

PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
March 16, 2006
Giffen Memorial Elementary School
7:00 P.M.

PRESENT: Teneka Frost, Vice President
Barbara Gaffuri, Secretary
William Barnette
Judy Doesschate
Susan Kushner
Jackie Jenkins-Cox

Dr. Eva Joseph
Terrance White
Linda Jackson-Chalmers
Joseph Dragone
Kathleen Wetmore

ABSENT: Edward Brown, President

Call to Order:

Ms. Frost the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance. Ms. Frost called for a moment of silence in memory of Arthur Gordon, a former teacher and administrator in the district, who passed away earlier this week. Ms. Frost also noted that Mr. Brown is out of town and unable to be present at the meeting this evening. Ms. Frost advised in Mr. Brown's absence, she would be leading the meeting.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Joseph advised this Saturday the district is hosting a workshop with Mr. Gary Howard, President and Founder of the Reich Center for Multi-Cultural Education and the author of "We Can't Teach What We Don't Know" used as the kick-off for this school year, at the Superintendent's Conference Day. Bringing him forward to the district is part of the district's Diversity Council. The workshop is scheduled from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Participants will hopefully develop a deeper understanding of issues regarding social, cultural and racial dominance, creating a culturally responsive learning community. The Diversity Council is made of principals, cabinet members and community members.

Dr. Joseph also noted in collaboration and partnership with the City of Albany, the district would host an event next Thursday and Friday for a number of students. The infamous Jim Brown of the Cleveland Browns will be here with a character-building program. This event is brought forward through the efforts of a number of community members and faith-based organizations to provide a message of character building for students. Full program information will be provided when it becomes available.

Dr. Joseph advised the district has received the New York State 2005 School Community Partnership Recognition Award for quality achievement by the New York State Rehabilitation Association. Dr. Joseph noted this is for the commendable work that has been done in the district for the integration of students with disabilities into regular programs.

Dr. Joseph advised this evening the first draft budget would be presented to the Board and the community. Dr. Joseph noted this is a very important conversation.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Alejandra Marnaga addressed the board relative to the Dual Language Program.
2. Gulcan Yalniz addressed the board relative to the Dual Language Program.
3. Donna Young addressed the board relative to the Dual Language Program.
4. Peter Halewood addressed the board relative to the Dual Language Program.
5. Annamarie Lippit addressed the board relative to the Dual Language Program.
6. Larry Frank addressed the board relative to the Alternative Education Program and the budget challenges to the district caused by charter schools.
7. Bill Ritchie addressed the board relative to the burden of charter schools on the district budget and requested that community members contact their legislators to request financial relief for the district.

FACILITIES PROJECT REPORT

Action Item Related to the Facilities Plan

Furniture Fixtures and Equipment (FF&E) Bids for School 16

Ms. Frost presented the resolution to award bids for furniture, fixtures and equipment for School 16. Mrs. Gaffuri made a motion to approve the resolution for School 16. Ms. Doesschate seconded the motion.

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

DISCUSSION ITEM

2006-2007 Budget Development

Dr. Joseph noted that as the district begins to develop the budget, the district looks to the budget as an opportunity to think about doing things in a different way, the kinds of improvements that can be made, operating in a more cost efficient way based on lessons the district has learned about programs. Each year the district finds itself trying to do more with less or doing the same with less. Dr. Joseph noted the single greatest variable that is affecting the district in this budget development is the charter schools, which cannot be minimized. Dr. Joseph noted the implications of the budget increase with respect to the charter schools compels the district to think about the budget in a different way.

Dr. Joseph noted there are a number of costs that have been shared previously with the board and variables that the district cannot control, one of which is the charter schools. The challenge in this particular budget process is laid forth so that everyone can understand that the budget that has been laid out in terms of programs - that the district wants to continue to support and even those that the district wants to continue to support but may not have a choice but to reduce are clearly identified.

Dr. Joseph noted factors affecting the budget are charter schools, state aid, utilities, health insurance, retirement funds and tax certiorari. Charter school costs for 2005-2006 are \$10.8 million. The projected 2006-2007 figures are \$16.1 million, an increase of \$5.35 million. This is an increase of 49.42%, which will increase the tax levy 5.95%. The executive budget as it is now gives the district a state aid increase of only 2.7%. The average for the last three years has been close to 9%. At the same time the state aid formula significantly hinders the district, which results in a reduction of \$8.5 million in state aid.

Dr. Joseph reviewed the budget goals and the specific strategies in place to achieve these goals. Dr. Joseph noted in light of this very difficult budget process, board members needed to be mindful of the specific strategies that are in place that will continue, as well as new initiatives that will be brought forth. Dr. Joseph noted the district is looking at an average class size of 21, which is larger than the present class size of 20 students. Dr. Joseph reviewed the general fund increases for new initiatives and other increase totaling \$1,435,094. Dr. Joseph continued with reductions and modification from the general fund totaling \$188,800 and other program reduction considerations totaling \$1,122,797. Total staff and supply reductions are \$1,645,655. Proposed budget figures for 2006-07 are \$168,735,886, which is an increase of \$11,698,254 from the 2005-06 budget or 7.45% increase. Dr. Joseph advised the tax levy reflected in these figures is 12.66%. Dr. Joseph reviewed the budget impact of major increases including a 45.79% increase in charter school funding. Dr. Joseph advised there would also be reductions in Title I (21%) and IIA funding (7%). Reductions in programs funded with federal funds total \$344,500. Reductions due to charter schools total \$898,606. Dr. Joseph advised staffing reductions from the general fund include 2 administrators, 31 teachers, 11 teaching assistants, 2 clerical and 1 maintenance position. Dr. Joseph noted with board approval of the legislative agenda, the district has gone forward and mailed a letter and the resolution to every legislator in New York State urging consideration of the Albany Charter Schools Relief Act. Dr. Joseph noted no other school district has been impacted by charter schools in the same way as Albany, New York. Dr. Joseph noted there needs to be special consideration of funding relief for the district. The district has requested consideration of a \$10 million relief. Dr. Joseph noted the estimated contingency budget is \$168,016,902, which is a minor \$718,984 difference from the proposed draft budget presented this evening.

Dr. Joseph advised that staff felt that there needed to be integrity to the budget relative to maintaining programs. Dr. Joseph noted the district is still maintaining an exhaustive list of programs and opportunities in the district. These are the kinds programs the district is confident about offering to the diverse student body in order to provide them with quality education, excellent education and good choices. Ms. Wetmore continued the presentation with a comprehensive review of revenue items the district receives in order to support the expenses.

Mr. Barnette made a motion to extend the time for this item by 30 minutes. Mrs. Gaffuri seconded the motion.

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

The Board had a lengthy discussion including the fact that the difference between the proposed budget and the contingency budget is approximately \$718,984. Dr. Joseph noted that while the figure is not substantially larger, a contingency budget would not allow the district flexibility in spending the budget amount as there are specific restrictions on spending with a contingency budget.

Board members are encouraged to forward questions and/or concerns to the attention of the administrative staff so that board members are fully informed when acting to approve the budget.

Ms. Frost called or a motion to extend the time allotted for this item to allow for public comment based on the fact that this is a roundtable meeting. Ms. Doeschate made a motion to extend comment for 25 minutes. Ms. Kushner seconded the motion.

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

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Bill Ritchie addressed the Board relative to staff reductions.
2. Bob Fullam addressed the Board relative to a budget below the contingency budget figure, taxpayer relief from funding charter schools and middle management staffing.
3. Jermaine Ivory addressed the Board relative to budget funds.
4. Larry Frank addressed the Board relative to language program reductions in the budget.
5. LoLisa McLaughlin addressed the Board relative to summer school programs in the budget.
6. Travis Chandler addressed the Board relative to techniques in containing school violence.

2006-2007 School Calendar

Dr. Joseph presented the 2006-2007 School Calendar for discussion. Dr. Joseph advised Ms. Jackson-Chalmers, along with the Calendar Committee had developed this calendar. Dr. Joseph noted there are a number of variables and requirements that were considered in the development process. Dr. Joseph noted the effort made by the district through this calendar to strengthen the opportunity for parent teacher conferences. One of the ways the district looked at in terms of doing that is to make full use of Election Day, where students are not in attendance, but staff is. The entire day is devoted to parent teacher conferences from kindergarten to grade 12. This calendar, as in the past, there are two calendar days that are earmarked for elementary parent conferences. Dr. Joseph noted a half-day in the fall and a half-day in the spring don't allow nearly enough time for a conference with every parent and across the board there were strong sentiments expressed that the spring half-day was not effective for that purpose. Dr. Joseph noted the beginning of the year provides a great opportunity.

Ms. Jackson-Chalmers also noted that due to Rosh Hashanah falling on a weekend in the upcoming year the district had an additional recess day to put into the calendar, which was designated as January 2. This will provide additional time during recess periods to accomplish the transitions that will be occurring in January, moving into the new schools.

Discussion followed relative to the number of instructional days on the school calendar. Board members requested that an analysis of the cost of expanding the calendar in terms of contract provisions be provided to the board. Dr. Joseph noted her understanding and appreciation of the comments related to the instructional year. Dr. Joseph noted in terms of the intent of having more instructional time for students is difficult if the district were to try to add days with a half day here or there because the intent is to have quality extended instructional time for students. Dr. Joseph noted there are other venues to have that conversation. Dr. Joseph noted that many times where the district attempts to do more with what it already has the parameters are so restrictive that it cannot be accomplished. Dr. Joseph noted she would be looking forward the conversations with teachers' unit about the amount of time for instruction, which will be an important conversation.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

Intergovernmental Committee

Ms. Doesschate advised the Intergovernmental Committee met earlier this week. Discussion included the impact of the budget and other issues that were put forth in the legislative agenda. Ms. Doesschate advised individual board members would be taking action to promote the legislative agenda. Ms. Doesschate advised she would be sending out an email. Ms. Doesschate advised she would also be scheduling meetings for board members to meet with legislators to discuss the importance of this issue to the district.

Audit Committee

Mrs. Gaffuri advised the Audit Committee made a recommendation for the Budget & Educational Planning Committee to work with the district in the budget development process. Ms. Wetmore advised she contacted one of the members to discuss the project identified at the last meeting. Ms. Wetmore advised the group was interested, however they did not feel that the time frame allowed for sufficient time to provide the requested information.

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

Ms. Jenkins-Cox noted congratulations to the Albany High School Basketball Team for their outstanding efforts in this year's competition.

Ms. Frost noted the district has been approached by the Times Union to do a blog (a personalized journal) on their website. Ms. Frost noted this might be an opportunity for discussion of issues related to the school district. Discussion followed relative to the having control of information related to the district.

Adjournment

There being no further business, Mr. Barnette made a motion to adjourn. Meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Catherine L. Cutting
Clerk of the Board