

WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Ypsilanti, Michigan

SPECIAL MEETING

April 4, 2007

The regular meeting opened at 6:30 p.m. at Willow Run High School, 235 Spencer Lane, Ypsilanti, MI, 48198.

Those present were:

Claudette Braxton, President
Andreas Blakita, Vice President
Brenda Clay, Secretary
Travis Greer, Trustee
Clifford Smith, Trustee
Dorothy Stewart, Treasurer
Sheri Washington, Trustee

Members of the Administrative Council Present Included:

Ron Ciranna, J.D., Superintendent
Joe Ann Allen, Principal, Ford Elementary School
Rosalind Coffey, Principal, Holmes Elementary School
Donald Goven, Principal, Kettering Elementary School
David Houle, J.D., Controller
Laura Lisiski, Principal, Kaiser Elementary School
Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Regina Williams, Curriculum Facilitator

Citizens' Time

Rhonda McGill, Kettering Parent, spoke in support of the Focus Group's recommendation. Commenting we must be proactive. She said Willow Run needs to be in crisis mode and added to think we can grow our way out of this is wrong. People are moving their families to where the jobs are – and it's not Michigan.

Virginia Dakesian, Willow Run Alternative High School Teacher, read the attached letter concerning the Alternative Program.

Jamie Lagoe, Willow Run Middle School Teacher, commented that she has heard talk about moving all of the 6th graders out of the middle school. She said she believes if we were to do that – there would be serious problems. She encouraged the Board to read the research material she distributed to them last week.

Stanley Stewart, Cheney attendance area, commented tonight the Board will make the most important decision in the history of Willow Run Community Schools. He said the decision to close an elementary school is fought with enormous peril. He said all the data from districts that chose to close a school show they lost more students than they anticipated and in many cases found the loss was far greater than the savings. Additionally, he said, in talking with parents and neighbors, the

perceived problem is with the Middle School- yet there is nothing to address this issue in the Focus Groups Recommendation. Mr. Stewart said students are leaving the middle school in droves. He added that yes, the middle school did make AYP last year and that there needs to be a review of the middle school and the staffing before deciding to close an elementary school.

Mr. Stewart pointed out at the last board meeting, and again tonight, it was said the loss of students was due to the fact that families were moving out of Michigan. But in his review of the numbers, out of the 50 students who left Kettering in the last two-years, only two of them actually left the state, the rest went to neighboring or nearby school districts. He said as a matter of fact, it appears the enrollment at the elementaries has actually stabilized this year, with only 19 K-5 students lost this year; he said he believes 19 students can be gained and if we close a school we will lose approximately 60 students. He proposed if the Focus Groups' recommendation is passed tonight and he is right, he would donate \$5,000 to the Dollars-for-Scholars program, with the condition that the board members who support the school closing will resign after the September count is verified. He then asked the board if we have a deal.

Mr. Stewart said the cost of losing 60 students is approximately \$450,000, which equals the projected savings for closing a school. He said Ypsilanti has closed schools but not addressed the apparent structural problems in their budget and they are facing another 3.9 million dollar deficit for the 2007 school year.

Nathan Norman commended the Board for the job they are doing at this very difficult time. He encouraged them to be very thoughtful in making the change. He said he has had a very wonderful relationship with many of the schools and urged the board to please be mindful of the students and the community as they are talking about closing a school.

Ms. Braxton called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Reconsideration of Approval of Items

#06070313

Ms. Stewart moved that the three items voted on at last week's Work/Study Session: Technology, Approval of Purchase – Additional Cost – Mirrored Hard Drive, Approval of Purchase – Network Cooling System, and Approval of Out-of-State Field Trips – Toledo Zoo, be placed back on the agenda for consideration. Mr. Smith supported.

Ayes: 3

Nays: 4 – Motion Denied

Discussion

Ms. Stewart commented that the bylaws state that no action is to be taken on agenda items at a Work/Study Session. Ms. Braxton recommended waiting until the April 19th meeting, which will give us time to review the Open Meetings Act. Mr. Smith suggested that we not put it off, but go ahead and act on it tonight.

Mr. Smith said we have to make a decision tonight, adding we have several elementaries that are performing well. He said he thinks we can gain 75 students and we need to promote our District. He said we have not done that in the last couple of years at all. He added we are saving nothing by closing a school. He said he thinks we should have options on the North and South side for 6th grade and also at the middle school and that the middle school is performing. He said close Thurston, but not another school- at least for this next year.

Ms. Washington addressed Dr. Houle asking based on his assessment of our financial situation, what can he add to support or negate what has been said? Dr. Houle responded that our District is structured to house 3,600 students, but we have been losing students annually for the last several years. Now we have fewer than 2,400. He said we have identified three major areas to help address the deficit problem: reducing the health care benefit costs to the district, instructional expenditures, and staffing realignment, and if we are able to close Thurston and another building we can get close to the target.

Mr. Blakita said Mr. Smith has a number of items that need to be addressed. He said we need to close one additional building in addition to Thurston, but to take 6th grade back to the elementaries is leaving holes at the middle school. He said the high-tech infrastructure, and the teaching staff at the middle school creates a strong curriculum. He said he supports the Focus Group's recommendation as it is written, with 1 K-6 building, although he does not think we will find it to be advantageous to our district. It's all about enrollment. We are going to lose x number of students, other districts have lost students. He said his question is: were they all 5th going to 6th grade? In talking with parents and neighbors it was stated they can no longer stand the dysfunctional Board of Education and they will take their kids to Erickson. This is broader than a 6th grade issue.

Ms. Washington said this is not just about enrollment, adding from her perspective on this Board and as a former student of Willow Run the thing that is important to her is a quality education. She said it is about what the package of education will look like for those students still here and those that are yet to come, and that they leave here with the tools necessary to become successful in whatever it is that they choose to do. She question if we are giving them a fighting chance. She said we say this about kids, but she has not heard anything qualitative yet.

Mr. Greer said he sent out an e-mail to the Focus Group asking questions and Ms. Rhonda McGill's e-mail response mentioned the idea to close a school did not come from Administration, but from a group of parents at the table. In fact the original recommendation was to close two schools. He said he has a few concerns with closing Thurston for several reasons. If we close Thurston and move the Head Start program to another building, there will be many renovations needed to accommodate the program, because there are lots of regulations for running a Head Start program. Lincoln Schools is closing down their Head Start program. Our program is evaluated monthly by Washtenaw County, and next year there will be a National Evaluation. You only have 30 days after a problem is sited to fix it. If problems sited are not fixed, they will close the program. We

need to wait at least one year. It will take two - three years before you see the savings, because of the money we will need to spend renovating a building to accommodate the program. The savings to close Thurston is approximately \$250,000. He said he thinks we can cut staff and save that much. If we do close a building we need to reconfigure the district transportation immediately. Ypsilanti busses are coming into our neighborhoods and picking up our students. It is a reality and we have to work together - we have to be one. Closing a building is something that no one wants to do, but it is a reality. He said, he does not think closing Thurston will be a good idea.

Ms. Stewart commented that Dr. Houle stated what we will save, but not what we will lose. If we lose 60 students because we close a school, we have saved nothing. Willow Run is providing a great education for many students. We hate to see that disrupted. She would rather be like Ypsilanti - they come into our district and pick up our students, and we just give up and say why don't we close a building. There have been studies that have shown that sixth-graders do not handle the transition to middle school well. She said to give them an option.

Mr. Smith said that from a financial and educational point-of-view, the money we have here determines what kind of education and programs we offer. Ypsilanti has a \$3.9 million deficit, so they really have an infrastructure problem, because they have already closed schools. He said he spent a whole week analyzing staffing (salaries and hire dates). If we close a school, we will lose kids, and we will never get them back.

Amendment of Recommendation

#06070314 Ms. Stewart moved that the proposed recommendation from the Focus Group be amended to read that only Thurston be named as the building to be closed. All other buildings will remain open. Mr. Smith supported.

Ayes: Dorothy Stewart, Clifford Smith

Nays: Travis Greer, Sheri Washington, Andy Blakita, Claudette Braxton,
Brenda Clay - Motion Denied

Approval of Recommendation – Focus Group

#06070314 Mr. Blakita moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approves the attached Focus Group recommendation as presented at the Work/Study session of March 29, 2007. Ms. Clay supported.

Ayes: Travis Greer, Sheri Washington, Andy Blakita, Claudette Braxton,
Brenda Clay

Nays: Dorothy Stewart, Clifford Smith - Motion Approved

Meeting adjourned at 7:40 p.m.