

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the Oak Park and River Forest High School was held on Monday, November 30, 2009, in the Board Room of the high school.

Call to Order

President Protempore Lee called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. A roll call indicated the following members were present: John C. Allen, IV, Jacques A. Conway, Terry Finnegan, Dr. Ralph H. Lee, Amy Leafé McCormack, Dr. Dietra D. Millard, and Sharon Patchak-Layman. Also, present was Dr. Attila J. Weninger, Superintendent and Gail Kalmerton, Executive Assistant/Clerk of the Board of Education.

Visitors

Kay Foran, Communications and Community Relations Coordinator; James Paul Hunter, Faculty Senate Executive Committee Chair, and Bob Skolnik of the *Wednesday Journal*.

Visitor Comments

Mr. Hunter read the following statement.

“I am speaking here today because the faculty feels it is crucial that we share our feelings about the recent and very public conflict that has divided this Board. First and foremost, the faculty urges you to move forward, so that you can join the faculty in meeting the very real challenges that await the school. Indeed, so focused are we on the task of raising achievement for all students, that we are tempted to say nothing at all about the strange turn of events that culminated in November’s extraordinary Board meeting. However, upon reflection, we feel we must communicate to you our concern that the obvious confusion, dissension, secrecy, and factionalism that has marked recent Board governance will, if not soon corrected, taint the entire institution.

“And so, as we look to the future, we urge all Board members and the Superintendent to demonstrate a greater commitment to following Board Policy 20, Article IX, which requires the Superintendent to “provide a copy of the agenda, with adequate data and background information, to each Board of Education member at least 48 hours before each meeting, except a meeting held in the event of an emergency.”

“So, too, do we urge all Board members to adhere to the Article 6 of the IASB’s Code of Ethics, which states: “I will encourage and respect the free expression of opinion by my fellow board members and will participate in board discussions in an open, honest, and respectful manner, honoring differences of opinion or perspective.”

“Furthermore, we remind the members of the Board of the importance of speaking with one voice. Doing so will prevent the confusing spectacle of the past few weeks in which certain Board members contradicted the

Board's official announcement that the Superintendent had retired, by saying, on the record, that the Superintendent was actually "fired."

"Additionally, we implore the Board to strive for consistency in its actions. Just in the last month, the Board has abruptly reversed its course on two significant issues, namely the status of negotiations with the Superintendent and the implementation of the Baldrige Review. Such vacillation might well paralyze a faculty less committed than this one to effecting positive change.

"Respectfully, we remind the Board and the Superintendent that in the long run factionalism, indiscretion, and polarization are qualities that are fundamentally incompatible with effective school governance.

"We are confident that by working together, the school can recover from this divisive episode. We hope the Board is prepared to move ahead. We exhort the Board to join this faculty in attempting to meet the enormous challenges that await the school. A first step in avoiding future problems would be the expeditious creation of a Search Committee for our next Superintendent.

"Finally, please know that the Faculty is poised, ready, and eager to tackle the challenges that lie ahead."

Dr. Millard read the following statement:

"This statement enters into the official District record why I elected to step down as President of the District 200 Board of Education, effective at the end of our Board meeting, November 20, 2009.

On that date, the Board of Education made a decision to re-open negotiations with our Superintendent for a one-year extension of his contract. I respect that decision. I also respect the right of a group to change its position. This Board has changed positions in the past typically after open and more thorough, collective discussion about an issue. Yet on the question of the extension of the Superintendent's contract, individual Board of Education members excluded their colleagues from private conversations despite ample time and opportunity to bring their concerns to the attention of the President and full Board. In my view, such conduct is unworthy of a democratic body that prizes transparency and inclusiveness in all deliberations and decisions affecting the District. By failing to alert the President, Board of Education members and the Superintendent also impeded my responsibility as the President to bring an important agenda item to the entire Board's attention in advance of the meeting.

During my tenure as President of this Board of Education, I welcomed all perspectives on District issues, regardless of my own point of view.

As President, I felt a personal responsibility to listen intently to each member's opinion and to gain a comprehensive understanding that would guide responsible decision-making. By ignoring democratic procedures and principles, some members of the Board have weakened my trust that they would consistently apply standards of honorable Board conduct and governance. Under these circumstances, I felt obligated to step down.

I will continue serving as a Board member. As we move forward, I would remind each of us of the oath we took when seated on this Board: "...that I shall abide by majority decisions of the Board of Education, while retaining the right to seek changes through (ethical and) constructive channels." I ask that we individually and collectively renew our commitment to fairness, transparency, and inclusion in our actions as a Board. I implore each of us to reflect upon our responsibilities to each other and to the District, regardless of how strongly we may advocate a particular position or course of action. We owe exemplary conduct to the students we serve and to the members of our communities of Oak Park and River Forest. As stewards of a school that professes excellence, we should settle for nothing less."

Closed Session

Mr. Finnegan moved to enter closed session for the purpose of discussing the appointment, employment, compensation, discipline, performance, or dismissal of specific employees of the District or legal counsel for the District, including hearing testimony on a complaint lodged against an employee or against legal counsel for the District to determine its validity. 5 ILCS 120/2(c)(1), as amended by PA. 93—57; seconded by Dr. Millard. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

The Board of Education resumed its open session at 10:29 p.m.

**Rescission of
Addendum to
Superintendent
Contract**

No action was taken.

**Approval of
Superintendent
Contract**

No action was taken.

Adjournment

At 10:30 p.m. on Monday, November 30, 2009, Mr. Conway moved to adjourn the Special Board Meeting; seconded by Mr. Allen. A roll call vote resulted in all ayes. Motion carried.

Dr. Ralph H. Lee
President Protempore

John C. Allen, IV
Secretary