

RECORD OF PROCEEDINGS

ARAPAHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT NUMBER SIX

Littleton, Colorado BOARD OF EDUCATION Minutes of Special Meeting

November 6, 2008

Call to Order

President Bob Colwell called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the Boardroom of the Education Services Center, 5776 South Crocker Street.

Present

Bob Colwell, President
Sue Chandler, Secretary
Renée Howell, Vice President
Lucie Stanish, Treasurer
Mary Nichols, Assistant Secretary

Others in Attendance

Connie Bouwman, Assistant Superintendent of Learning Services
Lucinda Hundley, Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services
Kirk Madsen, Assistant Superintendent of Operations
Scott Murphy, Superintendent
Mike Owens, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources

Discussion

Facility Use Task Force Recommendations

Mr. Colwell provided an overview of this evening's presentation. He noted that the Facility Use Task Force presented its recommendations to the Board on October 23, and the Board had further discussion at a workshop on October 27. At that time the Board requested further information from administration regarding the recommended options. Mr. Kirk Madsen, assistant superintendent of operations, will present the information requested by the Board; citizens who have signed up will have an opportunity to speak, and the Board will continue its discussion.

Mr. Colwell provided an historical perspective that led to the need to address capacity issues in schools. He noted that building usage was discussed in the 1980s and North Elementary School was closed in 1987. Since that time other studies of educational capacity and boundaries have occurred, along with demographic studies. In December 2007, the Board formed and charged the Facility Use Task Force to look at the issue of facility use. Mr. Colwell said one of the findings of the task force was that the district has about 2,000 empty seats at the elementary level. He also explained that the district's Strategic Plan calls for optimizing use of district resources and facilities to meet student learning needs and operating the district most efficiently.

Mr. Colwell said the task force looked at the capacity issues and developed recommendations that align with Board values for equity in the delivery of instruction, particularly in the "specials" areas of art, music, physical education, media/library, and gifted/talented; and in offering choice to parents, which means

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having at least two classes at each grade level. The task force also considered the value of providing high quality personnel.

Mr. Colwell said the task force had a well-rounded membership and thanked task force members for their work. He also expressed thanks to Mr. Madsen for his work to support the task force, and thanked administration for their work as well.

Mr. Colwell explained that the Board will not make a decision tonight and anticipates the Board will be ready to make a decision at its regular meeting on November 13. He recognized that the uncertainty is not pleasant and any decision will have a broad effect across the district. He thanked parents and the community for their input and willingness to express their feelings. He said the Board is trying to do what is best for kids and maintain high quality education in Littleton Public Schools.

Mr. Scott Murphy, superintendent, thanked Mr. Madsen and the Board for their work on this difficult issue. He noted that LPS has always been willing to face tough challenges and said LPS is and will continue to be a great place for kids.

Mr. Madsen presented a summary of the work done by administration in response to requests from the Board at its October 27 workshop. He said the four elementary schools remaining under consideration are Ames, Highland, Hopkins, and Whitman. Mr. Madsen described the additional analysis that has been done, which includes reviewing elementary classroom usage, combining enrollments from the sending school with the receiving school, evaluating transportation, and considering needs for special education programs currently housed in the four schools under consideration.

Mr. Madsen described the possible combinations of schools that could be closed and repurposed, and which schools could accommodate students from these schools while keeping neighborhoods together. The analysis of these combinations included anticipated enrollment at the receiving schools, effect on transportation costs, and costs for capital improvements that would be necessary to accommodate special education programs at a new site.

The following citizens addressed the Board.

Lisa Banks cited facts about Highland Elementary School, stating it has the largest enrollment of schools still under consideration. She noted it meets the quality standards established by the task force and has high academic achievement.

Kathy McGuire said she understands the need to repurpose a school to ensure quality education in LPS. She said closing Highland would send the wrong message to prospective LPS families.

Matt Shankle said this issue has an emotional impact on the district, it does not create any new marketing opportunities, and it could affect property values. He favors creating two K-8 schools.

Stephanie Martinez said the district needs to partner with outside agencies and businesses and look beyond current funding sources.

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Monika Nabuco said she researched many schools to find the right match for her children. She said it is important to consider the children in a school before making changes.

Dawn Goard said the proposed changes could create schools above 100 percent capacity. She expressed a concern about district communication regarding this issue. She asked if the recommendations consider the preschool and school-age child care (SACC) programs.

Cara Brandenburg stated that she believes the Marathon property will be developed and will attract younger families; closing Hopkins Elementary School is not a good strategy in light of its proximity to this property. She also commented about the large number of students optionally enrolled at Hopkins and said closure would take this choice away from parents.

Kristy Prezant said that younger families are beginning to come into the older neighborhood around Hopkins because it offers affordable housing. She said free full-day kindergarten at Hopkins is an asset.

Christine Oury said she does not see the value in repurposing any school and making changes at Ames Elementary School will change the community and affect property values.

Rob Cernich said he shares the district's concerns about declining enrollment, but closing a school could exacerbate the problem. He said the district needs to consider ways to increase enrollment, show parents the benefits of moving to another school, and work to unify the district and rebuild trust.

Kari Zoeteway said she just recently found out about the work of the task force and is upset that it did not provide information to parents or survey parents. She said LPS has not marketed its schools.

Gretchen Platt said the district needs to show parents the educational benefits of closing schools and wants some assurance of quality and benefits of the proposed changes.

Janet Haysley asked the Board to take more time to consider ideas from parents. She said the proposed changes will be very difficult for the students.

Amy Anthony said she researched schools before moving to the Ames community, and asked the Board not to take a school out of a community.

Lee Freedman said the district needs to compete with other schools. He believes the Board takes parents for granted and assumes that parents will go where they are told. He asked the Board to look at studies from other districts around the country that have faced declining enrollment.

Renee Schulte said that when the Marathon property is developed families moving into the area will need a school, so closing Hopkins is not a good idea.

Christine Allen said she agreed with the letter written by Lee Freedman, which was sent to the Board.

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Theresa Kovar said she just moved into the Ames attendance area from Denver and said there is a need for a K–5 school on the east side of the district. She said the district needs to better market its schools.

Marcy Tafoya said that repurposing schools is premature and the district needs to look at other creative solutions first. She said parents have offered some good ideas.

Pam Cirbo urged the district to be careful when considering K–8 options because this requires a specialized instructional program. She said that a compelling case has not been made for the recommendations. She cautioned the Board about depending on Marathon property development to generate increased enrollment. She said that whatever is changed needs to be better than the current situation and the district must sell the idea to parents.

Renee Ashcraft asked the Board to leave the deaf and hard of hearing (DHH) program currently housed at Ames as is. She supports the idea of a K–8 program that puts Ames with Newton Middle School.

Diane RaPue said the special education programs are a concern and said there won't be enough positions for all teachers affected by the recommendations. She asked the Board to consider other options before closing schools.

Lori Wager said something should have been done about declining enrollment sooner and the district needs to look at a charter schools model. She said the district has not tapped creative solutions to the problem.

Larry Bolden said three of the four schools under consideration have preschool programs and have generated increased enrollment via preschools. He commented that he believes transportation costs will increase under current proposals.

Angela Engel said administrative costs are growing and the district should look at ways to reduce these costs. She asked the district to advocate for kids with the Legislature.

Valerie Limes said LPS has amazing assets including students, staff, parents, and a supportive community. She asked why there isn't a waiting list to attend LPS schools. She suggested allocating resources to fix declining enrollment, explore options, and cultivate change for the future.

Sally Duvall said the new principal at Hopkins has been a positive change and closure now would not be a good idea. She said parents need access to the SACC program, and the district needs to support parents during the change.

Andrea Ellis said Hopkins has a great preschool program. She believes neighborhood demographics are changing and class sizes at schools absorbing students from a closed school will become too large, which will not be a positive aspect for people considering LPS.

Katlynn Cissell said Highland has great teachers and a great principal, along with high test scores. She believes new families will be moving to LPS.

Judy Allender said changes will hurt every school and all LPS families. She does not see neighborhood demographics changing. She is disappointed that no middle

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school options are being considered. She said LPS needs more forward thinking and needs to communicate better with LPS families. Web-based communication is not best for everyone. She asked the Board to make a thoughtful decision.

Ed Schroeder asked the Board to look at diversity and create good options.

Bev Banfield said the district must be able to “sell” any decision made. She said the district must do more than just web-based communication. She supports closing a school and noted that neighboring school districts are facing similar situations. The population centers that are growing are too far away to draw students to LPS. She supports the Board.

Kathy Kennedy-Tuchfeld expressed concern about putting two PACE programs together. She commented that programs that serve students with significant needs are important for these students. She said she supports the district and wants to be helpful.

Mr. Colwell thanked speakers for offering comments.

Ms. Howell also thanked speakers for sharing their thoughts, noting that this is a difficult decision. She said the Board must be responsible to tax payers and use district funds wisely. She expressed appreciation for the work done by staff to provide information and data. Ms. Howell commented that LPS must be cautious about marketing its schools too aggressively in order to preserve good relationships with other school districts. These relationships are vital when education issues come before the Legislature.

Ms. Nichols said she has heard the passion speakers have for their schools, which is the strength of the LPS community. She assured parents that they are not taken for granted by the Board and kids and families are a top priority.

Ms. Stanish said it is difficult to find the right balance and no matter what decision is made, it will not be satisfactory to everyone. She hopes the LPS community will pull together because that is what makes Littleton great. Ms. Stanish remarked that it is important for all students to have access to high quality programs and choice within a school. The reality is that LPS is a small, landlocked district with limited areas for development. If all schools remain as is, students in small schools will not have the opportunity to get everything they need, and it is the Board’s obligation to provide the best educational experience possible.

Ms. Chandler thanked speakers for taking the time to offer comments. She said a common theme is that the district needs to do a better job of communicating. She said the Board’s values include maintaining quality programs. Ms. Chandler commented that the reality of declining enrollment was brought home to her in 2003 when staffing cuts were made. She said that parents have expressed good ideas and noted that the LPS Foundation (LPSF) is working on partnerships and recognizes the need to grow these partnerships. Ms. Chandler noted that there is no perfect solution, but the Board and the district will do their best to create a smooth transition if the decision to close a school or schools is made.

Mr. Colwell remarked that more than 100 of the 178 school districts in Colorado are facing declining enrollment, so LPS is not alone in this situation. He noted that

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Englewood closed a school last year. Mr. Colwell also commented that LPS does market its schools and has about 2,000 nonresident students enrolled. He commented on the neighborhoods that are bused to various elementary schools explaining this is necessary because there are no elementary schools south of Dry Creek and the district tried to keep neighborhoods together when boundaries were drawn. He further noted that the Highlands 460 land is not owned by the district. Mr. Colwell stated that LPS has one of the lowest administrative costs in the metro area and the district cut central administrative costs by \$1.5 million to mitigate a budget deficit in 2008–2009. The district also used \$1.5 million from reserves to avoid cuts in classroom staffing for 2008–2009.

Mr. Colwell explained that the Facilities Use Task Force offered some recommendations that involved middle schools but the Board does not believe this is the right approach at this time, although it could come up in the future. He said a K–8 configuration needs more discussion and these recommendations were eliminated as options during the October 27 Board workshop.

Mr. Colwell said the Board has asked administration to send letters to families who attend schools affected by the Board’s decision.

Ms. Howell asked what will happen to preschool students if a school is closed. Mr. Madsen responded that there are classrooms available and individual schools will decide how space will be utilized. Ms. Stanish commented that out-of-district families may choose to go to the receiving school established for resident students or may optionally enroll in another school. Ms. Chandler clarified that LPS families, both resident and out-of-district may optionally enroll as in the past based on space availability.

Ms. Chandler asked about transportation for students placed in a new attendance area, and Mr. Madsen responded that by policy elementary students are bused if they live more than one-half mile away from the attendance area school or if they must cross a major street to get to the school. He noted that some transportation efficiencies can be gained because of attendance areas being closer together. Mr. Madsen stated that overall, transportation will be cost neutral.

Ms. Howell asked how a repurposed school might affect property values, and Mr. Madsen said the task force did not explore this area. Ms. Chandler asked what neighbors might notice about a closed school. Mr. Madsen responded that buildings will continue to be maintained and it will be important to have activity in and around a building to deter vandalism.

Ms. Howell asked if any of the recommendations put a school over 100 percent capacity, and Mr. Madsen stated it is a matter of judgment and the physical space is available as described in the recommendations. Mr. Murphy noted that five elementary schools could increase their enrollment if two elementary schools are closed. Ms. Howell asked if there were schools that had classrooms without walls, and the response was that Runyon still has some classrooms with partitions.

Mr. Colwell asked when demographic studies had been done, and Mr. Madsen responded that a study was done in 2003 and updated in 2006 with data available through 2004. Ms. Howell asked if there are data available about the number of children that could be potential LPS students if the Marathon property was

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developed. Mr. Madsen responded that development could generate 0.35 elementary-age students per housing unit, and the property could support 250–300 units.

Ms. Chandler asked if receiving schools could lose space for specials with increased enrollment. Mr. Madsen said that currently some specials are in dedicated classrooms and this could change. Ms. Howell asked if all schools currently have space for specials. Mr. Madsen said the value is for all schools to be able to deliver instruction for specials.

Ms. Nichols asked if the School-age Child Care (SACC) programs have space available for incoming students. Mr. Madsen said this is a site-based decision and there are a variety of ways to accommodate SACC programs. Ms. Chandler asked administration to investigate using a closed building for an SACC program.

Ms. Nichols asked about relocation of special education programs. Ms. Lucinda Hundley, assistant superintendent of student support services, said administration is exploring options to find the best way to accommodate both the physical and emotional needs of students. Ms. Hundley said this decision will take some time.

Mr. Murphy asked if we have moved special education programs in the past. Ms. Hundley responded that the district has moved one self-contained program and created a new self-contained program in buildings that hadn't had these programs previously. She said both programs were successful. Mr. Colwell asked what special education programs would be affected. Ms. Hundley responded that Ames has the deaf and hard of hearing program (DHH), which is a center-based program. The sound field system would need to be relocated. Highland has a Progression for Adaptive and Cognitive Education (PACE) program, Whitman has a PACE and a Self-Contained Individualized Learning (SCIL) program, and Hopkins has a SCIL program.

Mr. Howell asked about communication plans. Ms. Connie Bouwman, assistant superintendent of learning services, responded that a transition team is working to identify various areas that need to be addressed including support for students, parents, and staff. She said receiving schools will offer welcome and unity activities, school visits will be arranged, and PTOs will be involved.

Mr. Colwell asked about the process for teacher transfers. Mr. Mike Owens, assistant superintendent of human resources, said there is a process and timeframe in place for teacher transfers and administration does not recommend a separate process for teachers affected by a building closure. The current process is governed by policy, state statute, and the negotiated agreement. Other factors that affect staff transfers include enrollment projections and the weighted staffing formula, which could be changed pending recommendations from the Financial Advisory Committee. Mr. Owens commented that many teachers will follow the students, and staff with teacher status will be placed before probationary teachers. He noted that retirements and nonrenewal of probationary teachers will open up slots for these teachers.

Mr. Murphy commented that low enrollment schools have been receiving a financial subsidy and asked if the Financial Advisory Committee plans to make a recommendation concerning this subsidy. Ms. Hundley responded that there is a

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recommendation to eliminate this subsidy because of the budget deficit.

Ms. Howell commented that if a school is too small to sustain programs without a subsidy, it puts a strain on the budget.

Ms. Chandler asked if there are any areas in the district that might see an increase in the school age population. Mr. Madsen responded that the only vacant parcels are the Marathon property and the Highlands 460 at Dry Creek and Colorado Blvd.

Board members made comments concerning the pros and cons of closing one or more of the four schools under consideration. Ms. Chandler said she is not comfortable with a decision to close Highland because it is the school with the largest enrollment of the four. She is not comfortable with Hopkins because it has the largest optional enrollment. Ms. Stanish commented that Highland does not seem to be a good option because it is close to exceeding the criteria established by the task force. Ms. Stanish said that Hopkins has the highest optional enrollment and would be the neighborhood school for the Marathon property as well as Streets at Southglenn, making it a less desirable option. Ms. Nichols said Hopkins is working hard to become a quality school with district support, and Ames is making academic gains as well. Mr. Colwell summarized comments from Board members, noting that the consensus is that options which include Highland or Hopkins are no longer under consideration, leaving Ames and Whitman as options to consider for possible closure.

Ms. Stanish commented that the schools designated to receive Whitman students all feed into Euclid Middle School, and Whitman would be a prime site for expansion of alternative education programs as well as partnership opportunities with Arapahoe Community College. She further noted there are three other elementary schools within one mile of Whitman. Ms. Nichols and Ms. Stanish expressed concern about the lack of a K-5 school if Ames is closed. Ms. Howell also expressed concern about closing Ames and leaving the neighborhood without a K-5 school, but noted that the enrollment has not increased in a number of years. Ms. Chandler said there are competing values with regard to closing Ames. Ms. Howell said the number of students and staff involved if Ames and/or Whitman are closed is fewer than the other two schools.

Mr. Colwell asked Board members if they were leaning toward closing one or two schools and the consensus was to close two schools. Ms. Stanish commented that it would be useful to know what repurposing options might be for Ames and Whitman.

Mr. Colwell expressed the Board's appreciation to administration for the information gathered to facilitate this discussion, noting this is the most difficult decision this Board has needed to make. He again thanked the community for taking the time to speak and to stay to listen to the Board's deliberation. He emphasized that all LPS schools are great and that a decision to close schools is not a reflection of a school's performance, but merely a lack of enrollment.

Ms. Stanish asked about the process for this issue on November 13. Mr. Colwell explained that it will be part of the action section of the Board's agenda, and citizens may sign up to speak. A motion will be made and seconded, and the Board may choose to have discussion if necessary before a vote is taken. Mr. Colwell said

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that district students are at the center of this issue and the Board must do what is best for students.

Ms. Howell asked how the Board's discussion this evening will be communicated tomorrow. Ms. Bouwman responded that letters will be sent home with students at Ames and Whitman. Ms. Chandler asked for additional information concerning communication with the community and next steps in the process. Ms. Stanish asked for further information about plans to accommodate preschool students and SACC programs at the buildings that may close.

Mr. Colwell remarked that change is never easy. He said communication will be of utmost importance.

Future Agenda/Adjournment

Mr. Murphy distributed a draft agenda for the November 13, 2008, Board meeting. Action items include Auditors Report—Acceptance of CAFR, and Facility Use Task Force Recommendations. Discussion items include Student Assessment Results—Elementary.

MOTION: Ms. Howell moved that the Board of Education meeting adjourn.

SECOND: Ms. Stanish. AYE: Chandler, Colwell, Howell, Nichols, Stanish.

MOTION CARRIED: 5-0.

The meeting adjourned at 10:52 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Bob Colwell
President

Sue Chandler
Secretary

ks (12/12/08)