

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meeting

September 14th, 2005

Sixth Day Enrollment and Class Sizes

The Superintendent presented the sixth-day-of-school enrollment class size list (see attached pdf files). There are 67 classes with 30+ students in the district. The largest class is 33 students, although there is one split 5/6 gifted class at Central Road with 41 students and 1 ½ teachers (one full time, one ½ time teacher, with the one teacher alone with all 41 students for ~2 hours per day). The Central Road 5/6 gifted class pulls from Willow Bend, Kimball Hill, Pleasant Hill and Central Road students. The administration passed out a sheet that showed guidelines for how many aide hours are allotted per building based on class sizes, split classes, bilingual classes, etc. (see attached pdf file). There was considerable discussion about moving students to other gifted 5/6 classes at other schools vs. hiring the ½ time teacher at ¾ time or full-time. Rowden recommended hiring the teacher full time, said she thought moving the kids would be traumatic 3 weeks into the year. The Board was supportive of adding the additional ½ time staff, but a vote was delayed to discuss in closed session. In addition, a section for Algebra I at Sundling was extremely full and kids who qualified to take Algebra I were being denied access to the class because it was too full. The Administration was asking for an additional section of Algebra I to be added, which would require one additional section of teaching staff. The Board was supportive of adding the additional section, but the vote was delayed to discuss in closed session. Voting on these two issues was delayed to the October 11th Board meeting because they were not on the official agenda.

Clubs/Activities

When the \$12M in budget cuts was announced, it included a reduction from \$57.50 to \$42.50 per pupil in the building budgets (also called site based \$\$) at the elementary level. Site based money is spent on everything from consumable supplies (paper) to substitute teacher days, and includes stipends for site based clubs (like Video Production and Student Council). District based clubs (including Jr. High activities like intramural, chorus, etc) are paid by the district and are not at the discretion of the schools. Due to the reduction in site based money, some schools have eliminated or greatly reduced Video Production, while others have kept it. There seemed to be some disagreement as to whether the reduction or elimination of Video Production was actually due to the reduced stipend \$ available, or whether the elimination of staff that had previously handled Video Production (especially through the Learning Resource Center staff) made staffing the Video Production the main problem (the teacher contract specifies that a certified staff must conduct these activities and they may not be subcontracted). Teacher Union representatives suggested that the Video Production be made into a District Level program, which would require additional funds, unless those funds were taken from the site based \$\$\$. Rowden was concerned that making Video Production a District Level program would not solve the problem, that the problem primarily lay in having enough willing staff to run the program. Rowden questioned why some schools were able to find the money and staff to run Video Production when others did not, and was concerned about the issue adversely affecting the relationship between teachers/parents/PTA and administrators. Keenan asked for a list of what schools had which clubs. Millar was concerned that the schools get to keep site based \$\$ even if they don't do clubs at all, since club stipends come out of the site based budget which is entirely discretionary at the school level. There was a question about why PTA cannot pay for or run the clubs, to which the administration responded that the PTA can run after-school events, but during school (clubs are typically run during lunch), the teacher contract requires the clubs to be sponsored and run by certified staff.

Transportation

There have been serious delays in busing. The Administration addressed this, explaining that there were an unusually large number of parents (~100) that came to "Meet the Teacher" day requesting bus transportation for their children starting the next day. In addition, 4 people in transportation resigned and there has been a shortness of staff due to illness and injury. Currently office staff and mechanics are driving buses trying to cover the shortness of drivers. Transportation is currently trying to hire 6-7 more drivers to cover absences and they are working to reduce the number of stops to tighten efficiency and reduce transport times.

Videotaping of Board Meetings

A two page plan was presented to the Board to have the Jr. High students videotape the Board meetings, do the production and present the take to the various townships of District 15 for broadcast on local public access channels. The Board will consider piloting videotape at the next Board meeting.

10 year Life/Safety

The Superintendent denied any rumors related to closing buildings in the District, saying that the Board is forming a committee to study the use of space and what technology needs to be updated.

Tax Anticipation Warrants

Because the tax receipts due to the District will not likely be received in time to make payroll in November, the District will likely have to borrow approximately \$10M per month to cover payroll at a cost of (3-5% interest rate) \$44k-\$60k for 52 days of borrowing. In addition, necessary legal opinions would cost \$6k-\$15k. The Board authorized the Administration to obtain the necessary legal opinions so that they would be ready to borrow the money, if required.

Citizens Address the Board

Mary Hanson, Cathy Williams, Drew and Kristin Colombo, Linda Hall, Bob and Sharon Worth, Jennifer Swanson, Betty Davis Olsen – Eight parents of special needs children addressed the Board, protesting the elimination of CBT's (Community Based Trips) where special needs students generalize the skills they learn in the classroom to real-world experiences. They emphasized the special skills of the teaching staff in teaching their children how to be in real world environments, that CBT's are not field trips, and that it is important for the students to practice these skills while not in the presence of a parent.

Robin Sarofino – parent of a gifted child at Winston Campus. Protested that the referendum was not passed, budget cuts were not well explained and that there was a serious communication problem.

Elizabeth Brakiv – parent at Central Road. Commended the support and positive leadership at Central Road in spite of the referendum not passing, and felt the leadership made the connection between the teachers and parents stronger.

Tracey Zelomar – Wants to make Video Production district wide, but is concerned that they be able to keep the Video equipment in the building. Also thought it would be a terrible choice to send kids to another school to solve the gifted class size problem.

CBT's (Community Based Trips)

The Board emphasized that they consider CBT's to be part of the instructional curriculum, but that they need to be diligent about explaining why this is different from field trips and how it meets curriculum goals. Millar wanted a line item budget with specified trips and costs before voting to approve CBT's. Costs were estimated at \$10k for transportation (80% reimbursed by the State), \$900 for student purchases, for a net cost to the District of about \$2900. Trips per year were originally (before budget cuts) 9 trips for each level (primary, intermediate and Jr. High). The Board approved restoring 5

trips per year for primary, 7 for intermediate and 9 for Jr. High, with Millar voting "No" because he did not have the line item budget in advance to know specifically what he was voting for. The Administration agreed to provide the line item budget information after the vote was carried.