

SLAC Committee Meeting

Monday, March 12, 2012

Present: Amy Amspacher, Lori Benjamin, Julie Belser, Caryl Buffa, Karen Fitzgerald, Beth Fox, Lisa Freeman, Lynn Fyfe, Jessica Gordon, Allison Henneman, Kim Kissel, Kim Littrell, Stephanie Palic, Joyce Stephens, Suzanne Vucovich, Mary Sue Wolf, Kelly Yoder, Gene Freeman and District Staff Debby Mitchell, Donna Prokay, Jason Reifsnyder, Tim Williams and Stacy Winslow.

Lynn Fyfe called the meeting to order at 7:03pm.

Gene Freeman introduced Laura Heikkinen, Director of Business Operations, Debby Mitchell, High School Principal, Donna Prokay, Director of Human Resources, Jason Reifsnyder, Middle School Principal, Stacy Winslow, District Administrator, and Tim Williams, Assistant to the Superintendent.

Laura Heikkinen – Budget Overview

There have been changes in assessed property values that have affected income to the school district. A decline in taxable assessed values has led to a decrease in income to the district of \$243,000. In addition, two hotels in the district have appealed their assessments which could amount to an additional \$5 million loss of income. Back in 2005 Alcoa appealed the taxable value of its property and it has been in the works ever since. The worst possible scenario is that the school district would have to repay back taxes to Alcoa, potentially several million dollars, but the process is ongoing.

For the 2012-2013 school year the act 1 index is 1.7%. That is the percentage amount the school district can raise property taxes without a referendum. In addition, the district has been approved for two exemptions. If the School Board approves the exemptions the district would be able to raise taxes above 1.7% without a referendum. The first exemption is for Special Education cost increases of \$667,122. The district is required by state and federal law to accommodate various special education requirements. Because of the mandates, the district has little control over increases in the costs of those services. The second exemption is for increases to the PSERS (Public School Employee Retirement System). The state mandates the school pay a certain percentage of salaries and the district must comply; they have no control of the amount. The increase for 2012-2013 amounts to \$596,999. (The estimates for future years continue to increase even more. The current year percentage is 8.65%. The percentage for 2012-2013 is 12.36%, 2013-14 is 16.69%, 2014-15 is 21.18% and 2015-16 estimated at 23.66% where it will remain for the next twenty years. This amounts to an additional annual expense of \$5.5 to \$6 million dollars, compared to what we currently pay, when we reach 23.66% in the 2015-16 school year.)

Salary and benefits make up 63% of the total budget. The early retirements will save the district approximately \$2 million. Currently 25 teachers will be retiring and 24 of them will not be replaced. In addition, the contractual raise for teachers is 3.8%, however the real number is close to 6.15% due to lateral moves. For example, if a teacher completes a masters degree program they are given a raise over and above the 3.8% in the contract.

Tuition reimbursements are expected to exceed the budgeted amount. Right now it is at 66% of the budget. The district uses this money to pay employees who further their own educations.

Planned changes to the current budget for the 2012-2013 school year include:

\$592,264 reduction in building budgets
\$280,760 reduction in curriculum and instruction
\$50,000 reduction in technology
\$208,800 increase in plant operation services
\$414,550 increase in utility costs

\$600,000 increase in transportation budget due to contractual obligations

2012-13 will be a very lean year and it will be more difficult in the future.

Currently the district is trying to find ways to increase revenue. One example is to charge for van use. Currently when students go on field trips they must cover the cost of the buses for the trip. In some cases small groups use school vans and pay nothing. The district is considering charging a fee for van use.

If the School Board agrees to raise taxes by the 1.7% act 1 index and the \$1.2 million in exceptions, our expenses will still be higher than our revenue.

The district is hoping to generate income from the Neff 6 building next year but there is no contract in place so details were not discussed. Because it is a school there are many regulations about how the property may be used making it very difficult to lease.

The student population has continued to grow and the demographics have changed somewhat. In the last few years we have gone from 13% of the student population qualifying for free and reduced lunches to 25%.

Donna Prokay – Stipends

Stipend contracts are written on a year-to-year basis. The district is analyzing all stipends in an effort to make them more equitable across the district. Currently there are 168 non-sports extra-curricular stipends and 92 coaching stipends. In 2010-11 the district spent \$806,000 on stipends. That does not include transportation, uniforms and all the other expenses associated with extra-curricular activities. In the 2011-12 school year after they were reduced by 50%, the district paid \$403,000. The district is trying to get a more detailed understanding of exactly how much various activities cost and determine if the \$60 activity fee has much of an impact.

Many at the meeting felt families would be willing to pay more than \$60.

Debby Mitchell, Jason Reifsnyder and Stacy Winslow – grading at the High School and Middle School

Stacy Winslow has been chairman of the grading committee that has been in existence for about three years. (There are currently no parents on the committee but they were invited. If anyone would like to be on the committee contact Stacy.) During the first year they did a lot of research with the intention of coming up with a K-12 grading policy. There are many different opinions of how best to proceed. As a result of this committee there is a pilot test retake policy in the middle school. Since the goal of teaching is for students to master a particular skill, allowing students to retake tests helps students accomplish this goal. If a student does poorly on a test they must show they have done additional work since the first test, for example completing any missed homework assignments, before they are permitted to retake any test. In addition, the student must continue to keep up with any new material that is being taught. A secondary goal is that students will realize it's difficult to retake tests and hopefully put in the proper effort the first time around. The hope is to implement the same policy at the high school next year once all the kinks

are worked out and a standard procedure can be implemented. It is still in the planning stages but the thinking right now is the policy would not apply to weighted, honors and AP (advanced placement), classes.

The turn around time for grading in the high school according to the teachers' handbook are one week for tests and two to three weeks for papers.

There were questions about why homework is limited to 5% of a student's grade in the middle and high school. The intent of homework is to provide practice and learning. Since it is not done in class there is no way a teacher can know for sure whether or not the student was the one who completed the work. In addition there were kids getting A's and B's in classes but not doing well on tests showing they did not understand the material. On the other hand there were students who didn't do the homework but did quite well on the tests. By limiting the weight of the homework students would not be able to go up or down an entire letter grade because of homework.

Common Areas of Concern

Parents of fourth graders were disappointed there would not be any kind of recognition ceremonies as they move from their elementary school to Landis Run, while there will be ceremonies for the fifth graders. This decision is the responsibility of the building principals.

Other business

Minutes from the January 9, 2012 meeting were approved.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 pm.

Next Meeting: May 14, 2012, at the District Office at Bucher Elementary, 7:00pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Stephanie T. Palic