

WESTSIDE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
DISTRICT 66
Board Meeting Minutes – September 15, 2014

The Board of Education Meeting of School District 66 was convened in open and public session on September 15, 2014 at 6:00 p.m. at the Westside ABC Building, 909 S. 76th St., Omaha, Nebraska.

Board members present: Rosie Zweiback, President
 Scott Hazelrigg, Vice President
 Martha Slosburg, Secretary
 David Williams, Treasurer
 Dana Blakely, Director
 Beth Morrissette, Director

Notice of the meeting was given in advance by publication on the district website (www.westside66.org), beginning on September 10, 2014, a copy of which is attached to the official minutes. Notice of this meeting and the availability of the agenda was simultaneously given to all members of the Board of Education and available to anyone at the Board of Education offices. All proceedings hereafter shown were taken while the convened meeting was open to the attendance of the public.

District Administrative Office Staff Members in attendance: Blane McCann, Enid Schonewise, Greg Betts, Ruby Larson, Rick Avard, Kami Jessop, Molly Hurley.

Other District Staff and Visitors in attendance: Maryanne Ricketts, Lance Mosier, Russ Olsen, Doug Krenzer, Ken Baldwin, Marla Fries, Rob Zimmerman, Kris Karnes, Julie Anderson, Kirsten Sladovnik, Annie Feldman.

Board President Rosie Zweiback called the meeting to order at 6:03 p.m. She acknowledged that the meeting had been publicly announced and the agenda was available to any interested parties. Board member roll call was taken and attendance is noted above.

Ms. Zweiback welcomed the audience and encouraged everyone to sign the attendance sheet. She also stated that a copy of the Nebraska Open Meetings Act was posted as required by law.

Middle School Grade Configuration

Dr. Blane McCann, Superintendent, summarized the work of the 40-member Facilities Task Force that was formed this past summer to review and provide input on the data from the comprehensive DLR study that was done in 2013. The task force is made up of parents, teachers, administrators and community members. The information from the DLR study is being used to form a 5, 10, 15, 20-year plan for the district to upgrade and transform learning spaces. District administrators will review the Task Force input and provide a recommendation to the Board of Education for action by the Board in early 2015.

One of the key considerations of this long-term plan is a recommendation on the grade configuration at the middle school and how a potential middle school change could positively impact offerings across the district. There are currently three options that the Task Force has compiled for consideration:

- Keep current configuration of a single middle school with 7th & 8th grade
- Two middle schools with 7th & 8th grade
- Two middle schools with 6th, 7th and 8th grade

The middle school is currently at capacity with 964 students in grades 7 and 8. While adding classroom space to the building and reconfiguring current spaces could help with overcrowding, it would not impact the culture and evolving philosophy of the middle school concept. Additionally, at all grade levels, changes in how students learn today are affecting their physical learning environments. The current consideration to change the “footprint” of our middle school from 7-8 to 6-8, along with the possible addition of a second middle school, is one that would greatly impact all students (PK-12) in the district.

Dr. Greg Betts, Director of Learning Innovation & Professional Development and Mr. Jim Sides, Director of Secondary Teaching & Learning, spoke to the surveys and focus groups that were conducted at the beginning of this school year with 6th & 7th grade students and 6th, 7th and 8th grade teachers about 6th grade being added to the middle school grade configuration. Student results were somewhat mixed, with focus group feedback indicating that 6th grade students, as a whole, did not quite fully grasp all the elements of such a change. 7th grade students (only two weeks in to their middle school career) indicated they wished they could have started middle school as 6th graders, but felt that 6th grade should stay in elementary school. Overwhelmingly, (71% of 6th grade teachers and 80% of middle school teachers) teachers felt that 6th grade students belonged in middle school.

Mr. Lance Mosier, teacher at Westside Middle School, expressed that, with only two years in the middle school experience, students are always “transitioning”, either as a new 7th grader in the first semester or in the second semester of the 8th grade year, when students have their sights set on the high school. This short time at the middle school can also make it difficult for teachers, students and parents to establish connections / relationships / loyalty / familiarity to each other. All of these elements are vitally important to the social and educational experiences of middle school.

Mr. Doug Krenzer, a member of the Facilities Task Force, spoke about the building tours that the committee went on last week. Tours of newer construction (5 years or less) elementary and middle schools in OPS, Elkhorn and Bennington gave committee members a look at state-of-the-art educational building designs. While there was a tremendous amount of information to take in, the tours provided a wonderful opportunity to see how learning spaces are being transformed for today’s learners.

Ms. Martha Slosburg, Board Secretary, stated that many of the classroom designs allow for more collaboration among teachers with flexible spaces that, while not the “open” concept of the 1990’s, are more adaptable to providing more individual learning spaces for students. Ms. Zweiback and Ms. Kris Karnes, a member of the Task Force, both expressed the need to thoroughly and thoughtfully address the question – “Why are we doing this?” Is what we are thinking about doing with our facilities (K-12) impacting student learning and, also, how is it impacting student learning? There are certainly a number of issues with our decades-old buildings that need to be changed / fixed and Ms. Slosburg stated that many of these changes are things that will go “unseen”, like repairs and upgrades to electrical and HVAC systems. Communicating this reality will be an important part of the message to our voting community, no matter the amount that is asked for.

Ms. Kirsten Sladovnik, a member of the Facilities Task Force Communications Committee, expressed that this will present a unique opportunity of getting the word out about a bond issue and all elements that are at stake. Marketing and communicating this message to all district voters will be very important. Maintaining and preserving the district’s excellence to education and meeting the needs of learners in the 21st century will require changes to our learning spaces – changes that are both immediate and changes that would be 5, 10, 15 years down the road.

A copy of the Executive Summary and the Benefits and Challenges of the Middle School Options are attached to the official minutes.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:19 p.m.