

**WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS**  
**Ypsilanti, Michigan**

**WORK-STUDY SESSION**

**January 11, 2007**

The work-study session opened at 6:30 p.m. at Willow Run High School, 235 Spencer Lane, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Those present were:

Claudette Braxton, President  
Andreas Blakita, Vice President  
Brenda Clay, Secretary  
Clifford Smith, Trustee  
Dorothy Stewart, Treasurer  
Sheri Washington, Trustee  
Scott Wilson, Trustee  
Travis Greer, Student Representative to the Board of Education

Members of the Administrative Council Present Included:

Ron Ciranna, J.D., Superintendent  
Melvin Anglin, Principal, Willow Run Middle School  
Joe Ann Allen, Principal, Ford Elementary School  
Dr. David Houle, Controller  
Dr. Walter Jenkins, Principal, Willow Run High School  
Katie Smith, Director, Technology and Community Services  
Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment  
Regina Williams, Curriculum Facilitator

Citizens' Time

Mr. Stanley Stewart, Cheney attendance area, said he e-mailed Ms. Braxton asking who Lana Tatom's supervisor is. He said Ms. Braxton responded she is. Mr. Stewart then read Board Policy 1032, which states no board member is to direct the services of any employee. He said board members cannot decide which policies to follow and which ones to not.

Mr. Stewart questioned why the elementary schools are having half-days Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday of next week, just because the high school students are having half-days. He said the kids were just out on a two-week break and given the desire for our students to be high achievers, he cannot understand them attending only a half-day for these days.

Mr. Stewart also said he has been trying to find the bill for Mr. Leon Youngpeter and administration has yet to provide it to him.

Mr. Dean Johnston, Willow Run Chief Mechanic, said back in August he had mentioned to the board the creation of a policy for idling motor vehicles. He has now provided information regarding the creation of this policy for the board. Mr. Johnston said the District could realize a \$2,000 savings from now until June, or as much as \$4,000 a year if buses were not left to idle. He said the District has pre-heaters, which can be used to warm up the buses, without creating emissions.

### Communications

Mr. Wilson said he would like to have a mid-year review of the work/study sessions process. Ms. Braxton said this will be added to the February 1<sup>st</sup> work/study agenda. Mr. Wilson said he would also like to look at creating an ad hoc committee to deal with discipline issues and bullying. Ms. Braxton said she will be addressing this topic at the Parent Advisory Committee meeting scheduled for January 23<sup>rd</sup>, and invited all interested parties to attend the meeting to help work on this project. She said she hopes to have a policy implemented by the beginning of next year.

Mr. Wilson said Ms. Washington did a real good presentation about public relations a few months ago and nothing has been done with it. He questioned why. Ms. Braxton said the next step is for Ms. Washington to pull together her committee. Ms. Washington said it is not her committee. Ms. Braxton replied that Ms. Washington was going to spear-head it. Dr. Ciranna said public relations needs 100% board backing and a budget set to work with, which would dictate what the Public Relations Committee could do. Ms. Braxton asked Ms. Washington to pull together a committee. Ms. Stewart volunteered her services, as well as those of Mr. Smith to work with Ms. Washington on this project. Mr. Wilson also suggested that the policy work from last year needs to be finished and asked for board approval for the formation of an ad hoc Policy Committee.

Mr. Smith said he wishes we would look at getting in an energy study. He said the District could save some money and requested the administration bring in experts to make a presentation about this. Mr. Wilson said the board would like to see at least two and preferably three presentations, but that he understands there are only two in the area who will work with governmental agencies. Mr. Smith said his understanding is the preliminary investigation of energy use would be free. Dr. Ciranna said this could be part of an upcoming presentation by Mr. LaPrairie.

### Curriculum

#### Middle School - School Improvement Grant

Ms. Tatom introduced Ms. Leslie Wilson, President and Director of the Freedom to Learn Institute. Ms. Wilson said she is honored to be working with the middle school, knowing the quality of leadership and the passion of the faculty there. She said the plan is to continue the work started by Dr. Hamilton regarding the school improvement plan. She said she will also work with the leadership team to develop an evaluation tool to provide accountability and to measure the effectiveness of the program.

Mr. Smith questioned how long the District has been using her company's services, what the expected outcome is, and how long it will take to see results. Ms. Wilson said the goal is for benchmarks to be in place and being used by the teachers within a year, with the proof being in the school continuing dialogue about what they are doing and in increased MEAP scores.

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Mr. Blakita said the community has raised questions about if a six, seven, eighth grade combined environment is the best approach for teaching middle schoolers, or if this should be changed. Ms. Wilson said this is the pure middle school model and when combined with common planning time for teachers, research shows it is the best model. She recommended asking the teachers what works best for this community.

Ms. Stewart said she does not see what results are planned for and questioned if expectations should have been planned for at the beginning of this endeavor. Ms. Wilson said she went to the six objectives developed by Dr. Hamilton, including an instructional calendar and benchmark assessments. She said when you can see these things; you will know the benchmarks have been met. She said most schools do not have their curriculum committed to a calendar and our teachers began implementing this process this year and are making adjustments based on their use of this process. Ms. Stewart asked what the teachers were doing before and said this is what teachers should do.

Ms. Williams explained that benchmark assessments are different from section tests in that they measure state standards and can be used to help increase MEAP scores. Ms. Wilson said you have to be able to see how assessments change to guide student improvement. Ms. Stewart asked if we should expect to see a periodic assessment of how this is going. She added we have so many groups running around here and the board gets no report.

Ms. Washington said we need to make sure monies spent are getting a return. She also asked how information for each student is being tracked and if it goes into their folder. Ms. Tatom said until now, there has been no system for tracking. Ms. Wilson said the Department of Education is looking to help schools store data and to communicate that data with one another.

Ms. Washington asked when this information is captured how it is queried. Ms. Wilson said this tool will be able to tell how every student is doing and that teachers are using it right now to help their students. She added Ms. Tatom has content area meetings, so there is great ground work laid and conversations are being held about development and curriculum.

Ms. Tatom said as of right now there is not anything available to track this data. Ms. Washington responded we have the hardware here to begin using this process. Ms. Tatom said that is what the Eastern Upper Peninsula is doing for us. Ms. Wilson said you will be able to manipulate data and run reports yourself. Mr. Blakita interjected that no matter what data you have, it is what is going on in the classroom that counts. Ms. Quigley explained teachers are using data now to help teach their students.

Ms. Stewart questioned how much time training will take away from students learning. Ms. Wilson explained training is taking place during team time and early-release Tuesdays, so it does not take away instructional time.

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Ms. Clay said we should really be giving kudos to the curriculum team for using the programs they set in place. She said we should give ourselves pats on the back for how far we have come in this area and that we have a wonderful program going on here.

Ms. Braxton said she is really impressed with the work being done at the middle school during their professional development time and that this is an educational environment where kids are learning. She said the staff is running the building and we need to acknowledge that.

#### High School – School Improvement Grant

Ms. Tatom introduced Nancy Fenton and Pam Thompson of the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools, who presented the Willow Run High School Literacy Plan they have developed.

Ms. Thompson said the elementaries and middle school in the District have had very good systemic work and the high school can get there with very few changes. She pointed out high school math scores are low and this is critical.

Ms. Fenton said this program would be paid for from Title I funding, which can only be used for professional development, with any unused funds being returned to the State.

Ms. Fenton explained when there is a common literacy vocabulary, strategies, and reflective practice the students learn better across the board. She said the Reading Apprenticeship and the Real Reading in the Middle programs will be used at the high school.

She explained the reading apprenticeship dimensions of learning as encompassing the social, personal, cognitive, and knowledge-buildings aspects of learning. She said Real Reading in the Middle recognizes and helps to develop the skills good readers possess including; prior knowledge, determining important ideas, questioning the text, creating visual and sensory images, drawing inferences, retelling and synthesizing, and monitoring for meaning.

The Contract for these services includes 40-hours of professional development and 12 days of support, along with networking and resources. The project will begin via walking through classrooms, collecting surveys and pre and post-testing.

Mr. Smith questioned if any other schools in the county are using these services. Ms. Fenton said Inkster Schools are using their services. Mr. Smith said Inkster is in Wayne County and asked what the process is for selecting consultants, because he wants to be sure policy is not being stepped on. He requested other companies be brought in too.

Ms. Tatom said this company was chosen at the county level, through a bid process performed last year and that we relied on them. Mr. Smith said she needs to protect herself. Ms. Tatom said the State has to approve this plan before it can be implemented.

Mr. Smith said it seems we only talked to one company and this policy is not only ours, but the States' as well. He said this policy requires talking to more than one vendor and that when you spend \$30,000 of tax-payers money, you need to get more than one bid.

Mr. Wilson suggested Ms. Tatom read the policy manual, so she will see policy requires bringing three bids and that if there is only source, that should be stated on the blue sheet. Mr. Wilson asked if the Michigan Coalition of Essential Schools is who Kettering used and how that was going.

Ms. Fenton said they do not work with Kettering anymore, and explained they were funded through a CSRD grant and the grant ran out.

Ms. Stewart asked if this training will involve taking teachers out of the classroom. Ms. Fenton said for the most part, she does not believe teachers will be out of the classroom, but on occasion, teachers could be out of the classroom for an hour to an hour-and-a-half for training.

Ms. Stewart asked if the total services would be 40 hours of professional development and 12 days of support. Ms. Fenton said you just go when you have to go, you can meld 40 hours with the 12 days, but it is 40 hours and 12 days.

Mr. Blakita questioned if this is part of High Schools that Work. Ms. Tatom said this is one of their recommendations and these funds have to be spent by September 30<sup>th</sup>, or they go back to the State. She said the level the high school is at determines what areas monies can be used for.

#### Renaissance Learning

Ms. Tatom explained Renaissance Learning will provide math coach services and professional development for the high school. The Contract provides for four-days and 24 hours of professional development, helping teachers in the classroom. Funding will be provided for substitutes while teachers are in training.

Ms. Washington questioned how we know teachers are using what they are being taught. Ms. Tatom said you can pull up teachers' information to see what is being taught and what is being retained.

Mr. Smith asked exactly what they would be doing. Ms. Tatom said they will provide individual training by teacher, based on what they need to learn about, or small group training if more than one teacher is interested in the same topic.

#### Pacific Educational Group

Ms. Tatom presented the results of last year's MEAP scores, pointing out the different scores among African American and Caucasian students. She explained the Pacific Educational Group will continue the District's work on equity.

Ms. Stewart asked if the \$9,664 includes Ms. Hayes' first visit to the District. Ms. Tatom said it does. She added she is applying for a grant from the WISD for the administrators to address equity.

Ms. Washington asked what kind of plan was in place to address the equity issue. Ms. Tatom said there was no plan, and that was the problem. Ms. Washington said we are looking at the scores and they are systematically declining as the grade goes up. She also asked how teachers are being engaged in this process. Ms. Tatom said books have been purchased for every teacher that wanted one and principals are now receiving training to begin having conversations with their staff.

Ms. Stewart asked if we have looked at Cheney and Kaiser to see why they are achieving and the other schools are not. Ms. Tatom said she has her feelings about that, but she is not sure they are shared by everyone. Ms. Stewart said we need facts, not feelings to support that. Ms. Tatom responded this is why we need to have courageous conversations about this problem.

Ms. Stewart pointed out if you really look at the data you see some of our achievement gaps are not that big. Ms. Smith said he hopes Ms. Hayes looks at the achievement gaps at Cheney and Kaiser and at what they are doing there.

Ms. Williams said Barbara Ladewski has been tracking the students' progress and MEAP results at Kaiser in order to help teachers teach.

Mr. Wilson asked if the principals have started these discussions. Ms. Tatom said yes, you have to start with administration and that we need board approval for this.

Ms. Washington said whatever Ms. Tatom comes up with, she hopes it will be measurable. Ms. Stewart added the board needs to know the action plan and what is going on. Ms. Tatom said the MEAP scores are the only measurable data. Ms. Washington said she is talking about when a consultant comes in to develop an action plan it needs to be measurable, so the board can track the progress of the plan. Ms. Tatom asked if she meant the steps we are going to take. Ms. Washington said yes.

Mr. Wilson asked for a ballpark idea of when the teachers will start discussing this. Ms. Tatom said some principals are ready to start training now, some are not ready or feel their teachers are not ready, but that the middle school has already begun discussions.

Ms. Allen said part of the problem is some staff members are denying the achievement gap is really there, so you have to convince them through this data that this is a problem.

#### Finance

Dr. Houle presented the budget to date, including going over budget for interest expenses.

Mr. Smith said in reviewing the report he noticed operations and services spent more last year than other districts and asked if this is being looked at this year. Dr. Houle said this is a target area in the Deficit Elimination Plan. Mr. Smith

asked if this area has been analyzed and what we are going to do to fix it. Dr. Houle said the entire District budget is being analyzed and that the auditor noticed our costs in this area are higher than other districts of our size. Mr. Smith asked what is being done to fix this. Dr. Ciranna said we are not filling positions. Dr. Houle said the total number of square feet relative to the number of students is off the charts and we do not have the number of students needed to support the number of buildings we have.

Mr. Smith said \$1,201,234. was spent on contracted services and this needs to be looked at. Dr. Houle said the \$1,201,234 is what is still available for this line item and we have actually spent \$677,233. Mr. Smith questioned if we can look at doing things in-house rather than contracting them out. Mr. Wilson said some of these contracts are done to save money, rather than doing these things in-house.

Ms. Braxton asked where we should be percentage-wise at this point in time on line items. Dr. Houle said this varies according the line-item.

#### Discussion Items

##### Payment of Invoice – Solicitation of Bids

The board discussed the invoice for the invitation to bid advertisement for the Administrative Wing.

##### Approval of Hire – ROTC Instructor

Dr. Ciranna said approval of hire for Lt. Col. Wilbert W. Richardson will be presented at the next board meeting. As of now the salary has not been set, as it is based on the number of years of teaching experience, combined with a formula the military used to set a minimum salary. He added the Air Force will reimburse the District 50% of the agreed-upon salary.

##### Superintendent Search

Ms. Braxton said she has sent out requests for proposal for a firm to conduct the superintendent search and will be receiving proposals from the MASB and the Michigan Leadership Institute.

She explained the process will be a firm will come in and meet with the board and community to learn what we are looking for in our District leader and everybody will be involved. She said the firm hired will conduct the search and screen the applicants. She said the timeline is for someone to be in place by July 1<sup>st</sup> and that everyone will be posted as information comes in.

Mr. Blakita said that personally he does not think we need to go through this process.

##### Postings

Dr. Ciranna said the Math and ELA postings will come down on Friday and he hopes to conduct interviews next week. The postings for Assistant Middle School Principal, as well as the middle and high schools principal positions will be posted on Friday.

Mr. Smith asked if it is policy to have a selection committee for the hiring of administrators. He suggested including teachers, administrators, parents and maybe labor groups. He also requested that he be informed of who is selected for the committee.

#### Citizens' Questions

Mr. Stewart said Ms. Tatom's equity presentation was excellent and that he hopes the performance of the students at Cheney and Kaiser are being looked at. Mr. Stewart said he thinks we could learn a lot from these two schools and what they are doing could be used at other schools. He pointed out the achievement gap appears to be at the other three elementary schools that are a mix of black and white students.

Mr. Stewart said there had been consideration about having one principal between both the middle and high schools. Dr. Ciranna said this was brought up at Administrative Council and their advice because of so many issues not making AYP, and the lack of quality candidates was to continue the way we have. Dr. Ciranna said if there was a stand-out candidate who could handle both buildings, then consideration would be given to that possibility.

Mr. Stewart said he does not want to have to sue the school board to get them to comply with bylaws and read the MASB Compliance Rules regarding board members supervising employees. Mr. Wilson said when Dr. Ciranna was put into his position; the board by motion temporarily suspended policy and made the board the supervisor of Ms. Tatom. When a permanent superintendent is installed, the supervisory duties will revert to the superintendent. Mr. Stewart said in order to suspend the bylaws, there needs to be a vote. He added there are procedures you must follow to do this, including the vote to suspend bylaw/policy being listed on the agenda.

Ms. Allen said about two-years ago there was discussion about providing a low-band radio station for the Willow Run Community Schools' area and asked what happened with that idea. Mr. Wilson said he has researched this and it would cost about \$12,000 to do this and added he needs someone to spearhead this project.

Mr. Mark Wilde asked if we were successful in getting Willow Run students invited to the Martin Luther King, Jr., writing competition at Eastern Michigan University this year. Ms. Braxton said they are doing a writing competition this year, but are giving out scholarships to Lincoln and Ypsilanti High School students. She said they are discussing ways to work Willow Run students into this.

Ms. Fawn Martin asked how information is going to be relayed to parents about the High School Improvement Plan, so they can help their students at home. She also said in regards to the equity issues, when you have a group of professionals working together one-on-one you will get outstanding results. She said if we are going to look at equity and gear towards strengthening activities, it might be wise to look at getting coaches into each school to do distinct and individual things reflective of each school's individual culture.

Student Representative Comments

Mr. Greer asked if it was known the ninth-grade language arts teacher was leaving. Dr. Ciranna said she resigned at the last minute. Mr. Greer said he hopes everyone takes a lot of time to reflect on the District's situation.

He said the Robotics Team has begun their build games at General Motor and he is working with General Motors to schedule a date for the administrators and the board to come into General Motors to see what the Robotics Team does.

Mr. Greer said he hopes at future meetings we can fit in a five-minute presentation about what various student organizations are doing.

Mr. Greer said Redford Union Schools sent a student to observe him at the last meeting and asked him to come and speak with their board to help set up a student representative to the board.

Mr. Greer shared that Ms. Smith will have the access to student e-mail set-up by January 22<sup>nd</sup> and concluded his remarks by praising the advertisements going into the newspapers next week.

Board Comments

Mr. Smith said he thinks the ads going into the newspapers are great.

Ms. Stewart commended the high school for working together to prepare for test taking. She said public schools do not know the pains private schools take to prepare their students for testing.

Mr. Blakita asked if anymore Town Hall style meetings are being planned for. Dr. Ciranna said one will be held at Holmes Elementary on either the 22<sup>nd</sup> or 24<sup>th</sup> of the month.

Superintendent's Comments

Dr. Ciranna gave the following calendar updates to the board; there will be a special board meeting on January 25<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m., to review the pending finances and remaining projects for the Bond Project. He said mid-winter break will be the 16<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of February and Spring Break will be March 29<sup>th</sup> – April 5<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Ciranna said four departmental presentations will be coming to the board. These are transportation, maintenance and operations, athletics and the high school and middle school counseling departments.

President Braxton declared the meeting adjourned at 9:50 p.m.