

LWV Park Ridge Observer Report

Meeting: Park Ridge-Niles School District 64 **Date:** June 25, 2018

Observer: Mary C. Fontaine **Start/End Time:** 5:30-11:15 (preceded and followed by closed session and interrupted by a public hearing on interfund transfer)

Members Absent: Eastman Tui. School administrators (including Superintendent Laurie Heinz and CSBO Luann Kolstad) and the district's attorney (Anthony J. Loizzi, Sr.) were also present.

The open portion of the meeting dealt with a variety of subjects, but two topics were repeatedly raised in the public comments and board discussion: the formation of a Board committee to consider the launch of a SRO (school resource officer) pilot program and a SPED (special education) Board committee. Those topics will be addressed first in this report. Other topics will follow.

The closed portion of the meeting dealt with a student's application for residency status, litigation, investment contracts and the Superintendent's evaluation.

The public hearing dealt with the transfer of \$1 million from the Transportation Fund to the Education Fund. There is a limit on the tax levy to support the Education Fund but not the Transportation Fund. The budget for next year includes an \$2 million portion of the transportation levy that the Board intends to transfer to the Education Fund.

Public Comment/Discussion/Action:

SRO Committee

Four parents spoke during the Public Comment section in support of a SRO Program. One was the parent of a special education student, and two have been very active volunteers in the schools over a number of years. They hoped the SRO would help cultivate a culture of safety and trust to counter bullying and disrespect for authority. One parent spoke about a teacher who had been threatened with a false accusation of pedophilia by a student trying to avoid discipline. Another described how her son had been bullied and punched in the face. She wanted an alternative avenue for students when social worker intervention was not effective.

The third speaker represented the Emmerson PTO and conveyed the PTO's request for a representative on the committee to be formed. The fourth represented the SEL (social emotional learning) committee and noted that this committee had no opinion on the SRO issue and did not want the committee's work being used as a rationale for the SRO program.

The Board formally approved the creation of the Board committee to assess a SRO pilot program. It then discussed how the members of the committee should be selected. They noted tension between the desire to get input from all interested groups (community members, parent organizations, school administration and social workers, police, city officials, etc.) and the

operational difficulties of a committee that is too large, including compliance with open meeting laws. One member noted that some people could attend meetings and provide advice to the committee without being voting members of it. Mr. Sotos and Mr. Baigi agreed to collect suggestions from other Board members and the community and to make a proposal regarding committee composition for the Board to consider at the July 9 meeting. All interested people were urged to send suggestions to them with a copy to Dr. Heinz.

Later, the Board also considered publicly soliciting applications for committee membership. Dr. Heinz agreed to develop a procedure for doing so.

The Board then discussed the purpose of the committee. Ultimately it is expected to present to the Board a draft mission statement, MOU (memorandum of understanding) and IGA (intergovernmental agreement) for the SRO pilot program. The committee was to identify need (if any), benefits, downsides, solutions, staff training, means of evaluation and the like. Mr. Loizzi noted that the committee's first job was to listen and gather information from relevant groups and established research. Committee members would then have to make choices among competing priorities, recognizing that it would not be possible to please everyone.

District administrators mentioned two other considerations for the committee. One was how an SRO program would interface with the on-going SEL (social emotional learning) efforts. The other was cost, given that some of the objections raised at the last meeting asked whether an SRO was the best use of District funds.

Mr. Biagi and Mr. Sotos agreed that their draft proposal for the Board's next meeting would speak to the purpose and methods of the committee.

SPED Committee

Four parents spoke during the public comment period and afterwards on the subject of the special education (SPED) committee to be formed. They expressed great frustration that the formation of the committee was not on the agenda, because the Board had indicated in the last meeting that it would be on the agenda for June 25. They fear another 'lost semester' if the committee's work does not get started until the fall. They asked why the SRO committee appeared to be on a faster track, and suggested that it was not fair to ask the SPED students to wait.

A few Board members also asked why the committee was not on the agenda. Board President Borrelli responded that the delay was to allow the new Director of Student Services (Dr. Frost), who did not start work until July 1, to have input into the formation of the committee. A parent asked why that was true of the SPED committee but not the SRO committee, as the Director likely would want input on both. After some back and forth on the Board's policy of allowing the President to set the agenda, the Board members agreed that they could move things forward at this meeting even though they could not officially vote to form the committee until the July 9 meeting.

The Board determined that they would use the same initial process to launch the SPED committee as the SRO committee: two Board members (Mr. Sotos and Mr. Ryles) would draft a proposal for the Board's consideration at the July 9 meeting. The proposal would address selection and number of committee members (including public solicitation of applications) and purpose of the committee. Board members also agreed to have a formal vote on the formation of the committee on July 9. They acknowledged the strong desire of parents and Board members for the committee to commence work as soon as possible, so as to be ready for the start of the new school year.

One Board member noted that the SPED committee was different from the SRO committee in that it had a broader mission. The SRO committee had a single (if large) task. He asked whether the SPED committee should be an on-going standing committee. President Borrelli warned the Board to be careful of any standing committees, as they tended to take on administrative work that should be done by District administrators. Mr. Ryles commented that the committee should evaluate the recent audit, provide input to the Board and District administration after gathering information from the community, and monitor implementation of related Board decisions.

Other Board Matters

2018-18 Illinois Youth Survey

The District Administration reported on the results of a state sponsored survey of 8th graders at the District's middle schools. District 64 students reported use rates that were lower than state average for cigarettes, marijuana and prescription drugs and the same as state average for illicit drugs. One third of the students reported incidents of bullying, although the statistics reported did not distinguish among types of bullying (e.g., name calling, physical, cyber etc.). The Administration plans to respond to the information with staff training on restorative justice, health instruction as to the dangers of smoking/vaping, better tracking of bullying incidents over time to identify students needing intervention and other actions. Mr. Ryles encouraged the administrators to bring volunteers at the schools (such as lunchroom monitors) into the process as they may see things teachers do not, and to work at transitioning students with behavior issues between schools.

Child Care with Confidence (CCWC) Lease

Since 1982, CCWC has leased space at Jefferson School. Its annual lease is up for renewal. The District is exploring the viability of full day kindergarten, which could require use of CCWC space. The District Administration recommends extending the lease through June 1, 2019 but notifying CCWC that the lease may not be renewed after that date. Such notice is not required by the lease. Some Board members thought such a notice was premature, as the kindergarten expansion (and its timing) is uncertain. They noted that CCWC has been part of the community for many years and is used by many families. A vote to renew the lease is on the Board's agenda for July 9.

Approval of Exempt Salaries/Discussion of Administrative Salaries

These matters are a continuation of the discussion at the July 11 meeting, relating to raises for forty-four District employees. The Board reiterated its desire for consistent rubrics to measure an employee's performance over time, and for raises be merit based. The Administration confirmed that it is making existing standards more explicit. The Administration's recommendation for the 'Exempt' category was approved and the recommendation for the 'Administrative' category was scheduled for July 9.

Tentative Budget for 2018-19

CSBO Luann Kolstad updated the Board on changes made to the draft budget since the June 11 meeting, including changes in the numbers for tax levies, Federal grants and additional teachers. She confirmed the goal of a balanced budget and that the budget would continue to be refined. The Board approved the tentative budget and set a hearing at 6:45 on August 27.

Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)

The Board discussed how to be more transparent and efficient in responding to FOIA requests, and how to cut costs related to FOIA requests generally. They wanted to communicate the cost (in fees and staff time) of responding to requests to taxpayers, and also to make responses publicly available to cut down on duplicate requests. They discussed creating an on-going report for the District's website, which would also include the names of people making FOIA requests. The intent appeared to be to discourage broad requests. Dr. Heinz agreed to work on how such a report could be created.

Potential Property Sale/Leaseback of 164 S Prospect

President Borrelli noted that the Board had received a proposal from a contractor under which the contractor would buy the District's office building (164 S Prospect, Park Ridge), do some repairs and lease the building back to the District. Mr. Baigi noted that he knew the contractor on a personal basis but had no business dealings with him. After discussion, the Board concluded that it could not entertain such an offer without following required procedures to give others an opportunity to bid on the property. Any such offer would need to take into account the need to use union labor on District projects. The Board could also consider other options, such as purchasing a new building and simply selling the old. The topic was pushed to the July 9 agenda, prompting President Borrelli to suggest that the July 9 meeting start early, at 5:30.

Other Administrative Matters

The Board took other actions described in the agenda for the meeting, including approval of a personnel report, meeting minutes and payment of bills.

The Board discussed its concussion protocol and whether a baseline assessment of cognitive function should be required for every participant in school sports. It is currently voluntary. The Administration noted that many families voluntarily get the baseline assessment.

The Board also discussed changes to its policies on the requirements for use of school property. The changes are intended to provide clearer remedies for breach of the policies, such as drinking on school property. Approval of the changes will be on the July 9 agenda.

Other Public Comments

During the public comment period, a taxpayer objected to the Board's settlement of a dispute about sick day payout following retirement under the PREA contract. While not a lot of money was involved, the taxpayer felt that the contract was clear and that the Board should hold firm on contract matters.

League Action Needed: None at this time.