

LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Board of Directors - Work Session
Tuesday, January 31, 2006– 7:00 p.m.
Newport High School
Newport, Oregon

Minutes

PRESIDING: Ron Beck, Chairman

Present: Ron Beck, Chairman; Billie Jo Smith, Brenda Brown, Directors

Also Present: Tom Rinearson, Superintendent; Laurie Urquhart, Secretary

Excused: Jean Turner, Sue Ryan, Directors

Call to Order- Establishment of a Quorum

Chairman Ron Beck convened the meeting and called the session to order at 7:01 p.m. with a quorum of three board members present. Directors Ryan and Turner were excused from the meeting.

Mr. Beck explained work sessions are scheduled in months with fifth Tuesdays, and said the topic of variances is one of the agenda items during the current meeting. He said the Board would be taking public comment from the audience.

Discussion on Core Values

Superintendent Rinearson explained the development of core values by the Board is part of the long-range planning process. He said all five board members would need to be part of an agreement on a set of core values from which to make decisions. He added with the forecast loss of students, it may be easy to get caught up in the emotion. “We need the values as an anchor,” said Rinearson.

Communications

Chairman Beck reported the Board had received approximately 150 written comments on variances to date, all of which he read. He added that no decisions would be made at the work session.

Siletz resident Bob Young spoke in favor of variances, or changing to open enrollment district-wide. His daughter is currently an INMS student.

Linda Annable of Seal Rock said she would like to see variances or open enrollment continue, and said she and her husband work in Newport. Her daughter’s activities are in Newport, and the family feels Newport is their community. Their daughter was home schooled in the past.

Toledo resident Ted Driesel spoke in favor of variances, saying variances have been allowed over the past 35 years. He said residents in Lincoln County pay taxes to the county, not to any particular area.

Parents should have a choice of where their student attends school, said Driesel. He also said he has been very involved with community service in Newport, though he lives in Toledo.

Waldport resident Warren Crayton asked the Board to continue the variance option. He has two children attending school in Newport and one in Waldport.

Waldport resident Sue Oshiro-Zeier expressed her support of the variance policy, and said people want to be a part of schools with positive things happening. "It is beyond work reasons," she said.

Student Taylor Zeier also spoke in favor of variances.

Seal Rock resident Clifford Ryer expressed his support of variances, and noted the contributions parent volunteers bring to schools. "That would be lost if you forced parents to fit into cubbyholes," he said.

Newport resident Kyle Luther distributed a written statement and noted his support of the variance policy, or open enrollment. He said LCS D is a county-wide district, and should do what is best for all students. He said schools should take steps to attract students, and said all schools do not have to look the same. Doing away with variances could take away opportunities for all students by dividing up resources.

Discussion on Variance Policy

Superintendent Rinearson distributed several handouts, including numbers of variances in the district, students attending school sorted by resident city, and approximately 150 responses to a "variance survey" sent to parents of students with variances. He said he has looked over the responses and has talked with people about variances. Most seem to be choosing variances for family reasons.

Director Smith commented the Board heard from people in support of variances, but said at a Toledo meeting, the feeling was different. Schools there have lost "good programs due to the loss of students to variances." She also said Toledo schools recognize their schools need to offer programs that will attract students.

Director Smith stated if any changes to the existing variance policy occur, it would be very important a transition process take place.

Chairman Beck noted if variances were eliminated and 89 students returned to Toledo (their resident area), the high school would gain two to three FTE. This FTE would be reduced in three years' time, however, if the decline in students continues. **Eliminating variances will not solve the district's funding issues, as the underlying problem is the decline of the student population**

Principal Kurt Smith noted the huge amount of clerical time variances take. He also made note of the cost of transportation, should the district become an open enrollment district.

Superintendent Rinearson said the current variance policy does not contain a philosophical statement, though the administrative rules ("A.R.s") does. Some points in the A.R.s disagree with each other, and current practice is not accurately reflected there.

Chairman Beck said “we have the luxury of time to look into this,” and said the statement of the Board’s philosophy may reflect close to what currently exists.

Communications

Some audience members said they could not speak to the Long Range plan, as they were not sure what it is. The Superintendent explained the Board is in the process of developing a long-range strategic plan. An audience member (not identified) asked if the west area will change next year. Principal Smith said discussions about the coming year were taking place at the staff level, and that if warranted, would involve the community later in the process. Superintendent Rinearson stated his expectation that should the conversation pursuant to changes in the west area “get serious,” it would need to involve the community.

Discussion on Long Range Plan

Community Survey. Directors Brown and Smith said survey takers basically gave the District “C’s.” Ms. Smith commented she would like to see the District move up to “excellent,” but given the reductions through the years, “C’s” were not surprising. She said she felt it is an accurate reflection of what the District now offers. “It gives us a goal; we want to be better,” she added.

Superintendent Rinearson said his feeling was the communities were grading the District “D+”, and said he did not believe that rating was related to what courses are offered. Rather, he expressed a belief the concern is with relationships between schools and their communities.

Director Brown expressed her concern that either people had less than positive things to say, or they “didn’t know.” Chairman Beck noted 69% of respondents agreed classrooms are overcrowded, but a much smaller percentage have students in school. The Superintendent said parents in our schools now gave the lowest grades; Director Smith responded that the reductions to the district have affected parents’ opinions.

Superintendent Rinearson distributed a handout showing class size. He said the District received an email from LCEA President Joe Jordan describing the district as one unit, with varying work loads around the district. If decisions made in the spring create disparities, grievances on this issue may be forthcoming next year, per the email. The Superintendent said we must “reduce expenditures or raise revenues” to deal with the situation.

The Board discussed the perception of overcrowded classrooms; Director Smith noted that perception can be subjective. (Some classrooms feel overcrowded with 15 students, while others with 40 do not).

The Superintendent said he was embarrassed by results of the survey, so commissioned the same organization to do another survey to better understand underlying feelings. The follow-up survey will be conducted in the same manner as the original, with questions being asked of residents in four areas of the county.

Charter Schools. The Superintendent distributed a handout showing current charter schools and their cost to the district. For students in grades K-8 the district recoups most of the cost of charter school, but that is not true for high school students. In addition, the district is responsible for several costs that charter schools do not pay (including the cost of special education students above the monies received, teacher and administrative retirements, and additional transportation costs).

The Superintendent reported representatives of the proposed charter high school in Siletz will present their proposal to the Board in a public hearing February 14 at Taft High.

Chairman Beck noted the proposed charter high school in Siletz may be the first of other high school charters. Superintendent Rinearson said there seems to be a tendency to want to divide, and said this is one of the key core value questions the Board must consider. He said Siletz and Eddyville schools were closed due to lack of money, and said the Board may want to discuss the philosophy of those decisions.

Director Smith stated her belief that school funding in the state is finally being seriously considered. She mentioned a possible lawsuit against the state for not funding schools adequately, and said “schools cost money. I hope the state will recognize if we want good schools, we have to pay for them.” The Superintendent agreed that may be true, but said even additional state funding will not fix the Lincoln County issue. “We are losing kids. The state would have to increase its funding 45% to fix it here,” which is highly unlikely.

The Board discussed a new “teacher cost” handout, showing costs including PERS, insurance and leaves. A lengthy discussion about the handout and the cost of PERS followed.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 p.m.

Chairman

Superintendent