

LWV Park Ridge Observer Report

Meeting: Park Ridge-Niles School District 64

Date: August 20, 2018

Observer: Mary C. Fontaine
(closed session)

Start/End Time: 6:00-8:30PM (preceded by

Members Absent: Tom Sotos. School administrators (including Superintendent Laurie Heinz and Director of Student Services Lea Ann Frost) and the district's attorney (Michael A. Loizzi, Jr.) were also present.

Dr. Borrelli noted that August 20 was the first day of the school year. He welcomed students and their families and expressed enthusiasm for a number of goals, including improved trust between the Board and the community.

The bulk of the Board meeting and the public comments dealt with issues regarding the School Resource Officer (SRO) Committee and the Special Education (SPED) Committee authorized to be formed at the June 25 and July 9 meetings, respectively. Dr. Borrelli expressed second thoughts about whether a SPED Committee was necessary. Other Board members disagreed. Discussion and comment ensued, as described below. No action was taken.

The Board also approved a personnel report and held a first reading of proposed policy changes.

Public Comment/Discussion/Action:

Discussion of Committees

Upon request of a member of the public, the Board delayed public comment until after the presentation of Dee Molinare of the Illinois Association of School Boards (IASB). The presentation outlined IASB's recommendations for effective committees, and Dr. Molinare answered questions from Board members.

Dr. Molinare started with IASB views as foundational principles of effective governance. The Board should:

1. Clarify the District's purpose and mission.
2. Connect with the community, noting that community consists of many stakeholder groups, such as students, their parents, taxpayers, school personnel, etc.
3. Employ a Superintendent and delegate authority to the Superintendent, which requires trust and communication.
4. Evaluate the performance of the Superintendent and the Board. District 64 evaluates the Superintendent annually. Dr. Molinare noted that some districts do semi-annual or quarterly evaluations of the Superintendent and offered to facilitate a session in which the Board could evaluate its own performance.
5. Take responsibility for itself.

In relation to these principles, Dr. Molinare outlined IASB's position on what committees should and should not do. They should gather and summarize information, identify alternatives and make recommendations. They should not act for the Board or do the work of administrators. Mr. Ryles asked if having Board members on a committee and/or acting as committee officers clouded these issues. Dr. Molinare suggested that such a Board member might have a better understanding of the Board's goals and procedures, as well as legal/policy restraints and thus make the committee's work more efficient.

Dr. Molinare then outlined the issues to be considered when setting up a committee. Her list was subsequently supplemented by Mr. Loizzi. The issues included the following:

1. What is the purpose and scope of the committee?
2. How will members be selected, and for what term? Can members be removed for cause, such as missing several meetings?
3. When/how often does the committee meet, and when should its work be completed?
4. How will the committee be educated as to, and comply with, legal, policy and contractual constraints, such as the Open Meetings laws, social media policies and FOIA requests?
5. What insurance protection is available to committee members in the event of litigation?
6. What District resources are available to the committee, both physical and intangible (staff time, outside experts, etc.)?

Dr. Molinare expressed skepticism about the ability of standing committees to avoid doing the work of the Board or the District administration. She also noted that a 'committee of the whole' was required to comply with the formalities of any other committee, including keeping minutes and making reports to the Board.

Mr. Tiu asked how to make a committee representative of the community, given the conflicting desires of including a broad range of stakeholders and having a committee small enough to get things done. Dr. Molinare responded that the committee could never be fully representative, because it is composed of individuals.

This prompted Dr. Borrelli to ask whether having a committee was the best idea. He posited the alternative of designating Board members to act as community liaisons. Dr. Heinz then commented that Dr. Frost had put plans and procedures in place over the summer to address the issues raised in the SPED audit, and it was unclear how a Board SPED Committee would fit into the plans. She asked how it would be different than the PT3 committee of teachers and parents that the administration organized.

Mr. Lozzi suggested that an internal committee, like PT3, might be too invested in a particular approach or outcome to objectively evaluate the actions taken, relative to other options.

Mr. Tiu suggested that the role of the Board SPED Committee would be to identify and address gaps/dropped balls in the administration plans and implementation. Mr. Ryles also seemed to see a monitoring role for a committee but thought Board members would be better used as liaisons than committee members.

Mr. Sanchez and Mr. Biagi stressed that the purpose of the Board's SPED committee was to re-establish trust and accountability with the community—the accountability of both the administration and the Board itself. The committee would assess whether Dr. Frost had 'righted the ship.'

Dr. Borrelli countered that it was the Board's job to make that assessment, and the committee 'wouldn't be running' the SPED program. He then noted that Dr. Frost would be making a presentation at the August 27 meeting, and that the Board should defer further discussion until after they heard the report.

Two individuals, both parents, made public comments.

Mr. Tom Fisher stated that the parents of SPED students had never asked for the SPED Committee to 'run the SPED program.' Their goal was to work with the Board and the administration—not to disrupt, but to be part of the solution. Parent trust in the Board and the administration has deteriorated due to events over the last few years, and rebuilding trust would be a key part of the committee's role.

He also felt that the liaison idea was impractical. There are 600 SPED students in the district, with 600 individual sets of issues and needs. The liaison's capacity for problem solving would quickly be exhausted. A committee with different categories of disability represented would have a better chance of addressing problems experienced by groups of students.

Ms. Amy Bartucci addressed a few topics. First, she wanted to know more about Board self-evaluations and administrator evaluations—how they were done, and how often. Dr. Borrelli noted that, of the administrators, the Board only evaluated the Superintendent and did so in closed session once a year. As to Board self-evaluations, he said that one had not been done in the last year or so, but that older evaluations were done in open session and were available on video at the District's website.

Ms Bartucci then spoke about the liaison idea. She is open to it but confused about how it would work. She also expressed concern that the late introduction of the idea seemed to be pushing the Board sideways, instead of forward, in resolving issues from the SPED audit. She asked why the process of establishing the committee and addressing the issues was taking so long.

Dr. Borrelli returned to the position that a liaison was better than a committee, and that it should be Board members, not SPED Committee members, that interacted with the administration. Ms. Bartucci responded that she did not see any problem with a committee and the administration interacting to address problems.

Other Matters

The Board approved a personnel report following some discussion of staff retention issues. Dr. Borrelli asked why so many teaching assistants resigned close to the start of the school year and whether that could be contractually prevented. Dr. Heinz explained that most resignations resulted

from assistants being offered jobs as teachers and that the number of resignations reflected an improving job market. Mr. Loizzi explained that the likely benefit of enforcement contracts was outweighed by the cost of enforcing them.

The final item on the agenda was a first reading of proposed changes to board/district policies and related discussion. The affected policies included grievance procedures in the event of alleged discrimination, abuse and neglect reporting and remedies for prohibited use of alcohol on school property by groups renting the property.

Dr. Borrelli asked if the Board should go a broad review of policies on security issues. Mr. Tiu suggested that this would be better done after all of the construction projects to improve school security were completed in 2019.

Mr. Tiu asked whether students should be required to perform a modest number of community service hours as a condition to graduation. No action was taken on matter.

The closed portion of the meeting dealt with the placement of individual students in special education programs.

League Action Needed: Monitor formation of Board committees.