

Douglas County BOE Community Meeting
Sierra Middle School, Parker CO
01/17/2012

This report highlights items from the Public Comments at the BOE Community Meeting. A summary of questions and requests from the meeting are listed at the end of the report.

I have never seen this many attendees at a BOE meeting since I started to be a regular attendee in November of 2010. I would guess that there were over 500 in the Sierra Middle School Auditorium. All seats were full and folks were standing three deep around the edges.

One reason for the large crowd... the AFT had asked its members to attend the meeting. You could identify the members by their blue shirts. I sat with the teachers, Principal, and other SAC members from Pioneer Elementary School.

Bonnie Betts presented the 2011 budget update and new estimates for 2012. The new Community Relations Department gave a presentation on their activities. Several Student groups were recognized: the girls volley ball champions; the first ever U.S. team to enter the Robot Olympiad; and Congressman Coffman's service academy nominees.

The most important part of the quarterly community meetings is the public comment section. Eighteen made comments--parents, teachers, and students. I tried to capture the names of all the speakers, but sometimes clapping for the previous speaker drowned out the introduction.

Susan Meek [Prior to the meeting, Susan circulated an email regarding her question on use of "rainy day funds" that exist in the district's coffers. During Bonnie Betts' presentation, Bonnie talked about the use of \$11 million in reserve funds to balance the 2011 budget that would need to be paid back, eventually. Bonnie did not mention the use or existence of any "rainy day" funds nor did she make any corrections to Susan's comments. Therefore, it appears that the reserve account and rainy day funds are indeed two different buckets of money.] Susan asked why the District was growing the "rainy day" fund in 2011 rather than spending it. [Putting these facts together, one can conclude that: in 2011 we borrowed \$11 million from the reserve account and put an additional \$20 million, over and above the \$30 million required, into the "rainy day" fund.] According to Susan's email, the current balance in the rainy day fund is \$60 million.

David DeCarlo answered Susan Meek for the BOE. He said, "One year the State came back to the District and requested a \$7 million refund. Where was that money to come from? We need to be prepared for these events." David also mentioned PERA costs and stated the "District is not held accountable by the State." [The

comments from David did not explain the need for more than \$30 million in a rainy day fund.]

Hayley, 8th grade, wants to impact those who are against increasing taxes for schools. Hayley wants to put another school mil levy question on the 2012 ballot and work to explain to voters why the mil levy should pass. [An 8th grader cannot impact adults against an increase in school taxes if it is about a pay-for-performance program as in 2011. The mil levy increase would have to be directed solely towards class size reduction, i.e., hiring more super teachers. For an 8th grader to make an impact, the BOE would have to leave any mention of a pay-for-performance out of the 2012 ballot issue.] See Hayley's Facebook page: **Douglas County Kid Campaign 2012**.

Woman [did not hear the name] commented on several topics: "We lost 25 Principals last year." "The BOE continues to look at market structures trying to apply them to education [Very old hat. Read Diane Ravitch's book: *Standardized Testing Undermines Teaching*]." "The BOE reduced credit requirements for graduating seniors" "I am sure the Mr. Richardson does not intend to overshadow the importance of students with the stories about his former jobs in the secret service and white house." "I am sure the BOE did not intend to overshadow the importance of teachers with their pay-for-performance program."

SMART Student Advocacy Group – Students Making a Reliable Tomorrow say that education in Douglas County is declining due to class sizes. Class sizes have increased to 45 students [in high schools and middle schools]. Their opinion poll said that district retains excellent teachers. An \$18 million cut is too much. The student group wants to put another mil levy question on the ballot and ask voters to offset the cut. Their motto: "Cut No Money" [See SMART Facebook page: **Students Making a Reliable Tomorrow (SMART)** and <http://denver.cbslocal.com/2012/01/17/douglas-county-students-voice-concern-about-class-sizes/>]

Karen Stover, Parker, questioned the statement at the December 13, 2011 meeting where the BOE said they were making a resolution to disallow staff from running for the BOE until they had been out of their job for one year. Karen specifically asked for clarification on this statement regarding retired teachers. Unlike other questions that were being put forth, the BOE answered Karen. [Our Colorado News and the Denver Post both published articles about the December 13 resolution. Both papers stated that the resolution was NOT voted on. The Post said that the BOE "will delay a proposal requiring that district employees wait a year after leaving their job before running for the board." Our Colorado News said, "The Board withheld a vote because... John Carson was not at the Dec. 13 meeting. The Board will reconsider the resolution at the first meeting in January."] The BOE explained that the resolution was removed from the January 17 agenda [first meeting in January]. The resolution is being considered as part of BOE ethics revisions and that the BOE is taking input on this topic.

Cindy Barnard said that she was going to ask when the outstanding money paid out for vouchers will be returned by the schools [who received voucher money and must now pay it back due to court order] and when the state will ask for that money back, but changed her mind. Then she said she was going to ask about where money is coming from to support the pay-for-performance infrastructure that voters did not fund, but changed her mind. Then she asked how the community was invited to tonight's meeting. There was nothing under "Community" on the website. The information regarding tonight's meeting was very difficult to find. The new Community Relations Department needs to work on this.

Gary Colley [WE Teach the Children™] is a regular speaker at BOE meetings. Tonight, Gary mentioned several things. 1) He reinforced that the topic of the resolution regarding employees running for office had been rescinded from tonight's agenda, 2) There is no Community Info on the Community Page of the district website 3) Want to see the agenda items slated for the nearly 2-hour long Executive Sessions [Executive sessions are for the purpose of discussing staff and legal issues. The BOE can publish general topics to be discussed without revealing private information. The Parker Town Council was asked to disclose executive session topics, and they did.] 4) Want more details on the Board Retreat. What's on the website is not much more than the agenda items. 5) Want more information regarding the feedback that is being given to the BOE 6] Confidence in the current board is low.

Brenda Smith [AFT President] Until 2 years ago, teacher moral in Douglas County was quite high. A new survey conducted by an outside company shows a steep drop-off in moral while pride in the district remains high. Brenda says that it is easy to blame the economy, but that isn't it. Two years ago, the survey showed that 71% of teachers thought the district was moving in the right direction. That score is now 23%. At the same time, 85% of teachers feel supported by their principals. Conclusions: 1) The full results of the survey can be obtained from the AFT. 2) The district needs to improve. 3) There should be no more cuts to kids in Douglas County. 4) Change the direction of the district to focus on students. Again, the BOE chose to comment: Justin Williams said that the BOE has no control over whether there will be cuts. [See <http://www.ednewscolorado.org/2012/01/18/31386-calling-for-change-in-douglas-county> for more details on Benda's comments.]

Pam Mazenac said that the AFT survey was meaningless without knowing the *cause* behind the decline in moral. [I believe that other questions in the survey, such as the feeling that the district is moving in the wrong direction, points to the "cause" of the decrease in moral.]

Jason from Parker with 2 children in DC schools and a wife who teaches in the district said that his wife's concern about the district was causing him to be concerned. Jason checked the website to see what he could find. He said that he found basically what Susan Meek found—a budget that is creating a \$30 million

surplus. Jason asked the BOE to error on the side of children when there is a cushion.

Becky Barnes doesn't want AFT survey data spilling into the classroom. Becky told a story about her visit to her child's new high school. Her child is going from a middle school that utilizes all the latest technology to a high school with overhead projectors, chalkboards, and outdated books. Students are referred to more current information available on the Internet. Becky called it moving from new tech to "old school." She said that after the last election, her teacher told the whole classroom how the county does not support schools. Becky does not want that kind of information being told to students.

Ann Marie LeMute asked how we are paying for the new staff of six for the Community Relations Department. She also asked if the new relations department was going to be used to push Dr. Fagan's voucher and charter school agenda since that is all she talked about [at a previous meeting].

Gwen Wilhelm was a teacher for 48 years, 33 in Douglas County. Gwen decided to retire on 11/16/2011, not because she is tired of teaching, but because moral amongst the teachers had gone to zero. The district has lost perspective. Kids are not important. The BOE and teachers need to talk, think, and work together.

Jess Moser says that teachers are afraid to come to meetings. While teachers teach their students to stand up to bullies... that is, to stand up for what they believe in, teachers are scared [to bring issues before the BOE].

Jim Dullabe says that teachers are frustrated with the whole process. When do we learn the answers to our questions? [The audience clearly did not understand the rules of the Public Comment section. As they do at the Parker Town Council Meetings, the Board should explain that no actions will be taken as a result of the Public Comments. If appropriate, the BOE or staff shall attempt to answer questions at the next meeting.]

Andrew graduated in 2008 and is studying to be a teacher. He came to the meeting to learn how the interaction between the board and teachers works. He called the meeting "a conversation we are not having." He asked when the BOE can answer questions. [In order to answer questions, BOE members need to organize the questions and discuss them as a group, coming to a consensus regarding an answer. Since these questions are public, they cannot be discussed in Executive Session but must be addressed in a public forum, which means to answer these questions they need to be added to an public meeting agenda.]

Tiffany Von is a middle school teacher. She says that her school is not architecturally able to handle the 36-42 students now in each class. Class size is a liability. The district needs to bring back teachers, and dollars need to be spent on students. Large class sizes are not good for children. Children first.

Question Summary:

- 1) Will the BOE move some money from the “rainy day fund” and use it to reduce class size (hire more teachers)?
- 2) Will the BOE support another mil levy proposal on the 2012 ballot focused on reducing class size?
- 3) Will the BOE support student advocacy groups who want to put another mil levy question on the 2012 ballot?
- 4) Will the BOE continue to define the Douglas County educational system in terms of a “market-based system” instead of a “curriculum-based system”?
- 5) Will the BOE pursue efforts to create a resolution that will attempt to bar staff from running for office up to one year after leaving the district’s employment?
- 6) What is the status of outstanding voucher money? Has the state asked for the money back yet?
- 7) Where is the money coming from to pay for a pay-for-performance infrastructure when voters did not vote to fund the program?
- 8) How are we paying for the six new members in the Community Relations Department?
- 9) Will the new Community Relations Department be used to push Dr. Fagan’s voucher and charter school agenda?
- 10) When do we learn the answers to questions?

Requests:

- 1) Please post Community Meetings in the Community section of the new website.
- 2) Please post the agenda items to be covered in executive sessions without disclosing any private information.
- 3) Please post the detailed minutes from the BOE retreat.
- 4) Please provide more details about the questions and requests being made at meetings and the responses and actions being taken to address these questions and requests.
- 5) Please read the results of the entire AFT survey.
- 6) Please control comments from teachers to young students regarding the November mil levy vote and the AFT survey.
- 7) Please explain the “rules” of the Public Comment section of the meeting before comments begin.