

LARKSPUR SCHOOL DISTRICT
MINUTES OF THE REGULAR MEETING
OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES

October 24, 2007
Hall Middle School Library
200 Doherty Drive, Larkspur

I. CALL MEETING TO ORDER (Board President)

The regular meeting of the Larkspur School District Board of Trustees was called to order by President Michael Futterman at 5:00 p.m.

Trustees Present: Monica Bonny, Bruce Friedrichs, Michael Futterman, Kevin Mangan
Trustees Absent: Sally Blatt
Management Present: Valerie Pitts, Marilyn Clark, Daniel Norbutas

II. APPROVAL OF CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

M/s/c (Mangan-Bonny) to approve the Closed Session Agenda as presented.
AYES: Mangan, Bonny, Friedrichs, Futterman
ABSENT: Blatt
NOES: None

III. PUBLIC COMMENTS ON CLOSED SESSION AGENDA

None.

IV. RECESS TO CLOSED SESSION TO CONSIDER AND/OR TAKE ACTION UPON ANY OF THE FOLLOWING ITEM(S)

The Board adjourned to Closed Session at 5:00 p.m. to discuss the following:

- (a) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in Closed Session pursuant to GC Section 54957: Negotiations
- (b) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in Closed Session pursuant to GC Section 54956.9: Pending Litigation
- (c) With respect to every item of business to be discussed in Closed Session pursuant to GC Section 54957: Public Employees—Performance/Goals Evaluation: Superintendent

V. RECONVENE TO OPEN SESSION

Report of Closed Session. The Board reconvened at 6:04 p.m. Board President Michael Futterman reported that the Board took one action, which was to accept a late claim as a properly filed claim, and then rejected the claim on its merits.

A. COMMUNICATIONS

1. Superintendent's Report

Supt. Pitts presented student Alex Rauchle with a Certificate of Recognition for being honored by the Marin Independent Journal as Student of the Week, and for making Hall Middle School very proud.

Supt. Pitts then introduced Nancy Waters and Cookie Morin, Counselors at Hall Middle School and Neil Cummins, to speak about the upcoming "Red Ribbon Week" (RRW) events.

Nancy Waters in turn introduced students LuRay Joy and Alex Rauchle, Hall students, who provided RRW history and noted the activities to come: Teachers' lessons, auditions for a drug or alcohol-related skit or song to be performed at assembly and the prizes to be awarded to the performers, and viewing of the movie "Natural High 2." Ms. Waters announced that there is a Parent Education event tomorrow as well regarding how to talk to children about drugs and alcohol.

Cookie Morin introduced Maggy Kepler, Ellie Hurtado and Zachary Cohen, Neil Cummins students, who presented the Trustees and Superintendent with pins and ribbons to commemorate RRW, as well as explained how their school plans to promote and celebrate people making healthy choices and eating habits.

The Trustees thanked the students for their presentations and the leadership they provide.

Supt. Pitts then announced that the week of November 5th is Pledge Week for the Corte Madera Larkspur Schools Foundation. The November 6th Superintendent/ Board Coffee Chat will serve as an informational event regarding pledging to the Foundation.

Regarding the Staff Development Day recently held, Supt. Pitts wanted to recognize Principals Clark and Norbutas and their staffs for all of the hard work they expended on this event; it was a resounding success and the feedback was excellent.

Supt. Pitts also announced that there will be a Parent-Community Workshop on November 17th and that there were no Williams Complaints during the months of July, August and September.

2. Board Member Reports/Correspondence Addressed to the Board

Trustees reported attendance at the following activities:

- The Neil Cummins Hoedown.
- A Hall flag-football game.
- A planning event for the Costa Rica trip.
- California School Boards Association - Masters In Governance courses.
- The Parent-Ed event on "What To Expect From Your Adolescent."
- A Golden Bell Meeting.
- The Distinguished Donors Event.
- A Joint Legislative Action Committee Meeting.
- The CMLSF Men's Table Tennis Event.

B. PERSONS WISHING TO ADDRESS THE BOARD ON ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA

Carin Wethington, Hall Middle School Math Teacher, asked the Board to consider taking a stand on the unattainability of the goals set forth in the No Child Left Behind Bill. The Trustees requested Supt. Pitts research sample Resolutions.

C. STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

Priority: Foster high levels of student achievement

3. County Math Scores Presentation

Superintendent Pitts introduced Gretchen Muller, Project Coordinator from the Marin Teaching Network. Ms. Muller gave a brief slide presentation on the English-Language Arts test results for the County and the District. She then gave a very comprehensive presentation on the District's trends in math achievement for grades 2-8, and how they mirrored County trends. The math analyses included how:

- Students lose ground in proficiency levels in grades 6-10.
- Students who are not proficient in math by grade 4 tend to stay below proficiency through the rest of their math careers
- The curriculum in grade 8 is Algebra (the highest standard among states in the nation) and over 60% of our students are proficient. The ensuing discussion focused on instructional strategies, the importance of depth vs. breadth in teaching content standards and using additional measures of student achievement to document the progress of our students.

Ms. Muller then answered numerous clarification questions of the Trustees. She also felt there needs to be some serious systemic change in how mathematics is taught in the state, and she provided some examples, such as infusing mathematics across other curriculum. She supported the idea of students being able to get help with math homework and follow-up to class lectures three times a week for at least five minutes, in order to help strengthen concepts. That appeared to be invaluable in terms of students keeping up with curriculum. That assistance could come in the form of a study club, an after-school tutoring session, or the substitution of an elective for an additional math class. Those solutions did not necessarily require a math teacher or need to be expensive.

Math Teacher Carin Wethington added that she favored implementing multiple assessments, in order to better monitor student progress and intervene soon where needed.

Principal Clark felt it extremely important for children to go deeper into math curriculum—to fully understand the essentials and basics—not be forced to spread themselves thin by trying to cover too many topics in order to achieve higher test results. That certainly did not help them in the long run, and, in fact, not allowing them to fully grasp concepts before they moved on to new math elements, hurt them and the longer-term test results.

Principal Norbutas noted that his math team had already prioritized essential 5th grade standards in order to accomplish what Principal Clark just spoke to.

Ms. Wethington agreed that the basics needed to be mastered early on, so that the upper grades do not have to be re-taught concepts that they should have absorbed long before. That would certainly help later on with algebra and conceptualizing.

Ms. Muller agreed with their comments and provided examples of how they could cluster certain aspects of learning, and, by rotating them by grade, still achieve proficiency.

Trustee Futterman wanted to make sure that changes in curriculum, such as that for the 5th grade, needed to be communicated to parents, as that might well affect STAR test scores, etc., at least in the short term.

Supt. Pitts noted that staff is also considering multiple assessments, in order to more accurately measure the good work that is being done.

Principal Clark agreed that parents should be informed of the changes to be made.

The Trustees thanked Ms. Muller for such an in-depth, informative presentation.

Priority: Promote effective communication among the various constituencies

5. Draft 2008-09 and 2009-10 District Calendars

Supt. Pitts provided corrected versions of the calendars from what was in the Board Packet.

Trustee Futterman stated that the Board had received a number of e-mails over the past several weeks, virtually all about the "local holiday" being on a day that is also a Jewish holiday. Some were from parents thankful that their children did not have school that day and they could participate in religious observances, and others felt it was not appropriate for a public school to be favoring one religion over another. An example is not designating Good Friday a holiday too. Others were also not happy with having a day off (a Thursday this year), then having to return to school the next day for one day. Other comments involved having a half day off the day before Thanksgiving (which seemed to be a waste of a whole day) and having one of the District holidays or Staff Development Days in March, as that is a long month with no break. He invited commentary from teachers and other members of the public wishing to speak on any issue related to the school calendar.

Marilyn Clark, Carol Halpern, Lynn Lavaroni, Gayle Newman, Daniel Norbutas, Stuart Reiter, David Rembrandt, Carin Wethington, and Linda Wolfe spoke to the issue and the following were points addressed:

- In favor of strong separation between school and religion.
- A discussion amongst teachers recently had revealed that those at Neil Cummins were no longer adamant about not starting school on a Monday, because students are assessed during the first two weeks of school and are on early release. So, it was not as traumatic as it was when school started on a Monday with the days on regular schedule. That would also allow for school to end on a Thursday and teachers could enjoy closing their classrooms and having time to socialize with their peers before they departed for the summer—which is extremely valued by them.
- While there is a monetary loss because of students taking religious holidays off, one teacher wondered if the cost suffered was so detrimental that they could not switch back to the old calendar. While he personally observed the holiday, he was against it being designated a day off. But, if it were to be designated a holiday, then it should be called by its name, not called a "local holiday." To him, that is insulting. Also, Jewish people taking the day off should look at it as a point of pride, rather than feeling like they are separating themselves out in a negative way.
- A Monday start at Hall would make for a very long week, which would also push orientation back to the Friday before, which may result in a lower turn-out.
- Only two other districts in the County take Yom Kippur as a holiday, which, overall, comes across that our district is doing something different.
- If the holiday remains on the calendar, it should be done as part of an educational outreach to the community, acknowledging what it actually is. Calling it a local holiday seemed awkward. Also, Ramadan is at the same time, as is the United Nation's Peace Day.

- All Staff Development Days fall on Mondays, which is not good for those teaching classes only on that day of the week. Staff prefers having them on Fridays and/or rotating between Fridays and Mondays. It was suggested that the mandatory and first and last days be put on the calendar, but that staff should choose their development and work days.
- Religion should be separated from the public school calendar. There was a notable increase in questions from students about why there was a holiday in the middle of the week and there appeared to be a lot of resentment because of it.
- The Hall orientation is very successful and it should be followed by school the very next day. It would not be the same to have a few days off in between, as the same excitement and excellent vibe would not carry over.
- There was awkwardness in trying to explain a “local holiday” on a random day. If it is going to be a holiday, everyone should be up front about it.
- Desire for staff to be able to pick the Staff Development Days later on, as there were activities (and expenses) that the sites wanted to share with other districts and it is too soon to be able to choose those days.

Trustee Mangan agreed with those who wanted orientation to be held on a Monday with school following the next day. He knew firsthand how students benefited from those activities and he would not want the momentum built up to wane over a weekend. Students also needed to ease into the school year, particularly the younger ones, so starting on a Tuesday is a good idea. He also supported the idea of the last day of school being a Thursday, so that teachers could have Friday to organize their classrooms and have social time. Having them choose between coming in over the weekend or on the Monday after school let out did not feel the same as in the past. He noted that when the local holiday fell on a Friday, there were no complaints. It seemed that having a holiday and then having to return to school was what was problematic. He noted that they had previously discussed observing the day this year in a trial format. Therefore, he felt the holiday, when it fell on a Monday or a Friday, could be designated a day off, but not when it fell on a Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday. People tended to extend the holiday and make it a long weekend, and that did, in fact, have financial consequences for the district. That appeared to be a good compromise too. In the past, there appeared to have been little consideration for those students who had been out for religious observance in terms of homework loads or testing. Now that these issues have surfaced, staff is much more sensitive to the stress put on students and has responded appropriately.

Trustee Friedrichs noted that not only students take the religious holiday, but some teachers do as well. So, there was not only monetary loss, but some disruption to classrooms. That being said, there was some disruption with having a day off mid-week then having to come back to school for a day. He agreed that there has been improvement in terms of staff assigning homework and/or testing on or just before or after a religious holiday. He will give consideration to all sides of the cost arguments, and he felt it important, if the holiday is designated, to better explain to students why and what it is about. He too felt the orientation to be extremely valuable and that school should start on a day that immediately follows it.

Trustee Bonny acknowledged that there was a lot of resentment in the community over the local holiday, which was certainly not what the Board intended. She noted that if the winter break started on January 1st, for example, there would be an uproar in the community. It was silly to pretend that that break doesn't revolve around a religious holiday. She agreed that if they were going to designate a day off on Yom Kippur or Rosh Hashanah, it should be duly noted on the calendar as such. Trustee Bonny had researched the matter, and found it was perfectly legal to do that and many districts did so outside of the County. For her, a significant factor is that it needs to be administratively convenient, and she is not sure that it is if the holiday falls mid-week.

Whatever is decided, policies need to be established so that students opting to take a day off will not feel punished as a result.

Trustee Futterman was asked by Trustee Blatt, in her absence, to relay that she was not in favor of designating a religious holiday on the school calendar. As a reminder, she did not vote for it the last time it was before the Board for the 2007-08 calendar. Trustee Futterman understood the recommendation that Staff Development Days not always be held on Mondays. He mentioned that he was highly in favor of coordinating with the Tamalpais High School District's calendar whenever possible, as it was extremely inconvenient for parents who have children in both districts to have different days off. He was not convinced that, if done right, orientation at Hall could not be done on a Friday and still be a huge success, which would also be in keeping with Neil Cummins' willingness to begin school on a Monday. On the flipside, if Hall really felt it necessary for orientation to be on a Monday and for school to begin on a Tuesday, he suggested that consideration be given to Neil Cummins starting on a Monday (acknowledging that it might be an inconvenience for those with students at NC, Hall and Redwood to do so). He suggested that teachers discuss that suggestion and get back to the Trustees with a recommendation.

Because this had been the best round of discussions they have had about the calendar in several years, Trustee Futterman wanted to move forward with approving both 2008-09 and 2009-10. He felt it was an educable moment in many ways for the community, and, as such, should be used to heal and teach. He was willing to allow for Staff Development Days to be designated by teachers at a later time.

Trustee Mangan wanted to know what the Trustees are legally required to have on the calendar. He too was fine with allowing teachers to choose their Staff Development Days and other administrative holidays. He also felt that since most holidays are on Mondays, consideration should be given to Staff Development Days being on other days of the week. He suggested that class juggling could also be looked into as a solution.

Supt. Pitts answered Trustee Mangan's question about what needs to be on the calendar by stating that she believes there needs to be 180 student days and the Federal holidays. She would research that, however, and get back to the Trustees. She thought the idea of staggered start days between the elementary and middle schools to be an interesting idea and one she had seen implemented elsewhere. Commenting on the "educable moment," she stated that change won't take place unless there is some awareness, acceptance and diversity resulting from the dissonance that took place this year over the local holiday. She felt people should look at the positive aspects resulting from these discussion opportunities.

Priority: Foster high levels of student achievement.

4. Single Plans for Student Achievement (SPSA)

Principal Clark felt completing the SPSA for Neil Cummins was a productive exercise for several reasons, many of which she highlighted. She concluded that there is always room to grow and they are working at it. There are many ways to measure a school's growth, some of which are reflected in the SPSA.

Principal Norbutas felt Hall's SPSA process has evolved over the years and a good job had been done to identify goals, as well as formalizing a means of achieving them. He then highlighted several points in their Plan. One of great importance was how they were increasing focus on getting direct support to students at many levels and for various reasons. He feels great progress is being made.

In response to Trustee Mangan's question, Principal Norbutas stated that Hall did not have a formal feedback loop that records what parts of the plan have been accomplished and what haven't. Supt. Pitts added that the baselines from last year are written on the action plans and that the action plans also include quarterly monitoring and results sections.

Trustee Futterman noted pages 13 and 14 of Neil Cummins' report on academic ethnicity, and how the relative student percentages showed marked differences, whether in Math or English. Therefore, he wanted to know what strategies are being used to close those gaps.

Principal Clark responded that one thing that did not show up in the tests is that these are often not the same students from year-to-year and test-to-test. Staff is aware of who the students are who need help, and they are, for example, being pulled from certain classes to address their needs through specific strategies. Other examples are additional academic language classes (for the English Language Learners), having teachers work with specific children or groups within a class while others work more independently, using more pictorial or more manipulative strategies, the flexibility of Teacher Don Matthews being available before or after schools to students, push-in strategies, etc. Staff is constantly looking for ways to meet the needs of all students.

Principal Norbutas noted that they had also increased their academic support classes, which also focus on skill remediation. They have also established a support team of core staff and counselors, which focus on school connectedness—a key component of academic performance.

The Trustees were thankful for the work that had gone into the reports. The reports will return on the Consent Calendar of the next meeting for approval.

Priority: Maintain the fiscal integrity of the district.

6. CBEDS/Enrollment Report

Supt. Pitts presented the CBEDS/Enrollment numbers.

There were no questions and no action was needed.

Priority: Develop a flexible long range plan to manage continued enrollment growth.

7. Facilities Master Planning and Facilities Assessment Proposal

Supt. Pitts stated that the new Facilities Master Planning Committee (FMPC) will look at Hall, Neil Cummins and San Clemente in terms of modernization needs, as well as future enrollment and student housing needs. Greystone West will continue to act as the District's consultant. (Supt. Pitts noted that the remaining bond funds can be used for this planning process.) The first meeting of the Committee will take place on October 29th. Included with the Board Memo was the Long-Range Facilities Plan from 1999, which clearly stated that Marin Primary was ruled out as a potential site, as it would have to be razed in order to even be considered.

M/s/c (Friedericks-Mangan) to approve the Facilities Proposal from Greystone West Company.

AYES: Friedricks, Mangan, Bonny, Futterman

ABSENT: Blatt

NOES: None

Priority: Attract and Retain Highly Qualified Staff.

8. Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators

Supt. Pitts noted that this is an annual Declaration that requires Trustee approval during years when there are one or more teachers who are needed to teach in an area in which they have experience and education, but have not completed a second credential. This year, there is one teacher for which the District needs the Declaration.

M/s/c (Mangan-Bonny) to approve the Declaration of Need for Fully Qualified Educators.

AYES: Mangan, Bonny, Friedrichs, Futterman

ABSENT: Blatt

NOES: None

E. GOVERNANCE TEAM ISSUES/PLANNING

Priority: Promote effective communications among the various constituencies

9. Board Self-Evaluation

Trustee Futterman felt this item should be moved to the next meeting, due to time considerations. All other Trustees agreed.

Trustee Mangan welcomed commentary at the next meeting from teachers and administration.

Trustee Bonny felt commentary should be anonymous.

Supt. Pitts stated that she would provide staff with the same evaluation form the Trustees had completed, would be responsible for collecting the responses and bringing them to the Trustees.

10. Board of Trustees Meeting Dates

Supt. Pitts stated that the annual Mayors' meeting date is in conflict with the Board's scheduled January meeting on the 23rd.

After some discussion, the Trustees decided to change the meeting date to Wednesday, January 30, 2008.

F. CONSENT CALENDAR

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| 11. Minutes: Special Meeting of September 15, 2007 | Page 11-1 |
| 12. Minutes: Regular Meeting of September 26, 2007 | Page 12-1 |
| 13. Personnel Action 2007/08-03 | Page 13-1 |
| 14. Monthly Warrant Reports: 2007/08 – 18-25 | Page 14-1 |
| 15. Recycling/Disposal of Obsolete Equipment | Page 15-1 |
| 16. Resolution 2007/08-04 – Authorization for Official Representation to Marin Schools Insurance Authority | Page 16-1 |

M/s/c (Friedrichs, Bonny) to approve the Consent Calendar as submitted.

AYES: Friedrichs, Bonny, Futterman, Mangan

ABSENT: Blatt

NOES: None

IV. **ADJOURNMENT**

M/s/c (Mangan-Friedericks) to adjourn the meeting at 9:01 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Valerie Pitts
Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Mary Anne O'Keeffe
Executive Assistant to the Superintendent