



PROCEEDINGS OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

March 25, 2008

7:00 p.m.

Albany High School

PRESENT:

William Barnette President
Barbara Gaffuri, Secretary
Dr. Mark Barth
Judy Doesschate
Melissa Mackey
Wayne Morris

Dr. Eva Joseph
Dr. Joseph Dragone
James Mathews
Linda Jackson Chalmers

Absent/Excused:

None

Call to Order:

Mr. Barnette called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. All present joined in the Pledge of Allegiance. Mr. Barnette welcomed the members of the audience and thanked them for taking the time to attend the meeting. Mr. Barnette made remarks relative to the resignation of the former Board President and his new position as President of the Board of Education.

Amend Agenda

Mr. Barnette called for a motion to amend the agenda to entertain nominations for the Office of Vice President. Mr. Morris made such motion. Mrs. Gaffuri seconded the motion. Mr. Barnette advised if the board approves the motion it will be placed as item #1 under Action on tonight's agenda.

PUBLIC COMMENT

1. Myra Battista addressed the board regarding Pre-K programs in the district.
2. Alex Streznewski addressed the board relative to district representation at a recent legislative breakfast sponsored by the Citizen's Action Committee. Dr. Joseph advised the district received no notification related to this event. However, the district continues to work closely with legislators regarding issues before the district. Dr. Joseph encouraged the public to present similar opportunities to the superintendent's office to insure representation.
3. Jim Lembo addressed the board regarding the Pre-K program in the district.

ACTION ITEM

Nominations for the Office of Vice President

Mr. Morris nominated Melissa Mackey for the office of vice president. Mrs. Gaffuri nominated Dr. Mark Barth for the office of vice president. With no additional nominations, Mr. Barnette called the vote for Ms. Mackey.

The board voted 3 ayes.

Motion failed.

Mr. Barnette called the voted for Dr. Barth.

The board voted 3 ayes.

Motion failed.

Mr. Barnette noted in conversation with counsel earlier this date, he was advised that by law the board is not required to have a vice president. That a vote of 3-3 with six members on the board means the vote motions do not pass. The board at this point does not have a vice president. This item will be addressed at a future board meeting.

Resolution for Library Proposition

Mr. Barnette presented the resolution, authorizing placement of the library budget and the election of one board of trustee member for the Albany Public Library on the ballot for the May 20, 2008 school vote for approval. Mrs. Gaffuri made a motion for approval. Dr. Barth seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

Legal Notice

Mr. Barnette presented the resolution to approve the legal notice to be published for the school district vote on May 20, 2008. The notice is required by law to be published prior to the vote. Ms. Mackey made a motion for approval. Mr. Morris seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

Resolution to Appoint Inspectors

Mr. Barnette presented a resolution to appoint inspectors to conduct the May 20, 2008 school vote. Ms. Doesschate made a motion for approval. Mrs. Gaffuri seconded the motion.

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

Motion passed.

DISCUSSION ITEM

2008-2009 Budget Development

Dr. Joseph advised Mr. Matthews would be presenting the adjusted draft budget for board consideration. Dr. Joseph advised there is a meeting scheduled for April 1st that will include discussion of the budget, which is targeted on the Budget Development Calendar as a possible date for adopting the budget. If necessary, a special budget session is also scheduled for April 10, 2008. This is the very latest date for adoption of the budget. Discussions this evening will include the Contract for Excellence component as well as additional information regarding the expansion of the TOPS Programs.

Dr. Joseph advised the revised budget to be presented this evening does not include all of the requests for increases. The district has prioritized the requests and matched budget increase priorities with fiscal responsibility priorities. Direction from the board is important in terms of moving forward in adopting a budget.

Mr. Matthews presented a modified budget totaling \$206,866,488, a change of \$18 million, representing a 9.59% change. The biggest adjustments were \$185,000 for supplies, \$20,000 for textbooks and \$440,000 funding for the Extended School Day School Violence, which has been removed from the general fund budget. Dr. Joseph noted that funding would now come through grant funds. The new tax levy figure is now increased by 2.62% as opposed to 3.71% presented at the last meeting.

Mr. Matthews reviewed the budget impact of major increases, a state aid comparison chart and a comprehensive review of the Contract for Excellence, including the Charter School Transition Aid, which indicates the \$3,321,776 the district is required to spend on new and expanded programs. Dr. Joseph noted this is one issue that the district has continued to address with legislators as well as the State Education Department. Dr. Joseph advised the significance of excluding the charter school transition aid from the calculation for the Contract for Excellence because the district in essence is taking from one hand to give to the other. The charter school transition aid has a very specific purpose; to help the district offset expenses associated with the charter school increased costs. When it goes into the Contract for Excellence, the district is not offsetting expenses but rather required to apply it to new or expanded programs. Dr. Joseph is awaiting a response from the State Education Department as to whether or not there will be a revision of the formula to eliminate the charter school transition aid from the Contract for Excellence and then it would have to be legislated. No one is sure about that yet. The district's position on this has been very clear. If that occurs, it would lower the Contract for Excellence amount. A second question, is the charter school increase, the expanded charter school program, allowable within the contract? There is not a definitive answer on this issue at this time. Mr. Matthews concluded with a listing of the Contract for Excellence expenditures that total \$4,168,802.

Dr. Joseph advised the district is hopeful that additional aid will be forthcoming. However, this is a very fluid time and not as predictable as the district would like. The district needs to be very conscious of what is happening at the state level. Typically, the district is on safe ground when the budget is developed based on the Governor's proposal. Hopefully, the state aid amount indicated in the Governor's budget remains the same, if not higher.

- Is tax on utilities a requirement of districts? This is an opportunity offered to only small city school districts. Albany is at a rate of 3.3%.
- Explain the expansion of special education services at \$900,000. This is an increase placed on students in BOCES programs. Students with severe disabilities or high need. Ten students. The district is reimbursed, based on a threshold on services.
- Is the expanded Pre-K in the Contract for Excellence above and beyond the additional costs reimbursable under Pre-K aid? Increased program costs total about \$545,000 and there is a general fund portion not covered by state aid.
- At this point in the budget what are we assuming? If additional state aid comes to the district you are recommending that additional state aid would be used to reduce the tax levy or would your recommendation be to add programs? At this point in time we have done a very careful vetting in terms of prioritizing the requests. The recommendation at this point in time would be that additional state aid would be used to reduce the tax levy.
- Has there been discussion relative to consideration of starting a Lacrosse team to our athletic program? Recommendation is to strengthen existing programs, rather than dilute program opportunities. Cost for boys Lacrosse is estimated at approximately \$35,000 to \$40,000 per pupil for protective gear, coaching staff, etc. This item could be considered for the next budget cycle. Other board members expressed shared sentiment in strengthening existing programs and not going forward with additional athletic programs at this time as recommended by the Athletic Director.

- Budget implications of strategic planning recommendations need to be considered. Dr. Joseph advised that \$150,000 has been placed in the budget for strategic planning recommendations.
- Dr. Joseph noted expenditures are not expected to change before additional budget discussions on April 1, 2008.

Dr. Joseph continued the presentation regarding the proposal for expanding the TOPS program. Dr. Joseph noted that while the district is still left with the location question relative to expanding the TOPS program. However, Berkshire has been a long standing partner with the district in terms of its turn about program and other types of support services and they continue to be a promising partner in helping the district structure this program with the advantages that they may bring in terms of their expertise, even if the program is located on-site. Dr. Joseph advised she has asked Berkshire to provide the district with a proposal to provide a similar program within Albany, potentially at one of the district's school sites.

Dr. Dragone reviewed the program expanding elements with a contract provider. This is a conceptual framework of services provided by an outside contract provider in the City of Albany. The program would consist of a six (6) hour full day with a capacity of 75 students. Core subject instruction includes physical education, art, technology and foreign language, computer aid instruction, and aggression replacement therapy. Staffing would include an on-site principal, 2.0 FTE teachers, 7 teaching assistants, 2 home school coordinators, 4 security personnel and clerical support. Students would also be transported to and from the program. Estimated total program cost is \$858,284.

Dr. Joseph noted in terms of location, the district looked at where there is space in each of the existing schools. The obvious space is the Philip Livingston School site. The building is very large. With the small number of students that would be attending there next year for middle school, the district could actually section off or use opposite ends of the school. Start and end times could be staggered to maintain the integrity of the middle school to keep that viable. There are other site combinations, but none provide that same capacity.

Dr. Joseph noted the difference between TOPS students, who are referred to the program because of a violation of the Safe School Policy. Other alternative educational programs are alternative options for students who may have academic needs, some social, developmental or behavioral needs. They may not be functioning in this larger school environment. The district has done a very good job of building a 9th grade experience for kids who may have entered high school not fully prepared. The referral process has been refined. There is a comprehensive review.

Dr. Joseph reviewed TOPS and Alternative Education Program Improvement Costs. Full services Schools at Hackett and the ALC total \$351,410. The high school transition program improvements at the ALC total \$112,500 and the TOPS expansion with a contract provider is \$858,284. At the same time there would be a reduction of current program costs for the existing TOPS program of \$482,736. Total improvement costs for TOPS and Alternative Education Programs is \$839,458. Dr. Joseph then reviewed a list of advantages of using a contract provider for TOPS. Dr. Joseph noted the internal budget for the provisions of these services is approximately \$1.7 million, knowing what the district would have to add in terms of staffing.

Dr. Joseph also noted that if a student violates the safe school policy in this program. It would be dealt with within the program. There is no suspension from this program.

- Does the TOPS Program become a separate action item the board will be acting on? Similar to other contracts, it would be presented to the board as a proposal, but then the district work on a very specific contract and that would include board discussion. The board would then be acting on a service provider at a future date.

Additional discussion included evaluation of the program, services to students to prevent the need for TOPS placement, increasing full service options at the high school and issues related to revamping the alternative education program.

Following additional discussion regarding direction from the board relative to the 2.62% tax levy, most board members indicated they are in agreement that this figure should not be increased and that any additional state aid should be used to offset this figure.

Mr. Barnette advised additional discussions on the budget would be on the April 1, 2008 board agenda.

BOARD COMMITTEE REPORTS

None

BOARD MEMBER ITEMS

None

Adjournment

Dr. Barth made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Morris seconded the motion. Meeting adjourned at 9:45 p.m.