

WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Ypsilanti, Michigan

REGULAR MEETING

December 21, 2006

The regular meeting opened at 6:30 p.m. at Kettering Elementary School, 1633 Knowles, Ypsilanti, MI, 48198, with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

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
Rosalind Coffey, Principal, Holmes Elementary School
Neal Elyakin, Director, Special Education
Don Goven, Principal, Kettering Elementary School
Dr. David Houle, Controller
Katie Smith, Director, Technology
Lana Tatom, Director, Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment
Regina Williams, Curriculum Coordinator

Kettering Elementary Report

Two Kettering students welcomed the board and introduced their principal, Don Goven who highlighted Kettering's educational program via a PowerPoint presentation. The program illustrated the instructional challenges facing the Kettering staff from 2004-2006. These challenges include staff reductions, the MEAP window changing, lowered MEAP results, building and District assessment, and achievement gaps that are both gender and ethnic based.

Mr. Goven said there is a need to increase certainty towards instruction and said the Kettering staff has collected data and worked collectively to enhance, improve and increase student and staff performance, as well as to identify available resources. Mr. Goven cited the following as some of the resources the Kettering staff has identified: the staff and parents, instructional consultation and the Leadership and Design Teams, the Leadership Academy and equity action. Using these resources the Kettering staff has developed a professional development plan and a yearly calendar.

The Kettering students read the book *Willow Run*, by Patricia Riley Gibb, which is the story of a girl named Meggie, whose family moved to Willow Run during WWII and whose brother Eddie went off to fight the war. Using this book as a catalyst, the students performed a skit about the Willow Run of yesteryear, through current times.

After the performance the audience was permitted to ask questions of the students regarding what they learned the skit. The students said they learned Willow Run used to be a village, that it had its own business center and there was a river named Willow Run. The skit was written by Ms. Schwartz and her students during the 60th Anniversary Celebration.

Ms. Braxton praised Mr. Goven and the Kettering staff for their performance and thanked them for sharing the challenges they are facing with the board.

Citizens' Time

Mr. Stanley Stewart, of the Cheney attendance area, said he and his wife Dorothy, attended the play at the high school last Saturday night and were impressed by the commitment of the students and of the staff who volunteered to help with the production. He said there are a lot of good things going on in Willow Run and spoke of the excellent job the basketball team is doing this season. Regarding the equity presentation, Mr. Stewart said he could not find a contract or a resume for the presenter. He then asked if at some point he could be told the cost and be provided the presenter's resume.

Ms. Quigley read an ad the teachers placed in the *Paradigm* giving a shout-out to the parents who allow them to educate their students.

Ms. Dakesian said the greenhouse the board recently approved for the Alternative High School, has been started. Volunteers from Growing Hope and a volunteer carpenter worked on the project.

Ms. Marlo Bearman, Willow Run teacher and parent, said decisions made during a crisis carry a heavy responsibility. Regarding the proposed potential changes to the sixth-grade classrooms, she said no one has asked the sixth grade staff what they think. She added pulling sixth-grade students out of the middle school is just a stop-gap.

She said the middle school has been dealing with constant, unpredictable changes and the promises made about the middle school did not last more than seven-months. She said a community building is what leads to success.

Ms. Karen Walker, Willow Run teacher and member of the negotiating team, protested the proposed changes in health care saying the teachers anteed up a year-ago and again last week, and their offers were not accepted either time. She compared this to going to a red kettle to put a couple of dollars in and being told it is not enough. She said she is not sure she would still want to donate. Ms. Walker said the teachers have given major concessions and it is not fair to take the deficit off of the teachers' backs.

Mr. Mark Wilde, Willow Run parent, said the school board has a very difficult set of choices to make and it will not be possible to please everyone. He urged everyone that if they do not like the decisions made not to pull their students from Willow Run, because this would guarantee the failure of the District.

Ms. Rhonda McGill, Kettering PTO parent, said Kettering is doing fine and addressed recent rumors, comments and questions, saying the Kettering staff is among the best in the District and that Principal Don Goven is a man of integrity and honesty, who follows rules and procedures. Regarding enrollment drops she explained Kettering is surrounded by rental properties, with some streets having as many as 65% rentals. She said this is a transient population, but that the Kettering staff sticks to its motto of, "Learning for all, whatever it takes."

She said the challenges before Willow Run are great and spoke about a meeting she and other parents had with Dr. Ciranna to discuss these challenges. She said the meeting was productive and the community shared their concerns and ideas without making attacks. In the end the group agreed to disagree and to still respect one another. She said the parents feel the vision of the District has been lost and told the board to make their decisions, but not to take them lightly.

President Braxton called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m.

Additions to the Agenda

Dr. Ciranna added the following item to the agenda:

Item IV.C. - Acceptance of Recommendation for Suspension

Dr. Ciranna also pointed out the replacement blue sheet for item VI.B.2.

Approval of the Agenda

#06071201 Ms. Clay moved that the Board of Education accept the agenda as amended. Ms. Stewart supported.

Ayes: 7

Nays: 0 –Motion carried

Approval of Minutes

#06071202 Ms. Clay moved that the Board of Education approves the minutes as presented from the special meeting of November 14, the regular meeting of November 16, and from the work/study sessions of December 7 and December 14, as well as the retreat of December 16, 2006. Mr. Wilson supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Approval of Payment of Bills

#06071203 Ms. Stewart moved that the Board of Education approve the following General Fund checks, check #42826 through and including check #43211 with the exception of voided checks as noted on page 21 of the General Fund Check Register for the amount of \$3,317,179.44; and Building & Site check #1464 through and including check # 1469 for the amount of \$14,616.87. Ms. Clay supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Communications

Student Representative Comments

Mr. Greer gave the following updates about the goings-on in the District:

- the high school play was excellent and went off without a hitch
- the basketball team is doing well with a 5:1 record
- the National Honor Society and Science Club went caroling in the community last Sunday
- A great Town Hall meeting was held on Tuesday, with many issues brought up.

Mr. Greer said the board has to work together with the community and move on. He said at the next session he will discuss issues the seniors are having with dual-enrollment at Washtenaw Community College. He concluded his comments by wishing everyone a happy holiday.

Acceptance of Donation – Kaiser Elementary

#06071204 Mr. Smith moved that the Willow Run Board of Education accept the donation of sports equipment, backpacks, hats, mittens, socks, underwear and t-shirts in the amount of \$2,000 to Kaiser Elementary School, from Kappa Delta Pi, University of Michigan. Mr. Wilson supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Acceptance of Recommendation - Suspension

#06071205 Mr. Blakita moved that the Willow Run Board of Education suspend the student presented to them for suspension on November 2, 2006 at 5:45 p.m., for 30 days. Ms. Clay supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Approval of Renewal of Contract - AFJROTC

#06071206 Mr. Smith moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approve the renewal of the Contract with the Department of the Air Force as attached, for the continuation of the AFJROTC Program at Willow Run High School. Mr. Wilson supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried.

Acceptance of Recommendation - Suspension

#06071207 Ms. Clay moved that Willow Run Board of Education suspend the student presented for expulsion on December 21, 2006 at 6:00 p.m., until further investigation for threats to a school employee. Ms. Stewart supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Equity Presentation

Ms. Tatom introduced Dr. Cynthia Hayes of the Pacific Educational Group, who shared a presentation about equity with the board. Ms. Tatom said the county will support the District with a \$3,000 per year grant to be used for equity education.

Dr. Hayes said it is necessary to have courageous conversation and leadership about equity. She spoke about institutional racism in schools and how to target and focus on all students achieving at high levels. Dr. Hayes said studies show if students are taught at high levels, they will achieve at high levels and if the board, the superintendent, the administrators and the teachers believe in children's abilities, they will achieve.

She said the role of the school board leaders is a moral obligation and they need to move courageously in leading the District, to ensure economically justifiable, properly chosen, well-targeted results through policy-driven leadership.

Dr. Hayes will work with teachers and administrators to deepen the interracial dialogue, by talking about equality, empowerment, equity and anti-racism. She will do this at the December 22nd, District-wide Professional Development Day.

Discussion

Mr. Smith said Ann Arbor has addressed achievement gaps and he does not know where we stand. Mr. Smith requested information be presented to the board about this. Ms. Tatom showed some MEAP test results and said the gap is more predominate at the middle and high schools, as evidenced by minority students exiting high school with 8th grade skills and Caucasian students exiting with 12th grade skills. She said the gap is not as noticeable at the elementary levels and this follows national trends.

Ms. Braxton said other disciplines are also looking at the issue of equity. She said this is a nation-wide issue and she is not suggesting white people are intentionally doing anything, it's just everyday actions, just life, and you may view things through a different lens. She said this needs to be looked at from a strength-based perspective.

Ms. Stewart said we have some schools where all children are performing well and we should look at what they are doing.

Mr. Smith asked if we know our kids leave the District at 6th grade, who is going to the middle school. He said we have our high achievers going elsewhere and we need to provide support for the struggling kids.

Ms. Washington said if we are going to start categorizing our kids she wants to see qualitative data supporting this.

Ms. Stewart said she does not recall seeing a contract or a resume for Dr. Hayes. Ms. Tatom said Title IIA, provides \$9,600 for equity training and Dr. Hayes' presentation will cost \$3,000. She said she did not bring this cost to the board, because it did not exceed the \$5,000 threshold. She said Dr. Hayes may be brought back again in February for NAAPID day and if the \$5,000 threshold is exceeded this will be brought to the board for approval.

Approval of Installation - Payphones

#06071208 Ms. Clay moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approves purchase order #0760D, attached, to Communications Infrastructure Resources, Inc. (CIR) for installation of three (03) payphones and corresponding cabling in the middle school, totaling \$1,525. This item is to be charged to the 2001 Building and Site Fund. Mr. Smith supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Approval of Payment – SASI Software Support

#06071209 Mr. Smith moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approve payment of the invoice totaling \$11,735 to NCS Pearson, Inc. for software support. Ms. Clay supported.

Ayes: 7

Approval of Contract Revision – Physical Therapist

#06071210 Ms. Stewart moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approves the Amended Pediatric Therapy Associates Contract for services for the 2006-2007 school year, in the not to exceed amount of \$58,924. Mr. Blakita supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Approval of Deficit Elimination Plan

#06071211 Ms. Clay moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approves the Deficit Elimination Plan as presented. Mr. Blakita supported.

Ayes: 7 – Mr. Wilson, Ms. Washington, Ms. Stewart, Mr. Smith,
Mr. Blakita, Ms. Clay, Ms. Braxton
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Discussion

Dr. Houle reviewed the Deficit Elimination Plan (DEP) document, which he amended to include the citizen and staff concerns.

Mr. Smith said the District over-hired in the two-years after the buy-out. He also said there needs to be more marketing of the District, considering the tremendous growth in the District. He said we need each building to go out and we need to place ads in the paper. He added people need to know what we do here. He also said whatever the middle school needs from the board, in order to succeed, they should come to the board and ask for.

Ms. Stewart said we need to put together our own public relations and mentioned the recent drum line competition, after which nothing was written about it in the papers.

Ms. Washington said these are some of the things she put in her marketing plan. She said we need to let people know who we are and somebody has to be accountable. She said marketing has to be part of a coherent and deliberate plan and that is how the numbers in the DEP can be realized.

Ms. Braxton said this is a priority we have to set as part of our budget and that we cannot expect the teachers to do this, because they need to teach. Mr. Wilson added that part of doing marketing is not necessarily money, part is holding people accountable.

Mr. Greer said after Dr. Benit left, the marketing fell off. Ms. Braxton said Dr. Benit spent money on marketing that was not planned for.

Dr. Ciranna said he wanted to emphasize that the District is listening to people and community and board input was included in the DEP. He

Ms. Stewart said the board needs to commit to not closing buildings and not going to grade-level buildings. Mr. Blakita said we need to get input from as many sources as we can.

Mr. Smith added the community needs to realize we are not going to do anything to make students leave this District and closing schools would probably do that. Ms. Stewart said we are in a different situation than we used to be in, that now any student can leave any day to go to an academy.

Mr. Blakita said the minute we come back from break we need to start working on the DEP. Ms. Stewart added there is a sense of urgency and the board needs detailed financial data and they need to meet more than twice a month to work on this.

Ms. Braxton asked the board to list their ideas and input in an e-mail and to send it to both her and Dr. Ciranna, so they have a concrete place to start.

Approval of Payment - Kingscott

#06071212 Mr. Wilson moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approve payment of the Kingscott Associates, Inc. invoice for architectural and engineering services in the amount of \$22,101.99. Mr. Blakita supported.

Ayes: 7
Nays: 0 – Motion carried

Discussion

Mr. Wilson and Mr. Smith requested an update showing the status of the bond monies and projects. Dr. Ciranna will present this next month.

Approval of Payment – SEHI – Whiteboards, WRHS

#06071213 Ms. Stewart moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approves a purchase order to SEHI, totaling \$69,472.32 for the purchase and installation of projectors, interactive whiteboards, and classroom sound systems in the high school. These items are to be charged to the 2001 Building and Site Fund. Mr. Smith supported.

Ayes: 6
Nays: 1 – Mr. Wilson - Motion carried

Approval of Sabbatical Leave – Theresa Perlin

#06071214 Ms. Clay moved that the Willow Run Board of Education approve the six-month sabbatical leave of absence for Ms. Theresa Perlin, the District Occupational Therapist, for the remainder of the 2006-2007 school year, beginning on January 1, 2007 and ending on June 30th, 2007. Mr. Wilson supported.

Ayes: 7

Citizens' Questions

Mr. Stewart said he has problems with Ms. Hayes, in that he does not know how the District is going to pay her, with no purchase order and he does not know if the \$3,000 includes her flights. He said if she is going to come in again, to do it right, do a contract, listing expectations and deliverables. Mr. Stewart said we are in a deficit situation now, and this may be grant monies, but we need to be better Shepards of the money. Mr. Stewart added that last year some guy came in and did the schedules at the high school at a cost of more than \$5,000 and nothing was brought to the board.

Ms. Braxton replied to Mr. Stewart's comments saying she believes in this particular situation, board policy was followed. Mr. Stewart responded the intent of the policy is not for large figures to be broken up into small pieces to get what you want. Ms. Braxton said she assumes no wrong-doing on the part of the employees. Mr. Stewart said we had an employee spending thousands of dollars buying tinker toys and the District assumed Mr. Benit was not doing anything wrong either. Ms. Braxton pointed out that Dr. Benit is no longer here.

Ms. Fawn Martin, Willow Run parent said Mr. Stewart needs to stop using someone's name that is not here to defend himself. She also said it is time to stop slandering his name, because it is a done deal and repeated it is time to stop.

Ms. Martin said she is glad parents come out and said their piece was heard. She said each elementary school has its own culture and identity and the middle school does too. Ms. Martin said this situation is not a current problem, that it has been in existence for years and now we are dealing with it, can identify it and can change it. She continued, saying she hopes parents continue to come out to assist with change and that this District can continue, because we are too small to die.

Christine Warren, Willow Run teacher, asked for an itemized list of employees who took the buy-out, their salaries and their positions. She also requested a list of new-hires who took their places. She also inquired who is responsible for public relations in the District. Ms. Braxton told her all members of administration are responsible for public relations and have to share in it. She added we need to develop a plan to make sure the public relations plan gets implemented. Ms. Braxton added in regards to the buy-out, we had about 44 people leave us and 20 were brought back. In terms of savings a great deal of the new hires came in at entry-level pay. She said we just finished paying off the buy-out, so now we will see the savings from it.

Superintendent's Comments

Dr. Ciranna gave each board member a copy of *if You're Riding a Horse and it Dies Get Off.*" Dr. Ciranna said people say Willow Run is the same as it was in the 60's, in the 70's, in the 80's and 90's. He said it is time to embrace change. Dr. Ciranna said he is looking forward to working as a group to make Willow Run better than it is already is.

Board Members' Comments

Mr. Greer said the Robotics Team will be partnering with W4 Country at 6:30 a.m., at Brairwood Mall to collect Toys for Tots. He said the National Honor Society also collected toys and they were wrapped and distributed today. Mr. Greer urged the members of the press in attendance at the meeting to please take note of the good things we have to offer.

Ms. Clay said she wanted to give uplifts to the basketball team, who is displaying excellent team work, as shown in their 5:1 record. Ms. Clay said we need to promote the District and to honor all staff as a group. She reminded everyone of the Athletic Booster Raffle saying the drawing will be held on January 16th. Tickets are available for \$5. each from the Athletic Boosters and all proceeds will go to benefit athletic groups.

President Braxton declared the meeting adjourned at 9:48 p.m.