

Spotlight on the Board

Notes from the District 15 School Board Meetings

January 24, 2007

This was a "Committee of the Whole" meeting.

Discussion Items – Web site Policy

Dr. Jean Sophie, Asst. Superintendent for Personnel lead the discussion on the Web site policy that was first brought to the Board in December, 2006. A major concern at that time was student privacy/identification. Two photo release forms were presented to the Board for consideration. One form for parents to sign would grant permission to use only their child's first name/last initial on any publications from the District and/or on the District's Web site. The second form would give permission for the child's full name to be used. Sophie asked that the Board make a decision as to which release form would be used. She further indicated that if a parent did not submit a form to the District, that would indicate a "no" response for the release of a child's name/photo.

Board member, Kelly Keenan – Asked how honor rolls, team rosters, tournament listings would be affected. Would the District be responsible for those items? Only sees problem with listing a student's last name if it is on the Web site with a picture and the name of the school.

Sophie – Stated that this policy is only for the District publications such as press releases, newsletters and the Web site. Indicated that building principals, secretaries would be responsible for the forms – they can print lists of responses. Believes it is important for the District to develop a process for the return and managing of the release forms. Teachers can follow-up with parents. Wants to make sure that every parent/child has the opportunity to be recognized. PTA indicated that they would help with informing parents but not responsible for monitoring.

Board President, Nancy Lee Carlson – Stated that this is a district policy not PTA. Asked how long it would take to be implemented and if we had the staff to do this.

Sophie – Expects to spend the next few months informing parents of this new policy. Thinks it is important to start at the beginning of the next school year. Must inform all parents including ESL parents. Has the staff to do this.

Sandy Cramer, district webmaster/Web policy committee member – Expects release form to be sent with registration materials. Pretty standard – should come back with the registration form.

Carol Nelson, district editor/Web policy committee member – Concerned that policy is extended to newsletters that are typically published on the Web site. Indicated that if the policy was for only first name/last initial - local newspapers would not publish the District's press releases.

Mary Zarr, Exec. Director for Curriculum/Web policy committee member – Stated that this policy does not preclude having a special form for special events. Referred to a recent dog bite prevention program given at Plum Grove. TV crews were there and all parents of children in that classroom were informed of this. There was a special release form for that particular event. This could also be done for spelling bees, etc. It doesn't have to be all or nothing.

Sophie – There will be an implementation committee for the Web site policy. Board will vote on the policy in February. Tonight’s discussion is to decide on what kind of student information should be available. There can be a list of different situations that require special release forms. The forms can also be separated by K-6 (elementary) vs. 7-8 (junior high). Feels it is the parents decision.

Board member, Scott Boucher – Asked what the rationale was for first name/last initial only. Did the committee think that more parents would want this option? Asked Board how they felt about putting children’s names/pictures on Web site at all. Wants to be flexible, need exceptions for junior high.

Nelson – District’s Connections newsletter is our only broad based communication with parents and it is published on the Web site. Thinks the newsletter would not be useful without pictures/names. Organizations such as Word Masters send out press releases with student names. That is beyond the District’s control. However, the District would be constrained in its newsletter because it is posted on the Web site.

Rowden – Believes our District is ahead of the game through intellectual debate and discussion. District is being proactive by developing this policy.

Board member, Tim Millar – Asked if the committee polled other local districts. Believes that the release form needs to be pushed from the district side.

Sophie – Indicated that District 15 is ahead of other school districts in developing a Web site policy. Most other districts use full names. Said that a neighboring school district was in a lawsuit on this issue. The Web policy is now written as the committee recommends. Seeking guidance from the Board. Feels urgency of getting policy completed, procedures set and communicating to the parents.

Transportation Efficiency Study/Proposed Permanent Bell Schedule

Dr. McKanna opened the discussion by reviewing the timeline of events as outlined in a handout made available to those in attendance. **Kevin Nohelty**, Asst. Superintendent of Business; **Don Skinner**, Co-interim director of transportation and **Linda Fleming**, transportation routing coordinator were in attendance to present information and answer questions.

Nohelty – Referred to the handouts provided. Said that the proposed school bell schedule had been shared with various stakeholders over the past few weeks as outlined in the distributed timetable. He indicated that a point was reached while working with the transportation consultant (VersaTrans, Inc.) that the District had to go in one direction or another. The original intent was to have all the information to the Board at this meeting, but unfortunately all of the data is not yet in. **Nohelty** said that this is a monumental task, something much larger than he anticipated. Trying to stay with the goal of finding a permanent solution in a fiscally responsible manner.

Skinner – Wanted to make most efficient use of the District’s resources and arrive at a balanced lasting solution. The criteria he looked at was:

1. Moving the late start schools out of the 9:10 a.m. slot; that was a primary concern that he heard from people.
2. Examined the current bell schedule, current enrollments, wanted to pair schools to create increased efficiency in using the buses.
3. Examined the proximity of the schools to one another to be efficient and look at the District’s obligation to the parochial schools.

All in all, he was looking for an efficient operation.

Nohelty – Has heard comments from parents over the past several weeks. Intent is to put FAQ (frequently asked questions) on the District's Web site. Realizes it is critical to get information out to the community in a timely fashion. Stated that the transportation department is now waiting for the final report from the consultant and anticipate that arriving in the next week. The report will supply a lot of data so a cost/benefit analysis can be done. Met with parochial school leaders to address their concerns which include: safety/liability/supervision issues when dropping children off at the junior highs; and asked if D15 can do anything about lengthening their instructional day. **Nohelty** is also looking at the District's programs and how that would impact the bell schedule. **Nohelty** will present options but will also ask the Board if they want to continue to review the proposed schedule for another 6 to 9 months before making a decision. Board can also keep the past practice of rotating schools every 3 to 5 years. Brought up another consideration of relocating District programs to improve overall efficiency.

Rowden – When can the Board expect the study to be done, get the recommendations, post the information and then get feedback from everyone. Asked if it was realistic if this would be done in time to make a decision on February 14th?

Nohelty – Indicated his intention is to have as much data for the Board to make a decision on February 14th. It has only been 2 ½ months since the consultant was approved to crunch out the information; they were set behind due to corrupted data and dealing with two different systems.

Rowden – Wants information on the District's Web site. Concerned with transparency. Over the years, different things have been said. Board made this a priority. Over the past 3 years, this has been an anxiety provoking discussion, there are different answers every year, Board wanted to make a decision. If it is just presented in two weeks, it will create anxiety for the community, they'll say they didn't have enough time to show up at meetings, give feedback.

Carlson – Doesn't think it is feasible to make a decision now. Thinks Board needs to look at all District programs. Doesn't want to rush into it. Wants to see permanent solution with different programs scattered throughout the District. Would rather remain on the same system we have been on and keep the status quo until all the data is in. Board may decide it doesn't want to do any of this because of cost. District has to buy buses and have dollars set aside for that.

Rowden – Doesn't think Board needs to take on the District program discussion now. Doesn't want to tie the two together. Board knew this was coming, wants to make decision in February, Board acknowledged that they wanted to make a decision on this.

Nohelty – Stated that it was made clear to the transportation department that the Board wanted to make a decision. Wants to clarify that there is still a lot of work to be done, if they have a few more weeks they can provide additional data. Took apart every bus route and put back together, hopes to see less miles driven than under the old plan and less time children are on the bus.

Boucher – Asked what the hard dates the Board needs to be concerned about. Registration for child care, etc. Wants information made available to the press so it can be published. Wanted to know how it was decided which schools would be on the early schedule.

Nohelty – Stated that kindergarten registration at parochial schools and after school programs start in a few weeks. **Nohelty** feels drop dead date can be extended to February 28th.

Skinner – Reiterated that he wanted to move the 9:10 a.m. start schools to an earlier time. All 7 of those schools were moved to the 8:45 a.m. start. That left him with 7 schools currently at 8:30 a.m.; he moved 4 back to 8:45 a.m. The remaining 3 schools were moved up to 7:45 a.m.; minimizing the number of schools with the greatest change in start time. He knows it is early, he heard that a lot. He was seeking a balance with enrollment; pairing schools in terms of relation to each other. He focused on efficiency and enrollment; did that throughout the District and it worked out extremely well.

Millar – Stated it would be nice to have as many options as possible and the costs associated with the options. Asked what was the best method for community to give feedback on this issue; wants to reach all people with the proposed plan.

Communication methods discussed among Board members included:

District Web site and a FAQ (frequently asked questions) page; have teachers e-mail/contact parents about this issue; have Principals send a flyer home in student backpacks; hand out information to children on the bus; community can e-mail questions to Board members; transportation department give presentations at individual schools, have VersaTrans study available at all schools for parents to review, etc.

Zarr – Wanted to clarify a question raised earlier about District program locations. Several programs in the District such as gifted and special education change sites year to year and the District has never changed their start times. She says that is a separate issue – not part of the transportation issue.

Citizens Address the Board

Jennifer Peterson – Paddock School parent

Concerned with Paddock being on the early schedule starting at 7:45 a.m. Kids have more activities that are later in the evening, especially 5th and 6th graders. The early time would infringe on their resting time. Paddock hosts the 3rd/4th grade gifted program and then those children go onto Marion Jordan for the 5th/6th gifted program. MJ is on a later bell schedule. This would cause problems for parents with children in two different schools/different start times. Concerned about added day care costs when children are out of school at 2:15 p.m. Another issue was the time a child who lived near the Buehler YMCA would have to get on the bus to get to school by 7:45 a.m. Wanted to know why only three schools have a significant change in start time – 45 minutes earlier.

Jennifer Pautler – Paddock School parent

Concerned with early start time for Paddock. Did some research of neighboring school districts: Arlington Hts., Schaumburg, Barrington, Lake Zurich and Algonquin. Those districts have all their elementary schools start and end at the same time. The times vary from 2:30 p.m. to 3:40 p.m. with an average of 3 p.m. She would like the Board to pick a goal and look at the schedule that way. What is the ideal time that parents are looking for? District 15 owns its own buses. Other districts own their own buses and are still able to have all their elementary schools on the same schedule. Other districts have one day a week for staff planning time and dismiss 30 minutes early on those days. May want to think about that when next teachers' contract is up in three years. Can give a copy of her research to the Board.

Judy Zollner – Will have kindergartener at Paddock in 2008

Many people have not heard of this start time change. District needs to reach out to people like her who do not have children in the district yet but will be affected. Asked why the district owns its own buses? This is a big challenge – corporations outsource their biggest challenges. Why 7:45 a.m./8:45 a.m. start times – why not 8/9a.m. or 8:15/9:15 a.m.? She did Web research on how much sleep children need. First graders need 12 hours of sleep. Lack of sleep can result in ADHD symptoms. Ten year olds need 10 to 11 hrs. of sleep and would have to go to bed at 7:30 p.m. These are issues that parents are concerned about.

Lisa Tracey – Paddock School parent

Objects to the 7:45 a.m. start time for Paddock. Agrees with other issues that have been raised. How was Paddock selected for the 7:45 a.m. start time? Other surrounding schools (Sanborn, Marion Jordan, Pleasant Hill, and Hunting Ridge) are all at 8:45 a.m. Where is the fairness? Not a good time, early enough at 8:30 a.m. Knows that you can't make everyone happy. But why 7:45/8:45 a.m., why not 8/9 a.m. or 8:15/9:15 a.m.? What is the reasonable explanation for Paddock selection?

Doreen Taylor – Two children in District 15

Was told that this issue was widely publicized. However, nothing has been in the newspapers or sent home with her children. Maybe people with cable/internet access can find information on this issue. Understands that Board meetings are open to the public but meetings are not heavily attended unless there is a hot issue like the teachers' contract or referendum. Wants the Board to know that important information is not getting out. Start time study just started 2 ½ months ago, should have been five months ago. As a concerned parent, would like to know how 2-tier program would be implemented, the cost of this change that affects real people and does the District know what the cost and/or savings will be? Report isn't in yet, don't try to push this through in a few weeks. Would like the District to provide more details.

Board member, Wendy Rowden – Said she spoke with Mrs. Taylor and had mentioned that many people would look forward to a change and knows many people are not looking forward to this change. Recognizes that perceptions of "widely publicized" means different things to different people. Thinks District has made tremendous effort to get information out but agrees that there is always room for improvement. Start times has been an issue for years, it did not just come up in March of this year.

Board President, Nancy Lee Carlson – Said the transportation department will answer questions as to how schools got selected for the different tiers. Waiting to see the study report and will make sure that information gets out to the individual schools. Board is listening to everyone's comments. Mentioned that the gym was packed with parents in past years, this is an ongoing issue. Board just authorized the transportation study 2 ½ months ago.

Mary – Paddock School parent

Doesn't like the 7:45 a.m. start time. The transportation department said that their primary concern was to move the 9:10 a.m. start time schools up. Can understand that, 9:10 a.m. is not a desirable time. But need to be fair to everyone. In the past, schools were rotated every 3 to 4 years - that was fair. Wants to know why schools were chosen for the early start? Thought she would see more information tonight. Publicity so far has not been good. Friends at other schools did not know anything about this. Also had heard it was a done deal. There is a lot of miscommunication out there.

Vicky Nelson – Paddock School parent

A change of 45 minutes is significant to a young child. Catching a bus at 7:25 a.m. vs. 8:10 a.m. would have a major impact on her son. Disagrees that children would eventually get used to it. Early start time affects after school activities. Mentioned PTA sponsored Rec nights that start at 7 p.m. at night. Has heard that children really like them. Submitted a sunrise/sunset schedule to the Board. Said it shows that for two months out of the year, children would be walking to bus stops in darkness. Asked why there needs to be a full hour between the two tiers? Hasn't heard the explanation. Asked why the start times couldn't be 8:10/9:10 a.m. Thinks that a 3:40 end time is more reasonable to children than a 7:45 a.m. start/2:15 p.m. end time. Wants Board to think of all children not just a subset of vocal parents.

Karen Schutz – Pleasant Hill PTA President

Said that the PTA Presidents and Principals were informed of the start time change. She informed her parents. If people weren't informed, they shouldn't blame the Board. Pleasant Hill has had the late start for a long time already, needs an earlier start. PH has been hopeful, waiting and patient. Expressed disappointment with Kevin **Nohelty** (Assistant Superintendent for Business) – at PTA Presidents' meeting **Nohelty** was confident that the change would happen next school year. Tonight, she sees no confidence from him. Said she has friends with children in the gifted program, those parents deal with different start times for their children. Said that if the Board does not change the times this year, she would like to formally request that the Board switch start times between Paddock and Pleasant Hill. PH would be more than happy to take the current 8:30 a.m. start time if Paddock would like more rest for their children.

Sandra Hirsch – Paddock School parent

Agrees with comments of other Paddock parents. Has concern that the need for expediency is taking precedence over the need to make the right decision. Understands that the 4-tier system is not working and that a change is necessary. Concerned with making a decision in 2 to 4 weeks without the study from the consulting company. Says regardless of outcome, wants to understand that all options were fully considered. Realizes that PTA Presidents/Principals need to be accountable for communication. So far, there has only been one piece of paper and no explanation as to how proposal was arrived at. Three elementary schools are greatly impacted with a 45 minute change. Board needs to get more feedback from those parents, perhaps face-to-face meetings to explain proposal. Board needs to help people understand this change.

New Business/Other

Dr. McKanna asked **Mary Zarr** to report on the recent Teacher Institute Day. Zarr indicated that she received many e-mails/cards from staff members indicating that they learned a lot that day. There were 90 different sessions – only 3 had to be cancelled because no one registered. The keynote speaker also taught two breakout sessions. Zarr thanked the Board for their support of staff improvement.

Executive Session

The Board went into executive session at approximately 9:15 p.m.

Authorization to Waive Attorney/Client Privilege

Following executive session (approximately 10:15 p.m.), the Board voted by a vote of 4:3 to reject authorization to waive attorney/client privilege and therefore documents related to this item will remain exempt from release.

(Carlson, Boucher, Mikula, Silverman voted 'No'; Keenan, Millar, Rowden voted "yes")