



Potomac Elementary School

School Board Minutes

for

June 22, 2012

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*“Potomac School equips each student for his/her future
within a culture of excellence that values the small community experience.”*

Call to Order

Board Chair Robert O’Boyle called the meeting to order at 4:14 PM by leading all in the Pledge of Allegiance. Those trustees present were: Jeff Hahn, Gary Long Victoria Richardson and Jim Wrobel. Tim Johnson, principal and Jill Thornton, clerk, were also in attendance.

Public Input (for issues not on the agenda) None.

Consent Agenda

Victoria moved to approve the Consent Agenda. Jim seconded the motion. **Passed 5-0.**

Potomac School Strategic Plan

At the last Board meeting, Jim said his attendance at the MTSBA legal primer was very helpful. He has felt the need for more direction in negotiating with the staff, and Debra Silk made a statement at the legal primer that hit the core of his frustration. She said “in order to develop a contract, the board needs a strategic plan” ...that can then be used to analyze how the negotiated contract fits with that plan. With the substantial budget constraints the school faces next year, he feels we need a strategic plan to develop a contract compatible with where we want to go.

Bob started the discussion on a strategic plan for Potomac School by stating it needs to be considered in two parts. The first is for the short term to give Jim, Victoria and Jeff a base plan to be considered during negotiations with staff. The second is a long term plan for the school. He would like to form a committee similar to the vision statement committee. The committee would work on a recommendation for this plan to present to the School Board. As with the vision and goals committees, it could be composed of representatives from the staff, the School Board and the community, with Tim as the coordinator.

Bob then asked for volunteers from the Board. Jim said he would like to work on the plan. He added that the discussions he was part of while on the committees for the vision statement and the goals work well into discussions for the strategic plan. Bob also volunteered.

Jim then asked what is needed for a strategic plan. We do not need to rehash goals, but achieve them. Bob said we could pick the 3 to 5 most important goals and develop a plan to reach those first. Jim also added that an action plan to reach those goals needs financial projections.

Bob said what we are already doing is working to create a school that will increase enrollment. Things like the athletic field and the 4 day school week are starts, but the increased financial gains are long term results. At this point, he would like to focus on what is needed for the short term to help with negotiations.

Jim said the next negotiations are the week of July 2nd. Since he cannot have a strategic plan by then, he would like to know what is important to the Board. “As the Board, it is our responsibility to ensure the students are well educated.” He feels that is the main reason for everything. With a tighter budget, we need to prioritize.

Victoria said the negotiations have discussed everything but salary to this point. One of the points has focused on a disparity in the prep period for teachers, which has changed from 250 minutes to 240 minutes per year. Jim said the discussion began because of the change from 187 days per year with 5 days per week, to a 4 day week. The language in the contract deals with the days throughout the contract, so the language needs to be adjusted for next year. He also said the matrix increase next year of approximately 4% makes it impossible to add anything on the

base. The usual request from the union when there is no financial addition to the base is for a change in the language beneficial to the staff. But this often has a financial impact also.

Bob said he feels we cannot put language in a contract that does not reflect our vision statement and goals. And many teachers already put in extra time at school which is not compensated.

Victoria said she has a problem with the fact that the matrix does not allow for any reward or bonus for teachers who do outstanding work. She would much rather pay extra for those who go above and beyond.

Jim said that 'pay for performance' needs a definitive plan. One of the arguments against it is that it's driven by personality, not performance.

Victoria said the next consideration is does the board give the teachers a raise by letting another teacher go?

Tim said this brings up an often stated comment about the number of students in the classes. When the teachers have a class of 10 students, it has been commented that 10 is too few students and the class size should be increased. That is a value statement. Either it is perceived as 'too few students' or 'an amazing opportunity'. There is a value behind small classes. There is also a value in offering the teachers more compensation, but it means larger classrooms.

This brings up the need to expand our base of students outside of our district. Tim explained the district he was a part of in Minnesota. People were waiting to get into the community because it was the top school in the state. He feels the matrix method of compensation needs another piece. As an example, if compensation was based on outside income or attendance the matrix could be used as base pay, with additional income added on through bonuses.

Tim also says performance pay can be structured to avoid personality problems, though personality is part of the equation as it can negatively affect performance. The matrix is an entitlement system. That type of system doesn't work well with our fluctuating enrollment.

Jim said we are considering this because historically there has been a net financial gain to the staff. That has shown to be unsustainable. So, how do we move forward with volatile budgets, and how can we include incentives?

Jeff said one of our goals is to attract more students as well as attract teachers by offering an exciting place to work. He does not feel we reach that goal with an entitlement system of pay, nor can he justify an entitlement pay system to the community.

Bob said the comments he has been presented with from the community is 'we're all taking pay cuts, why can't teachers?' His feeling is that pay cuts would create a bad working environment.

Tim also brought up the fact that the teachers already have gone through a staff reduction, which has created more work. Grade levels have combined and the teachers have more subjects to prepare for. There is a value to working in a small district, but added work load creates a risk. Finances are not the only part of the equation. Incentives should go where the extra work goes. Tim said the school is already doing good things to create the 'best education' in the state. A peer review process might be an example of how to add performance pay to our system.

Jim asked the board if adding performance pay is the direction it would like to go in. He feels it is, and that it can start with a small step. The board agreed.

Tim brought up the problem with additional pay for teachers at the top of the matrix. He feels they need extra for longevity as the teachers who are in the middle of the matrix receive.

Gary asked what we are planning for if our budget keeps shrinking. And what do you base performance pay on? Is it student scores, bright students vs. troubled students? He is supportive of weaving in performance pay for the staff, but he also feels we need to look at the economic reality. How do we prepare if class sizes and enrollment stay stagnant? We need to live within our means and structure pay for the long term, which includes possible lean prospects.

Bob said bids are often based only on cost, not quality. The cost of educating our students should be considered on quality.

Victoria said she has seen the results of employees receiving bonuses. They feel very proud. It needs to be a target they can attain.

Tim said money is not the only reason people stay in places. If that is the only incentive, then some people are working for the wrong reason. He feels our pay system is not wrong, just not balanced. Since our payroll goal is to remain at 80% of General fund costs, we could start with pay composing 79.9% of that fund, with the last .1% offered as performance pay.

Bob said even though grants cannot be relied on for the long term, can they be used for the short term?

Jim said his review of the preliminary budget showed no buffer for contingencies. The preferred percent for contingencies is 5%. What can we offer the staff if the matrix is reduced? What about the money saved, especially if contingencies are not required?

Tim offered the possibility of basing bonuses on community communication. We could have a survey in the fall on communication, and then again in spring. Also, if a peer review process was set up it would reduce the problem with 'personality' as a basis for evaluation.

Bob said this can also be renegotiated in the future. Starting the process is what is needed now.

Jim said he feels this is good beginning direction to go back to the negotiations with.

Adult Education Fund

Jill presented an opportunity to the school board that has opened up as a result of our 4 day week and reduced transportation needs. The preliminary calculations show a savings of 5.34 mils in general fund and transportation costs. At this point, the kindergarten building is being refitted, with the kindergarten moving to the main school. If the uses of that building included adult education, additional saved mils put towards an Adult Education fund could provide a visible benefit to the community.

Jim moved to create an Adult Education fund and fund it with 5.34 mils. Victoria seconded the motion.

Jim feels offering adult education provides many benefits.

Bob said adult education opens the door for the community to get more involved.

Jeff asked if the community could then come in and check out a book? The answer is – they always could, but the library in the basement of the school caused problems with that.

Tim said this is an investment in the community.

Bob called for a vote on the motion. **Passed 5-0.**

Principal Evaluation

Chair O'Boyle closed the meeting for the principal evaluation.

The meeting was reopened at 6:18pm

Adjourn

Chair O'Boyle adjourned the Board meeting at 6:19pm.