

**West Contra Costa Unified School District
Minutes of the Board of Education Study Session
Lovonya DeJean Middle School
3400 McDonald Avenue
Richmond, CA 94805**

November 12, 2008

A. OPENING PROCEDURES

Clerk Madeline Kronenberg called the meeting to order at 6:32 PM.

A.1 Pledge of Allegiance

Clerk Kronenberg led those in attendance in the pledge of allegiance.

A.2 Roll Call

Board Members Present: Madeline Kronenberg, Audrey Miles, Charles Ramsey

Board Members Absent: Dave Brown, President Karen Pfeifer

Staff Present: Adrienne Blalock, Director of Bond Facilities; Steve Collins, SELPA Director; Paul Ehara, Director of Communications; Sheri Gamba, Associate Superintendent for Business Services; Wendell Greer, Associate Superintendent for K-Adult Schools; Bruce Harter, Superintendent; Debbie Haynie, Executive Secretary to the Superintendent; Joe Mayes, Maintenance Manager; Ken McDaniel, Interim Electronics Supervisor; Elmer Meredith, Electronics Technician; Nia Rashidchi, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services; Jessica Romeo, Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources; Bill Savidge, District Engineering Officer.

Clerk Kronenberg said the purpose of the meeting was to discuss criteria for decision making and development of the process for use of the criteria as it pertains to school closures. She invited Board Members Elect Tony Thurmond and Antonio Medrano to participate in the discussion.

Clerk Kronenberg offered welcome and instructions to the public regarding the meeting.

B. School Closure Process

Staff Report

Superintendent Harter provided a presentation about declining enrollment and demographic shifts within the school district and projections over the next ten years, showing comparisons to other similarly sized school districts. He indicated that the planned budgets for 2008-09 to 2010-11 are affected by projected state budget allocation reductions, and that the approved budget was based on the state legislature's adoptions in September 2008 to include school closures. The County Office of Education approved the budget while expressing areas of concern that require addressing at the second interim reporting period, January 31, 2009. He said the Board is required to submit to the County Office of Education a list of permanent budget reductions to correct the structural deficit for the current and future years including a list of schools to consolidate for the 2009-2010 fiscal year, and a plan to address the rising cost of current and retiree health benefits.

Superintendent Harter said the District budget for 2008-09 includes a deficit of \$7.9 million. Deficit spending of \$12 million is projected for 2009-2010 and another \$10 million in deficit for 2010-2011 which would put the district in the negative category. Given the magnitude of dealing with these issues, the District must propose a balanced approach to include school closure, property sale for debt elimination, benefit cost containment, and service reductions.

Superintendent Harter clarified that this meeting was intended to focus discussion and gain public input on setting criteria and looking at the process for school closure. He discussed projected savings from school consolidation by closing combinations of elementary and/or secondary schools to reach \$3 million in annual operational savings by 2010-11. Suggested criteria for determining possible school consolidation include facility conditions, enrollment and enrollment projections, utilization, available capacity, special programs, and geographic equity.

Superintendent Harter explained that the essential assumptions to consider for the process included redistricting and consolidating schools simultaneously. These include a strict timeline for decision making, sale of closed property to pay down debt, the uncertainty of the state budget could push closures toward a maximum number, that school closure

is categorically exempt from CEQA, and the potential to increase school size averages to add capacity for student enrollment. In order to prepare for all the changes he said that February 11, 2008 will be a deadline for Board approval.

A suggested timeline for the process was presented to include community involvement in public meetings.

C. Public Comment

Naomi Williams wanted to know how long the Board knew about this issue before Measure D came to public attention. She urged no closure of Richmond schools and limiting charter schools.

Robert Brower recommended using the MGT study proposal for the school closure procedure. He suggested objective criteria such as maintaining schools with API scores of 800 or higher and avoiding the appearance of subjective criteria. He also urged consideration of K-8 schools in selected situations to maintain ADA (Average Daily Attendance).

Debbie Long, Pinole City Council member, said she heard from constituents who feel betrayed that the district waited until after an election to disclose the issues of school consolidation. She requested a decision making process based on a community based process with a board established commission to review and study closures district wide.

Terra Smith expressed concerns of safety for children due to school closures.

Chester Murry and Nathan Murry said they want to feel safe at school.

Ralston Soong, Kennedy teacher, asked Board members to think about funds that could be lost if schools closed.

Erin Calentine, Kennedy teacher, said that the community needs to be involved in the short timeline. She would like to see parents, students, and teachers involved to obtain objective results.

Karley Nuzman, Castro teacher, urged the district to look at historical issues resulting in declining enrollment due to change of school boundaries. She asked the Board to consider schools that are making academic growth, geographical equity to avoid unfair balance, and K-8 schools.

Kathy Nuzman said she is concerned about changing enrollment and would like the Board to look at variables involved in the change and also consider successful programs in school communities.

Tammy Campbell, Pinole Valley High Site Council Chair, thanked the community for the passage of Measure D and asked the public to be involved in this process. She continued to say that she does not support community decisions, rather district wide-decision making, suggesting a panel of school Board members, two city council members, two community members appointed by the superintendent, key students, parents and teachers. She concluded by inviting the public to the next Budget Advisory Committee meeting.

Mary Schmida asked the Board to consider schools that house special programs and continue to serve the English language and low income population.

Greg Whaling, a home owner and Kennedy teacher, urged that geographic equity be considered important. He urged consideration of the capacity of each school and how it might be accomplished as well as the strengths of the community, staff, parents and alumni.

Al Kirkman reminded the Board of a promise two years ago not to close schools. He said he feels that neighborhood schools are very important.

Alexander Ponce, fifth grader, spoke about a reduction in administration in order to save schools.

Kathleen Casey recalled the closure of Seaview Elementary school and administration moving in. She urged cuts in administrators rather than closing schools and cutting staff.

Tigran Johnson, Valley View parent, asked that rebuilt schools be considered for closure. He would like to see other criteria rank higher in the determination of closure.

Martin Snider spoke about the process to overlook conflicting agendas. He suggested involving outside impartial experts rather than more community input because of the emotional impact. He urged the preservation of elementary schools within walking distance for students.

Sharon Farrell spoke about a format with transparent results and a transparent process accessible, inclusive of community input, with support from objective professionals who could discuss technical components to allow the community to be better informed in assisting with the decision making process.

Elizabeth Hirshfeld, Kappa teacher, said she was concerned about continuing education schools which are a last chance for many students.

Robert Studdiford, member of the Citizens' Budget Advisory Committee, suggested looking at feeder patterns and the financial impact to schools to being spread evenly across a base, maintaining best programs, and collaboration between administration and teaching staff to deal with consolidations. He suggested that the Board keep future capacity expansion in mind rather than lose all real estate assets. He also asked that a comparison of K-8 services be offered.

Mine Ternar Kal said she would like to bring back K-8 as a possible solution to maintain programs. She appreciated the open and frank discussion of school closure and asked for involvement of the community and due process before considering closing programs.

Ann Palmer, Olinda parent, said not to use facilities as criteria, but evaluate high performing under enrolled schools, high parent involvement, and K-8 options, and suggested independent informed technical expertise in the process.

Joanna Pace, Portola parent, said she agreed that schools have to be closed and it will be painful to have a long process. She suggested criteria of looking at geographic equity for 11 to 14 year olds, and involving school staffs jointly to plan the consolidation of their schools.

Kendys Nam, teacher, spoke about the economic benefits of any property sale that may not bring much monetary gain. She said she would like to see more development of the proposal to explain potential benefits.

Charles Cowens, Community Budget Committee Chair, invited the community to give input at its November 20, 2008 meeting.

Michelle Gutierrez said she felt the district is turning children into victims and that closures will put children at risk with greater walking distances.

Robyn Dixon, Kennedy parent, said that closing schools kills children's dreams for their goals.

Leonard McNeil, incoming San Pablo Mayor and member of the Bond Oversight Committee, spoke about each criteria being made a committee, holding meetings at the comprehensive high schools, ways to reduce administration, fund raising strategies, and community resources to mitigate issues.

Buford Irvin asked about the rationale in closing a minority school.

Samara Aguilar said she graduated from a school of over 5000 students, but that today's district children have the benefit of small class sizes. She asked the district to consider every child in the process.

Board Comment:

Tony Thurmond thanked those who spoke tonight and shared in the difficult decisions. He said public input is of utmost importance and he would like to see a committee with broad representation. He said he felt that all schools should be considered, along with K-8 possibilities, preserving high performing schools, and giving students at low performing school opportunity for quality education.

Antonio Medrano urged this discussion to take place in community centers at all levels. He suggested a look at population trends, guarding high performing schools, and a review of the drop out problem.

Ms. Miles said that the community will be part of the process. Board members live and are employed in the community and are committed to work through this situation together. She continued to say that the current economic situation affects everyone as families struggle, but the solution will be found by people working together with a positive attitude.

Mr. Ramsey thanked the public and community for providing comment and feedback. He offered congratulations to Mr. Thurmond and Mr. Medrano. He said he experienced the closure of Seaview and cautioned the Board members to be thoughtful when they hear from public. He said he advocates maintaining reconstructed facilities because programs can be transferred to updated, safer facilities. He said he would suggest a blue ribbon commission process and welcome additional meetings set up with the ability for schools to have same level of involvement. He concluded by saying that a moratorium on school construction should not be a criterion and that this process will require involvement by every constituent group.

Mr. Thurmond offered clarification about comments regarding construction decisions. He said he recognized the Board's preference in maintaining rebuilt schools, while he does not want to be locked into a statement if a scenario might make sense for closure. He continued by saying he thought a blue ribbon committee should be balanced with a facilitator to move the process forward and invite schools, PTAs, parent clubs, and students to send delegates.

Mr. Ramsey said he would like to hear the opinions of Board members about rebuilt sites.

Ms. Miles said she would like to look at the MGT report and its school closure proposal. She said that if the emphasis for decisions is to be financially feasible, maintaining reconstructed schools should be a criterion.

Ms. Kronenberg said that reconstructed schools were built under a promise to voters and must be kept. She liked the wisdom of putting staffs together as high performance teams for a discussion among schools. She would like to find a way to incorporate as much participation as possible to include students, teachers, parents, and community. She said she also supports a facilitator to enable participants to listen to each other, with technical experts on an objective panel.

Mr. Medrano said that same data should be presented to all community meetings.

Mr. Ramsey asked Superintendent Harter to summarize what was heard tonight.

Superintendent Harter said he heard direction about a broad scale involvement with a series of community meetings to disseminate data and a call for experts to analyze the data and criteria. He said he heard disagreement about whether to consider newly renovated schools, but he sensed that cost benefit would need to be considered in property values. He said he will bring a recommendation to the Board for a parallel process in December.

Mr. Medrano urged experts to walk through neighborhoods to know the areas they are considering.

Mr. Thurmond clarified that on December 10, 2008 the Board will vote on criteria and a process for school closure. He asked that there be a way for the public to send recommendations through a link on the district website.

Mr. Medrano suggested that this financial problem and process might be a service learning project for high school seniors as an economic exercise.

D. ADJOURNMENT

Clerk Kronenberg adjourned the meeting at 8:42 PM.

BH:dh

AAM Approved 12-10-08
