



PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
August 20, 2009
7:00 p.m.

Albany High School

PRESENT: Barbara Gaffuri, President
Melissa Mackey, Vice President
Judy Doesschate, Secretary
Dr. Mark Barth
Rose Brandon
Daniel Egan
Wayne Morris

Dr. Raymond Colucciello
Dr. Tresa Diggs
Bill Hogan
Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Linda Rudnick

EXCUSED: 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

- Staff is busy preparing for the arrival of 8,000+ students to our schools for the 2009-2010 school year. Tours of schools will be conducted to insure that buildings are ready.
- Staff will arrive on September 2, 2009 with various programs scheduled.
- The Administrative Staff will participate in a retreat on August 24th & 25th, at which time a number of professional activities are planned. Part of this program is preparing programs that will be provided to students in September.
- National Grid will be turning off power at Albany High School this Friday. Members of the staff who are able to continue their work in the building will remain. Those who are unable will be shifted to Abrookin to conduct work duties at that building. Power is expected to be back on by the end of the day, with normal on Monday.
- Scheduling and orientation programs are moving ahead. Orientation programs for those middle school students in merging schools have been prepared. This outstanding program will be shared with board members in the upcoming update.
- We are excited about the opening of this school year. We are going to be ready for all students in September and we are anxious to deliver program on day one, September 8, 2009. We will be ready for these students, our focus is on the students, they are our guests, bring it on!

Mrs. Gaffuri requested a motion to amend the agenda to add to the agenda under discussion, with possible action the Tax Amnesty Program. Ms. Doesschate made the motion. Ms. Mackey seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

OPPORTUNITY FOR PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Robert Malerba addressed the board regarding the Alternative Education Think Tank and the need to focus on closing the achievement gap in conjunction with the alternative education program. Closing the achievement gap cannot wait for another think tank in another year from now. The think tank should not be rushed.

INFORMATION ITEM

Volunteer Program

Board members heard a presentation from Ms. Jackson-Chalmers, along with Rita Floess, Interim Volunteer Coordinator, on the district wide volunteer program. The timeframe of the volunteer program was reviewed. To date meetings have been held with community partners. A needs assessment has been developed and an MOA between partners is being developed. The volunteer utilization needs assessment will be shared district-wide. The assessment is expected to be completed by September 11th and the process for selecting/hiring a permanent school volunteer coordinator will be defined. The position will be posted and the selection process will take place in early October with the appointment scheduled for the October 7, 2009 board agenda. The program will officially begin in October continuing through June at which time a district-wide Volunteer Awards Luncheon will take place. A draft needs assessment was also reviewed, along with a draft job description for the school volunteer coordinator position. Rita Floess spoke about the collaboration with the community partners in developing this program, working with the needs assessment and assisting the district in developing a volunteer handbook.

- How are you seeing the utilization with the volunteers working directly with students, i.e. tutoring? One of the priorities is to bring volunteers in to help students.

Training teachers to better utilize volunteers is key. Also, volunteers will need strategies on how to assist students. Professional development will be a major part of the program. The needs assessment will be critical because it will ask principals what services they need in the classroom and other related activities.

- Do we currently have volunteer coordinators at the school level? Have we encouraged principals to identify someone to start working on this?

Not as yet. When the Volunteer Policy was approved it was forwarded to principals. They have a sense of the program. We plan to insure that they follow the guidelines and policy as presented to them. They are, at this point, seeking people in their buildings to serve in that capacity.

- Is there an expectation for parents and community to be contacted regarding their thoughts about how they would envision volunteers in our schools?

A family survey is being developed. The first priority is to start with principals, staff and some of the volunteers presently working in the schools.

- I'm hoping that the district will be looking at state agencies for volunteers to work in the schools by adopting a school.

Some of the schools that have traditionally had volunteers in their building have similar things to that. Schuyler Achievement Academy has had a partnership with the Albany District Links, Inc.

- I would like to see how this program could expand to preschool children in the neighborhoods. Also, high school students need particular attention.

Ms. Floess will be investigating these areas through a partnership presently existing in the Syracuse School District.

- Will there be official staff hired to work with the coordinator?

No. The decision to develop a department has not been made. This will be part of the consideration as the district moves forward. Principals have historically been the leader in their own buildings.

Nolene Smith noted there has been no mention of families and kids coming into the program. Volunteerism is a way to get families and neighbors back in school.

Dr. Malerba noted that those groups that participate in PTA meetings and other activities in the schools appear to be "clicks" that can be intimidating to people outside those circles. There needs to be a leader who can bring the disenfranchised people into the program.

ROUTINE CONSENT ITEMS

Routine Consent Items were presented as follows: Appointments (Miscellaneous); Salary Adjustments (Management Confidential, Extra Classroom Stipend and Magnet School Positions Stipends). Ms. Doeschate made a motion to approve Routine Consent items as presented. Mr. Egan seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

DISCUSSION ITEMS

Alternative Education Think Tank

Dr. Diggs reviewed Result Statement 2.3 Create a BOE Committee "Think Tank" to evaluate how our existing alternative education programs are doing, and research new and innovative ideas. Action steps related to the Result Statement and essential questions were also presented for discussion. Dr. Diggs provided new recommendations for the committee membership along with a new timeline and a newly defined leadership option.

- I remain concerned about moving forward with a new alternative education plan without really knowing how effective individual programs have been. Modification of programs cannot be accomplished without information on the effectiveness of the programs. I want reiterate my belief that we need more data. We have to have data in order to make data driven decisions. The issue of the achievement gap primarily affects students who are in alternative education programs. I also do not want to rush decisions because we feel that the budget is driving the process. We presently spending millions of dollars on our alternative education programs.
- I think we need another set of steps around those essential questions. What would the data requirements be? What are the measures needed to answer these questions. We need to identify those data points. That might help flesh out what this task is about. Steps 1 - 12 tells how we got to this place. We still do not have a scope and sequence. Unlike the enrollment committee and the public involvement, this is not easily contained. Aside from the entry criteria, what steps are being taken that lead up to the referral process. Do we have those steps right? Are we making sound practices that lead up to the placement of a child in an alternative program? Is our referral and placement methodology right – not the criteria for placement, but what are the steps that led up to that? Fleshing out these questions will give us the sense of scope and sequence of this task.
- There are many students who simply do not learn well and have difficulty in certain learning environments. I think that the definition should be more expansive in terms of students who are not learning in our traditional learning environment. In some cases that may mean we need to do more to engage them in their classroom. I would like the group to also think expansively in terms of having different types of environments to help meet the needs of every student the way they learn, not special education or something punitive. One of the questions I did not see is what are the goals of alternative education? Following the first and second meeting of the group, I would like to see the group present the board with more clearly defined objectives.
- In order for the group to evaluate present programs the group will have to get some data. Statistics are needed to show us where we are now so that we'll know where we need to go.
- This task is much larger and more complex than the middle school enrollment. I need to think about ways to chunk this up into a couple of phases. It looks to me that there are three tasks here. What is it we are talking about when we say alternative education first of all? How well are we doing? The third part is what do we change? Maybe the first task of the team should be to define alternative education, which may take months. That might be okay because that is what drives everything else. You can't ask for data when you haven't decided what it is that you want data about.
- This may take 6 - 7 months because for the last 4 - 5 years our alternative program has not been where it should be and I'm hoping that it could be 2 -3 months, but this is a heavy task. Let's not rush it.

- I would like to have something before the next budget that we can visualize, that makes sense and I hope the work of this committee can yield something to us. It is important to identify when our children go into alternative education and when do they go out. I'm interested in seeing some kind of action that we can implement.

Dr. Colucciello advised that a separate subcommittee, as a research and development group, start to look at what the district could be doing with the \$5-6 million presently being spent on alternative education programs. New might bring new creative ideas into this discussion.

Dr. Malerba spoke a project that included a number of different committees to look at closing the achievement gap, developing a plan to the plan.

Nolene Smith noted the Board of Education should decide what the purpose of the alternative education is. It should not be any different than the purpose of general education is. We have 80% of students entering the 9th grade behind. There are a number of kids at Harriet Gibbons. Use Harriet Gibbons as a source of data. Ask where these kids came from? What were their scores? What have we done differently? What could have been done differently? What could have been done in the first and second grade to avoid alternative placement? Also, the district provides information to the State Education Department. These numbers can be part of the consideration.

Mr. Egan

- Two quick things, I don't know if there is an assumption here that there will be an outcome from this team that will then help guide this upcoming budget cycle. That would be very ambitious if the first meeting is in September followed by monthly meetings. If that is the assumption then there will need to be adjustments to the meeting schedule. Also, I would like to suggest that we form a smaller group initially, maybe not the 32, but a group of something like 5 to get past this first task of what the charge is. That might be a lot easier and a lot faster and then bring the larger group to do the 2nd and 3rd parts of the project. In that group I would include the two board members, the administrator and the chair of the larger group.
- I like the idea of having the subcommittee. I do think that perhaps it would make more sense to start with a smaller group now. But, again I want to reiterate, we need data and I do think that Harriet Gibbons provides a good cohort to start with. It is an alternative education program that has been running for several years. The new TOPS Program at Livingston provides a year's worth of data. With those numbers, as opposed to looking at thousands of kids we have smaller cohorts of kids and we can start looking at the variables like when did they enter alternative education and all of those things. I agree that this is all tied together, the achievement gap, the graduation rate, drop-out rate, suspension rate, etc. We report out on so many things. It should be brought out together.
- We are one of the few high schools in the area that has an alternative education high school. We had a four year program. The history of the present students can be studied back to what led up to the alternative placement and information relative to the outcome when they re-entered the high school, if they did re-enter.

- I like the idea of getting this smaller group together. I think these are critical questions and I appreciate what you are saying, Mr. Cioffi, that we need know those questions so that you will have a better idea of the cope of what we are looking for. I am wondering if we could narrow the scope right now, saying the first year of Harriet Gibbons, those students, where are they now? We are looking at a few years going forward. Where they came from might take a little bit longer. What grade are they at, starting to answer those questions. I think that those two things can happen and keep the ball rolling.

One of the things I would like to see is the smaller group tackling this whole problem with the think tank to give it more direction. I'd like to see a couple of board members, some administrators. I would like to leave here this evening with you delegating or volunteering two board members to work with me so that we can get this rolling. In the meantime I think we can look at the Harriet Gibbons figures and get back together too. We can do both of those things, I don't think we should do one and not the other, because if we leave here tonight without some clear direction – I don't want to spin wheels here. I would like for some of this to come to some type of conclusion in terms of how to proceed.

- I would suggest that we have a seven member group, these two distinguished administrators (Dr. Diggs & Ken Cioffi) and two board members, the Chair of the Think Tank, and let those five people recruit the other two. We want to be careful how we treat Harriet Gibbons and then apply that method to the other programs.

Ms. Mackey volunteered to work with this group. Dr. Barth noted he could participate in the small group, but is unavailable for the larger group. Ms Doesschate advised she has planned some time away in mid September and would therefore not be available. Mr. Egan also volunteered. Board members are Ms. Mackey and Mr. Egan.

Ms. Doesschate made a motion to suspend the rules to amend the agenda to move the Tax Amnesty and Real Estate Items moved to Action Items. Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

Tax Amnesty Program

A resolution for the Albany City School District to participate in a Tax Amnesty Program with the County of Albany was presented for approval.

RESOLUTION

Tax Amnesty Program

WHEREAS, the Albany County Legislature has adopted Resolution No. 272 authorizing a one-time amnesty period, from September 1, 2009, to November 30, 2009, for the reduction of interest charged on delinquent property taxes from 1% added per month to .5% added per month; and

WHEREAS, Albany County has requested that the Albany City School District similarly provide such an amnesty period, in an effort to motivate payments; and

WHEREAS, Albany City School District would like to cooperate with Albany County,

THEREFORE, IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED, the Albany City School District Board of Education hereby implements a one-time amnesty period from September 1, 2009 to November

30, 2009, for the reduction of the interest charged on delinquent taxes, from 1% to 0.5% for taxes levied during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 fiscal years only. For all 2007-08 and 2008-09 school taxes unpaid as of December 1, 2009 and thereafter, the interest rate added of 1% will go back into effect.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Superintendent of Schools is authorized to approve as to form and content agreements and documents necessary for the implementation of the aforementioned amnesty program.

Mr. Morris made a motion for approval. Ms. Brandon seconded the motion. Mr. Hogan advised Albany County is going to be offering a tax amnesty program. They are collecting a significant amount taxes on the behalf of the district. Outstanding taxes for the district total \$6.3 million, \$2.4 million from 2007 and \$3.9 from 2008. These are the funds that would be involved in the tax amnesty program being presented for approval. The program allows for individuals with past due tax bills pay prior years taxes from September through November and their interest charges would be reduced by one-half the normal percentage. The impact to the district would be 13%-14% of interest charges forgiven for September taxes levied for 2007 and 7%-8% forgiven for September taxes levied for 2008. The interest forgiven would range from \$116,000 - \$158,000. The district would have to manage the funds to minimize the impact on the 2010-11 budget. Staff recommendation is for the district to participate in this program because it will assist taxpayers and also because the district has an excellent working relationship with Albany County and by participating in this program the district continues to support the County.

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

Real Estate

The following resolution was presented for approval:

PUBLIC HEARING RESOLUTION

WHEREAS, Education Law Section § 402-1 of the Regulations requires the School District to hold a public hearing to solicit comments from the community in connection with the closing of property at 27 Western Avenue, currently identified as The Adult Learning Center.

IT IS HEREBY RESOLVED:

1. A public hearing shall be held on September 1, 2009 at 6:30 p.m. and lasting to 7:00 p.m. in the Northeast Cafeteria at Albany High School, 700 Washington Avenue consistent with the obligations of the School District under the above law and regulation.
2. The Superintendent of Schools shall cause notice of the public hearing to be published in the official newspapers of the School District once a week for two weeks preceding the date of the public hearing, August 21, 2009 and August 28, 2009.
3. The public hearing shall be conducted in a manner to reasonably afford members of the community the opportunity to provide public comment on the closing of the above mentioned building. Each speaker shall be afforded a maximum of three minutes to present any comments. No stenographic record of the public hearing is required nor will one be maintained. Any individual wishing to have his/her comments submitted as part of the public hearing record shall submit such comments in writing to the facilitator of the public hearing at the time of the public hearing. No comments, written or otherwise, shall be considered or accepted after the public hearing is closed.

Ms. Doesschate made a motion for approval. Mr. Morris seconded the motion. Mr. Hogan advised that whenever a public school system wants to sell a building, the district must follow a specific process. The district is required to hire a realtor by way of an RFP process, accepting proposals and appointing by board resolution. TL Metzger & Associates is being recommended to the board this evening for appointment. The district is further obligated to hold a public hearing to hear public comment. Following the public hearing the board will be asked to pass a resolution to close the ALC building, authorize the sale of the building, approve a referendum to be placed on the ballot at the general election in November for public approval to sell the building and finally, the board is required to appoint voting inspectors and voting locations for the general election as a formality. The building can then be formally sold following a positive vote in November.

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

Motion passed

The following resolution was presented for approval:

RESOLUTION

BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Education of the City School District of Albany hereby authorizes the Interim Superintendent of Schools to enter into a contract with realtor, TL Metzger & Associates to provide services related to the sale of 27 Western Avenue and 43 Second Avenue in the City of Albany, New York. The final cost will ultimately be determined by the selling price of the properties in accordance with industry standards for the real estate market. Mr. Egan made a motion to approve the resolution. Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed

Employee Benefit Reserve Fund

Mr. Hogan noted the district is in the process of finalizing financial records for the 2008-2009 school year ending June 30, 2009. When revenues are greater than expenses a budget surplus is generated, which goes into the fund balance accounts. There is a 4% fund balance limitation. Due to a surplus in the 2008-2009 budget and other changes in reserve accounts there is excess Fund Balance that needs to be reallocated. Recommendation is to transfer \$9.55 million into the Employee Benefits Reserve Account. The current liability for compensated absences is \$10.3. The board will be asked to consider approving a resolution to re-appropriate this amount at the September 1, 2009 board meeting. Mr. Hogan concluded the presentation with a review of the advantages of transferring these funds.

- Is there any indication of what the liability for next year for employee benefits is going to be? It doesn't change significantly.

ACTION ITEM

Approval of 2009-2010 Tax Warrant

Ms. Mackey made a motion to approve the 2009-2010 Tax Warrant. Mrs. Brandon seconded the motion. In accordance with the adopted budget for 2009-10, the school tax levy will be \$103,125,848. The prior year's tax levy was \$100.6 million. New tax revenues for 2009-2010 will be \$2.6 million that represents an increase in school tax levy will be 2.55%. Typically there are changes in assessments and changes in STAR Aid, which change the overall school tax bill. With the changes in assessments and the changes in STAR, the tax levy that would go out on September 1, 2009 would be \$17.59 per thousand of assessed value, an increase of \$1.30 per thousand for the homestead, which is residential. The non-homestead tax rate is currently \$24.79 per thousand, an increase of \$0.26 per thousand. This is because the assessments have changed significantly. Commercial real estate, which is non-homestead, has decreased approximately \$84 million. As the commercial assessments are decreased, the taxes shift. Tax amounts based on \$100,000 assessments are \$1,759 without STAR; \$1,193 with Basic STAR and \$687 with Enhanced STAR.

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

Motion passed.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

None

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

None

Adjournment

Ms. Mackey made a motion to convene into executive session to discuss particular personnel. The board will not be reconvening in public this evening. Dr. Barth seconded the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.