

**BOARD OF EDUCATION
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE WORK SESSION**

July 23, 2007

The committee of the whole work session meeting of the Board of Education of the Portage Public Schools held on Monday, July 23, 2007, was called to order at 6:30 p.m. by President Johnson in the Professional Development Center of the Administration Building, 8111 S. Westnedge. She welcomed an audience of 15 people and all in attendance recited the Pledge of Allegiance.

Board Trustees Present: Tom Eddy, Shirley Johnson, Wendy Mazer, Deb Polderman, Dale Posthumus, and Jennifer Whistler

Board Trustees Absent: Melanie Kurdys (via conference call)

A motion was offered by Mrs. Whistler, supported by Mrs. Polderman, that the Board of Education approve the consent agenda consisting of: corrected minutes of the July 9, 2007 organizational meeting and the July 11, 2007 governance retreat; set a public hearing for August 20, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. during the regular School Board meeting to take public comment on the subject of Not Offering Breakfast Service at West Middle School for the 2007-08 school year; appointment of the following new teachers: Mr. Dennis Kozian, Ms. Aimee Ostach, and Ms. Sara Wagenaar; and approved the purchase of 30 Dell Optiplex 320 desktop computers per quote #374050310 in an amount not to exceed \$25,020.60. Motion carried unanimously.

This concluded the action portion of the agenda. President Johnson then opened the meeting for comments.

President Johnson thanked all in attendance and explained the new format for Board meetings that will hopefully better accommodate the schedules of our students, staff, and Trustees. She also thanked Dr. Tim Quinn, President, Michigan Leadership Institute, for facilitating discussions as part of the conclusion of the superintendent search process. She announced the membership of the 07/08 Board Committees as follows: Policy and Personnel Committee, Mrs. Whistler, chair, Mrs. Mazer, and President Johnson; Finance Committee, Mrs. Polderman, chair, Mr. Posthumus, and Mrs. Mazer; Facilities and Technology Committee, Mr. Eddy, chair, Mr. Posthumus, and Mrs. Kurdys; Curriculum and School Improvement Committee, Mr. Eddy, President Johnson, Mrs. Kurdys, Mrs. Mazer, Mrs. Polderman, Mr. Posthumus, and Mrs. Whistler; Ad Hoc Executive Committee, President Johnson, Mrs. Whistler, and Mrs. Polderman; Portage Education Foundation, President Johnson, liaison; District Advisory Council, Mrs. Polderman, liaison; Portage Athletic Foundation, Mr. Eddy, liaison; and KRESA LINKS, Mrs. Whistler, liaison. President Johnson asked that public comments regarding the facilities Bond be held until after the facilities presentation was complete. She then opened the floor for citizens' comments.

Mr. Mark Anthony Martin, 10514 Dandale, a citizen, spoke in support of the high school International Baccalaureate Program, discussed a student concern with Michigan State University's recognition of IB credits, discussed concerns with middle school students failing math and inquired about at-risk programs for these students, discussed how a student can fall through the cracks in the

District's reading recovery program, and he asked Mr. Posthumus to follow through on securing private parties to assist with the Northern stadium project.

Several Board members questioned Mr. Martin for clarification on the failing math student numbers and where he obtained this information.

Ms. Mildred Taraszka, 410 Marylynn Court, a citizen, commented on student arithmetic and use of calculators.

Mrs. Whistler and President Johnson responded to Mrs. Taraszka explaining how teachers are keying into the students that need extra assistance and that calculators are required for some tests.

Hearing no further citizen comments, President Johnson closed the comments portion of the meeting and moved on to the facilities Bond presentation. Mr. Eddy shared highlights from the recent Board Facilities Committee meeting pertaining to Phase 1 cost per square foot vs. current usage, technology funds dedicated to new buildings, cost savings, options for the current Way Elementary building, elementary projections, classroom size, safety issues, equity between the high schools, and traffic concerns.

Superintendent Wells elaborated that after 18 months of scrutinizing new construction, renovation costs while taking into account wants vs. needs, she is pleased with the Phase 1 proposal and is looking for a consensus from the Board to move forward. She discussed meeting with architects and engineers about critical areas, preliminary construction vs. critical areas of need, scrutinizing costs, and equity between both high schools as we go through more in-depth key components of this proposal. Superintendent Wells commented on our high schools being the lighthouses of the District and her desire for a consensus to move forward with this draft plan.

The Assistant Superintendent for Operations, Mr. Tom Noverr presented an update pertaining to the campus of Central High, Central Middle, Central Elementary, the athletic complex, Way Elementary, the Administration Building, District transportation, Northern High, North Middle Community High, and the athletic complex at that site. Mr. Noverr used aerial enlargements to explain traffic flow issues, problem areas, and available acreage. Much conversation followed between the Trustees, Mr. Noverr, and Superintendent Wells.

President Johnson reopened citizen comments regarding the facilities Bond.

Mr. Bob Schafer, 7667 Cobblewood, a citizen, commented on his number one issue, security and safety. He discussed elementary plans and concern about the high school plans.

Mr. Mark Anthony Martin, 10514 Dandale, a citizen, commented on taking the Bond vote back to the public in November vs. waiting until February or May and his concern about reaching the absentee voters.

Mr. Tony Kaufman, 5884 East P Ave., a citizen, discussed Mr. Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*, and how computers hurt kids and

cause Attention Deficit Disorder. He discussed Waylee relationships and high school students that drive to school.

Ms. Mildred Taraszka, 410 Marylynn Court, a citizen, asked the District why it can't put a stop light at the intersection of Waylee and Centre. She offered suggestions about moving the transportation department and Administration Building to different locations, the use of brick in any of our new buildings, and commented on Central High not being handicap accessible.

President Johnson responded to the citizen comments then asked for Trustee comments on the Phase 1 proposal.

Mrs. Kurdys stated she thinks we have a fair amount of work to do on cost and taking Waylee off-line. She does concur with next steps, coffees to communicate with the public, and coming up with a strategy people can agree with. She is in favor of the high school strategy.

Mrs. Mazer stated the overall project is going in the right direction with classroom sizes and equity, however, she would still like to see the total Bond amount lowered if possible. Her concern is that at this level, it decreases our chances of passing the Bond. While she would prefer to keep Waylee, she understands the need for student safety. She also suggested that we look at offering separate line items with this Bond request.

Mr. Eddy spoke in support of moving forward with the current proposal. He told the audience if they want the District to plan for the future and take more time, it will only increase the costs. He urged citizens to make a commitment to kids and our community and continue the vision that will be most successful.

Mrs. Whistler discussed visioning for the future. She stated the District did get a message from the voters in February and from the survey. We know we are not going to please everyone and we have decreased our request by 24% (to \$110 million) from the previous request. She stated she supports the draft plan.

Mr. Posthumus stated he wished he could start with a clean sheet of paper, but we need to do what makes sense. We need to communicate with our community, continue this effort, and evaluate feedback. If we wait for a more robust economy, it will only increase our costs. It's time to catch our facilities up and we do need to communicate Phase 2 and 3 drafts.

Mrs. Polderman stated she is conscious of different perspectives, optimistic and pessimistic, and stressed everything in this proposal is important, and the need to educate our community. She is in support of the plan.

President Johnson stated she is very much in support of the next steps and agrees the high schools should take priority. She commented on a recurring message over the past six years as a Trustee, to do something to fix the high schools. She is aware of overcrowding at the elementary levels but most students are in good facilities. She commented that Mr. Ron Kitchens, Southwest Michigan First president, continuously says what draws people to a community are the schools. We have to do what is right for our students. Equity issues may not mean the same way, shape or form.

Waylee needs the same instructional space and playground options as all our other elementary schools. She doesn't enjoy decommissioning Waylee but it makes sense. She also commented on spending funds most effectively to impact academic achievement. All Board members expressed agreement to move forward with the proposal to make high school improvements as presented in concept.

Superintendent Wells stated that she appreciated the Board's consensus on the key issues and will move forward in the planning process. Avenues will be explored to continue to gather community feedback and further details about a potential proposal will be brought to the Board Facilities Committee and Board of Education by mid-August. She also asked Trustees to confirm their attendance at a Committee of the Whole Work Session meeting on Monday, August 13, 2007, 6:30 p.m. in the Professional Development Center.

There being no further business to come before the Board, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Edna Kent
Recording Secretary