



PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
January 15, 2009
7:00 p.m.

William S. Hackett Middle School

PRESENT: Barbara Gaffuri, President
Melissa Mackey, Vice President
Judy Doesschate, Secretary
Dr. Mark Barth
Rose Brandon
Daniel Egan
Wayne Morris
Dr. Eva Joseph
Dr. Tresa Diggs
Bill Hogan
Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Linda Rudnick

ABSENT: None

Call to Order:

- Meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Members of the audience were welcomed and thanked for taking the time to attend the meeting.
- The Mission Statement was read.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

- On Tuesday, January 20, 2009, the inauguration of Barack Obama will be celebrated in all of the District's school communities. Each school has planned activities to make this a memorable event for all students. A schedule of activities will be posted on the website. All schools will be showing the inauguration on TV. The District is planning a full-scale community event on Wednesday, February 11th to celebrate the inauguration. The event will take place in the evening at Stephen & Harriet Myers Middle School. An art show and reception at 6:30 p.m. and a program with performances will begin at 7:00 p.m. The event is being organized by our Diversity Council and is titled Peace and Unity Celebration. The program will include student performances that highlight the historical significance of the inauguration of America's first African American President. Guest speakers are being invited from across the City to join in this celebration. Everyone is invited to attend.
- The Middle School Enrollment presentation will take place this evening. A number of parents and community members are present. It is a very important topic. Thanks and appreciation to the many parents and community members who have been able to participate in the forums to provide feedback and provide the District with information that is helpful in this process.
- District administrators are engaged in the budget development process for 2009-2010. The present fiscal climate presents fiscal challenges and deficits unlike any the District has experienced before. In November, although the state's budget was more than half a year away at that time and the details were unknown, the district started to discuss the serious impact of the State's budget deficit. Since that time we have communicated general information about the impact of the Governor's proposal to the Board, and to all District staff. Working meetings have been held to discuss program efficiencies. This past week a

meeting with the City Council PTA Co-President was held to ask that the PTA assist the District in designing a different, perhaps a more involved format for presenting information to our parents and community members. Meetings have also taken place with the three union presidents for an initial exchange of information and ideas about the budget. Next week Mr. Hogan will be meeting with the City Council PTA to review not only the budget development process, but also some general budget impact information that has been shared with District staff.

- This evening the Board will hear a presentation regarding progress performance in the District. Traditionally, this presentation is one of the first steps in the budget development process where the District starts to talk about targeted goals and how the District is doing toward meeting them. So as we design program strategies, what the District will continue to support, what we may need to do differently, what we might want to eliminate guided by how well we are doing in the goals that have been set forth as important. The District Strategic Plan has been advantageous because it actually has defined performance goals that everyone has agreed to. They serve as the basis for the presentation this evening and they will guide the budget development process. The District's primary focus will continue to be our students, maintaining a sound basic education for every student in every classroom as we deliberate budget reductions. The first draft budget will be presented on March 3, 2009. During the February board meetings, programs and strategies that drive the District toward meeting its goals will be reviewed. Parents and community members are welcome to join in those discussions so that the proposed budget put forward to the community is one that everyone is able to support.

Mrs. Gaffuri noted the Board would be convening in Executive Session following this meeting to discuss particular personnel.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

1. John Curcio addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
2. Ruth Sadinsky addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
3. Susan D'Entremont addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
4. Nadine Kozer addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
5. Jeff Marlett addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
6. John Rosensweig addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
7. Shawn Sorce addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
8. Gina Smith addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
9. Mary Kate Lasch addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
10. Joanne McElroy Moore addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.
11. Dennis Gaffney addressed the board relative to the Middle School Enrollment.

ROUTINE CONSENT

Termination (Approval of Resolution)

Termination effective December 19, 2008 and agreement between Lisa Connell and the School District was presented for action. Ms. Mackey made a motion for approval. Ms. Doesschate seconded the motion.

The board voted 6 ayes, 0 nays and 1 abstention. Mr. Egan abstained.
Motion passed.

INFORMATION ITEM

School District Performance Report

Performance report is presented to the board annually. Each year the timeline is such that it is one of the first things the district talks about as the budget development process begins. The 2007-2008 data has not been certified by the State Education Department (SED). The information being presented this evening is the way the district believes it will be the way it comes forward once it is released by the SED. The Strategic Plan was used to guide the performance benchmarks and the things that will be looked at to gauge the progress.

Mr. Cioffi, Chief Information Officer, presented a very comprehensive report on student performance data. The way SED works and the way the district reports data through the data warehouse is a relatively new system which started in 2006 and has moved to become a very cumbersome reporting system. Student Performance Standards were adopted in 2007. This presentation is built around those standards. Mr. Cioffi reviewed NYS Grades 3-8 ELA and Math data at the district and building levels along with Proficient Student Percentages. High School ELA results, graduation rates, drop out rates, attendance rates, suspension rates, subgroup performance, assessment summaries also by district and building, achievement performance summary, achievement targets were also reviewed.

- Grades 3-8 ELA and Math show consistent strong improvement.
- Students with Disabilities (SWD) on all levels show gains but are not at the state benchmark.
- High school ELA and Math made strong improvements during the previous five years but had a sharp decline in 2008 due to changes in Math standards and Regents variance changes.
- Attendance has made consistent improvements approaching the statewide average with a decrease at the high school level.
- Middle schools have shown consistent improvement over three years.

- The measure of how the high school graduation rate is computed changed. If the statewide average is 71%, did the statewide average go down?

SED noted that would happen with the change. The state average dropped 2 points.

- The variation in the suspension rate? A student can be suspended numerous times throughout the year. However, that student counts only once in the reporting process. With new programs in place, the district is keeping closer track of suspensions. The 2007 rate for suspension is not as accurate as it should be. Figures that were reported by the building principals on their BEDS reports are then put into the formula for the State to do their report card. The rate of 14.6% is closer to the district rate.

- Data on the state website is considered preliminary data until the State releases the report cards, which will not be available until April this year. The State is working very hard to get these certified figures to districts for their financial planning.
- Preference is that the information be separated. The 9-12 data be presented separately from the 5-8 testing data, because of the different testing systems. Similarly, look at the suspension data in the elementary and middle schools separately, also the suspension rates.
- What is the district doing to make sense of this information and to think about what could be done differently. If you come up with subgroups that are particular to Albany. They don't get reported in the State Report Card.
- How do you use this data to help principals to use this data to move in on students who are struggling? When the district was working on the Strategic Plan and started looking at assessment data, the district didn't just look at straight assessment data. The district determined that it needed to develop a database that would allow the district to look at attendance rate, suspension rate, beyond the assessment information. Meetings are conducted with all the building principals to review data and look at all the subgroups that they have. Review extends through the item analysis of each student, looking at the different items that they might have missed on the NYS Assessment. From that point the building principals will also start to look at attendance data for their students. The building principals and the teachers go the next step further to look at the assessment data on a building level. Then they look at the individual teachers and their classrooms and the individual students by grade. On the building level the principal will be looking at their attendance rates and how well they are doing. Each school has a data team. The participants are the building leaders at each school, with the building principal and they have been given very specific guidance in terms of how to look at data, the kinds of things they should be looking for, how to interpret it and how to apply that to improvement strategies. Supervisors and coaches will work with teachers on individual grade levels, not only looking at individual teachers, but across grade levels to target individual areas.
- What is the current suspension rate? The first five months of school this year there has been a significant decrease across the board in suspension rates for the middle schools due to the protocols that the principals have set in place and the no tolerance policy enforcement. The figure is more than 25% lower.
- What is the significant of the target not being met district wide for grades 3 – 8 in the benchmark comparison related to students with disabilities? The significance is that the district is designated as a district in need of improvement. The same rules apply to the school district as whole as they do to the individual school buildings. If the district fails to make the points two years in a row, you become a district in need of improvement, DINI school district. These areas were targeted because these are the areas where the district has had trouble and concentration has been focused on these areas. The rest of the subgroups are all making their APY. These are the concerned areas.
- Is the district looking at attendance rate at the grade levels? It is one of the things that can be determined with Power School, looking at individual grade attendance rate.

- Explain the flat scores for grades 3-8 ELA on the district level. One of the issues is the nature of the test. Grades 3, 5 & 7 the tests are structured the same way, different from 4, 6 & 8. The group of 3rd graders who sat for the 3rd grade test and are now taking the 4th grade test, for the most part, the entire test changes at grade 4. It's a three-day iteration. The test is a test of writing as well as reading and it's the first time that students are really exposed to that. Looking at the data for grades 4, 6 & 8, the students who have sat for 4 have an understanding as to what 6 and 8 look like as well as building those skills, strategies and stamina for student performance.

Mr. Malerba addressed the board relative to suspensions.

DISCUSSION ITEM

Middle School Enrollment Planning

Dr. Diggs and members of the Middle School Enrollment Committee presented a report from the committee to the members of the Board of Education. The report included background information, the purpose of the committee, the points of agreement and the various options that were considered throughout the process, the results of the public forums and the recommendation of the committee. Points of Agreement include Hackett, Myers and North Albany students have the option to remain in their school. North Albany continues to feed elementary students into its middle school (with the option for families to choose Hackett or Myers). Siblings can attend the same school, providing they have a sibling currently in attendance. Maintain the 20% NCLB requirement due to Hackett's status as an underperforming school. The district is in the process of restructuring Hackett with the intent that the school will be relieved from its SINI designation. Students attending Livingston in 2008-2009 will have a choice for 2009-2010, providing space is available. Staff will work with parents in making decisions for the students presently at Livingston. Exceptions: Special Education students, ESL students. These students have to attend those schools that provide special programs. Academically all schools will be successful and community input should be part of the process.

The committee presented two options:

Feeder – students from designated elementary school advance to designated middle schools.

Feeder recommendations are as follow:

Hackett Middle School

Arbor Hill Elementary School
Delaware Community School
Eagle Point Elementary School
New Scotland Elementary School
Schuyler Achievement Academy

Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science & Technology

Stephen & Harriet Myers Middle School

Albany School of Humanities
Giffen Memorial Elementary School
Montessori Magnet School
Pine Hills Elementary School
Sheridan Preparatory Academy

Six public forums were scheduled to inform community members about the options under consideration and to solicit feedback. Dr. Diggs reviewed the feedback information garnered from the six forums.

The Random school assignment would involve students assigned to Hackett or Myers by a random, computer-generated selection process. Every student has equal opportunity for Hackett or Myers. No application is necessary. All students automatically are included.

Demographics resulting from this grouping were reviewed by Academics, Gender, Ethnicity and Economics based on free and reduced-price meal eligibility.

Dr. Diggs also reviewed the neighborhood preference, advising that the committee supports an enrollment model that is equitable for all students and families. The committee does not recommend a neighborhood zone with either plan. Based on public comment earlier in the meeting the issue of neighborhood preference for Myers, as promised during the middle school planning discussions.

- What is the impact of transportation with these options and how do they compare. Transportation for Livingston students going to Myers amounts to 44 extra students eligible for transportation and 108 students going to Hackett with the feeder model. Run several simulations to determine the increased numbers with the random assignment model. Further investigation of the transportation issue is needed, particularly related to feeder schools and open enrollment.
- Did the committee look at other distributions that might lead to more walkers at each one of these schools? Academic balance has been the focus of everything the committee has done all along. Transportation was a consideration. However, walkers were not a consideration. This plan resulted in the best balance of demographics.
- Did the committee consider a recommendation that 6th graders be retained in their schools to avoid over-crowding in the two middle schools? The feeder group did discuss that possibility. There are currently 6th graders in Giffen and ASH that would stay in those elementary buildings.
- My concern is that this has become another divisive issue in our community. That some students are being given a preference. As a community we have to find a better way of providing quality education to everyone in our district, where there is not preference and no preference. In this community where we all want to come together, we have to find a way of making decisions where we don't always feel as though someone lost.
- In a single pass with 1,300 students, a random selection would bring balance. Over time as that sample size declined, based on a number of factors, the statistics would not produce a balance. Do you have any response to that? The question is that a process that creates an equitable division continues to do that. The reality is that both systems have pros and cons.
- There were four suggestions from the community regarding the single-grade middle school. That particular avenue of approach should have been examined a little more thoroughly. Based on the numbers, there is not sufficient room in either school for complete grades.
- How was the feeder system designation made? Based on the School Report Card data and combined the schools that were scoring low with those that were scoring high to create a balance. All the data balances out, academically, ethnicity, gender, etc.
- What if the plan doesn't results in two balanced schools, what is the corrective mechanism? The random assignment, it self corrects each year in a way that the feeder can't. The feeder system can be modified in order to address imbalances, but it doesn't happen automatically.

The board will be voting on the middle school enrollment at the February 3, 2009 board meeting. If there are additional questions, board members are encouraged to forward them to the superintendent prior to that date.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

The Policy Committee met and considered a proposal for a Hall of Fame Program. Board members have received information on this matter previously. Following suggested changes to the proposal it will be submitted to the board for consideration. The committee also discussed the Volunteer Policy. Additional review of this policy is necessary prior to being submitted to the board.

The Committee met early this date. Members were provided information from the superintendent related to committee structure. The committee is looking to developing a list of items that would go through committees for review so that the board can determine how the structure outlined in some of the materials submitted to the members of the committee might work. The Committee is hoping to get together again within the next two weeks to continue discussions.

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

Ms. Mackey expressed a desire to get a better understanding of the district's suspension data. This item has been mentioned previously and Ms. Mackey would like to keep it in the forefront.

Adjournment

Ms. Mackey made a motion to adjourn the public so that board could go into executive session. Mr. Morris seconded the motion. The board is not expected to reconvene in public this evening. The meeting was adjourned at 10:50 p.m.