

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
October 20, 2005
Harriett Gibbons High School
7:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Edward Brown, President Dr. Eva Joseph
Susan Kushner, Vice President Terrance White
Teneka Frost, Secretary Kathleen Wetmore
William Barnette Joseph Dragone
Patricia Fahy Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Barbara Gaffuri

ABSENT: None

Call to Order:

Mr. Brown called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Brown welcomed the members of the audience and thanked them for taking the time to attend the meeting.

Mr. Brown advised there is an addendum to the agenda under Routine Consent Item to include the appointment of the Human Resource Specialist.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Joseph advised the Governor has designated October 24 through the 28th as School Board Member Recognition Week. Dr. Joseph read a proclamation from the Governor relative to the contribution of Board Members to the children they serve. Dr. Joseph also distributed coffee mugs to Board Members in celebration of School Board Members Recognition. Board Members who completed Board Member training through the New York State School Boards Association also received certificates related to that training.

PUBLIC COMMENT

There were no speakers in attendance.

ACTION ITEMS

Routine Consent Items

Emergency Conditional Appointment

Mr. Brown presented the appointment of Ms. Josette Williams to the position of Human Resource Specialist. Ms. Gaffuri made a motion to approve the appointment. Ms. Fahy seconded the motion.

The Board voted unanimously (5-0) to approve the motion.

INFORMATION ITEM

Comprehensive Education Plans

Dr. Joseph advised the plans to be presented this evening are the comprehensive education plans required for the two middle schools that have been designated as schools in need of corrective action, Hackett Middle School and Philip Livingston Magnet Academy. Dr. Joseph noted that while these plans are a required under NCLB, the Board has maintained a very keen interest in understanding the restructuring plan and the various initiatives and goals that have been set for those schools beyond the obligation of NCLB in insuring that the District is doing all that it can to promote stronger student learning and increased academic performance at those schools.

Mr. Dragone gave presentation, which is an encapsulation and summary of the reports that were provided to Board Members with the agenda packet. Mr. Dragone noted the presentation give a prospective of where the District is at, where it is going and the work that has been done regarding the Restructuring Plan created and submitted to SED last May. Mr. Dragone acknowledged the work of Mr. White and staff in the Office of Instruction, along with Mr. Pelletier and Mr. Neumann in developing this process. Mr. Dragone advised both buildings are technically in “Corrective Action Year 2” based on the fact that they have not made adequate yearly progress for the past four years and prior to that a required two years to be designated under improvement status.

Mr. Dragone noted that the timeliness of the facilities project provided an opportunity for complete restructuring with the Middle Level Educational Restructuring Plan. Mr. Dragone noted although the two schools are officially considered “Planning for Restructuring” by SED designation, all middle schools in the District are implementing the Restructuring Plan that was submitted to SED in May 2005. Mr. Dragone noted this year the District would focus on implementation, assessment and modification of the Plan.

Mr. Dragone noted if the Average Yearly Progress (AYP) is not met this year, both schools would officially be designated as in Restructuring for 2006-2007, and the revised Restructuring Plan would be implemented. Mr. Dragone presented a comprehensive review of the plan, including goals and action steps. Following discussion Mr. Dragone advised the compliance framework is that the document is submitted to SED with an understanding that there is a potential for recommendation to make changes. Mr. Dragone noted the District would be revising the plan and would then re-submit the plan to SED in May of 2006.

2005-2006 Staffing

Dr. Joseph advised there have been a number of questions that have come forward in recent time regarding staffing demographics and diversity. Dr. Joseph advised Ms. Jackson-Chalmers would provide a staffing report to the Board. Ms. Jackson-Chalmers advised the purpose of this report is to provide Board Members with a snapshot of what the District workforce literally looks like. Ms. Jackson-Chalmers provided information relative the to the total number of district employees, followed by a breakdown of overall staff by ethnicity, a breakdown of administrators, teachers/faculty in each of the schools by ethnicity and the SED SAR: Statistics for Public School Districts Report to the Governor and the Legislature – July 2004, which is a comparison report of schools in Albany, Schenectady, Rensselaer and Saratoga Counties, along with information related to the Big Five Cities.

Ms. Jackson-Chalmers noted the issue of recruiting minority teachers is a problem throughout the State. Ms. Jackson-Chalmers also spoke about recruitment efforts including the Teacher of Tomorrow Program, Grow Your Own and the Empire College MAT Program and recruitment and retention strategies specific to increasing minority recruitment and retention. Board Members discussed setting a goal for recruitment of minority teachers in the District and ways to achieve that goal relative to highlighting the things that the City of Albany and surrounding areas have to offer to residents, possibly in the form of a brochure. Dr. Joseph also spoke about the issue of the number of positions the District is able to fill, based on retirement numbers and the number of available positions.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

2004-2005 Financial Statements

Dr. Joseph noted Mr. James Cusack and Mr. John Triscone from Cusack & Company to present the District's audit for the 2004-2005 school year. Ms. Wetmore advised the audit has been conducted by Mr. Cusack and Mr. Triscone for a number of years. Ms. Wetmore noted they have given the District many significant suggestions and recommendations over the years that have helped to improve District operations. Ms. Wetmore noted again this year the District has received an unqualified opinion. Mr. Cusack reiterated that the District has received once again this year and unqualified opinion on all five reports issued by Cusack & Company. The unqualified opinion is the highest level of assurance you can receive on financial statements and financial affairs. Mr. Cusack also noted the Management Letter issued this year includes planning suggestions, not critical material weaknesses in the internal control systems, but planning suggestions for things to consider in the future. This year's audit was well planned for, well prepared for and included very high level of cooperation in the Business Office. Mr. Cusack noted management has already responded to suggestions, by providing a follow-up report in terms of an action plan addressing comments in the letter. Mr. Cusack noted a very detailed report was conducted with the Audit Committee. Mr. Cusack added the quality and quantity of the accounting staff and the Business Office has improved significantly. Reports are very accurate and reliable and activities are being monitored on a monthly basis rather than an annual basis.

A suggestion was made to include the cost of Charter Schools as a financial liability as part of the audit and also to report this very positive audit as part of public information, possibly issuing a press release related to the fact that in spite of the fact that the District receives the least amount of state aid and the impact of Charter Schools, this District is able to maintain a positive financial position. Another point to be considered is the fact that the District has met the criteria of the Five Point Plan, before it was brought to the attention of Districts throughout the State. Mr. Cusack noted there is a new Government Accounting Standards Board Statement No. 45 that requires District estimate and record liabilities for covering retirees for any retirement benefit other than pension. In the case of this District this would be health insurance, which is the largest benefit provided to retirees. Mr. Cusack advised the District would have to hire someone to do that study.

Ms. Gaffuri advised the members of the Audit Committee are recommending that the District investigate the process of hiring an actuary as soon as possible on the possibility that next year is a negotiating year in order to get that data in place.

Ms. Kushner made a request that all Board Members be permitted to attend the mandated fiscal training for new Board Members. Dr. Joseph advised the local BOCES is putting together training information. Information related to this training will be passed on to Board Members.

High School Restructuring Survey

Dr. Joseph noted Board Members received information related to this item in the Board Update. Dr. Joseph introduced Tara Mitchell and Erica Ringewald of the Public Information Office, along with Heather Adams of NYSSBA. Dr. Joseph noted Ms. Adams is very familiar with the survey process. The survey was reviewed with the Facilities Committee earlier this week. Questions resulting from that presentation were shared with Ms. Mitchell and Ms. Ringewald. Dr. Joseph noted basically the District was looking for some strategies to do some broad-scaled community feedback regarding the high school restructuring plan. Dr. Joseph noted if the Board is amenable to this process, she would be looking for Board approval this evening, given the timeframe involved.

Ms. Mitchell advised the purpose of the survey is to determine where the community stands on the high school restructuring plan. Ms. Mitchell advised the recommendation is that the District use a phone-in poll service, which is offered through the New York State School Boards Association. All Albany residents would be invited to call a toll-free number and answer questions specific to the high school referendum. The recommendation is that the phone survey would take place between November 9 and November 22. During that time the polling service is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week for caller's convenience.

Ms. Ringewald advised regarding the design of the survey, the recommendation is to keep it to twenty questions in an effort to increase the likelihood of complete responses. Ms. Adams recommendation is to keep the response time to five minutes or under. Questions have been broken into categories. There is also a response profile that would indicate who is responding to the survey, how they feel about particular issues. There is also a set of questions particular to the referendum itself and the plan in general and then specifics such as moving Abrookin to the high school campus. People will also be asked to prioritize what they think needs to be done with the high school based on their present knowledge. The first wave of communication is a brochure that briefly describes the need to restructure the high school, the preliminary plans and how to call the survey line. Brochures will go to all Albany residents, which means 50,000 copies are mailed out to every household. These will be done through bulk mail to be in mailboxes a day to two before the start of the survey. Once the survey starts, the second wave of communication would be a reminder flyer describing the survey and asking people to call in. During the entire survey, the District would reach out to all of the internal contacts, PTA's, asking Principals to include something in their newsletters, City Council PTA's, Common Council, Albany Public Library and the website to help to get the word out to have as many people as possible responding to the survey. Ms. Ringewald reviewed the timeline with a comprehensive report of the survey findings due within 30 days of the close of the survey on 12/16/05.

Mrs. Gaffuri made a motion to approve the survey to gauge public opinion regarding the Albany High School Restructuring Plan as proposed. Ms. Kushner seconded the motion.

Discussion followed relative to a call-in survey as opposed to a call-out survey, associated costs and response figures anticipated in the call-in survey. Concerns also include the issue of using taxpayer dollars to conduct a survey related to a pending referendum.

Following additional discussion, Mrs. Gaffuri withdrew the motion.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Ms. Fahy advised the Academic Committee has discussed voluntary school uniforms, in discussion with Mr. Dragone and Mr. White. Following a lengthy discussion Board Members indicated their interest in gathering input from the community relative to the issue of school uniforms. That information will then be brought back to the Academic Committee for additional discussion.

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

Mr. Barnette asked if the Board would be discussing the Arbor Hill project in conjunction with the referendum. Dr. Joseph advised the DEIS has already been done for Arbor Hill. Dr. Joseph advised everything that is required in terms of preparation for Arbor Hill has been completed. Dr. Joseph advised the District was aware, at the time the DEIS was conducted for Albany High School, that the DEIS for Arbor Hill had been completed. Dr. Joseph added that the Arbor Hill project has been part of continued conversation and that this conversation would be brought back to the Board.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mrs. Gaffuri made a motion to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 10:50 p.m.

Catherine L. Cutting
Clerk of the Board