

BIG SPRING SCHOOL DISTRICT

Newville, Pennsylvania

COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE OF THE BOARD MEETING MINUTES

MONDAY, MAY 17, 2010

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I. CALL TO ORDER

The Committee of the Whole of the Board of School Directors for the Big Spring School District met in the Big Spring High School Large Group Room, Room 140, at 7:00 P.M. with President Wilbur Wolf, Jr., presiding. Seven (7) directors present: Wilbur Wolf, Jr., President; William Swanson, Vice President; Robert Lee Barrick, Secretary; Kingsley Blasco; Tarin Houpt; Richard Norris; and William Piper..

Terry Lopp, Treasurer, and Richard Roush were absent.

Others in attendance: Richard Fry, Superintendent; Jeanne Temple, Assistant Superintendent; Kevin Roberts, Director of Curriculum/Instruction and Educational Technology; Richard E. Kerr, Jr., Business Manager; Linda Slusser, Mount Rock Elementary School Principal; Bill August, Newville Elementary School Principal; Stacey Kimble, Oak Flat Elementary School Principal; Krista Zeigler, Plainfield Elementary School Principal; Erica Dolson, The Sentinel; Denny Clopper, The Valley Times-Star; and Brenda Line, Board Minutes. Also present: Kathy Bravin, Charlene D'Amore, Doug Lautsbaugh, April Messenger, Sam Sheeler, Jason Shover, and Jessica Shover.

II. PREVIEW OF THE AGENDA

A. Combine and Address

President Wolf requested that the Board address XIII., NEW BUSINESS, A., PERSONNEL CONCERNS, Items A-1 through A-14, as a single action item.

B. District Administration Office (DAO) Change Order – Agenda Item XIII, NEW BUSINESS, H.

Superintendent Fry explained that the change order related to the DAO is the result of an engineer's calculation error. The engineer believed the impeller used with the old steam system for the middle school and DAO would be adequate; however, as the new HVAC equipment was put into use, it was clear that the impeller was not adequate. The cost for the impeller upgrade is \$6,080.58, and the District would be responsible for balancing the new impellers (approximately half of that cost), and the architects would assume responsibility for payment of the other half of the costs related to this change order.

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III. PRESENTATION

Elementary Reconfiguration/Update on Plainfield Elementary School

Richard W. Fry, Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Fry indicated that when the Board began plans for a new Plainfield Elementary School, that plan appeared to be the most logical option based on proposed housing developments and the potential for a dramatic increase in student enrollment; however, that has all changed with the downturn in the economy and the inability for developers to obtain an adequate water supply for the proposed developments.

Mr. Fry added that the District's four elementary schools are all operating below enrollment capacity; and he noted that when the Board closed Mifflin and Frankford Elementary Schools, the transition worked well and there are no regrets for that decision.

Mr. Fry reviewed the discussions over the last 18 months regarding student enrollment and grade configuration. Mr. Fry indicated that many changes have taken place in the last two years, and he summarized that based on the State's decreased student enrollment projections and the dismal state of the economy, he believes the time has come for the District to consider (1) offering kindergarten through Grade 3 at Mount Rock Elementary School and Newville Elementary School; (2) offering Grade 4 and Grade 5 at Oak Flat Elementary School; and (3) closing Plainfield Elementary School.

Mr. Fry supported the grade reconfiguration proposal with information outlined in a PowerPoint presentation entitled "Elementary Reconfiguration in the Big Spring School District." Please refer to the attached document: Elementary Reconfiguration 5.17.10.pdf.

Mr. Fry reviewed the following items in the PowerPoint presentation:

- Current alignment – 4 "Kindergarten to Grade 5" Buildings – Mount Rock, Newville, Oak Flat, and Plainfield.
- Issues with Current Alignment.
- Goals that will guide our grade reconfiguration.
- Factors that need to be considered when looking at grade reconfiguration.
- Enrollment Projections (08/2007).
- Enrollment Projections (10/2009).
- Basis for Act 34 Hearing for Plainfield.
- Available Classrooms Within the Reconfiguration Model/PDE Capacities.
- Administrative Proposal.
- Pros and Cons of Administrative Proposal.

A. Additional items noted during the presentation are as follows:

1. Mr. Fry's definition of "sustainability" is to keep the District healthy financially while "looking down the gun of PSERS increases." From a financial standpoint, the District could stay in business through attrition with the proposed reconfiguration. Mr. Fry added that the District does not have the flexibility at the elementary school to commit to a formula of sustainability that "allows the District to move forward."

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III. PRESENTATION (Continued)

Elementary Reconfiguration/Update on Plainfield Elementary School (Continued)

A. Additional items noted during the presentation are as follows: (Continued)

2. Efficiencies in student transportation need to be addressed, and reconfiguration will enable the District to do that.
3. Students adapt well to transitions, while parents sometimes have a difficult time with transitions.
4. Variances from enrollment in kindergarten to first grade have disappeared with the implementation of full-day kindergarten.
5. Enrollment projections and the state of the economy have changed dramatically in the last 18 months.
6. Newville and Mount Rock Elementary Schools could accommodate 400 to 420 students in each building. Oak Flat Elementary School could accommodate 500 students, but space would be "tight." The PDE listed capacity is always much higher than the practical capacity.
7. Because of zoning restrictions in West Pennsboro Township, it is believed that housing developments would be limited in the foreseeable future.
8. It is the wish of the administration that the fine and practical arts could be offered well into the future.
9. It appears that the pros outweigh the cons associated with the proposed reconfiguration.
10. The two additional rooms at Newville Elementary School (originally a deduct alternate for the project) are estimated to cost roughly \$402,000. Two workable stair towers would be required. The administration would prefer to have the building ready for occupation by August 16, 2010. The preliminary expedited cost estimate for the two additional rooms to be finished by August 16, 2010, is \$70,000 above and beyond the construction estimate. Regardless of the date of occupation for the proposed two additional rooms, the remainder of the building must be inhabitable by August 25, 2010, including two operational stair towers.
11. The two additional rooms at Newville Elementary School would not change the footprint of the building.
12. The last estimate for the proposed new Plainfield Elementary School was just under \$11 million.
13. The Plainfield project to date has cost the District approximately \$500,000. The \$700,000 in architects' fees included the architectural work for the Newville project.
14. A bond will still be required to complete the Newville project; however, a bond of approximately \$4 million (possibly slightly higher) would be required versus the original \$14 million for the Plainfield and Newville projects. The \$4 million would include the current \$3 million short-term borrowing.
15. Gang restrooms at Mount Rock Elementary School must be completed.
16. Additional cafeteria tables could be required for the elementary schools as a result of the reconfiguration.
17. Approximately 5 weeks' worth of work is required before the proposed new Plainfield Elementary School plans would be completed to the point that they could be suspended indefinitely for use when necessary in the future.
18. The projected decrease in student enrollment is *not* due to an increase in the number of students enrolled in private school or cyber school. In the next seven years, PDE estimates that there could be an estimated 500 fewer students enrolled in the District's schools.

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III. PRESENTATION (Continued)

Elementary Reconfiguration/Update on Plainfield Elementary School (Continued)

A. Additional items noted during the presentation are as follows: (Continued)

19. The administration believes this reconfiguration proposal is a "fiscally prudent model."
20. Elimination of staff members is not being considered at this time; however, when feasible, staff members would not be replaced as they retire. Mr. Fry added that "this isn't about losing jobs; it's about taking the District into the 21st century and sustaining what Big Spring is all about."
21. Newville Elementary School landscaping is slated for completion by August 25, 2010.

B. Staff Comments Regarding the Reconfiguration Proposal

1. **Ms. Charlene D'Amore** indicated that she travels throughout the District in her teaching role every day, and she experiences firsthand the difficulties that Mr. Fry addressed this evening. Ms. D'Amore indicated that it would be "powerful" if all fourth and fifth graders were in one area and more kindergarten through third graders were in one location, noting that staff collaboration would increase and consistency across the curriculum would be enhanced, leading to an improved education for the students.
2. **Mrs. Linda Slusser**, Mount Rock Elementary School principal, thanked the Board for providing the Mount Rock facility, and she noted that students and staff have adjusted well to that building. Mrs. Slusser indicated that she experienced the K-3 configuration at a different school district, and she added that she fully supports the proposed reconfiguration. Mrs. Slusser added that any program that involved older students working with younger students could be modified to fit the proposed configuration.

Mrs. Slusser indicated that she believes that curriculum consistency, library facilities, PSSA scores, art, physical education, music, and sports would be among the items that would be enhanced with the proposed configuration.

3. **Mr. Bill August**, Newville Elementary School principal, noted that he would prefer to delay the opening of the two additional rooms at Newville Elementary School and allocate the expedited construction fee of \$70,000 for new cafeteria tables instead. Mr. August indicated that he would be amenable to pushing the project back for completion date of the two additional rooms to the beginning of October 2010.

Mr. August added that he believes the reconfiguration would make districtwide practices more practical and manageable. These practices are difficult to organize with the current configuration.

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III. PRESENTATION (Continued)

Elementary Reconfiguration/Update on Plainfield Elementary School (Continued)

B. Staff Comments Regarding the Reconfiguration Proposal

4. **Mrs. Krista Zeigler**, Plainfield Elementary School principal, read a prepared statement in which she chose to put her personal feelings aside and think of what is best for the students from an educational standpoint. Mrs. Zeigler reviewed her history with the Plainfield Elementary School and the problems associated with the facility, including deficiencies in the infrastructure, inadequate space issues, security concerns, and inequitable services compared with the other elementary schools. Mrs. Zeigler concluded that students and staff deserve to have a learning environment that is equitable to the District's other elementary schools, and she supports the administration's recommendation as outlined this evening.
5. **Ms. Stacey Kimble**, Oak Flat Elementary School principal, indicated that she "lived" the K-3 and 4-5 configuration at a school district in South Carolina, and she noted that she supports the administration's proposal. Ms. Kimble indicated staff collaboration and staff development were "amazing" in this configuration, and she added that the feedback from parents and students was positive in the configuration similar to what the administration proposed this evening.
6. Several teachers in the audience addressed the members of the Board of School Directors and offered support for the administration's recommendations. For some of the teachers, this evening was the first they learned of the administration's recommendation, and all of the teachers present reported that they are excited about the prospect of increased collaboration among staff members with the proposed reconfiguration.

C. Concluding Comments

In response to a question from Director Barrick, the teachers responded that students could be enrolled in the gifted program as early as Grade 1.

Director Piper expressed support for the administration's proposal, noting that the Board could use the plans in the future as the need arises.

Superintendent Fry concluded that it is impossible to predict fluctuations in student enrollment, and he added that Big Spring School District appears to be one of the only District's in the area where student enrollment is projected to decline in the next several years. Mr. Fry added that this could be largely due to the inability of developers to secure the necessary water and sewer resources to build in this area.

In response to a question from Director Piper, President Wolf indicated that, in his opinion, the Board should proceed with the budget and tax increase as proposed this evening because it is "prudent financially" in light of the fact that the PSERS increases in the coming years would impact the District's finances negatively to a great degree. Mr. Wolf indicated that he believes the proposed budget is "probably what we need to have to carry us into the future."

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III. PRESENTATION (Continued)

Elementary Reconfiguration/Update on Plainfield Elementary School (Continued)

C. Concluding Comments (Continued)

Vice President Swanson agreed with Mr. Wolf and added that he believes the proposed budget would put the District in a sound fiscal position for the future. Mr. Swanson concluded that he supports the administration's proposal.

Director Blasco indicated that, based on the financial conditions, the administration's plan is a good compromise for the District, although he feels badly for Mrs. Zeigler, who has an extensive history with Plainfield Elementary School. Mr. Blasco indicated that, in his opinion, greed at the State level has put the District in a difficult position.

President Wolf requested that Director Barrick prepare recommendations for the Board to address during this evening's regular Board meeting regarding the proposed grade reconfiguration, the construction of two additional rooms at Newville Elementary School, and the proposed Plainfield Elementary School closure.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Blasco, seconded by Norris to adjourn. Roll call vote: Voting Yes: Blasco, Houpt, Norris, Piper, Barrick, Swanson, and Wolf. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:06 P.M.



Robert Lee Barrick, Secretary