

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

March 15, 2007

7:00 p.m.

Giffen Memorial Elementary School

PRESENT:

Teneka Frost, President	Dr. Eva Joseph
William Barnette, Vice President	Terry White
Wayne Morris, Secretary	Dr. Joseph Dragone
Mark Barth	Kathleen Wetmore
Jackie Jenkins-Cox (left at 11:15 p.m.)	Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Judy Doesschate	
Barbara Gaffuri	

Absent/Excused:

None

Call to Order:

Ms. Frost called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Frost called for a moment of silence in memory of William Wallace, a former Assistant Principal at Philip Livingston Magnet Academy.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Joseph advised the State Education Department made an announcement on the Schools Under Registration Review (SURR) report earlier this date. Dr. Joseph advised the District is aware of the need for improved student achievement. For that reason, the District has presented the proposal, which is presently being reviewed by the board. Dr. Joseph noted SED is waiting word on the board's decision related to this proposal.

Dr. Joseph advised an Albany High Student, Adam Gutta was featured as Athlete of the Week on Channel 13. Adam is a member of the swim team, he volunteered at Habitat for Humanity during the winter recess and is also one of the students who will travel to Paris to receive an achievement award for a film produced by Albany High School students.

Dr. Joseph advised March is Music Month in the district with a number of events planned throughout the month. Also, Black History Month celebrations took place throughout the district during the month of February.

Dr. Joseph advised a National Urban Alliance forum took place last week, which provided information to the community. Dr. Joseph advised the program is gaining momentum throughout the District.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Jacob Hamilton addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
2. Rose Brandon addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
3. Mary Beth Fowler addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
4. Leroy Graham addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
5. Debora Brown-Johnson addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
6. Janice Mwapaga addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
7. Barbara Smith addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
8. Annmarie Lippitt addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.
9. Lisa Ternullo addressed the board regarding the Middle School/High School Plan.

INFORMATION ITEM

Elementary Literacy Program

Dr. Joseph noted the District has scheduled as information items many of the programs that are of interest throughout the District. As the District proceeds through the spring semester, the District will be making decisions about the District Elementary Literacy Program. As such, Dr. Joseph introduced Ms. Linda Rudnick, Director of Instruction and Mr. White, who would be doing the presentation.

Ms. Rudnick gave a very comprehensive presentation on the review process related to the Elementary Literacy Program in the District. The presentation included an outline of the program review, indicating the goals of the program review, a needs assessment and the process, action steps that were identified, along with outcomes. Ms. Rudnick continued the presentation with a definition of those involved in the program review process, the team formation and the implementation schedule. Ms. Rudnick concluded the presentation with the findings of the review team and the impact on the 2007-2007 school budget, including a breakdown of the cost of implementing a system-wide reading program in the District.

Discussion followed, requiring a motion to extend the time allotted for the discussion. Motion was made by Mr. Barnette and seconded Mr. Morris, with a unanimous vote of the board.

2007-2008 Budget Development

Dr. Joseph advised the presentation this evening would begin with a review of the educational plan. Dr. Joseph noted the board has heard two presentations of budget goals, which reflect the educational goals. This evening those goals and strategies will be connected to actual dollars for a first sense of the budget. Dr. Joseph noted the District has crafted the budget over the past several years to be an educational plan, with costs are driven by what the District wants to accomplish in terms of achievement and program improvement within the District.

Dr. Joseph reviewed each budget goal, followed by a review of specific strategies presently in place and new programs and strategies for 2007-2008 to support each of the five budget goals. Dr. Joseph continued with a summary of total general fund increases for new initiatives. The impact to the general fund for these new programs totals \$3 million.

Dr. Joseph noted as the District began this budget process, it began with a budget level that was \$500 below a contingency cap. Dr. Joseph also noted the District did a significant amount of work last year to provide a fiscally responsible budget that could be passed, but as the District started to think about programs, there was very little that could be eliminated to offset increases of expansion or continuation of programs. Dr. Joseph noted that most of the strategies that carry a cost increase are under the umbrella specifically associated with direct services to students.

Ms. Wetmore continued the presentation with a review of the fiscal implications of the draft budget. Ms. Wetmore reviewed a comparison of the 2006-07 and 2007-08 draft budget. Ms. Wetmore noted the projected cost of Charter Schools has increased 33.77% to \$22,140,545 from \$16,551,776 and the projected cost of Refund of Real Property Taxes has increased 64.29% from \$1.4 million to \$2.3 million based on increased assessments. Final budget, including the \$1.5 Magnet Aid increases from \$169,873,460 to \$190,117,612 or 11.92%, which results in a tax levy of \$103,794,989 or 8.60%. Ms. Wetmore gave a recap of the \$20,244,152 increase from the 2006-07 budget, i.e. Charter Schools, which represents approximately 27% increase, benefits is approximately 11%, debt service is approximate 20%, Magnet and Early Grade Class Size, which are now coming out of the General Aid Fund, account for almost 12%. Ms. Wetmore concluded her presentation with a summary of reductions included in the budget. Cuts due to Charter Schools are 15 teachers, 1 administrator and student supplies. Other reductions are 5 secondary teachers, 1 teacher retirement that would not be replaced and savings related to transportation and energy management and utility costs that are expected to decrease.

Dr. Joseph advised typically, the first draft budget is the proposal. The District would be coming back to the Board with further detail on each of the components presented this evening. Dr. Joseph noted the first draft budget is the full presentation of what the District has identified as supporting improvements as well as maintaining the District's sound basic education. Discussion related to the tax increase would continue in order to reach an agreeable balance in terms of the resulting tax increase. Dr. Joseph noted the District's Foundation Formula Aid increase yields 15.4% State Aid increase. The District carries with that 8 Charter Schools next year, which takes up all of the State Aid increase. Comparably, Cohoes and Schenectady are going to be receiving comparable or higher levels of State Aid under the Foundation Formula, but don't carry the weight of the \$22.2 million charter schools cost. Dr. Joseph noted the District is appreciative of the transition aid the Governor has included in the budget, along with the acknowledgement of the significant impact of charter schools, both fiscally and enrollment levels, on the District. Dr. Joseph advised the transition aid as identified would yield for the District \$2.5 million in comparison to the \$22.2 million cost next year. The burden of responsibility rests with the District. Dr. Joseph added that consideration of something different than the tax levy presented this evening, the responsibility would be making the hard decisions about what the District would not have supported in the General Fund Budget.

Following an extensive discussion, Mr. Barnette made a motion to extend the time for this agenda item. Ms. Jenkins-Cox seconded the m. The board voted unanimously to approve the motion.

Board members noted that presentation of charter school information to the public is very necessary. Also, the problem in Albany is that the percentage of the cost that is offset by state aid in Albany is traditionally less than the percentage of cost offset by state aid in other similar size school districts.

Dr. Joseph also noted the District has scheduled a public forum on Saturday, March 24, 2007 from 10 – Noon at Albany High School for the public to provide feedback as well as a special budget session scheduled for Thursday, March 27, 2007 also at Albany High School at 7:00 p.m.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Middle School and High School Planning

Dr. Joseph noted the District has been very deliberate in thinking about some pieces in terms of planning and design that have been part of discussions throughout the past seven years. Dr. Joseph advised there are also some pieces that have not been on the table for that long, but drive a goal that the District wants to accomplish, always with the thought of improving student achievement and doing better for our students. Dr. Joseph advised the District's achievement results are not acceptable at the secondary level and change to eliminate the achievement gap in the four years under the guidance and directive of the Board of Education requires that the District thinks comprehensively and holistically about doing things differently.

Dr. Joseph continued with a presentation including the main tenets of the Middle and High School Planning Proposal, defining what the District knows at this point in time in terms of goals, enrollment, the high school facilities reconstruction, the concept of smaller learning communities and opportunities through the Federal Magnet Grant and the College of Nanoscale Science & Engineering Partnership and the steps that need to be taken toward developing these opportunities. Dr. Joseph concluded with the importance of staff, parent and community involvement in the process.

Dr. Joseph noted the District has conducted one community forum that was low attended. A second forum will be scheduled to allow public input. Meetings with school faculty members have been ongoing. Dr. Joseph advised faculty members have been engaged in ongoing discussion about the proposal through the work they have been doing with the middle level education task force.

Ms. Frost thanked Dr. Joseph and staff for the information provided on this issue. Ms. Frost advised the Board of Education is faced with important decisions and it is imperative that the Board makes a decision with regard to the Magnet application, noting the deadline for this decision is April 27, 2007.

Mr. Morris made a motion to extend the time for this item an additional 20 minutes for additional discussion. Mrs. Gaffuri seconded the motion.

The board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the motion.

Following additional discussion, Ms. Frost called for a motion to extend the time for this agenda item by ten minutes. Mr. Barnette made the motion. Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

The board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the motion.

Discussions included proceeding with the thematic approach whether or not the District moves forward in applying for the Magnet Grant. Dr. Joseph noted that committing to a themed approach to the District middle schools is a way to re-engineer programs is what it's all about. The Magnet opportunity is a way to move through that planning process quickly with the added incentive of financial support. Dr. Joseph advised that with or without the Magnet Grant, the District is still committed to re-engineering middle level programs and see smaller learning communities with a themed approach as a very strong aspect of moving to two middle schools.

Dr. Joseph advised that if there was a sense on the board to move to that concept, but some of the questions that need answers will only be answered if the District goes through the Magnet development process, she suggested a commitment to the process by the Board with the understanding that as the District works through the process, if anywhere along the line, the questions or elements noted by members of the Board are not answered to the satisfaction of the board or there is not comfort with the outcome, the District can take a step back. Dr. Joseph noted that perhaps the Magnet application is not the vehicle to getting to the end.

Ms. Frost asked for clear direction from board members as to whether or not the District should proceed with the Magnet Grant application. Ms. Frost polled board members to determine whether or not the majority of board is in favor of the concept. Following additional discussion it was determined that the majority of board members are in favor of the concept.

Legal Notice

Due to time constraints this item was deferred to the next meeting.

School Lunch

Ms. Wetmore introduced J.W. Gayle, Director, Food Service Department, who gave a presentation on the School Lunch Program. Ms. Wetmore added that cost increases over the last few years have made it more and more difficult to balance the Food Service budget. Mr. Gayle reviewed current lunch prices with surrounding school districts along with historical information related to prices for breakfast and lunch over the past ten years. Mr. Gayle noted the average high school lunch price is (\$1.73) and the average middle school lunch price is (\$1.69). Mr. Gayle advised the District prices are significantly less than the average at \$1.25. Mr. Gayle presented a proposal to increase the elementary school lunch price by \$.25 and the middle and high school lunches by \$.50. Mr. Gayle advised breakfast prices would remain the same. Lunch prices in the elementary schools would be increased from \$1.25 to \$1.50. Middle and high school lunch prices would be increased from \$1.25 to \$1.75. Mr. Gayle added that prices have not been increased since 2003. Mr. Gayle noted the total revenue impact of these increases totals \$56,740.

Following discussion relative to providing an opportunity to parents to have breakfast with their children in the schools and nutritional value of the foods being served, Ms. Frost advised this item would be placed on the next agenda for action.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

None

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

None

Adjournment

Mr. Barnette made a motion to adjourn. Mrs. Gaffuri seconded the motion. Meeting was adjourned at 11:40 p.m.

Catherine L. Cutting
Clerk of the Board