



PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
January 21, 2010
7:00 p.m.

William S. Hackett Middle School

PRESENT: Dr. Mark Barth
Mrs. Rose Brandon
Ms. Judy Doeschate
Mr. Dan Egan
Ms. Melissa Mackey
Mr. Wayne Morris
Dr. Raymond Colucciello
Mr. Jeffrey Honeywell
Dr. Tresa Diggs
Mr. William F. Hogan
Ms. Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Ms. Linda Rudnick

ABSENT: Mrs. Barbara Gaffuri

Call to Order:

- Mr. Egan called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m.
- All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance.
- Mr. Egan welcomed members of the audience.
- The Mission Statement was read.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Jeff Weltz, coach of the Speech & Debate Team at Albany High School gave a brief history of Team founded in 1869. Albany High was the first chapter of the National Forensic League in 1925. The original charter is on display at Albany High School. The team has competed locally and nationally. The team Members of the Debate Team will be competing at Columbia University in New York City this week and Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia on January 28 through February 1, 2010. Mr. Weltz introduced members of the team Leah Gorman and Meredith Parmalee who spoke about their experiences related to this activity. Other members present were Lexi Athens, Kayli McTague, Lauren Ha, Dudley Okongo, Melanie Mabee and June Criscione.

Jennifer Pryor, a teacher at Myers Middle School introduced a number of students who submitted essays on the Times Union website that were ultimately chosen to be printed in the book, "the Story of Albany". The twelve students were Angela Burton, Martine Chandler, Will Dayer, Pierce Dias Carlson, Austin Longstaff, Ashanti McAdoo, Stelios Moisidis, Athena Muhammad, Tyaela Nieves, Kasharri Oliver, Jeanne Ringwald, Anna Stoneman. Essays can be found on <http://timesunion.com/storyofalbany>.

Dr. Colucciello advised today the Commissioner of Education identified Albany High School as one of the schools in the state that needs intervention based on the decrease in ELA and Math scores over the past three years. Albany High School was already started moving in the right direction towards restructuring. The State Education Department (SED) has presented four options for consideration by the district. The district will be presenting a restructuring plan, choosing one of four options:

- Replace the principal and 50 percent of the staff
- Restart or reopen in partnership with an external organization, such as a charter school or school management company
- Implement rigorous staff and school leadership development and evaluation systems
- Close the school and re-enroll students at other high-achieving schools in the area

It is the charge of the administration, with the support of the teaching staff and the board to pick one of these restructuring approaches. With this announcement comes the potential for the district to receive approximately \$500,000 to assist the district in the restructuring effort. It also presents the opportunity for the district to receive Race To The Top Funds. Dr. Colucciello noted the district has been actively moving towards this restructuring. This news is not new to the board. The board has been planning and discussing restructuring of the high school for some time. Restructuring the high school is a key element in the district's strategic plan "A Vision for Tomorrow" developed in 2008 by the Board of Education, district staff and community partners. A committee on application for magnet schools has been formed at the high school, seeking input from the community. Over 600 parents and community members have participated in a survey to assist the district in developing the design for the application. Meeting dates for this committee are posted on the website for those who are interested in attending any of those meetings on the magnet school grant. We look at this as a window of opportunity for our community and our students. SED requires that the district receive input from the community and staff in the development of the restructuring plan. The district must improve our ability to help young people to be successful. The plan has to be designed in short order and has to be approved by SED.

The Charter School Institute has delayed its decision on closing New Covenant Charter School until February. This board has a difficult time planning under these circumstances. The district needs to be poised to accept those students if and when that school is closed. These are Albany students and the district is obligated to educate all of them so they can be successful. A task force has been developed to prepare a smooth transition plan for these students.

The district has been preparing for a very difficult year in terms of the 2010-11 budget, with a budget gap of \$10 million, reduction in staff, etc. The district received the news in the Governor's proposal that reduces state aid an additional \$6.7 million. The district will be losing significant resources. This is one, if not, the most devastating years in terms of school budgets. It will be very difficult for the district to develop a budget that this community can support in May.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Bill Davis addressed the board relative to the Pre-K lottery, noting that parents should keep in mind several points about the Pre-K. Mr. Davis noted the program is free and that parents need to be involved in their children's education. His preference for the plan is to pick the lottery slots. Following would be sibling and neighborhood preference and then open enrollment.
2. Kate Carroll addressed the board relative to the Pre-K lottery, urging that the district provide sibling preference in the process that her children are not split into different schools. As an involved parent she would not be able to continue this effort if her children are in different schools.
3. Jim Lembo addressed the board urging the board to include sibling preference in the Pre-K lottery process. Until the district is able to commit to transportation to the Pre-K programs neighborhood preference should also be a part of the lottery process. Mr. Lembo volunteered his services in assisting in developing the specifications of the lottery and review of the software.

4. Eric Goldberg addressed the board regarding the Pre-K lottery. Mr. Goldberg suggested parents be given the opportunity to rate the schools they want their children to go. Pre-K is a wonderful opportunity for parents and children.
5. Edith Leet addressed the board regarding the position of volunteer coordinator. Volunteers can free teachers to teach more efficiently. They can also provide caring attention to the students.
6. Dan Smirlock addressed the board regarding the Pre-K lottery. With a set of twins that will be going to Pre-K in the fall he is requesting a "twin" preference provision in the lottery process.
7. William Thomas addressed the board regarding the Pre-K lottery. When the district implements the Pre-K lottery process, hopefully it will be a process that allows children to go to the school parents choose. Also, there should also be sibling preference for the Dual Language Program.
8. Bert Malerba addressed the board regarding the Pre-K program and how it should be for all Pre-k students in Albany. We need to have a needs based priority for Pre-k. It is a vital component in preventing children from getting lost in the system early on. In impoverished homes kids have one-third the vocabulary of those not in impoverished homes. It is imperative that the district focus on those students. Also, no transportation also slants the program to those who can afford transportation.
9. Alex Streznewski addressed the board regarding the opportunity for parent involvement in the Pre-K process. Ms. Streznewski encouraged the district to reach out to those parents and other forums to reach those parents are not being heard. Go out into the communities to reach these parents.

Mr. Morris made a motion to amend the agenda to move the Pre-K discussion before Routine Consent. Ms. Doeschate seconded the motion.

The board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the motion.

DISCUSSION

Pre-K Enrollment Plan

Ms. Linda Rudnick noted three separate forums were held to provide an opportunity for parental involvement in the Pre-K Lottery discussion. Feedback was also received from parents who were not in attendance. Approximately 85 parents have weighed in on this issue. Ms. Rudnick gave a presentation, including Enrollment Projections, the Application Process, the Lottery Process, and Placement Recommendations. Currently there are 591 seats for Universal Pre-K in district schools and community based agency programs (CBO). New classrooms will be opened at Schuyler Achievement Academy, Sheridan Preparatory Academy and Thomas O'Brien Academy of Science & Technology (TOAST). Applications will be available from March 1, 2010 through March 31, 2010 in schools, Central Registration, the district website www.albanyschools.org, CBO's and area day care centers and nursery school sites. Discussions have taken place with community agencies such as the NAACP, Trinity Institution, and the Family Education Alliance related to getting this information to parents in the impoverished areas of the City, stressing the advantage of children attending Pre-K. A help number will be provided on the application to assist parents in completing the application. Applications must be mailed or hand-delivered to Central Registration at Sunshine School by close of business on March 31, 2010. The district will make every effort to insure that all applications are included in the lottery process.

Per SED directive, the district is mandated to conduct a lottery. The lottery will be held on Friday, April 16, 2010 in the auditorium at TOAST beginning at 10:00 a.m. Parents need not be in attendance for the lottery draw, but are most welcome. The Magnet lottery will also be conducted at this time. Notification to parents will go out on Monday, April 19th. Parents will have until Friday, May 7th to claim that seat. Instruction included in the notification will inform parents as to documentation necessary for registration at Central Registration to complete the process. Unclaimed seats will be made available to parents beginning on Monday, May 10, 2010. Placement recommendations were reviewed. Ms. Rudnick also presented an application for review. Ms. Rudnick presented a number of recommendations for consideration by the board including sibling preference and neighborhood preference.

- The district complicates the lottery process when we weight it for certain populations. State Ed states that the district has to have a lottery and then it can enroll students. If the district has 591 seats, we receive all the applications and those seats are filled by the lottery. Then the district can enroll students based on the district's enrollment plan. Another concern is that the pool has to be representative of the City. Pre-K was originally created to assist students who were falling behind. They were coming to kindergarten unprepared to learn. More seats need to be made available in those areas where the greatest need exists. Preferences mentioned this evening are not based on need or attracting those families who are placing their children in charter schools as opposed to district schools. The district needs to have the right Universal Pre-K program now. This is an opportunity where the district can distinguish itself from charter schools and provide quality education for all students.
- The district needs to work on getting to those parents to educate them about the importance of Pre-K and the program in the district, particularly those in impoverished areas.

As the district opens Pre-K programs there are looking at high need areas. Discussion continued relative to the process. Board members urged staff to look into a Pre-K Center for September of 2011. A suggestion was made to have applications accepted over the web. Those who are not selected will be notified, with additional information related to possible available seats. Possibly rework the applications to simplify the document. Applications should also be collected at school sites and forwarded to pupil personnel. Applications should be distributed to pediatrician offices, Whitney Young Health Center, St. Peter's Health Center as a way of reaching parents with children eligible for the Pre-K program. Any support that can be provided for non-English speaking parents would also be very helpful in reaching the parents.

Public Comment

Jim Lembo asked if there would be a waiting list if necessary. It can be done. Mr. Lembo asked for clarification of the proposed process.

Eric Goldberg agreed with selection first, followed by enrollment.

Jennifer Lane stated disenfranchising families is not an advantage. Involved parents are an advantage for the schools. If the district does not support families, these programs will not succeed. How do I send my children, my family, to different schools?

The district is not attempting to disenfranchise families. There should be no assumption that certain parents who get a school outside their neighborhood would not be as much involved with the education of their children. Looking at this district and the totality of the problems faced in this district the district has to do all it can to embrace those parents, even those for whatever reason are not here to express themselves. They choose public schools too. They need to be given an equal opportunity to have a seat, a place in our district.

Dr. Malerba noted in his practice he is witness to people who need to be educated to bring these parents to a point of considering Pre-K for their children.

Nolene Smith noted that people should be thinking about all students in the district. What is good for one is good for all. Parents need to be educated about how important Pre-K and kindergarten are in a child educational development.

Jennifer Greech noted sibling preference is building community. Parents of the Dual Language Program have been doing that.

William Thomas advised the Dual Language Program because parents support the program. The people that are there really want it. The suggested process could possibly result in students being placed in programs they do not want.

Ginny Farrell advised the district can not afford to alleviate parents who are motivated. These parents will leave the district.

Ms. Rudnick advised the process would be a random lottery followed by the current enrollment process. The application will be redesigned and the collection process will be changed to have applications accepted at the schools. Connection with community agencies to reach out to families and increased advertisement, using flyers would be utilized.

A pulse check on the issues indicated agreement that the process would be to pick the slots first and once the 591 students who will be slotted into seats, followed by the current enrollment process, using sibling preference and neighborhood preference.

The Pre-K enrollment plan will be brought before the board at the next meeting for action.

ROUTINE CONSENT

Mr. Egan presented Routine Consent Items for approval, including Appointments (Miscellaneous); Leaves of Absence, Transfers, Resignations/Retirements; Field Trip; Contracts; Resolution to Accept Donations for Harriet Gibbons High School; Resolution to Approve Hall of Fame Inductees; Board Committee Listing and School Liaison Listing. Ms. Mackey asked that the School Liaison listing be set aside.

The board voted unanimously (7-0) to approve the routine consent items absent those set aside.

Motion passed.

Mr. Morris made a motion to approve the School Liaison Listing. Mrs. Brandon seconded the motion. Revised listing was reviewed by board members. Letters will be sent to principals indicating their school liaisons. Those schools that have not yet been assigned will receive notification that when the vacant seat on the board is filled, they will receive notice of their liaison.

The board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the motion
Motion passed.

INFORMATION

Superintendent Search

Mr. Egan advised the district issued an RFP for a search firm to conduct the superintendent search in April of 2009. Hazard, Young, Attea Associates was hired at that time. A series of focus meetings were held along with open community forums for public input of the process. The board has completed a leadership profile assessment survey to get input from stakeholders. 175 people responded to that survey. 92 people participated in the focus groups and forums. Recruitment was started in October and there were 50 applicants for the position. The board of education is in the process of interviewing candidates, identifying finalists. This process is on track.

Race To The Top

Dr. Colucciello advised the board and staff have signed off on participating in the grant. Legislature has been working at this and they were not able to reach agreement on lifting the cap on charter schools in New York State, one of the requirements of the grant. Dr. Colucciello noted that when the Commissioner spoke about Albany High School he indicated the district's eligibility for Race To The Top money.

DISCUSSION

Board Vacancy

Mr. Egan noted Dr. Barth would be resigning from his position on the board effective January 31, 2010. Board members discussed the process of filling the vacancy that was followed previously when a seat was vacated. Notice that the district will be accepting letters of interest and resume until February 1, 2010 will be posted on the district website and emailed to community groups. Applicants will be invited to address the board at the February 4, 2010 board meeting at Albany High School. At that time the board will decide the next step. The possibility of interviews with candidates was suggested. Also, the process should be followed expeditiously. Following discussion the board agreed to repeat the process.

Budget Discussion

Dr. Colucciello reviewed a summary of the preliminary 2010-2011 budget. The guidelines for program review will be utilized in determining the future of programs. The district is looking at 100 additional staff reductions in addition to the 113 positions in last year's budget. This year the district is looking at program elimination. The district is looking at every aspect of every program. The district will look to the bargaining units for relief in some way. On February 4th staff will bring before the board a laundry list of items for possible reduction.

Mr. Hogan advised the Governor is calling for a reduction of \$6.75 million in state aid for Albany. This is a 7.76% reduction from the current state aid levels. Cost drivers for the district include increases in salaries and benefits of \$9.4 million, based on labor contracts. Charter school costs are expected to increase \$3.8 million due to enrollment. These total an additional costs \$20 million. Sources of revenue include a tax levy increase of 2.5% and reserve funds, both of which total \$5 million. The CPI is negative .4%, which will affect the contingency budget cap. This will not be positive if the budget fail. Budget reductions identified to date total \$7 million. The district is looking at an additional \$8 million in required reductions. The district is hoping for some relief in the Governor's aid package. This will be a very challenging year in terms of the budget. The district has placed a budget freeze on this year's budget Mr. Hogan noted that every school district in New York State is struggling in terms of budgets. The approach that is recommended is that the district plan accordingly given the information that is available. Should there be additional funds forthcoming, it is easy to restore programs can easily be restored. Historically, the legislature has always added money. The difference this year is that there is no money. Mr. Hogan ended his presentation with the announcement that this month the district received \$2.5 million in aide that was held in December.

Discussion focused on possible reductions, noting that the number of students affected by the reduction and the actual cost savings of the reduction would be helpful in making those difficult decisions. Also, total cost of programs that are funded from various sources would be helpful. Discussion also included offering programs that compete with charter schools. The decision on New Covenant will have an impact on the district's budget development. The decision is expected by the end of February, which will give the district some direction.

- What is the financial impact if bargaining units agree to a salary freeze at the current level? The impact would be \$4-5 million. There is a huge escalation in the pensions, regardless of what happens to salaries.
- Mid-year cuts were kind of disruptive in the schools. If that can be avoided mid-year that would be helpful.

If the district starts the year conservatively there would be additions when necessary, rather than cutting because the year started with a high number of staff. It's easier to add than to subtract.

- If there is any sensible way of working with other districts in sharing resources and/or programs that might be a way of revenue increasing. Also, benchmarking in the future could be very helpful.
- There is a huge gap between the strategic plan and what the district is doing now. The district needs to keep that alignment in mind.

Bert Malerba noted that increased class size should be done with equity in mind. Also, alternative education should continue. The district needs to shift to prevention and also be mindful of those students in those programs.

Edith Leet suggested that as the district looks at programs that need to be cut, look at volunteers that could provide these services, i.e instrumental lessons.

Alex Streznewski asked if there has been any consideration to closing an elementary school. The district is looking at everything in this process. \$20 million is 10% of the budget.

ACTION

Policies

The following policies were presented for approval.

- 1000 Community Relations Goals
- 1050 Annual Budget Vote
- 1050.1 Voting Procedures
- 1130 News Media Relations
- 1230 Public Participation at Board Meetings
- 1400 Public Complaints
- 1420 Complaints About Curricula or Instructional Materials
- 1420R Complaints About Curricula or Instructional Materials Regulations

Ms. Doesschate made a motion to approve policies as presented. Dr. Barth seconded the motion.

The board voted unanimously (6-0) to approve the motion.

Motion passed.

Board Committee Reports

Ms. Mackey advised the Audit Committee met and the discussion included what was previously discussed during the budget discussion this evening. The committee asked for costs related to introducing Foreign Language in the lower grades. The committee was also provided a list of programs that will be reviewed.

The Alternative Education Think Tank met. A mission statement was created and subcommittees were developed; evaluation of existing programs; literature review and stakeholder input. Mr. Egan, Mrs. Brandon, and Ms. Mackey sit on the evaluation subcommittee with Ms. Ferlazzo, Mr. Ott and Judge Walsh. Harriett Gibbons, TOPS, MAPPS and Abrookin Extended Day programs will be reviewed. The group developed the cohort study and the years that would be reviewed. District staff will be pulling data and the entire group will analyze the data and board members on the subcommittee and Judge Walsh will be writing the report.

Ms. Mackey noted she also attended the Gun Violence Task Force. The report will be issued to the Common Council as directed. Mr. D'Allesandro from the DA's Office has formed an advisory committee and has invited those members to come to the meeting for additional input. The group is also looking at meetings with Schenectady and Troy who are also doing gun violence work.

Ms. Doesschate advised the charter school committee met and reviewed information provided by the district. Parents from Arbor Hill Elementary School spoke about why they choose Albany schools and what they think would draw parents that choose to send their children to charter schools and what might bring them back to the Albany schools. The group will meet again on February 10th to continue that discussion. The group also discussed the opening of the school in September.

Board Member Items

Ms. Mackey requested that the board consider discussion relative to having more than one school on the same bus as a cost saving measure. Board members agreed to have this as part of the transportation discussion.

Adjournment

There being no further business the board adjourned into executive session at 11:15 p.m. Mr. Morris made a motion to go into Executive Session. Dr. Barth seconded the motion. Mr. Egan advised the board would reconvene this evening.