

WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Ypsilanti, Michigan

WORK-STUDY SESSION

December 7, 2006

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
Joe Ann Allen, Principal, Ford Elementary School
Dr. David Houle, Controller
Neal Elyakin, Director, Special Education
Laura Lisiscki, Principal, Kaiser Elementary
Katie Smith, Director, Technology and Community Services
Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Regina Williams, Curriculum Facilitator

Citizens' Time

Mr. Doug Winters, who attended Willow Run Community Schools, from kindergarten through graduation, spoke about the hard times facing Willow Run. He said Willow Run has always been counted out by other people and referred to as the underdog; we've always had to fight harder to go on and achieve. Mr. Winters said it is our pride that has distinguished us from other school districts and that we all learned to get along thanks to our racial diversity and through this process formed lifelong friendships.

Mr. Winters said he attended this meeting to encourage the board to live up to the legacy they are entrusted with, to ensure the survival of the Willow Run school system through partnerships with the community, school body and businesses.

Mr. Winters said it is possible to have differences of opinion, but we don't want our neighbors sticking their noses into it. He added you don't air dirty laundry in public and urged the board to go back to our roots, to the beginning. He said as we face difficult times, to call upon our community, knock on doors, have a telethon, and call on your alumni. He said he is available to help.

Mr. Winters said he knows there are contract and other issues (the board is dealing with) he is not privy to, but said not to forget the fiduciary responsibility you are entrusted with.

Communications

Dr. Ciranna said the Work/Study Session scheduled for January 4, is during the time when the District is closed for the holidays and suggested either skipping the meeting entirely or holding back-to-back meetings on January 11th and 18th. The board discussed this and decided to hold meetings on both January 11th and 18th.

Curriculum

Community Relations Survey

Ms. Tatom shared the results of the recent Community Relations Survey. Of 152 respondents, 55% were Willow Run residents, 45% were not. The survey found the most important reason parents choose a school were 1) teachers, 2) curriculum, 3) location and 4) miscellaneous.

Ms. Tatom said the survey explored how well-informed citizens felt they were about the District and where they get their information; the web-site, mail or newspapers. Results showed citizens want more information about curriculum, board/administrative policies, athletics and extra-curricular activities.

The survey also asked how progressive the District is and how they viewed the quality of services.

Mr. Smith asked what we plan to do with the information and if there is a plan to address the weak areas. Ms. Tatom said she hopes to discuss this at the work/study session.

Ms. Stewart asked if we can mail this survey to Willow Residents, including those without children attending Willow Run. Ms. Tatom said a follow-up survey will be included in the *Paradigm*, which will be mailed out to the community. Ms. Stewart also asked if spot-surveys can be done in the community. Ms. Tatom said she will be happy to provide the survey to Ms. Stewart and asked her how many copies she will need.

Dr. Ciranna said we will be doing a paper survey, as well as a telethon this summer. Mr. Smith asked Dr. Ciranna to have the administrative team come up with ways to incorporate their concerns into the survey. He said we need to look at why students are leaving the District and that the key is the whole District-including teachers, administrators, custodians, and everybody. He said to ask them why Ypsilanti is picking up a lot of our students. Ms. Tatom said the elementary principals have tracked where their students went and that Town Hall meetings are being planned for each building.

Ms. Stewart asked why our students left. Ms. Tatom and Ms. Allen responded that job moves are the primary reason, along with moves to new homes outside of the District. Mr. Wilson added there are a lot of rental properties in the area and a lot of them are empty. He said his research indicates this is due to landlords pricing themselves into vacant housing, which is translating into lower enrollment in our District.

Equity Presentation

Ms. Tatom said the District is looking at literacy, numeracy and equity. Ms. Williams said one tool will be to train our staff in equity. Ms. Tatom shared the results of a staff survey about equity. Of 115 respondents, 83% feel race is an issue in Willow Run. When asked if there are gaps due to race and socio-economic status, most respondents said yes.

Ms. Clay discussed the need for administrators to have training in order to lead the staff in confronting this issue. Mr. Smith said we need to see what they are going to offer us and he hasn't seen anything to approve for training. Ms. Tatom said equity training is written into the consolidated grant application and the Intermediate School District is helping too.

Mr. Smith said the State wants to know how we are spending Title I and At-Risk monies and that when it is agreed to do something, to make sure it is on the priority list. He stressed we really need to look at how our Title and At-Risk monies are spent. Ms. Tatom said she recently gave the board paper copies of how grants are spent. Mr. Smith said the State wants to help us look at using At-Risk monies to solve our financial problems.

Title I – Grants

Ms. Tatom spoke about the School Improvement Grants the District has applied for. If the grants are received both the middle and high schools will receive \$40,000, with very specific allowed usages. The middle school grant will have to be used for the leadership team and the high school grant would have to be used for literacy and math coaching.

Ms. Stewart questioned if the grants were wrote this way, saying there are a number of different choices you can make for their usage and asking if Ms. Tatom made these choices. Ms. Tatom responded there is more to it than that. She said the middle school had building administrator changes and the high school had MEAP deficiencies. Ms. Stewart asked if they sent a grant saying you can only use Hamilton. Ms. Tatom said no and offered to e-mail copies of grants to the board.

Health Science Early College Grant – WCC

Rick Leyshock and two of his partners from the Washtenaw Intermediate School District presented the Health Science Early College program they are in the process of implementing. Mr. Leyshock said the grant is to be used by the RCTC consortium in working with community partners and the local districts eligible to participate include Lincoln, Willow Run, Ypsilanti and Whitmore Lake and that Milan has recently joined the consortium.

This program will combine middle school awareness, summer mentoring and enhancement opportunities and require academic and life preparation classes to prepare students for life after school and to help them earn college credits at no charge to the student. This program will be offered through Eastern Michigan University and Washtenaw Community College, but the students attending the Early College High School will still belong to Willow Run.

Students in the program will receive a learning centered education in a program emphasizing personal learning, allowing them to graduate high school with a diploma plus a technical certification or a two-year degree, students will also receive help attaining entry-level jobs or continuing their education at a four-year university.

The ISD will be working with faculty to implement this program within the next three-years.

Finance

Dr. Houle presented the board with a first draft of the Deficit Elimination Plan (DEP), which was originally due to the State by December 15th, but has now been extended to December 22nd.

Dr. Houle explained there was a \$1.8 million dollar deficit last year and the DEP allows the District one-year to correct this. He said by the third year of the DEP, the District has to generate a surplus and this will require sacrifice from every stakeholder in the District, as well as requiring cooperation from all bargaining units regarding health care. He said this will also mean reductions in staff.

Both Ms. Stewart and Mr. Smith said they were disturbed the DEP was not included in the board packet, rather than being handed-out at the meeting, as well as its being presented in a way that the audience can not see it. Mr. Smith asked how he can read this tonight and ask questions tonight. He said we are talking three-weeks and that is poor management. Dr. Houle said this plan mirrors what was presented in June, so there are no surprises.

Dr. Ciranna said the DEP is a very detailed document and Dr. Houle has been working diligently since he received the deadline for it. He said this will be discussed at the board workshop on the 16th and again on the 21st. Dr. Ciranna asked the board to take the time to read it over and said he and Dr. Houle are available anytime to discuss it.

Mr. Smith said we are in a dire situation and asked how we can make decisions without community input. He added we need to make certain we can do what we say we can do and this is pitiful.

Ms. Clay said everything here appears to be what we have discussed in the past. She said this is a living document and there is no need to point fingers, but to say this is in front of us and encouraged everyone to move on it.

Ms. Stewart requested being able to see copies of reports going to the State. Ms. Braxton said we will be talking about this particular document at the Saturday work/study session, but that this meeting is to talk about the audit.

Mr. Wilson said he noticed the DEP plans to continue to leave the Human Resources Director's position vacant. He said he thought we were waiting for other cost-saving options like building closing costs. Dr. Ciranna said we will be talking about his at the Saturday meeting.

Ms. Washington asked if there is an agenda for the Saturday meeting. Dr. Ciranna said we will have one; he and the board president will be meeting to put it together.

Mr. Smith said he knows it will be an open meeting on Saturday, but that when you are making changes the community needs to know about them. He said that is not the way you do things, and you should at least let the community know the suggestions. Ms. Braxton said we do plan to have a meeting to share the report with the community before it goes to the State.

Dr. Ciranna said Town Hall meetings will be scheduled at each building to discuss the DEP.

Mr. David Fisher, CPA, Rehman Robson, said the District's losses equaled \$1.6 million in 2004, \$2.2 million in 2005 and \$1.9 million this last year. He said the fund deficit is \$1.9 million in the hole and that there are 19 other Michigan School Districts in the same boat. He said he has looked at our financial situation and compared costs with Dearborn Heights and in comparison our health care costs are high. Mr. Fisher said we should be looking at increased contributions from employees, as well as increased deductibles.

Mr. Fisher also said our operation/maintenance costs are \$1,500 per student, based on the September 2005 student count, while one neighboring district spends \$909 and another district spends \$939 per student. He said this tells him operating and maintenance costs are relatively higher at Willow Run. He said these costs include utilities, maintenance and building costs. Mr. Smith said if we take \$550 times the number of students that is \$250,000. Mr. Fisher said Mr. Smith was right and said now we have to find out why.

Mr. Fisher said he looked at the DEP draft today and it looked sound. He said \$200,000 of Durant money can be spent this year. He said there are a lot of things like that, for you to cut without taking drastic measures. He said the District should look at grade-level buildings and try to avoid building closures and elimination of staff.

Ms. Stewart asked regarding the audit, if we lost money on class-size reduction, because funding was cut, or because we did not reduce class sizes? Mr. Fisher said that part of the audit was drafted by District management. Dr. Houle said any grant fund revenues and expenditures have to match-up. He said there was a reduction in this fund and he thinks it was used up. Mr. Wilson said it was the end of the grant and Ms. Clay added the grant was only for three-years. Ms. Tatom said the District met the criteria last year and she believes we met it again this year.

Mr. Smith said he asked Mr. Fisher for a comparison between us and other districts about their usage of Title I dollars. He said usage is based on documentation, particularly regarding At-Risk dollars. Mr. Smith said Detroit used more than \$10 million of At-Risk monies to solve their deficit problems and asked how we can do an even more efficient job of allocating funds.

Mr. Fisher said you have to be real careful with Title funds, if you try to identify additional areas where you can charge that grant – it will take away Title I teacher monies. Mr. Smith said the Curriculum Director charges 50% of her salary to grants, while people that work closer to students are not being charged to grants. He said \$3.6 million could be charged to grants if psychologists, social workers and counselors could be charged to them.

Dr. Houle said we may disagree with how we are spending money now, but what charging these items to grants would mean is items now grant funded will either go away, or will become a burden on the general fund.

Mr. Smith said we spent \$300,000 on Ron Clark and maybe that was a good way to spend it, maybe not, when we are in a budget crunch.

Dr. Houle said the categories Mr. Smith listed are all special education categories, which are offset by special education funding. Mr. Smith said before we take drastic measures, we need to clean-up internally. He said we should call Detroit and ask them how they did it.

Ms. Braxton said she agrees if there is a way to spend our money more prudently we should. She asked Mr. Smith to get her the number and the name of the contact person in Detroit. Mr. Smith said he (Dr. Ciranna) is sitting right next to you. Dr. Ciranna said he actually did ask Mr. Smith to get him the number and he still waiting for Mr. Smith to get this meeting set up.

Ms. Washington said we need to get a meeting on the calendar and if the board is given all of the needed information, she thinks they can understand it. She said she doesn't want to come to another meeting to hear the same old thing. She asked when we can put an agenda on the table and discuss it.

Ms. Braxton this is not getting our questions answered. She said we want to be able to understand, so we can do our own analysis. She said this is not what she expected and that she is disappointed.

Dr. Ciranna said he e-mailed the board asking for specific questions and received responses from only two people with general questions.

Ms. Washington said the board has not even sat down and discussed the information in the audit. Ms. Stewart said we need more detail before they can discuss this. Mr. Smith said it is not about the audit firm, that we should be able to get information from the superintendent and the business office. He said if we want to hire Mr. Fisher to do an analysis of our finances fine, but it is all right here in our District.

Ms. Stewart said in the auditor's management letter they talked about internal controls in payroll processing, with someone else, besides the payroll clerk, looking at the register. She said she believes it was suggested Dr. Houle look at it. Dr. Houle said this has not been eliminated yet, and there was also a separate recommendation of signing off on check registers.

Ms. Stewart said there is also an internal control problem with the superintendent also being the Director of Human Resources.

Ms. Braxton said the board needs the option to look at the break-down of the budget.

Dr. Houle said the DEP is not intended to look at last year's budget, but is intended to address the deficit. He said nobody has ever asked him for a listing of restricted funds and he will be glad to provide this listing. Mr. Smith asked for the same listing for At-Risk funds.

Dr. Houle said the focus of the DEP needs to be a perspective and tens of millions of dollars will not be found in grant funds. Mr. Smith said Detroit did it. Dr. Houle said information about Detroit doing this has not been found and the District has looked into this. Ms. Braxton said we need more specific information (names and numbers), so we can get the information Mr. Smith is asking for.

Ms. Braxton said the board needs to talk about how it wants to address these issues. She said what she is hearing is we need to take a closer look at the budget to see what needs to be cut. Mr. Smith said we need to look at staffing, independent contractors, as well as buildings and grounds and that he has already asked to have our energy situation looked at.

Mr. Wilson said he would like to see those three categories Mr. Smith just mentioned and he would like the board to sit down, just among them, so they can let administration know what they are asking for. He said this should be a scheduled meeting, with an agenda. He said the board can't just ask for things, the central office staff is already cut to the bone and it takes them time and money to answer the board's requests.

Ms. Braxton said the board needs to settle on three-four areas to look at including:

- 1) Staffing
- 2) Independent Contractors
- 3) Operations and Maintenance (Buildings and Grounds)

Mr. Smith asked if supporting services are being charged properly. Ms. Stewart asked for grant information. Mr. Fisher said this is At-Risk and Title I. Ms. Tatom said we can use the money differently, but that would mean eliminating social workers, Deputy Boivin, and Alternative Education. Ms. Braxton said the board is not look at eliminating, but just looking, that's all.

Mr. Blakita asked if the State would consider granting another extension to the District for the filing of the DEP, maybe until sometime in January. Dr. Houle said he can certainly ask. He said when we talked about his last June, we talked about building trust with the State and at that time he said this would be a horrific experience for the District. He said he thinks we will be asking for favors along the way, so his recommendation would be that we hold off a little bit, that we

make a good-faith effort with this first filing. He said to get to that point we need to get this DEP filed and if we think we are at some kind of block down-the-road, then we can ask for an extension.

Ms. Braxton reminded everyone this is not the first time they have seen this document. Dr. Houle added the first time was in June- saying the basic framework was there. Ms. Braxton said the board has three other opportunities to discuss this at the meetings of the 14th, 16th and 21st. Ms. Washington asked everyone to have all of the information they need for their focal points, so they can dive right in and discuss them.

Discussion Items

Payphones

Mr. Blakita asked who will make the money from the payphones proposed for approval at the next meeting. Ms. Smith said the District will. She explained the installation of these payphones is part of the bond, but the original installer went bankrupt, so they are just now being put in. She said they will be part of our current phone system.

Whiteboards

Mr. Wilson said he thought all of the high school whiteboards were installed. Ms. Smith said seven whiteboards have been installed at the high school, and after discussion with high school administration and the curriculum department they wanted to have more whiteboards installed.

Physical Therapy Contract

Ms. Braxton asked if the addendum to the Physical Therapy Contract is an additional \$58,000. Mr. Elyakin said this is an additional expense, because the students need more therapy than was originally hoped for. He said we wanted to evaluate the students' needs once the new school year was underway, and we do have a need for additional services.

SASIXp Software

Ms. Clay asked what the SASIXp Software is for. Ms. Smith explained this is the annual maintenance agreement renewal. This motion is for approval of updates for the State court.

Kingscott Invoice

Mr. Smith said initially we paid the architect a percentage of the total of the bond and asked if we are still working on this agreement. Mr. Wilson said this states this is the final bill.

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Approval of Suspension – WRMS

Ms. Clay moved that the Willow Run Board of Education suspend the student presented for suspension on December 7, 2006, through the end of the first semester, returning on the first day of the second semester of January 2007. Mr. Blakita supported.

Ayes: Mr. Wilson, Ms. Washington, Ms. Stewart, Mr. Smith,
Mr. Blakita, Ms. Clay, Ms. Braxton
Nays: 0 – Motion Carried

Citizens' Questions

Carol Blackburn, Willow Run resident and employee, said she has had many of the same discussions at home that Mr. Winters spoke about tonight, with her husband, a former board member. She said her husband told her the board is responsible for monitoring money. She said she is begging the board to do all they can to add, subtract, multiply and divide for the kids of Willow Run. She also stated she is insulted that she has not seen the DEP as either a union member or as a member of the Budget Task Force.

Ms. Allen, principal of Ford Elementary School, said as the board was talking, she noticed a part of the audience would applaud and then someone else would say something and another part of the audience would applaud. She asked if we can please all work together to do this and not be in one faction or another.

Christina Oliver, Ford and Willow Run Middle School parent, said she agrees with Mr. Smith's comments about the community needing more input. She said there should have been a plan put in place three-years ago, when the subject of closing a building first came up. Ms. Oliver also said Willow Run needs incentives to draw people here and said it was a mistake to take foreign language classes out of the elementary schools. She said foreign language should be mandatory and the students here should not be short-changed. She asked what we are doing to keep the students here.

Ms. Oliver said things have improved at the middle school this year, but she does notice more work needs to be done to help students want to excel. She asked what is going to be done to help keep children from falling through the cracks.

Fawn Martin, Willow Run parent, said she loves this District. She said the information the Budget Task asked for was not adequate or made accessible to them. She said the future is staring us in the face and we as a community still don't know what we need to do to assist the District. She said she wishes the community knew what the DEP was, so they could ask questions. She said the Early College program is promising and it will be a benefit to no longer have to take the students out of the district. She said it will put students in a position to choose to succeed and give them options. She asked the board to please take an extensive look at this program for our students.

Ms. Martin also asked if the community could see some numbers and assemble as a team. She said the community needs to become more aggressive in approaching

Renee Smith, Willow Run teacher and resident, thanked the *Ann Arbor News*, for writing the wonderful article about Cheney that appeared in last Sunday's paper. She encouraged other principals to invite the press into their building to spend a day at their schools to toot their own horns. She said we need to be proactive, rather than reactive and that we all need to work together, because we are all invested here. Ms. Smith said she is excited about the EAC, because it is a wonderful opportunity for our students.

Ms. Lisiscki said she wants it noted that she has had to arrive at the last two board meetings late; for the meeting at Holmes, she was late due to conferences in her building and tonight because of her school's Literacy Night. She said 6:30 is a little soon to hold these meetings.

A citizen in the audience thanked the board for acknowledging the work that needs to be done and asked when the Town Hall meetings will begin. Dr. Ciranna said information about the meetings will probably be sent home on Monday. She also encouraged the board to develop a vision and a plan and to tell parents why to keep their kids in Willow Run. She also reminded everyone of the Kettering Winter Sing next Thursday.

Ms. Tatom said the board and administration needs to have a courageous conversation about grant funding and usage as it continues to be discussed time and time again. She stated that there are comments being made that are untrue to the staff and community regarding the usage of grant funds. One comment mentioned in a prior meeting was that grant funds were not being used and being sent back. Ms. Tatom assured everyone that grant money is being used and has not been sent back. Ms. Tatom further explained some grants can only be used for professional development and since she does a lot of professional development, her salary can be partially paid by grants. She also explained that in most districts the curriculum director's entire salary is paid out of the general fund. In addition, each time staff or community members contact the state, central office is notified. The district's Title I grants will be audited in May. Ms. Tatom explained you have to be very specific about documenting grant usage. She said you can tweak how funds are spent, but you have to be very careful about it.

Ms. Tatom further explained some grants can only be used for professional development and since she does a lot of professional development, her salary can be partially paid by grants.

Mr. Winters said what he heard tonight is a board very in-tune with finances. He asked how they rectify that and deal with the DEP? He said the board members need to remember that questions are not necessarily meant to do away with your rationale, but rather to have you consider every option. He said it is important to keep in mind the need to reassess and re-evaluate, so you are open to hearing good thoughts. He urged the board to trust the professionals, administration, community and teachers, saying we are in this together.

Student Representative Comments

Mr. Greer said there was an article in today's *Ann Arbor News* about the upcoming Drum-Line Competition and he would like to see more articles like this. He also thanked those who have been buying from the Robotics' bake sale and said the team also has Crispy Cream Donuts for sale for \$5.00 a box.

Mr. Greer said there is good news to share and that is the math teacher position has been posted, he said the bad news is there is no EMU student coming to tutor students.

Mr. Greer shared the news that Col. VanVleck has resigned from the District and that MSgt. Eddy, along with Col. Buley have been working with the ROTC cadets. He said the District already has a prospective replacement for Col. VanVleck.

Mr. Greer said he met with Ms. Smith to discuss the problems with the District's security cameras and encouraged her to press on ICOM to correct these problems. He said Ms. Smith also assured him she will have the student e-mail accounts set-up by the end of the year.

Mr. Greer said the next meeting of Students/Superintendent Working Together to Make High School a Better Place will be on December 20th at 7:00 p.m.

The Robotics Team made a 10-minute presentation at the Ypsilanti Chamber of Commerce First Tuesday Breakfast this week. Mr. Greer said great things are coming out of Willow Run and said we need to get out and get support from the business community to help pay for the Robotic Team's events. He said he already has a couple of businesses who have committed to helping.

Board Comments

Ms. Clay said the Varsity Basketball Team won their game last night. She also shared the scores table, with display advertising, will be delivered for games beginning next semester. She said advertisers can purchase ads for display on the table boards, which will also be displayed on the screen.

Ms. Clay also thanked everyone for their prayers, flowers, and visitations upon the passing, last week, of her mother.

President's Comments

Ms. Braxton said Willow Run is going to be okay as long as we stay positive and work together. She reminded everyone they are invited to the meetings of the 14th and 16th.

Superintendent's Comments

Dr. Ciranna said Travis Greer is a great spokesperson for the District and an ambassador for Willow Run. Dr. Ciranna said General Motors invited the administrators to their plant and he will work with the *Ann Arbor News* to write an article about General Motors and their sponsorship of the Robotics Team.