

Rochester Board of Education
Policy Committee Public Hearing
May 14, 2008
6 p.m.

Chairman Brennan opened the hearing at 6:03 p.m. with Commissioners Elliott and Powell. Commissioner White also attended. Chairman Brennan noted that the topics were Parent Involvement and School Based Planning. He outlined the structure as participants speak and the Committee members listen. He asked speakers to provide their names and addresses at the start of their discussion. The results of this meeting and the Monday hearing are expected to be discussed at the Committee's May 20 meeting. He noted that people can always provide comments to the Board in writing, by phone or by email.

Charlie Richardson
4 Spring Hill
Fairport

Mr. Richardson said he is an active member of the community; this is the 16th time he has spoken to Board, and has never gotten a response except when former President Domingo Garcia had him removed. He has spoken to more than 8,000 families. The number one reason there is not parent involvement is the school choice policy. The District spends \$43 million on busing. How are parents expected to get to school conferences that are on the other side of the city. He urged the committee to reinstitute neighborhood schools. All schools should be equal. It would help build the parent organizations too. He also asked why buses sit idling for 45 minutes waiting to pick up students and cited the issues of the cost of fuel and the fumes.

VW: Training not to respond.

Commissioner Brennan explained that the structure of a Public Hearing is for the public to speak and the Board to listen. Other meetings can be scheduled to accommodate the exchange of ideas.

Lori Thomas
Teacher, Community Member, Parent
460 Hayward Ave.

Ms. Thomas said she hears people talk about parent and community involvement and hears people say parents not involved. We are all their parents. You have parent involvement. They're all our children. There is parent involvement right here and the Committee is not listening. You may hear us but you are not listening. There's a difference. Ms. Thomas said the Committee can't wait for parents to fill the room before something is done. All of our children are dying now. Ms. Thomas said the City spent \$9 million in overtime for police because education is not doing its job. The graduation rate is a crime and they see it as ok because we see it as ok. Thirty-nine percent shouldn't be ok by us and shouldn't be ok for them. Children see adults role-modeling disrespect and hatred; bullying; and they see good people being harassed. There are children having a tantrum who are taken to Strong Psych for a mental health check, how can you sit there and take money for hating children? It's not rocket science but it has to be done. All have to step up as adults, not just by book but by example. There is no integrity in this process. There is no truth in this process. Honor and justice don't exist in this process. Adults are role-modeling their failure and blaming them for it. We need to start changing us so we can change them. People should be more concerned with them than whether or not we're going to be sued. We need to stop reducing them to dollars and cents and act like we have some sense.

Deborah Jones
640 Genesee Street

Ms. Jones said she became so angry while preparing a written statement for the meeting that she couldn't understand her own writing. There are certain groups that have gone to the Superintendent to tell him what we think is wrong with the system, how we need parent involvement. Parent Academy is to help us help our kids with homework that they don't get, and we will be taught by the same teachers who teach them, the same teachers who are not doing their job. Ms. Jones discussed a friend with a son going into first grade who was told to use a form and select five schools from column a and two from column b. Her friend chose seven schools from column b because she didn't want her son at any of the schools offered in column a. We have got to start educating our children. The police will get ahold of high school dropouts. Children need to know how to learn. Ms. Jones said she does not need Parent Academy, she can teach her grandsons whatever they need to know. If she doesn't, they will fail. She doesn't want any child falling through the cracks. There are better laws protecting animals than children. You have to wake up.

Glenny Williams

(Mr. Williams spoke and submitted a written statement for the record. It is attached here in hard copy and as a PDF.)

Mr. Williams said he represents at least eight groups, including Parent to Parent, DACT, PPC, AQE, ARM, CAFEE, and at least four or five more. Parents are not happy. All parents want the best for their kids and they do the best they can with the skills they have. Expect schools to take them the rest of the way. He told the Board to persuade the Superintendent to produce a true shared decision making table. Hasn't happened in seven years; get it done by June 1. There is money for parent involvement that should be dedicated on a spent for parent involvement, it is not there for administrators and teachers to use as they want. Wilson has spent none of its \$16,000 this year. Mr. Williams' grandson had three courses with no books this year; last one arrived in April. No one was keeping track of the attendance of Mr. Williams' grandson, but because he was in the building and not causing trouble no one paid any attention. He wants Mrs. Hasler gone. The point is staff has to work better with parents. All are on the team together and need real work. Parents want open, fair elections of parents for shared decision making. Should have official elections on the same day every year with extensive publicity. Notify everybody, not just those with email. Call a convention, parents will organize and pick who represents them. District should facilitate and that is all. Parents want a formalized continuous improvement model of accountability and transparency with measurable objectives, assessment and evaluation. Why wasn't Urbanski here Monday with solutions to behavior problems? Teachers got 40 percent raises and student grades have all gone south. Mr. Williams told the committee that parents need them to do more this time. There is no excuse for kids being dragged down the hall by their hair, being called monkeys and names like that, for the beatings at East High School, the gang problems among the Hispanic students at Monroe. Parents don't believe that if they come to parent conferences they will be respected. They are only spoken to in negative and pejorative ways. It is not that parents don't care for their kids.

Willie Sanders
181 Sherwood Avenue

Mr. Sanders said a recent District newsletter and said it is hard to believe it is students first in the District. Seventy percent of the budget goes to payroll, leaving very little for students. Mr. Sanders approached Neil Zwierlein at Central Office, on behalf of students at Edison, about using the slush fund to help students participate in a track meet they were invited to in Philadelphia. He did not get a call back. The secretary told him there was no slush fund. Things like this give parents a bad taste. People making \$100,000 should at least return a phone call. This is the not the first time this has happened. If you want to get something done you have to step on toes. He was also the parent who brought the Edison field situation to light last fall. There was a community forum conducted, a small turnout, promises made and no follow-through. Principals are given X amount of money in the budget and can only do so much. Where parent involvement comes in, it didn't go very far, the suggestion goes over your head or you don't hear it at all. It's all about the dollars. There are problems

in the system with supplies for students – basically, books – and 70 percent of the budget goes to payroll. Mr. Sanders loves the kids in the community. One was just lost last night. The system failed him. Kids are dying. All we need to do is educate them. Parents want to be included in decisions and respected as parents. Make Neil Zwierlein be accountable for making \$100,000 up there.

Wallace Smith

Did not provide address

Mr. Smith said he was there to set the record straight. His rights were violated as a legally elected parent representative at School 33. He was removed without cause by the Superintendent and did not receive due process. He accused Commissioner Brennan of obtaining his child's file and sharing information from it with another parent. Mr. Smith had guardianship papers and gave them to several district officials. Mr. Smith said that because Commissioner Brennan was upset about some papers he took from a previous meeting to be copied does not give him the right to violate his rights. He called it an abuse of power.

A heated exchange followed between Mr. Smith and Commissioner Brennan.

Mr. Smith told the other commissioners he expects action to be taken against a commissioner who breaches the confidentiality of a student in the City School District.

Howard Eagle

Mr. Eagle began speaking.

A misunderstanding developed between an audience member and a security staff member. Commissioner Elliott told the staff member to go back and sit down. Commissioner Powell offered a motion to adjourn. Commissioner White seconded the motion but suggested everyone take a breath and asked that the guard take his seat. An intense exchange followed between the security staff member and Commissioner Elliott regarding their respective roles and the meeting structure. Meeting adjourned at approximately 7:05 p.m.

Commissioner Powell left at 7:14 p.m.

The meeting was reconvened at 7:27 p.m.

Mr. Eagle resumed speaking, said he was the recipient of the email referenced by Mr. Wallace, and read the following statement:

Good evening,

On March 12, 2008, the Chairperson of this Committee convened a meeting similar to the one you're holding this evening. Following my participation in the March 12th meeting, and sharing my thoughts, ideas and concerns regarding the topics of discussion --- a colleague forwarded me a copy of an email in which the Chairperson of this Committee had referred to me (without provocation) as a "thug" and a "blowhard," and probably a whole lot of other disrespectful and derogatory titles as well. With regard to that situation, one of the Chairperson's associates wrote a despicable, libelous article about me in his elitist newspaper --- called the Smugtown Beacon. Considering these facts, it was difficult to come here this evening and risk another unprovoked attack. However, I feel that the topics at hand are so important that I had to take the risk. Basically, I would like to repeat the same information, which I shared at the March 12th meeting.

In January of this year, we enrolled our son at school #42. In late January. I had written to the vice-principal to inquire about the status of the school's School Based Planning Team. I asked when does the team meet, and whether there were any openings on the team for parents. The vice-principal apparently asked the school's Parent Community Outreach Coordinator to respond to my questions, which she did. Her response was that the "Team meets about every 2 weeks on Wednesday mornings at 8:00 am in the Library." She sent me the

names of 4 people whom she said are parents serving on the team, but there was no contact information for the 4. Unless I am mistaken, Parent Community Outreach Coordinators are District employees, and do not represent parents. According to Board Policy, those who do represent parents have a responsibility to communicate with those whom they represent. Apparently the Board must consider this point to be fairly serious -- since it's spelled out in at least several Policy sections. For example, in accordance with Board Policy 1900 (Parent Involvement). Section 111, Subsection 2 --- "Parent representatives shall be responsible for communicating with their constituencies.. ." In accordance with Board Policy 2265 (School-Based Planning Teams), under the Section titled "Authority and Responsibility" --- "Members shall be responsible for seeking input from and reporting back to the constituencies that they represent on a regular basis." Also in accordance with the Section of Policy 2265 titled "Parent Representation" --- "Parent representatives shall be responsible for communicating with their constituents."

As it relates to 8:00 am meetings, unless I am mistaken, there is language in the Policies, which I have just cited, that requires efforts to be made to hold meetings at times that are reasonably convenient for parents to be present. If such language is not in the Policies --- it should be. That is, if we are serious about maximizing opportunities for parent involvement and input into decision-making. I have served on several School Based Planning Teams, and my experience has been that the main reason why meetings are held during early mornings is because teachers and administrators don't want to attend late afternoon or evening meetings --- the latter of which are often the most convenient times for parents to meet. My expectation is that school Based Planning Team meetings at #42 will be held either late afternoons or evenings during the 2008-09 school year. After I raised this issue during the March 12th meeting, the Chairperson of this Committee wrote that he would bring my concern to the Superintendent's attention, but no one has contacted me about the concern since that time.

Lastly, in accordance with the Section of Policy 2265 titled "Parent Representation" --- "The district recognizes and adopts the state definition of "parent" as defined in section 100.1 1 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education in the document entitled "Information Regarding the Commissioner's Regulation Concerning School-Based Planning and Shared Decision Making." This section clearly notes that a "parent may not be an employee of the district or of either a teachers' or administrators' bargaining unit."

In accordance with this particular provision of Policy 2265, in essence the Board is making a statement that those of us who are parents and District employees, are required via this Policy to give up some of our rights as parents and citizens, which makes this a very bad policy. No matter where I work, I will always retain the right to represent my children. As far as representing parents, it ought to be up to parents to choose any other parent that they so desire to represent them --- regardless of where they work. I believe parents are intelligent enough to know if someone can and will represent them well. Thus, it is my unequivocal belief that instead of "adopting the [illogical, restrictive and undemocratic] state definition of parent" ---you ought to be forward thinking and progressive enough to create your own definition of "parent."

Ms. Thomas said speakers at Business Meetings should speak at the beginning of the meeting.

Mr. Richardson said he apologized if it appeared he is belligerent at times.

Motion to adjourn by Commissioner Elliott. Adopted at 7:41 p.m.