

League of Women Voters of Downers Grove-Woodridge-Lisle

Observer Report

Governmental Body: Community High School District 99
Date: April 14, 2014
Type of meeting: Workshop
Media: Trib Local

Absent: Beckman; Matune arrived 7:40

The Board convened at 7:30 P.M.

Student Perspectives

Two students, one a Senior and one a Junior, were recognized for receiving Abraham Lincoln Readers' Choice Awards. Each of them had read all 22 of the books nominated as students' favorites.

Workshop

A. Fund raising

Supt. McDonald recalled that, in the recent past, the Board had questions about fund raising within the district. In response he had asked staff, and in particular the Athletic Directors and Activities directors, to prepare a presentation for the Board about the athletic budgets and various fund raising activities. Staff first explained how the athletic budgets are developed. They pointed out that the budgets do not provide for certain items pertinent to uniforms, such as personalization or hygienic additions desired by specific students or specific teams. This led into a review of the fund raising process since that process is used to buy the special additions. After describing the approval process and the criteria which must be met for a fund raising event, staff said the key question they perceived was: do we need to raise money to buy uniforms? What followed was a thorough and thoughtful airing of the fund raising issue in District 99, involving both Board and staff.

Several Board members revealed that parents had complained to them about such things as the number of fundraisers, overlapping fundraisers, the occasional hard sell made to parents, and kids who cannot participate in sports because their families cannot afford to support fundraisers. Member Davenport asked what happens when a student or parent does not want to go along with the fund raising. He felt that the process exposes disparities and creates jealousies among participants, resulting in a bad atmosphere. Member Matune commented that, in the fund raising context, some parents use their kids to get what they, the parents, want, rather than what is needed.

Supt. McDonald told the Board that, regarding fund raising, staff was working with what it had inherited, i.e., the way things were done in the past. He explained that staff was now trying to apprise the Board of what the situation is at the present time. Reviewing the budgeting and fund raising processes has given staff a much better picture of what has been and is going on. It has fostered the understanding that fund raising should be used only for things the district cannot ask of the taxpayers. McDonald concluded by saying the district needs to change, and he anticipates that this review and discussion will lead to changes. Other staff members told of changes to the fund raising process that are already being made.

A great deal of the discussion focused on the need for increased communication. Both staff and Board stressed that it is important to communicate the rules for fund raising to the kids, coaches, parents, and sponsors. It must be clear that fund raising efforts have to comport with the processes established by the schools. Administrators and coaches need to communicate to kids, parents, and sponsors regarding the difference between needs and wants. A staff member noted that staff needs to be more sensitive to this issue and perhaps needs to look more carefully when a request to do a fundraiser is made. President Kupka commented that if changes are made, there may be a need for extensive re-education of parents, coaches, boosters, and sponsors.

Winding down the discussion, Member Pavinato told the staff that he wants to hear about the changes they make in the future, about how things are improving. President Kupka stated that the Board will have an update on the issue before the start of the next school year. The Board members expressed general agreement that they did not want to be perceived as against fund raising, but as wanting fund raising to be done for a proper purpose and according to the district's rules.

B. School Fees

This item was essentially a continuation of recent Board consideration of fees charged by the district. Mr. Staehlin explained why the District needs to collect fees at all. One concern is that other revenue streams are failing, particularly interest income and funding from the state. The state now provides less than 50% of school funding statewide, but less than 8% of what is needed by most suburban schools. Thus, schools are relying more on local property taxes. But fees, which enable expansion and enrichment of programming, are preferable to cutting programs or raising taxes. Fees produce significant revenue, currently \$1.7 million or 2% of District 99's total budget. Staehlin said the district has been trying to hold the line on fees, which have not been increased in four years. In addition, the number of fee waivers granted has more than doubled in the last five years. A deferred payment option is available for families needing it. Staehlin recommended that fees not be capped.

Several Board members stated that they had heard complaints from parents about the fees/amount of fees. The history and rationale for fees was set forth in some detail. Supt. McDonald repeated many of the reasons for fees given by Mr. Staehlin, adding new and increased costs to the list. The bulk of discussion, however, was about trying to help families who do not qualify for a waiver from the fees. Member Boyle urged that the district needs to be more proactive in finding new revenue streams so these families can be given some relief. Members Matune and Davenport stressed the burden placed on families, no matter how many children they have in school. One parent spoke to the Board regarding fees. Her family does not get a fee waiver, and she wanted the Board to know that paying the fees truly is difficult. The discussion ended without any action or decisive direction to staff. Nor was the matter continued to a future date.

C. School Signs

The Board again discussed the outdoor school signs, some of which violate the Village sign ordinance. It was learned that the Village is reworking its Zoning Ordinance, and the new ordinance will probably include some new institutional zoning provisions. These might accommodate District 99's sign needs. The district is going to remove some of the signs that are out of compliance with the Village Code, as a sign of

good faith. Supt. McDonald told the Village that the district will go to court if necessary, to get the signs it needs. The Board learned that the new sign proposed for North will cost \$54,000; the one for South will be \$70,000. Member Pavinato will not support the new sign at North. He feels the present sign is fine. A majority of Board members directed the Supt. and President Kupka to continue talking to the Village to try to work something out.

Action

By unanimous vote, the Board expelled three students.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

For more detailed information see District 99 website: www.csd99.org

Observer: Peggy Healy

Date submitted: April 24, 2014

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