

WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Ypsilanti, Michigan

WORK-STUDY SESSION

August 10, 2006

The work-study session opened at 6:00 p.m. at the Willow Run Administration Building, 2171 E. Michigan Avenue.

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

Members of the Administrative Council Present Included:

Ron Ciranna, J.D., Superintendent
David Houle, J.D., Director, Business Services
Katie Smith, Director, Technology and Community Services
Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment

President Braxton called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m.

Dr. Ciranna introduced Kathy Hayes, Executive Associate Co-Director of Leadership, MASB, to everyone, who he said was here to help create a more efficient, effective board and superintendent response and to help them learn to work together as a team. Dr. Ciranna recommended the board consider a full series of workshops to be held through the next year.

Ms. Hayes said the purpose of the work study session is to focus on issues specific to Willow Run and the best practices to use to overcome obstacles. She encouraged open, honest conversation among the board during this session and asked each board member to introduce themselves and to tell a little about them, their length of time on the board, what they are passionate about in Willow Run and their desired outcome for the meeting. The resulting, combined desired outcomes were:

- Being on the same page.
- Common goals.
- Better communication- honest information.
- Honesty.
- No Hidden Agendas.
- Effective teamwork.
- Accountability i.e. measures of accountability/visibility in everything being done.
- Not taking discussions personally.
- State differences with respect and dignity.

Ms. Hayes and the board, along with Dr. Ciranna, discussed the obstacles faced by board members, as well as the board's relationships with one another, which she said are reflected throughout the district. To start this process Ms. Hayes gave the board a "Togetherness Index" assessment, to evaluate where each member of the board sees the board as a whole as being, and to highlight the areas of agreement and differences.

The board then discussed the need to decide as a board what constitutes sufficient information to be included as information for decision-making in board packets for agenda items. Mr. Blakita shared Dr. Ciranna's idea of holding the first meeting of each month as a study session to review items to be voted on at the second meeting of the month. Ms. Hayes said part of a board member's responsibility is to contact the superintendent with questions they may have about information they receive and/or wish to receive to help with their decision-making process. Ms. Stewart suggested the board develop guidelines setting minimal items to be included for approval of agenda items.

Ms. Hayes then led the discussion to the need to develop board operating procedures and discussed the need to provide clear expectation to the superintendent, especially regarding controversial matters. She said there is a need to work together to develop a collective board voice, rather than individual voices.

The district's history and its impact on current board/superintendent relations, as well as the effect of trust among board members, on the process of working together, was the next topic of discussion. This led to a discussion of the board/superintendent vision for the district, which includes the areas of financial stability, providing the best education possible, and recouping lost students.

Ms. Hayes discussed the need for the board to buy-in to a collective vision for the district. The group discussed the status of the Strategic Plan, which was presented to the board, but due to financial woes, has not been fully adopted.

The need for administrators to report how they are moving forward toward goals, rather than presenting "fluff" to the board was stressed, by Ms. Hayes. She pointed out this is what becomes what is repeated throughout the district to staff, students, and the community as a whole, which creates a positive focus and highlights our strengths to the public.

Ms. Hayes said there is a need for existing board members to sit down with new board members to explain the norms of the board, or maybe to assign a mentor to new board members to help them in their development as board members.

Ms. Hayes said if the following four-items are in place, you will have an effective board:

1. Unity of purpose.
2. Understanding and agreement on the role of the board.
3. Collective values, norms, informal standards, and specific agreements regarding the district's governance.
4. Formal structures and processes must support the unity of purpose, role of the board, and norms and standards of the board culture.

The rate of turn-over among the superintendent and cabinet, along with the slow rate-of-change in educational institutions was discussed. Ms. Hayes said a high rate of superintendent turn-over (less than eight to ten years on the job), impacts the district in that effective change cannot take root. She added if a district has a succession plan in place this helps to overcome the obstacles in the way of long-term planning.

Dr. Ciranna said he will poll the board to get their opinion about holding further work-study sessions like this one.

President Braxton declared the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m.