

**MINUTES OF BOARD RETREAT HELD  
October 5, 2009**

The Board Retreat of the West Windsor-Plainsboro Board of Education was called to order by Mr. Hemant Marathe at 6:00 p.m. in the media center at High School North. The following Board members were present:

Mr. John Farrell	Mr. Robert Johnson	Mr. Hemant Marathe
Mr. Anthony Fleres	Mr. Richard Kaye	Mr. Randall Tucker
Mr. Todd Hochman	Mr. Alapakkam Manikandan	Mrs. Ellen Walsh

Present also were: Dr. Victoria Kniewel, Superintendent of Schools; Mr. Larry Shanok, Assistant Superintendent for Finance/Board Secretary; Mr. David Aderhold, Assistant Superintendent Pupil Services and Planning, EdD, and Mr. Russell Lazovick, Assistant Superintendent Curriculum & Instruction.

**CONVENE**

In accordance with the State's Sunshine Law, adequate notice of this meeting was provided by mailing a notice of the time, date, location and, to the extent known, the agenda of this meeting to the PRINCETON PACKET, THE TIMES, THE TRENTONIAN, THE HOME NEWS TRIBUNE, AND WEST WINDSOR and PLAINSBORO PUBLIC LIBRARIES. Copies of the notice have also been posted in the board office and filed with Plainsboro's and West Windsor's township clerks and in each of the district schools.

No members of the public were present.

**BOARD PRESIDENT'S COMMENTS**

Mr. Marathe welcomed everyone to the retreat.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S COMMENTS**

Dr. Kniewel thanked everyone for participating during a busy week that includes two committee meetings. Tonight is to consider how we interact and the power of this group to set the tone for the entire school system. The superintendent covered the ground rules for the night.

As a check-in participants were encouraged to indicate what they care about most in education. Board members mentioned: passion for lifelong learning; value of learning; having a strong foundation; having the best possible outcomes for each student; having meaningful preparation for each student; that every child has what I want for my child; how to learn; develop the skills and how important it is; provide what is needed for the future.

What is the hope for this group for this year? Board members mentioned: defining metrics for use over time; how well the group works together; while we will not always agree there is a common purpose; to sharpen focus as makers of policy; work to see that what I do is for the good of the board; handle the big issues that are coming in the future years; keep students in mind; respect and tackle the big issues; and set direction. Board members noted the value of additional interaction among board members. Such actions must take careful note of regulations impacting meetings and discussions of the board of education. There is more freedom in committees and more detailed notes or informal interaction of individuals may aid in augmenting communication.

## **STRATEGIC DISCUSSION: Administration and Facilities**

Question: How much do we want to push advertising as an opportunity?

### **Administration and Facilities**

Dr. Aderhold presented a PowerPoint on Corporate Advertising. While the purpose of advertising is to generate funds the question of “How do we define the line?” This question raised significant questions about our values as both a school board and a school district. Currently there is no defined policy governing fundraising activities and advertising, yet fund raisers are pervasive within our school community. Schools sell yearbook advertising, raise money through sports teams, book covers, fruit sales, cheese cake sales, school play bills, etc. Fund raising is primarily utilized as a means of offsetting student activity and field trip costs.

Issues of concern such as the fundraising for the purpose of offsetting student activities or field trips versus fundraising for the purpose of revenue generating were discussed. Feedback from the discussion provided direction to the Administration and Facilities Committee in the further development of Policy # 6162 – Corporate Advertising. There was general consensus that the BOE was not in favor of general school level advertising as a means of revenue generation. Further direction was given to ensure that any policy created should provide general policies to govern student activities. Additional concerns provided a cautionary approach in allowing individuals or groups that are not connected to the school district to solicit the student in an effort to raise revenues.

The recommendation to the Administration and Facilities committee was to establish a “quiet policy” which allowed for the control and accountability of raising student activities funds while limiting the ability for fundraising to be utilized to raise significant revenue for other purposes. Strict accounting protocols will need to be uniformly created and implemented at the building level. Board members wanted additional information about what works in other districts. A fact-finding period will begin in which the Administration and Facilities Committee investigates like districts.

In conclusion, the general consensus was that the BOE was not fundamentally opposed to advertising as long as it is established within limits. There was consensus that standards must be set in place to ensure that the values of our school district are upheld and protected.

## **STRATEGIC DISCUSSION: Curriculum**

Question: How will we know if curriculum is successful? What evidence should be seen?

### **Curriculum and Instruction**

Russ Lazovick began by presenting the district mission statement and asked members of the BOE “What data would prove to you that we are achieving our mission?” Suggestions considered academic, sports and games, extracurricular, and administrative data. KPI’s (Key Process Indicators) and Metrics were discussed as a means of evaluation. It was stated clearly that “What gets measured is what gets done?” Questions surfaced regarding whether we are meeting the needs of all learners. Additional concerns were raised, questioning how and at what levels we are measuring outcomes. It was further questioned if we are we are looking at data at the individual student level.

After a fifteen minute conversation Russ Lazovick stated, “I want to contend that the answers to all these questions can be found within a well-written, comprehensive curriculum.” He provided the board with a brief Power Point presentation about the components of a powerful curriculum and the different faces of the curriculum.

- Best Practice: Ten Pieces of Curriculum

1. Program Philosophy
2. Large Learning
3. Mapping System
4. Cornerstones and Collections
5. Rubrics
6. Exemplars
7. Teacher Resources
8. Using Data
9. Guides for Adventures
10. Lifelines

- The Three Faces of Curriculum

- Primary
- Practical
- Public

Definitions:

- Primary curriculum is a statement of who we are as a district, including what expectations we hold for ourselves and for our students.
- Practical curriculum is a document that assists educators in translating expectation into instruction by providing resources, examples, and assessments. The practical curriculum translates what is in the primary document into instructional strategies.
- Public face – This is the curriculum face for the public. It communicates with stakeholders, allows the public to be involved in the process providing the opportunity to interact in the curriculum.

It is important to note that the number one thing we can hold supervisors 100% responsible for is the state of our curriculum.

Key questions were asked:

- How do we serve all students?
- What data can define our success?
- Data: Is it going to make us get better?
- How can we define our success?

Through this discussion it became evident that the utilization of external data is not only not controllable but that it does not answer questions that require us to look at “ALL” students. External data does not aid us in defining the success of our student, and external data cannot be used as formative assessment. Therefore, we must create assessments that will produce relevant and useable data. Mr. Lazovick presented the four realities of assessment. He shared that if assessments were going to drive student learning then we needed to consider four major factors: the development, management, warehousing and analysis of data.

Analysis and development processes are the most difficult. Serious professional development is needed. Performance Data can be utilized to lead discussions with teachers on student performance data. However, as we move to this model several factors become evident. First, the “curriculum has to spiral.” Second, as the focus swings to data driven instruction we must focus on improving all aspects of teaching. To improve teaching we must look at instructional methodology, evaluation tools and professional development.

We must answer the following questions:

- How do we serve all students?
- How do we serve all teachers?
- How do we serve all administrators?
- How do we serve all stakeholders?

Mr. Lazovick stated that “In order to answer all of these questions completely, two items must be completely understood: the need for time and the need for a tool. First, we must move at the speed of success. It will take time to shift the district culture to a culture of data-driven decision making. Moving too fast will derail the process and moving too slowly is unacceptable. Second, with a technological tool that is specifically designed to warehouse and analyze student performance data, success will remain elusive.

As these conversations evolve, it will become increasingly important that we communicate the purpose and need for data. We must continually involve all stakeholders in these discussions. Of primary concern will be the teaching staff. As we drive internal benchmarks and begin to hold conversations about student data there will be push back from teachers. There will be some in the teacher’s associate that will question the impact on their academic freedom with the standardization of internal assessments. Others will question the validity of offering such indicators in such a high performing district. While there is a clearly defined culture of excellence if we are to ensure that “Each student” achieves success then we must create and analyze internal indicators so that our students are meeting our definition of excellence and not one determined from external indicators.

### **STRATEGIC DISCUSSION: Finance**

Question: What is the strategic goal for the district?

#### **Finance**

Mr. Shanok framed the discussion by borrowing the lead question from the Curriculum discussion: are there indicators of budget success? Percentage budget increases over the past seven years are distinctly lower than the previous seven years. While school taxes are the lion’s share of all property taxes, the school’s share has declined noticeably in recent years. This came about while maintaining and building on educational excellence and improving our relative position on per pupil spending. Of course when an organization moves from spending the same as its neighbors and \$500 per student higher than the state average, relatively more can be bought than when spending moves to under the state average and thousands of dollars below sister districts.

While the last budget finally saw the tax levy apportioned on the basis of enrollment, only the first part of that levy is collected this year. The move from a relatively low percentage of equalized value to a higher percentage of enrollment meant that Plainsboro was hit harder in this year’s budget. The second part added to the mix in 2010-11 means that Plainsboro will be hard hit again, all things being equal. If enrollment remains steady the 2011-12 year should see relatively equal percentage changes in taxes in

both townships. It should be noted that in the cycle since regionalization, West Windsor has been hard hit too at times under equalized value.

There are continuing opportunities to ease spending similar to recent efforts; but the dollars while helpful, are not large. Larger impacts would require contract changes be negotiated. Larger cost reductions are possible in two areas: a study of economy & efficiency in Building & Grounds may reveal economies and three tier bussing may reduce costs.

If 2010-11 develops incrementally, a budget increase of nearly 5% would be needed. This is due to contracted wages and the 25% increase coming in medical coverage. Utilizing the most likely cost reduction opportunities could reduce the 5% figure to around four percent. Most costs are personnel driven and class size impacts the number of certified personnel needed. Several board members are willing to save with increases to class sizes, even if sizes then differ at a grade level across the district. Other board members are reluctant to increase class sizes at the lower grades; some were open to curbing high school sections with lower numbers of students even if it that resulted in some disappointments for students. Some are not sure of the impact of class size and are interested in acting on other areas, such as stipends and the supervisory structure

It was agreed that the results of the economy & efficiency study may be important to moderating budget growth. It was noted that the pharmaceutical industry out sources its facility needs while having stringent federal requirements. Similarly, three tier bussing may be acted upon but it was the consensus of the board that while breaking the students into three equal groups will require the three tiers to have sufficient time between start/end times, the high schools should not be moved significantly earlier in their start times. Having the same grade level starting at different times is acceptable. A positive of three tier bussing is that district drivers would likely have more hours and pay in that scenario.

The board stressed the need for a coherent negotiation strategy in future years so that the tax caps and pressures on salaries and benefits can be managed. Meaningful contributions to the total cost of health benefits will be needed in such an environment.

## **DISCUSSION**

The Superintendent and Mr. Marathe thanked everyone for their participation.

Upon motion by Mrs. Walsh, seconded by Mr. Johnson, and by unanimous voice vote, the meeting adjourned at 10:33 p.m.

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Larry Shanok, Board Secretary

Prepared by:

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Kathleen M. Bertram