

# Superintendent's Faculty Committee

## Minutes of Meeting November 3, 2004 Room 103, Doyle Building

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*Comments by Faculty Committee members are in italics and bold.* Responses by *At* Rainwater or other staff members are in regular type.

### ► Opening Comments, Budget, Election, Reading 1<sup>st</sup> Grants

The election results are pretty depressing for people in education. It's not possible to predict all of the consequences. What affects our district directly is No Child Left Behind (NCLB). We have heard that there will be a substantial shift of funding from ESEA to Reading 1<sup>st</sup> Grants, which after one year, the district has decided not to continue.

The Reading 1<sup>st</sup> grants are designed to support schools where reading is an issue. Like everything in NCLB, they are based on a relatively sound principle but farther down the line you find something insidious about that...NCLB, in general, is based on the premise that we should assess children – we all agree with that, particularly as it informs instruction; we agree it is good to assess progress at a point in time and also on a daily basis. NCLB took that idea and created an assessment system that is not conducive to that – it is based on snapshots. We believe the best way to look at progress is longitudinally, looking at growth. NCLB will compare this year's third graders at a point in time with last year's third graders. NCLB is also built on the idea of using research based best practices. We can all accept the idea that good research informs how we teach and helps children to learn. They have taken that idea and based it on a very narrow band of research, not because of its research design, but because it fits in with their ideology. Renowned researchers have assaulted the Bush administration for this in all areas, not just education – in order for grants to be funded, their research has to fit into a very narrow band of ideology.

What NCLB does is take these sound principles and apply them to research in a bad way, and applies a whole series of sanctions when things don't go well. It does not work to make change in a punitive environment. It sets out to reach what is an impossible goal. By the year 2013, if we have one single student in the whole district who is not proficient or advanced in reading, math and science, then our district would be designated a failure. Much research has been done by a variety of educational associations. They show that, after six years, 80% of districts will be failing. When that is the goal, people don't take it seriously. An important part about making change is having attainable goals.

Part of this as well is the Reading 1<sup>st</sup> grant. We originally did not intend to apply because we did not believe we could meet the qualifications, but were encouraged by DPI to apply, so we did. We have our own reading program, which is very successful for us. We spent much time and effort developing it and training people to teach it. Five schools got the grant and received the first year funding. As part of the process, we asked for technical assistance from the University of Oregon (the designated technical advisors) and we worked with them for

several months. As part of this grant, there are five reading programs you can purchase, but you can also have your own. We submitted our own program. The technical advisors said we needed to write a consumer guide (which we did, tying everything we do to research). The advisors said we needed to do more – to write a scope and sequence (which we did – its good and will enhance our program). The advisors said we needed some way to make sure our program is being implemented (we enhanced our checklists, which unproved our program). Then the advisors said we need to have daily, scripted lesson plans so that every teacher in every school will be teaching the same lesson in exactly the same way according to the exact same timeline. We said we couldn't go there – but we could develop a structured lesson plan guide which we feel would be a good tool. The advisors said a core reading program should have 80% of children successful. At a final, big meeting, we presented our very clear, supportive data, over time. They said, OK, but they won't compromise on the scripted lesson plans.

They have no data that shows the programs they offer are successful 80% of the time. We have a program that works; we are making tremendous progress. So, we turned it down. Everyone involved with that decision concurred. We will soon present our annual report to the Board of Education on their priorities. We will share that there is no achievement gap at the minimal level on the third grade reading test – regardless of race or income – we cannot make predictions based on either race or income. For middle income children, we cannot predict achievement based on race. We need to concentrate interventions for low income children still scoring in the basic range. There is also no difference now, as there was in the past, between third and fourth grade data.

*What was the reaction to the district saying no to federal money? I read a little about it in the newspaper.* That was it – there was no other reaction. *Will this preclude us from getting other grants?* I don't think so. We have been pretty successful at getting them. A concern is that it will be harder and harder to meet the criteria on grants. When they are based on things we don't believe in, it presents a dilemma about compromising. Do we forego what we believe in order to get money? (Jane Belmore gave an example about not considering meaning when teaching beginning reading.) *I have a niece in school in an outlying district and she was told that – don't worry about what it means, just sound it out.*

This situation (declining federal funds) presents a dilemma for a Superintendent – not so much for me because I've done what I want to do and am looking at the end of my career. But for a young, career-building Superintendent in a struggling district it would be very hard to decide whether you accept desperately needed money and compromise program, or turn it down because you know you have something better. About this situation in our district, I saw one article in the newspaper from a Board member, another that refuted that and two other letters, each reflecting an opposing opinion – that's it. I can promise that we will not compromise the learning of kids for money. We are fortunate that we live in a city that let's us do that. In the end, it's all about kids learning. During my tenure, we will not compromise our teachers' ability to teach kids.

## ► Food, Healthy Food Choices

*What can we as professionals do to respond to the problem of obesity and helping students make appropriate, healthy food choices. Our students are able to buy donuts at breakfast. (Another comment) Our sophomores were tested today – their breakfast choices were a banana apple, frozen juice, or six donuts.* Frank Kelly is working hard to deal with that – one way is by working with Home Grown Foods. They have a wonderful program – educationally and nutritionally – but it is difficult to provide all that we need for such a large district, processed the way we would need it. There is also the dilemma that the Food Service program has to be self-sustaining, so Frank is also interested in what students will eat. We are also learning that there are foods that students will eat that we didn't think they would. I heard a story through the Minority Student Achievement Network Board about a renowned chef who created 10 healthy choices menus for the Brookline, Massachusetts school district – and they found their student participation skyrocketing. Frank is serious about addressing this issue here. *Staff are concerned – maybe students need some information – can we phase out some of these choices?* Why don't you invite Frank to speak with your staff.

*If students don't eat part of their lunch (not unwrapped or opened), can we put it out for other students who may want to eat it?* I don't think so, because of health department restrictions, which are different for us than for restaurants, even. I don't think we've ever had a problem with that, though – the biggest problem is the “faculty pot luck”. (Checked with Frank Kelly, who provided this information for the minutes....) Once a food item is served to a student, it must be thrown out if they choose not to eat the item. That would include wrapped, unwrapped, open or unopened items.

*As long as you're talking with Frank, remind him that we'd like to receive the weekly and monthly menus in Spanish – need them.* (Frank Kelly responded for the minutes....) The middle school menu is put on the intranet each month in both Spanish and Hmong. The elementary menus are on their school phone system. I'm not aware of anytime in the last year when they were not available.

## ► Recycling

*What is the status of recycling? We have recycling containers everywhere, but nothing is recycled.* We do some, I believe paper. (Jane Belmore added) The issue is pick up and getting the materials to a central site. *See them emptying paper recycling containers at my school, and it all goes into the same trash – its not recycled. Can we at least do newspapers? What about the plastic and aluminum trays that come with breakfast and lunch? Remind staff to use less paper, more e-mail.* I'll follow up and get some information. (Response from Doug Pearson for the minutes....) We do have a recycling program, and custodians should be dumping the contents of the blue recycling containers in the recycling dumpster. Madison Recycling pays us market value for mixed paper collected. We count on the cooperation of students and staff to put the recyclables in the appropriate container. Building Services also recycles cardboard and scrap metals. (Response from Frank Kelly for the minutes....) The district does not have the staff nor the space to manage recycling the trays and the biggest problem is the food left on the trays. We don't have the facilities or people to wash the trays and if they are stored that way, it attracts rodents and bugs and there are health issues. Several individual staff members have attempted to recycle them, but it has not ended up well.

(Speaking of e-mail....) Communicating via e-mail is very different than writing a letter – when you do that you write it, sometimes by hand, put it in an envelope, put a stamp on it and get it to the mail: you have time to think about it. When you write an e-mail, you just push the “send” button, and you can definitely tell from some of the message I receive that sometimes people have not thought about whether they want to send it or not.

## ► Mote Budget....

*Are we headed for another \$10 million in budget cuts?* The best case, which I believe we are heading for, is between \$6-7 million. The worst case would be if the Legislature passes a property tax freeze and the Governor can't veto it, which would result in somewhere between \$15-17 million. These cuts are getting bolder and harder to make. We are at the point where there are not many places to cut except schools. We could give up some functions, but you see what happens then – for example, the Board decided to cut the Fine Arts Coordinator, but then reinstated it. At the central administration – when we cut things, we can no longer provide services. Sue Abplanalp's job is an example – we cut an Assistant Superintendent, the Coordinator for Staff Development, and the Coordinator for Title I and combined those three jobs and gave them to Sue Abplanalp. Does everything get accomplished in the same way? No – some things were assigned to other people who already have full time jobs; they can't do it all. What if (only an example) we cut Research & Evaluation where we would only have to have a person to manage testing? We could cut the rest, but we would lose a lot – all our data and reports. People will work longer, take on more work. That too, will affect schools – we can no longer provide support; it changes the nature of the school. We have not yet hurt our quality of education, but we can't keep on making cuts. *Is No Child Left Behind the driving force behind the cuts?* No, it's the revenue cap. NCLB, up to this point, has not “cost” us anything. What causes the cuts is the interplay between the revenue cap and the QEO. It would be “worst case” if they eliminate the QEO and keep the revenue cap. This is a situation similar to what businesses face all the time – making the decision to hold salaries down and keep people, or cut people.

**For future referendums, like for new buildings or building maintenance, will there be work on what the wording of those questions will be?** The Board is committed to a referendum for Leopold (which would raise property taxes about \$16-17.00 per year for the average homeowner) and to renew the maintenance referendum (which actually funds itself but doesn't save the taxpayer money) – these will be two separate questions. This does not represent a big property tax hit – but if we need a referendum for \$6 million every year, it gets more difficult to sell. At my rate, everything would be on a separate question.

**When is the referendum vote for TABOR?** That has to pass the Legislature twice and has not yet come up for the first vote. **Are we headed in that direction?** I'm not sure. Joe Quick, our legislative liaison, reports that the Republicans keep bringing it up and forcing the Governor to veto it, which he has said he will do. People are beginning to understand the consequences and how this will affect everyone.

Recorded by Ann Wilson.