

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

October 11th, 2006

Over 400 people were in attendance at the Board meeting, the majority of who were associated with the D15 Concerned Parents group.

Authentic Use of Quality Tools

Kathy Weiner and Andy Tieman (the new Administrative Facilitators for the district), both of whom support 3 schools, presented some of the work they have been doing to implement Quality Tools at the schools and to support teachers. Used Quality Tools to improve achievement, gather, connect and track information, and solve problems. Tieman gave examples of mission statements, lotus diagrams to organize ideas, and PDSA (plan-do-study-act) plans to address responsibility issues in a particular classroom. Weiner talked about data collection to support School Improvement Plans, using trend data for state assessments, using Pareto diagrams for parent surveys and graph templates for teachers and students. McKanna mentioned that Quality Tools were part of the culture of the D15 school system.

Transportation

McKanna reviewed how the Board asked the administration to reduce the number of busing tiers. Kevin Nohelty (Asst. Superintendent for Business) spoke about wanting to maximize the efficiency of the transportation system and moving to a permanent bell schedule. Nohelty said he needed a consultant to work with the computer program – cost was up to \$24,000 (for up to 20 days of consulting). Nohelty said he would present the options and recommendations to the Board, as well as costs, in January. During the consent calendar portion of the BOE meeting, the Board approved 6:1 to fund the consultant (Keenan voted “no”).

Negotiations Rumors

Keenan asked McKanna to address rumors that have been circulating about a possible strike. McKanna said that if a strike occurs, it is more likely to occur after a payday (paydays for D15 are October 15th and October 31st). McKanna confirmed that he had contacted the parochial schools to inform them that in the event of a strike, no buses will go out to the parochial schools, although he expects that the parochial schools will continue to hold classes.

Keenan said she thought the Board needed to be more transparent about negotiations and that a huge undercurrent had been created by not discussing negotiations in public. She thought that was a mistake and that the Board should be updating the community. McKanna said the mediator asked the CTC and Board not to talk and that he felt they should honor that request. He said the next negotiating session would start at 10 am on Friday 10/13. After that session, the Board and CTC would decide whether to make progress public, or not. Keenan argued that the mediator did not live in our community and doesn't have a stake in the negotiations, like the rest of the community does. Keenan thinks the Board owes it to the community to keep them informed.

Citizens Address the Board

Carlson announced that speakers would have 3 minutes to address the Board. There were 28 speakers who addressed the Board, with 2 speakers declining to speak after having submitted a form.

Peggy Babcock – Proud to be active in D15 for 8 years, but not proud any more. Sad about the lack of respect among people; this is a tough time. Stakes are

high. Right now the contract is being negotiated in the public with slurs and low blows. Only the Board and CTC have the ability to negotiate this contract. Low attacks in letters to the editor. This is about the right to disagree and stand up for what you believe in. The contract will be negotiated; we will be speaking to each other. Encourages the CTC and Board to negotiate in good faith.

Jennifer Mondy – Told a story about her 11 year old child. They were at Harper college for piano lessons. The piano teacher assured them that even if Harper struck, even if they were told the building was closed, that he would be there, teaching piano. Her son asked her “what about the teachers at Whiteley”, because he knew that there was a possibility of a teacher strike. She told him they would not be there if the teachers struck. He asked about particular teachers of his, and she again replied that they would not be there, that no teachers would be there. He asked her “why would the teachers do that to us kids?” Mondy asked the CTC to think before they pushed that strike button, to think about the damage that would be done to the most important relationship that everyone has worked for: the relationship between the student and the teacher.

Sally Kim – Speaking representing the D15 Concerned Parents group. A voice for fiscal responsibility. We have a vested interest in the contract negotiations. There are hundreds of us here, but many more fear retaliation from the CTC, teachers. That this fear exists sickens me. These discussions do not mean we do not respect or value our teachers. We believe that the D15 teacher salaries are competitive. D15 is burdened with escalating health care costs. Quality education will suffer by benefits escalation and deficit spending is not an option. We support the Boards last published offer. If we deficit spend, there will be staff cuts, larger class sizes. The Board needs to hold firm. The decision to strike is in the hands of the CTC.

Tracey Coleman – I supported the referendum 2 years ago. In working to support the referendum, I came to find out more about how the district was functioning and found that the district has a “spend without future thought” attitude. Want the Board to hold firm. If they negotiate a generous contract, the district will be encumbered for years to come. If the district tries to pass another referendum to support this generous contract, they will not have community support.

Jennifer Ramonucky– Grew up in D15. Moved back here for the schools. Here to speak for the silent voices, the teachers. Unexpected tax caps a few years ago caused budget problems. Compared the salaries of D15 to D21 and found that D21 was \$1000 ahead of D15 teachers. The average increase has been 6-7%. The teachers are asking for 9% because they are trying to catch up. If you pay teachers less, they will leave. In the business world, a master’s degree is paid for, but teachers have to pay for it themselves. Teachers pay \$400-500 out of pocket each year. Treat teachers like professionals.

Chris Hicke– Kids in district. Very pleased with the quality of education. Worried about direction of district; worried about balance. Teachers spend hours before and after school; we take for granted our teachers. Can always find someone paid higher or lower; if we don’t keep compensation competitive we will lose teachers. There is already a flood of teachers, principals to other districts. The failed referendum upset a lot of teachers; don’t blame teachers for feeling that way. If don’t pay teachers, we’ll have lower quality teaching, lower test scores and lower real estate values.

William Crenshaw – Lived in NW suburbs all my life. Have 3 children and volunteer. Truly repulsed by behavior of CTC and teachers: putting our students in harm’s way as a tactic to force the school Board to give forced raises. Want to

find a way to avoid this situation in the future.

Jennifer – Mom of 2, thrilled with kids teachers and volunteer frequently. Proud that we reward our teachers at the top of the ladder. Still, can't support out-of-line-with-reality raises proposed by CTC. Polled my local community, our street: there were 2 forced relocations, many lost jobs. Reality is difficult and even embarrassing to talk about, but must be told so teachers will understand the opposition. Being out of work is very hard. A strike will be hard, but not as hard as being out of work. Want fiscal responsibility. Board: be strong and don't give in.

Anita Jamnik – I am a PTA President and I have seen a great deal of information. I urge the CTC and Board to keep talking. Strike is not good and children will be the losers. Community: let negotiations go on without negative comments; don't be swayed by rumor and innuendo. Only people actively involved in negotiations really know what goes on behind closed doors. Do not want long-term hard feelings.

Kristine O'Reilly – D15 Concerned Parents supporter. The fiscally irresponsible demands of the CTC and threat of strike threaten the quality of education in our district. Quality teachers are respected and valued. The Board, administration, parents and volunteers are respected and valued too. Deficit spending reduces quality education – this is unacceptable. Community has experienced job loss, minimal salary increases. Current CTC proposals are out of touch with the community. Think before you act about the example you will set if you walk out on your students. School Board should hold their ground. Kids Must Count.

Chris Nyburn – Not an issue of whether teachers have done a good job. Salary increase has to take into account the community, budget, students. Unfair to students and teachers to have classes that are too full. Smaller class sizes are needed. Quality teachers have been laid off and will be again. The referendum was voted down, there are not enough funds. A CPI increase is the only responsible way to be fair to all and keep quality teachers.

Matthew – Thanks to negotiations participants – your efforts are appreciated and want you to continue. Board and CTC should remain flexible and open minded. Drawing a line in the sand is not the way; don't dig in too deeply. Children are watching and waiting to see what the adults are going to do. Do not underestimate them. Words mean little; actions speak volumes – show them an example in compromise and conflict resolution. Urge both sides to model the best behavior and get this done.

Karen Schutz – Board and CTC need to work together. Would rather endure a strike than have a fiscally irresponsible contract. Not punishing the teachers, we simply can't afford what they are asking for.

Mr. Abrams – Representing the Northwest Coalition for Quality Education. The Board will turn D15 into a low-cost, low-quality place for education. D15 fills all new openings with teachers right out of college. Education suffers if more than 1/3 of staff are new teachers. New teachers have the highest dropout rate. The district has cut the mentor program and there are fewer role models for new teachers. Is this the best model you have for our district? This especially affects low income families. D15 had financial difficulties in the past and somehow worked it out.

Keenan commented to Mr. Abrams that the mentoring program in the district has not been cut.

John Shereda – I have an education degree and 3 children at Pleasant Hill. This

dispute comes down to economics (pay and benefits) and performance. Teachers deserve fair pay but not to the point of deficit. To the CTC: how to pay for these raises? Quality: what does it mean? Do students learn what they need to learn to go to the next level? We have some bad, many good, and some excellent teachers. These excellent teachers do not teach to make as much money as they would in business; for them, it is not about the money. School Board: work hard to find how far you can go. Earmark 2 or 3% of the money that would go toward raises and use to give extra money to those teachers that really excel. CTC: How far can you go? This is not Us vs. Them. Don't take it out on the kids.

Mary Vanek – Board: don't be afraid to act in a fiscally responsible manner in the face of irresponsible demands. Blaze a new trail. Taxpayers: don't be afraid to look facts in the eye. Educate yourself on the CTC website about how the CTC stalled over the summer so they would push negotiations into the school year. Look on champion.org. Don't be intimidated when people say it's none of your business. Don't be afraid of retaliation. Don't be afraid to ask "Why is IL one of only 12 states that allow its public school teachers to strike?" Do not let fear, and its close cousins ignorance and apathy, get the best of us at this time.

Dean Vanek - I have reviewed the publicly available information including teacher's salaries from the CTC website. I am at a loss to understand the CTC: they are defensive, combative, worked to move negotiation to the school term. The union is hiding behind their "no comment" stance. My calculations show that the average salary, with the CTC proposed increases, will cost an additional \$11 – 18 ½ million over the next 5 years. The union has no proposal about how to pay for this. It is unsustainable without budget cuts. The Board must choose fiscal responsibility. The Board's current offer is responsible. If the CTC chooses the picket line over the lunch line, I will help the district recruit, interview and hire replacement teachers.

Brita Higgins – Representing D15 Concerned Parents. Any proposal out-of-sync with current reality is not responsible. Urge CTC to take into consideration, during Friday 10/13 negotiations, the real world economy. Disappointed in the "silence" about negotiations. We are stakeholders in D15. Strike is a drastic step. If the CTC walks out of the classrooms, we will advocate the teachers returning to the classroom. Urge BOE to stand firm and not cave in.

Jill Rusta – Happy with teachers, they are hard working role models and I appreciate them. Happy they have job security and high pay, so they can focus on teaching our children. People in our district are highly educated. I find it insulting that the CTC believes their members work harder than the rest of us. I am losing respect for those teachers – I've always been generous with my time, but I can't help wondering if I still will.

Pat Jandura – Thanks to the CTC for their ½ page letter to the community in the Daily Herald. You say that "Quality Must Count" and we have seen those buttons accessorizing our teachers for a year. In theory, I would agree, if I could figure out what that means. The letter in the Herald said the district was providing misleading information, and yet the CTC provided no information of their own. The CTC letter said they were seeking fair and equitable compensation, and yet they are asking for 23%. The CTC letter talked about the teacher's professionalism, and yet the teachers walked out en mass at the BOE meeting, not waiting to hear the rest of the community that was patiently waiting to have their turn to speak. The CTC letter said they did not want to disrupt the educational process, and yet they will not even give the 24 hour notice requested by the PTA before a strike. Their motto is Quality Must Count. What does that mean?

Phillip Brinkerhoff – I am a parent and taxpayer. Teachers have done an

excellent job in teaching our children. We do not live in utopia. We don't have magical teachers that show up for no compensation. The Board is offering 9.5%; but I understand the Board has not provided a salary schedule to the community. A regressive salary scale is not appropriate for this district – let's see the salary schedule. The average increase is \$2500 per year per teacher – we are arguing over \$64 per paycheck – for some in this room that is a trip to the beauty parlor or golf course.

Mr. Fipps – declined to speak, saying his points had already been made.

Kathleen Davey – D15 Parent, PTA member, substitute teacher. I believe the teachers are professional, but I'm disappointed in the tactics of the CTC. This evening I received a phone call from the CTC asking me, as a substitute teacher, not to cross picket lines and further, to not work for the YMCA or Park District in the event of a strike. How did they get the substitute teacher list? I asked the CTC when they called me, but they said they did not know where the list came from. The substitute phone list should not be distributed to the teacher's union.

Bob Hanson – Thank you to the teachers for teaching my 3 children. The CTC has lost its grasp of reality. United pilots, Motorola employees, Sears employees: all have faced layoffs, benefits cuts, and job losses. School districts are accountable to the taxpayers. Since the referendum was voted down and the new Board was voted in to stop the bleeding, the CTC has been talking about a strike. Stop using our kids as the rationale to extract money from taxpayers. If you do not like your job, like anyone else, you are free to seek employment elsewhere. The personal attacks that were made on individual Board members last time: people should know who that gentleman was. He was a retired teacher who was making \$142,000 a year when he retired. His salary increased 92% in the last 6 years before he retired. Shame on him for making personal attacks on Board members that don't get paid a dime.

Greg Armamentos – Teacher at Whiteley, CTC member. Teachers are required to work way more than 8 hours a day. I love what I do. I want to solidify our bonds. Make kids count and quality count. Public negotiating has released a toxin into our community that undermines teachers and the union. Our teachers should have been here last year when the budget cuts were made. The referendum failed by ½ of 1% due to a smear campaign. Be wary of pejorative information claiming to be fact. There is a rift in our community.

Dorene Taylor – Parents appreciate their teachers – the teacher's jobs are very important. However, need to reduce the sense of entitlement. We own our own small business. We all have to chip in to health benefits. Increasing health benefit costs eat into salary increases. Asking the teachers to go back to the negotiating table. Our taxes went up \$5,000 in one year. We've done our part, now do yours.

Lisa Moran – Representing D15 Concerned Parents. Our website and flyers are facts straight off the teachers salary schedule. A person emailed us and said they wanted to be at the Board meeting tonight but could not make it because her husband was working and she had to take care of her children. Wanted me to read her letter to you: I have read the websites, and seen much divisiveness. Divisiveness is an illusion. Parents want both: quality education and fiscal responsibility. We rallied behind our teachers when their jobs were being cut. We expect the Board to make the best decision for all of us. We ask the CTC to do the same. Our families cannot afford an increase in taxes. We support our teachers.

Robin Sarafino – Community: I know that many of these community members were not here before. We are arrogant to think we know the facts. These leaders

that we elected are pitting us against our teachers. They are bringing negotiating issues into the community with people that have no idea how these things are done. The Board should take the upper road, like the teachers. Where are the questions to the Board about transparency and why the referendum did not pass? We are shooting our community in the foot.

Keenan asked the Board why doesn't the Board change the process so that people can see what exactly is going on? Millar commented that the Board could have an education session on how to read contracts; that the Board needs to be clearer about where information is derived. Keenan asked the Board to put a discussion about this matter on the next Board meeting agenda. Carlson agreed.

Personnel Report: Board approved the personnel report (6:1) with Keenan abstaining.

Consent Calendar:

Consent Calendar items were all passed unanimously, except for "F. Scope of Services – Versa Trans Efficiency Routing Study" which was voted on separately: passed (6:1) with Keenan voting "no".

The Board adjourned for closed session.