting companies, a law firm, 2 program administrators and himself, the traveling representative.

Millar asked why D15 couldn't do a 7 month contract, until deregulation occurred in the Fall. The IEC rep said that would be unfair to the other members of the consortium. Rowden emphasized she did not want to risk tax payer dollars, that the district could lose a lot of money, and that the district should operate on bids. The IEC rep said the IEC does not operate on bids.

Boucher said that utilities costs are going to skyrocket and that suppliers are more responsible to 300 school districts; that this was not a risk but a smart move for the district. Silverman asked if Nohelty recommended this. Nohelty deferred to the district Energy Services Director, who replied he thought the

district was o.k. either way: IEC was a good deal, and Constellation was o.k. too. Silverman asked when deregulation was happening. The IEC rep replied in October, when a reverse auction occurs. Silverman asked if we could enter the IEC after the auction; the IEC rep said yes. Millar said that was his recommendation and made a motion to table the issue. The Board voted 6:1 to table the issue (Boucher voted "no").