

President's Report at the December 18 Board of School Directors' Meeting

This is an update on recent developments in negotiations with the Teachers' Union Leaders.

You may recall that during earlier negotiations sessions, I reported that the union negotiator, under "status quo" and "work the rule" protocols, threatened several moves:

1. to hold hostage the move to the new high school as a 4 year school;
2. to hold hostage the resulting relief from crowding pressures at Valley and Crest;
3. to hold hostage the planned reconfiguration of Valley and Crest to two equal middle schools;
4. to hold hostage the carefully planned reconfiguration of mid-level education that promises to cure many of the ills in this difficult transitional part of our students' education.

The Board takes these threats very seriously. The threats tell us something about the union leadership's strategy. Let's review some facts.

1. Many teachers have participated in the extensive planning for the improvement of mid-level educational outcomes. We have heard from the Administration and teachers' committees about their extensive planning to come up with new programs, new methods, class configurations, teaming, mentoring, "Good to Best" models, etc. to improve educational outcomes in secondary education. The Board has endorsed and funded these planned improvements.
2. Many teachers have participated in the planning and preparation for the new high school. This facility, which cost the taxpayers \$114 million, is an investment designed to provide our students the best technological and educational advantages in order to prepare them for their next steps in life. When you see it, you will know that the new school can measure up to its promise and potential. But fulfilling that promise depends on the participation of teachers.

The Union leadership expressed their displeasure when the Administration had to revamp the school calendar as a result of the strike in September. The Administration was forced to do this in recognition of the fact that a settlement might not be reached and the Union leadership might call a second strike in the same year. By law, we have to provide a prescribed number of educational days each year. The 13 day strike combined with a PDE directive, caused the Administration to revamp the calendar in a way that eliminated in-service days. These are days which are set aside for teacher training and in particular, preparation for the planned changes in secondary education.

The union leadership advertised that the administration did not really care about preparation for the new secondary education plan since it had cancelled in-service, training days which were intended for orientation to the new plan. Of course this cancellation could also have cost the teachers three days pay.

The Administration, backed by the Board, is determined to make sure that all teachers are prepared for this important improvement in the educational program for our children.

The Board agrees with the Administration that teacher training and preparation are essential for the best education of the children.

We are in a state of non-binding arbitration. During this time both parties are precluded from comments about that process. That does not prohibit either party from attempting to offer a negotiated point and perhaps make progress on individual, important issues. Actually this helps the process, since it sends a signal to the arbitration panel about what has been resolved and what issues they have to concentrate on in order to craft an agreement.

For all of these reasons, on October 20th, the Board authorized our negotiator to propose to the union that the Administration would restore and conduct three days of in-service training related to these important educational transitions, provided that the union leadership would not interfere with the previously planned and agreed-to educational initiatives. In return for this agreement, teachers would have received three days pay which they had previously forfeited due to the work stoppage.

Sadly, I have to report that we received an e-mail response from Mr. Gary Smith, the union negotiator, indicating that after a meeting with the president of the local, Mr. Bill Lukridge, he declined our offer, without any negotiated response.

And in addition, Mr. Smith continues to assert that the union leadership will rely on their "rights under Act 195 and/or Act 88" to hinder educational opportunities for our children. In his response, the union negotiator implies that those two acts allow union leaders to hold hostage the transition to the long planned and expensively funded secondary education initiatives.

I'm not sure if all teachers are aware of the position in to which their leadership has put them.

I'm not sure if all teachers are aware of the fact that in their current contract, their average annual salary increases during the first 15 years of service ranges from 8.8% to 10% per year.

I'm not sure that all teachers are aware that the folks who pay their salaries and benefits are paying up to 70% premium participation for health insurance and that we are asking for less than 20% participation by teachers.

I'm not sure that all teachers are aware that the tax payers who fund teachers' salaries and benefits are under constantly increasing jeopardy for their jobs and benefits, a risk not shared by teachers.

It is the firm hope of the Board that the union membership will inform its leaders of the realities of the situation and urge them to come to the table willing to accept an agreement that is just for all stakeholders.