

Rochester Board of Education Board Governance Committee

Minutes
May 30, 2006
6 p.m.

Attendance: Commissioners Elliott and Henley, District Staff Kim Dyce, Board Staff Linda Dunsmoor. Commissioner Thompson arrived at 6:05 p.m. Commissioner Powell absent.

Commissioner Henley convened the meeting at 6:00 p.m.

1) Board Retreat

Commissioner Henley said he wanted to discuss the positives and negatives of the Board's organizational retreat on May 6. He asked Commissioner Elliott to open the discussion.

Commissioner Elliott said she was happy with the facilitator at the retreat. If the intent of the retreat was for Commissioners to become closer, that was not accomplished, but it may be okay. She said there are remaining issues but that with tension and conflict come opportunities. She suggested that future retreats, if held, should take up the "parking lot" issues of the May 6 retreat; specifically her issues of trust of the Superintendent and the information she is given.

Commissioner Henley noted the retreat provided a unique experience to see how Commissioners worked together in an informal atmosphere. He added that the diversity on the Board is a positive; Commissioners don't all have to be best friends and if that were the case, it could actually hinder their abilities to do their jobs. He identified another "parking lot" issue, which concerned determining which associations the Board belongs to and ensuring there is a formal Board liaison to each association. He also brought up the recent school violence reporting article in the local newspaper, using it to cite the Commissioners' need to be able to trust the information provided by administration.

Commissioner Thompson said collaboration across standing committees is key and suggested a quarterly meeting of the Chairs of each committee.

Commissioner Elliott said an additional Board meeting per month may need to be scheduled as a work session. At a work session, she envisions Commissioners communicating with each other in a non-official capacity; no voting on resolutions; and dialogue between Commissioners and staff to spur a better understanding of what will be voted on at the monthly Business Meeting. She noted that her "no" votes at Business Meetings are often based on a lack of information, not opposition.

Commissioner Thompson said such a work session could be used to cover topics like Parent Preference/Managed Choice, for example, and as an opportunity for open free dialogue.

Commissioner Elliott said the impact on the public of a work session would have to be considered.

In response to Commissioner Henley, Commissioner Thompson said that Business Meetings have been held away from Central Office in the past at various schools. She said they were often scheduled in conjunction with another event at a school.

Commissioners discussed the best method for instituting a second monthly Board meeting as a work session, whether under New Business at the Business Meeting, through a discussion with the Board leadership, or as a resolution from the Committee or from the floor.

ACTION ITEM: Research what other Board's work sessions look like. Also report on the staffing provided to other Boards, the Monroe County Legislature and the City of Rochester.

ACTION ITEM: What associations do we belong to? Who is willing to be assigned?

Linda Dunsmoor to provide in time for next meeting.

2) Process for filling Board vacancies

Ideas discussed as previous meetings:

The vacancy will be advertised through press releases, the Board's website, and at public meetings. The selection process will be noted and candidates must agree to participate as part of application process.

Applications for the vacancy will be accepted for two weeks from the initial announcement. Board staff will screen applications as they arrive to be sure candidates meet the residency, party affiliation and age requirements for appointment.

Candidate interviews will be conducted by all Board members who meet party criteria. Up to XX percent of applicants, but not more than XX, will be scheduled for interviews. If necessary, the Board will narrow the field of candidates using a method to be determined.

The Board will narrow the field to three and will host a public forum to introduce the candidates.

Following that forum the Board will select a replacement by a simple majority.

Discussing the above, Commissioner Elliott noted that appointments are primarily political and that more time is needed for dialogue regarding candidates. Last time, she felt that the Board raced through the applications because a decision had already been made. She also said that there may be people in the Party who want certain candidates supported.

Commissioner Thompson said the Committee should recommend a process that would promote dialogue.

Commissioner Henley suggested a three-step process: Whittle down number of candidates, interview selected candidates, then discuss candidates and vote.

Commissioner Thompson said each Commissioner could come prepared to discuss three candidates. She also said that principles and fairness cannot be sacrificed for the sake of politics.

Commissioner Elliott pointed out that all Commissioners should be able to see all the paperwork submitted for a vacancy.

ACTION ITEM: Determine methods for removing a Board member in order to see what qualities a good Board member possesses; criteria.

Linda Dunsmoor to provide information in time for next committee meeting.

3. Televising of Board Business meetings

Linda Dunsmoor reported that she had discussed the matter with District staff and that meetings can be televised with little to no cost for labor.

Commissioner Elliott said that even at the worst-case scenario of \$800 in labor per broadcast, the Business Meetings should still be broadcast on live television (public access channel).

She motioned that a recommendation go to the full Board that Business Meetings be televised; second by Commissioner Henley. Carried.

Action item: Linda Dunsmoor to write resolution and forward to Committee members for consideration at June 15, 2006 Business Meeting.

4. Discussion items

Commissioner Thompson said she was in attendance in order to discuss the purview of Board Officers; their parameters and behaviors; and actions to be taken when decisions rendered fall outside of officers' purviews. Commissioner Thompson's second discussion topic was the "communications protocols" established for the Board and Administration.

There was some debate among Commissioners as to whether these topics belong in Governance or the Policy Committee, or perhaps in a Committee of the Whole discussion. Commissioners agreed that any protocols either among Board members or between individual Board members and the administration must be administered fairly and uniformly.

Commissioner Thompson recommended that there be -- by whichever body -- a review of the language of the Board Bylaws regarding the roles of the President and Vice President for the purpose of advancing recommendations for changes with an eye toward reducing the opportunities for misuse or abuse of the authority of the President and Vice President so Commissioners are in fact a body of seven equals.

Governance will continue the discussion at its next meeting, June 27, 2006.

Adjournment: Motion by Commissioner Elliott, Second by Commissioner Henley, approved at 7:50 p.m.