

Unapproved School Board Workshop Minutes

Dickinson Public Schools
Board Workshop

May 16, 2017; 1:00 p.m.
Board Room, Central Office

The Dickinson Public School Board held a workshop on May 16, 2017, at the Central Administration Office. Board members present were: President Sarah Ricks, Vice President Brent Seaks, Mrs. Tanya Rude, Mrs. Kim Schwartz, and Mr. David Wilkie. Administrator present was Superintendent Douglas Sullivan. Also present was Mrs. Twila Petersen.

Call to Order - Board President Ricks called the workshop to order at 1:00 p.m.

National School Board Association Convention – Mrs. Rude distributed a PowerPoint handout she had collected at a session at the National School Board Association convention. She explained a school board in Illinois devised a plan to help the communication between the school board and the District superintendent. This included expectations on both sides. Vice President Seaks said he had attended a workshop regarding strategic planning. He used a shipping company that was responsible for transporting cargo as an analogy for setting up the strategic plan. His analogy explained the importance of communication, otherwise the ship would be going the wrong direction. Everyone needs to be on the same page. Mrs. Rude mentioned some board specific goals and shared that communication is the key to all avenues. She then asked for input from Superintendent Sullivan regarding the goals presented in a handout. Superintendent Sullivan responded that some items are already in place with some having policies to provide direction. Dr. Sullivan explained that #4 requested that all Board members receive the same information. There are situations that the superintendent can only share information with the Board president. This allows for the Board members to be impartial should an action by an employee end up in court. Sharing all information would put the school district in an uncompromising position. Additionally, requests for agenda topics should be funneled through the Board president. This is noted in a Board policy which states that the agenda is set by the Board president and superintendent.

Vice President Seaks felt it was important that the District be honest and transparent. He used RSP and Associates and the Berg building as an example. He appreciated Dr. Sullivan's willingness to do additional research. Vice President Seaks added that as the District moves forward with the strategic plan, the superintendent's opinion is valued. He would request that there be an opportunity for the Board to provide input which Dr. Sullivan has supported in the past. Mr. Seaks noted this Board has a lot of energy and excitement about how they want to make the District better. The superintendent will need to be the one to navigate through that process. Mr. Seaks appreciated Dr. Sullivan's willingness to always navigate through processes and noted that Dr. Sullivan shares his opinion in a very respectful way.

There was discussion regarding moving the celebrations from the consent agenda higher on the agenda. Additional input shared regarding having a DEA representative and administrators present at Board meetings. A Board member suggested having a nameplate for the Board members at the Board meetings so that individuals could identify them and if the Board member was out in the community, individuals would know who they were. School board members could also get their photos taken at a school in the fall so they could have name cards with a picture on a lanyard when visiting a school.

RSP and Associates – Superintendent Sullivan explained the District has contracted with RSP and Associates to do the District’s demographics and attendance boundaries. Dr. Sullivan recently drove to Bismarck and met with Mr. Schwartz, a representative from RSP. Dr. Sullivan and President Ricks inquired what the Board members wish to have shared with RSP. Dr. Sullivan inquired, with the Berg Elementary building scheduled to reopen in 2018, what type of alternatives for a purpose for Berg could be shared so that RSP can assist. Mr. Seaks inquired if one of the alternatives is for Berg to reopen as a 5th grade center. If so, how long would it take before the District would outgrow a 5th grade center. He also inquired if it became a magnet school, how many parents might be interested in having their child attend the school. Dr. Sullivan responded that RSP could help with those scenarios. Dr. Sullivan shared that Mr. Chris Gibbs from the DLR Group will be meeting with the high school faculty for about 3-4 hours on October 9. Mr. Gibbs helped the District with the community forums which lead to the decision of building a new middle school. Dr. Sullivan cautioned the Board in attempting too many projects at one time. If Mr. Schwartz from RSP would come back and verify the enrollment projections from Assistant Superintendent Reep and if the Board were to ask Dr. Sullivan to prioritize, he would focus on the high school and then transition to the elementary discussion. Mr. Seaks asked what the role would be of the DLR Group. Dr. Sullivan responded the DLR representatives would facilitate the conversation. An example would be at the high school to facilitate the discussion regarding the instructional delivery model. Mr. Gibbs would have a discussion with the high school administrators, faculty, and staff and then have three or four public forums to collect the community’s sentiment about Dickinson High School. The discussion would also include the Center for Technology in Education. President Ricks inquired if a profile of the graduate could be part of the conversation in the forums.

Mr. Seaks inquired if there was a timetable they should be considering since Mr. Gibbs will be here in October. Dr. Sullivan responded that he would want to be efficient with Mr. Gibbs’ time so that he does not have to come back. He suggested the first public open forum be scheduled for October 10. President Ricks inquired if the superintendent felt it would be difficult to try and do something creative with the elementary school at the same time. Dr. Sullivan responded that he felt it would be challenging. The District will have a new business manager. It will take some time for the new business manager to become aware of how the District operates. Dr. Sullivan felt if the school board would focus on the high school it would send the right message. He noted that if the enrollment numbers continue to increase, the District will need to consider doing something with Heart River Elementary or consider building another elementary school.

Vice President Seaks inquired if Berg Elementary would open as a K-4 or K-5 in fall of 2018, when would a decision need to be made. President Ricks understood it was going to be a K-5 building. She inquired if it could be an innovative building. Mrs. Rude suggested focusing on the priorities. She suggested focusing on the high school since it would be a transition from an innovative middle school to an innovative high school. Vice President Seaks felt that it would be a more comfortable transition with a specialized school because parents could choose to enroll their child rather than being forced to change schools based on boundaries. It could be a risky solution if no parent voluntarily signs their child up to attend Berg. President Ricks added it would be similar to a pilot program. Vice President Seaks inquired if Berg could have an emphasis on art or foreign language immersion.

Mr. Wilkie agreed with Mrs. Rude that the Board should not spread themselves too thin. If they do, they will not be doing anything to the best of their ability. The high school has some potential and the students will be coming out of a fantastic middle school and should have the opportunity to transition into a fantastic high school. He also agreed with President Ricks that this would be a great opportunity

RSP and Associates (cont.)

to do something different with Berg Elementary. Vice President Seaks agreed that the high school is a priority but if something is not done with Berg prior to opening it in 2018 an opportunity may be lost. President Ricks added it may be difficult to find an elementary principal that is willing to try something different. It would require adding some extra days to their contract. Mrs. Rude inquired if it was something that could be discussed and planned in the next three months. Vice President Seaks inquired if someone could be hired to explore the idea of Berg specializing in a foreign language emergent school or magnet school, as examples. Maybe some of the homework could be done ahead of time to find out how many parents would be interested in this idea. Mrs. Schwartz suggested a 5-10 year commitment and not give up after six months.

President Ricks asked if Mr. Gibbs could provide a timeframe for this type of project. Dr. Sullivan will make a contact to Mr. Gibbs. Dr. Sullivan explained the challenges ahead for the Board and reminded them it took two years preparing for the opening of the middle school. There was a great deal of time and money invested and a lot of professional development for the administrators and teachers. He reiterated it would be a challenge. President Ricks suggested gathering information and bringing this topic back to the next Board workshop.

School Board/Business Manager Working Relationship – Vice President Seaks said the Board/Business Manager relationship can be confusing since there is a fine line between the school board and the business manager. Superintendent Sullivan said it will be important to have everyone on the same page regarding protocol. He noted that it will be a bit different than the last few years. He did not think it really changed the landscape at all in terms of relationship between the Board and the employee. Dr. Sullivan reminded the Board members they really have one employee and that employee is the superintendent. The day-to-day supervision of the business manager will be from the superintendent. However, part of the modification of the Central Office administration and looking at the bigger picture, it will be necessary for the Board to interact with the business manager when it comes time to navigate the elementary school concepts or ideas that require some financial input.

Superintendent Sullivan suggested sending emails to President Ricks or himself and they will filter the questions and decide whether or not they are to be forwarded to the business manager. Sometimes it may not be a business manager question; or it could be someone else. Vice President Seaks inquired where an email would go if there is a scenario where the carpet at a building is hazardous for the safety of the students and staff. Dr. Sullivan responded the email should go to both him and President Ricks.

There was discussion regarding the evaluation of the business manager. President Ricks said there are important pieces the Board can contribute to the evaluation. She gave some examples, such as the information the business manager presents to the Board, bigger financial picture discussions and his responsiveness to those discussions. She added that the business manager has a direct impact on the Board but also agrees that the Board should not be doing the evaluation on their own similar to what they do for the superintendent. Vice President Seaks inquired if a Board member should regularly meet with the business manager. President Ricks responded probably not. Mrs. Rude inquired if there was a question on a line item on the budget, could they go directly to the business manager. Dr. Sullivan responded that there are situations, especially during bargaining and negotiations, that direct communication would be satisfactory but he would not want to blur the lines of communication.

Adjournment – President Ricks declared the workshop adjourned at 2:51 p.m.

Sarah Ricks, Board President

Vince Reep, Business Manager

Twila Petersen, Secretary