

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 625**  
**Saint Paul, Minnesota**  
**MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING**

**December 16, 2009**

**1. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 5:39 p.m.

**II. ROLL CALL**

PRESENT: Ms. Carroll, Mr. Hardy, Ms. Kong-Thao, Ms. O'Connell,  
Ms. Varro, Mr. Brodrick

ABSENT: Ms. Street-Stewart. She joined the meeting at 5:42 p.m.

**III. ORDER OF THE AGENDA**

The purpose of the meeting was to hear Dr. Douglas Reeves of the Leadership and Learning Center (LLC) share the summary findings of an Implementation Audit of 16 key SPPS academic initiatives. The Audit will help SPPS determine both the extent to which the initiatives are implemented at the school and district level and the extent to which the initiatives are linked to student achievement.

Dr Reeves indicated he would be covering the Executive Summary of the Audit with the Board. He extended his thanks to SPPS leadership and staff stating LLC found them to be candid, open, direct and willing to confront what is not going well and taking pride in what was working. He went on to state that overall there was a clear and measurable relationship between many of SPPS' initiatives and gains in student achievement. The Audit covered data (State test scores) from the spring of 2008 to spring 2009. In many, not all, cases there was a measurable gain with deep implementation of initiatives and gains in achievement. He then went on to review the key findings of the audit.

- A. The District will benefit by focusing on fewer initiatives with greater depth. The initiatives may have value individually; however, the problem is no matter how good an initiative is it is only as good as the time allowed for implementation.
- B. The Senior Leadership Team has extraordinary clarity and specificity of vision. They know what to do and are communicating consistent messages.
- C. The district teachers and leaders are clearly focused on achievement and equity. There is a high degree of commitment to achievement across the district. The issue is moving from building level excellence to system level excellence.
- D. In the area of instructional coaching, district leaders should clarify and specify expectations for instructional coaching. While there is an exceptional cadre of experienced and professional instructional coaches, the supervision and use of these coaching resources is inconsistent.

**QUESTIONS:**

- Is the decision about how coaches are used determined at the building level, mid-level, who makes those decisions? Response: Officially this is a central office decision. What is observed however is that it is executed with wide variation at building level.
- E. SPPS is rich in data but more principals and teachers could use the data in specific and detailed ways to improve instructional and leadership decisions. Plans and

assessments, however carefully designed, will not have an impact on student results if the plans are not monitored and the assessment data is not used to guide teachers and leaders in their decisions.

- F. Professional development should more carefully match specific teacher and administrator needs. The professional development structure for SPPS is complex and clearly committed to meeting the needs of the district. Teacher mobility and frequent new training requirements at school level can result in a mismatch between professional development delivered and the needs of teachers and schools. There should be a more collaborative effort between the Teacher's Federation and district administration so that professional development takes place within a defined framework.
- G. The relationship between implementation of initiatives and gains in student achievement is generally low and non-linear. This does not mean every initiative is ineffective but that the time, technology, professional learning, resources, teaching attention and leadership support for each initiative is fragmented, with the more recent initiatives crowding out time and attention to initiatives from previous years or in other cases a deep commitment to previous curricula (reading in particular) which prevents allocation of time and teacher attention to the new.
- H. Time requirements for initiatives should correspond to capacity and needs. Time use varies widely among schools with several blocks of time in school schedules having multiple initiatives competing for the same block of time. Professional learning communities are fragmented with multiple demands.
- I. High degrees of implementation for several SPPS initiatives are related to gains in achievement. Low and moderate levels of implementation generally has little impact on achievement. If implementation is done right, it works.
- J. No high levels of implementation were observed in some initiatives. Nevertheless, even here with moderate implementation some gains were observed. The preponderance of evidence shows the higher/deeper the level of implementation the greater the gains.

The District has taken the initiative to articulate next steps; there is a clear commitment to follow up on implementation. Dr. Reeves recommended a synthesis of the main themes of commendation among the schools as a possibly valuable tool.

#### QUESTIONS/DISCUSSION:

- A Board member noted there is a need to review the data to find any remaining inequities within the system and address them. It is important to see where the deep implementation is occurring and this may help identify some of those remaining inequities.
- Are there specific recommendations on what should be dropped? Response: There are areas which need to be continued, expanded and celebrated. There needs to be a system for celebrating building level successes and documenting and sharing these across the district. Dr. Reeves noted several programs really ought to be replicated:
  - Writer's Workshop
  - Everyday Math
  - Content-Focused Coaching
  - Professional Learning Communities
  - Language Skills Block
- It was noted some programs need further review – what measurement was used, was it the correct measure, are there inconsistencies in implementation, is there inadequate teacher support, is time allowed insufficient or was the initiative simply unsuccessful.
- Will this mean increased testing and record keeping for teachers? Response: There are efficiencies in record keeping by doing it “real time”. On over testing, if an assessment is followed by recognition of what needs to be worked on it is a valuable asset. It provides feedback which teachers can use. The testing culture is a change for teachers, they need to learn to look at the data and what can be done with data; it will take time and a culture shift.

Dr. Reeves stated the District is poised for great improvement; there have been outstanding building level gains in achievement and improvements in professional practices. These improvements get clouded in the district averages. The Board may want to begin to balance the macro and the micro views of the district.

#### NEXT STEPS

- The first step is to fully review and analyze the information contained in the report. It must be viewed as part of all of the information being collected regarding student performance and implementation of key initiatives, including: state assessment results, formative assessment results, observations from school executive directors, professional development leaders, content specialists, school and program leaders and the senior leadership team.
- The SLT will appoint an audit Project Team to fully analyze findings and prepare a report with preliminary recommendations to the Superintendent by January 29, 2010.
- The Center for Professional Development and school executive directors will provide support to school principals in early January for the analysis of the individual school data contained in the audit.
- The larger engagement and alignment process will then follow. Between mid-January and early March, administration will work to align the audit recommendations to the budget development process.
- Shortly after winter break, staff, families and the community will see a number of communications about engagement opportunities related to the combined budget and recommendation process.
- The Superintendent plans to make decisions on specific initiatives and approaches, within the context of the district-wide budget and priority-setting process, by March 5, 2010 so that items requiring Board action may be forwarded to the Board well before final decisions on the budget are required.

#### IV. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: Ms. Carroll moved the meeting adjourn. Mr. Brodrick seconded the motion.

The motion passed with the following roll call vote:

Ms. Street-Stewart	Yes
Ms. Carroll	Yes
Mr. Hardy	Yes
Ms. Kong-Thao	Yes
Ms. O'Connell	Yes
Ms. Varro	Yes
Mr. Brodrick	Yes

The meeting adjourned at 6:28 p.m.

For clarity and to facilitate research, these minutes reflect the order of the Agenda and not necessarily the time during the meeting the items were discussed.

Prepared and submitted by  
Marilyn Polsfuss  
Assistant Clerk, St. Paul Public Schools Board of Education