

LINCOLN COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Board of Directors – Work Session
Tuesday, August 29, 2006- following 6:30 p.m. Special Session
Newport High School
Newport, Oregon

Minutes

PRESIDING: Sue Ryan, Chairman

Present: Sue Ryan, Chairman; Brenda Brown, Vice-Chairman; Ron Beck, Jean Turner, Billie Jo Smith, Directors

Also Present: Tom Rinearson, Superintendent; Laurie Urquhart, Secretary; approx. 10 members of the staff, media and interested patrons

Call to Order- Establishment of a Quorum

Chairman Ryan convened the meeting and called the session to order at 7:00 p.m. with a quorum of all five board members present.

Discussion on NSBA “Action Alert”, NCLB

The Board received an “Action Alert” from the National School Boards Association over the past few months, and asked for input from staff regarding it. Superintendent Rinearson reported staff had not had time to analyze the publication, and asked Board members to provide input regarding specific information they would like to receive.

Discussion on Policy JECC, “Assignment of Students to Schools- Requests for Variance in Attendance”

Superintendent Rinearson distributed the following handouts to Board members regarding variances: current policy and administrative rules (JECC); Summation of Feedback Regarding Variances; Student Residential Areas Compared to 06-07 Attending School (Planned) as of 8-23-06; Letter from Principal Nickerson to parents regarding 06-07 variances.

The Board discussed the handout showing the student residential areas/attending school handout first. The Superintendent noted some variances are currently on hold pursuant to class sizes (by elementary schools in Newport), and will be assessed in the coming weeks. Also, variances requested after April 1 are on hold. There are currently ten in this category; Operations Administrator Joe Novello is retaining these requests. All ten are from new students. Superintendent Rinearson noted principals were instructed to follow the current administrative rules; that has occurred, though some parents will be notified of the outcome in August rather than May.

Director Smith noted the administrative rules may need to be modified to comply with NCLB requirements. The Superintendent said “choice” schools for Taft Elementary are Sam Case, Toledo Elementary and Newport Middle School. Letters were sent to all Taft Elementary parents; fewer than

ten have been received requesting choice. By federal law, transportation is included in this scenario. Though Newport Middle School did not meet AYP, it was offered as a choice for sixth grade Taft Elementary students. Isaac Newton Magnet School (INMS) did meet AYP, but offering that school as an option will create another set of challenges to be solved. There is currently a waiting list to attend INMS; an application process also is in place for that school. It may be that a certain number of slots will need to be set aside in the future for “choice” placements. Capacity is not allowed as a criteria to disallow a school from being considered for choice.

The Superintendent suggested the Board examine the first paragraph of the policy, which calls for “annual variances;” he noted that it may not need to be done each year, but rather at the end of a student’s stay at a particular school. Director Turner noted the importance of principals’ retaining authority to deny a variance at any time based on certain criteria (including behavior). It was suggested that once a student enter a geographic area on a variance, he/she be allowed to attend school in that area until graduation.

The Superintendent suggested a scoring guide be used to prioritize reasons to allow variances.

Director Smith expressed hesitancy at allowing a student to stay through varying levels of schools, as it is hard to predict the impact so many years ahead. She said she is in favor of a student being allowed to stay in a building, even if the student’s parents have moved out of the attendance area. She also noted the current liberal variance policy does not include transportation for students. This could result in students whose parents cannot afford to transport them being left behind.

Superintendent Rinearson said the variance issue is a complex one. Letters sent to parents of students with variances last year generated a number of comments regarding the value of variances.

In further examination of the policy, Mr. Rinearson suggested the second paragraph regarding the distribution of copies of variances be placed in administrative rules. The third and four paragraphs deal with NCLB. The fifth paragraph speaks to students who have either exceeded or have not met state standards at grades 3, 5, 8 and 10. “The way this policy currently is, the only kids we could force to stay are those that meet benchmarks. We really have an open enrollment policy, with lots of paperwork,” said Rinearson.

Director Smith suggested language be included saying “Variances between district schools, other than those required under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLBA) may be granted, unless they adversely affect the class sizes or programs offered in the sending or receiving school. This requirement may be waived only in cases in extreme hardship.

Students who are enrolled in and attending a district school may continue to attend that school unless their variance is denied for behavioral or academic reasons stated in their original variance application. Students whose parents or guardians move within the district may remain in the school they were attending prior to the move, or transfer to the school in their new attendance area.” She also suggested allowing high school students to attend up to three classes in another district school while enrolled in the high school in their attendance area.

Director Turner agreed with the concept of allowing variances except when “adverse affects” occur, but asked who will decide what an adverse affect is, the definition, the number, etc. Director Smith

suggested examining other districts' policies, including Corvallis, who has clear guidelines pursuant to class size. "We want clear and measurable data," said Smith.

Director Beck suggested using the class size committee's guidelines. He also asked who adjusts attendance areas. The Superintendent said past practice will need to be examined, and said in his experience the Board adopts attendance areas.

Superintendent Rinearson asked the Board to define the direction staff should take with the policy; "What is the next step? Where do we go from here?" he asked.

Director Turner asked the group to focus on the "elephant in the room," parental choice. She said the district has an obligation to provide all of our students with the best we can, and not to negatively impact either the sending or receiving school. However, "I am in favor of parental choice. No one knows the child as well as the parents do. How do we stand above that?" She noted the good reasons noted in the summary. "Are we more knowledgeable about the needs of the child than the parent? Or do we say that we look at the greater good?" asked Turner.

Director Beck commented the Board's philosophy has never been clearly articulated in the policy, and said he is glad it is being discussed.

The Superintendent noted the potential direction of the state board of education, leaning toward only six electives in a high school career. "I have heard us grappling with what is a quality education and quality versus quantity. It is a collision we are headed toward in the state." Director Smith said the state is considering requiring more credits, thus eliminating electives, "but schools can determine how they offer those credits," said Smith.

Director Brown called attention to items 3 and 4 of the administrative rules, speaking to school enrollments and adverse affect. She said the policy and administrative rules are not being implemented as they are written.

Mr. Rinearson noted that, in the past, principals allowed all variances, knowing the district would adjust staff to match some time in the fall. "I told them we would not be doing that any more."

Director Smith said she would like to see the requirements prioritized and contained in the policy. "So we are saying we would allow variances, based on doing no harm. We also do not want to pull any existing variances," said Smith.

The Superintendent reminded the Board that the policy should "be the fence." Director Turner said "negative impact" should be defined. Chairman Ryan noted safety can be another kind of hardship to be considered.

Mr. Rinearson said administrative rules will be developed to complement the policy, once it is written. He reminded the Board that state law says a student's Personal Education Plan drives the school's structure. Method of delivery may change; with online classes, more is available than will be used. He said a revised policy draft should be ready for presentation to the Board by the second meeting in September.

Superintendent Rinearson said the discussion will “be a long conversation. One of the challenges I have for you is to fall back and reflect upon the problem we are trying to solve.” He asked the Board to consider this between now and the September 26 board meeting; he said “we can end up with a solution looking for a problem.”

Director Brown said the Board could use its decision making process on this issue, which could help define the problem. She said she saved some letters from parents with students on variances that offered solutions.

Director Beck said the perceived problem is declining enrollment in the east area and future effects on the high school.

The secession movement in east county was discussed briefly. Director Beck asked who defines the boundary of a new district. The Superintendent said we are looking at historical data, and said the ESD is the boundary board. The boundaries for a proposed district must be in the legislation; whomever writes the bill will define the boundary.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

Chairman

Superintendent