

**COMMITTEE OF THE BOARD  
MEETING MINUTES  
JANUARY 10, 2006**

**PRESENT:**        **BOARD OF EDUCATION:** Ms. Kong-Thao, Chair; Mr. Brodrick, Ms. Carroll, Mr. Conlon, Mr. Goldstein, Mr. Oertwig, Ms. Street-Stewart

**STAFF:** Louis Kanavati, Interim Superintendent; Su Yeager, Luz Maria Serrano, Patrick Quinn, Stephen Schellenberg, Denise Quinlan, Joanne Knuth, Nancy Katzmarick, Jill Cacy

**OTHERS:** Diane Schroepfer, Jennifer Purtell, David Mergens, Nicole Becker, Valerie Atkinson, Saul Castillo, Michael Kowolski, Mary P. Williams, Tom Kranz, Gilbert de la O, Christian Borgan, Kayla Fearing, Lisa Lieder, Beth Black, Susan Wright, Doug Beldon, Pioneer Press; Kari Denissen, Tim Williams, Mike Sodomka, Isreal Moses, IV, Brian Hamilton, Natalie Hamilton, Chris Fischer, Bonnie Bellows, James Walsh, Star Tribune; Christine Vang, John Thoemke, Wendy Bjorklund, John Riemer, Patty Bowe, Deborah Bennett

**I. CALL TO ORDER**

The meeting was called to order at 4:30 p.m. by Ms. Kong-Thao, Committee Chair.

**II. AGENDA**

Ms. Kong-Thao introduced the items on the agenda for this meeting which were:

- **Humboldt Senior High**
- **School Choice**
- **Work Session**

**1. Humboldt Senior High**

Mr. Kanavati, Interim Superintendent, provided background information on this topic and discussed concerns expressed by the Gates Foundation and the community regarding the perception of the West Side where Humboldt school is located and community and city concerns on the declining enrollment. Mr. Kanavati issued a challenge to building staff to look at ways to revitalize community and city interest in Humboldt School. Mr. Kanavati talked about the difficulty of convincing people there was a problem. With the leadership of Dr. Luz Maria Serrano, Area A Superintendent and John Bianchi, Principal at Humboldt Sr. High, a strategic plan was developed.

Dr. Serrano continued the presentation and stressed the importance of having the Superintendent's direct involvement working with Humboldt School in setting the direction. Dr. Serrano introduced John Bianchi, and expressed appreciation that he had agreed to assist in this plan.

Mr. Bianchi acknowledged the many participants and parents in attendance who were not on the agenda but who are very much involved in Humboldt school matters. He introduced the site-council members present and community representatives who could speak about the positive things happening at Humboldt even though there seemed to be a lack of community and city support for their school. The site council members, community representatives,

parents and students who spoke about their commitment to Humboldt School, its staff, and the proposals before the Committee were:

- John Hines, parent
- Jennifer Purtell, parent
- Kari Denissen, parent
- Nicole Becker, student
- Saul Castille, student

Mr. Bianchi introduced and congratulated co-chairs of the Humboldt site-council, Valarie Atkinson and Becki Hamilton for turning the council into a healthy, vibrant and happy group to be a part of.

Mr. Bianchi remarked the five (5) schools on the Westside are involved in a partnership and are working on a marketing brochure they hope to complete by early next week. He commented this is something that has not happened for a long time and it is a unique opportunity because there is not another high school within all these boundaries that can be thought of as a pre-K-12 program. Mr. Bianchi, the elementary principals and Mary Williams, Principal, Humboldt Jr. High, met to address the issues of decreasing enrollment, public perception and low test scores. A strategic plan was developed for Humboldt Junior and Senior High Schools based on a three-fold framework to: 1) Realign the schools' programs and educational opportunities to better serve students, 2) Enhance the Environment (dramatically improve the physical appearance of the entire campus) and 3) Standardize dress/attire.

Mr. Bianchi discussed the meeting held in the community to exchange thoughts and ideas with school staff and the agreement reached on what needed to be worked on (i.e., better marketing of the schools, better communications with the public, regular meetings with community people and the media, marketing brochures and an educational summit. He remarked when these goals are achieved it should create a sense of pride and ownership by everyone. He added other schools have been visited to recruit more students. A big selling point is that Humboldt is a small school with big opportunities and if student enrollment is substantially increased it will still be a small school compared to the other surrounding high schools. Mr. Bianchi asked Committee members to consider two (2) things: 1) The implementation of the proposals on a three (3) year time line and 2) Exempt the Board policy under Students Dress Code that requires eighty-percent (80%) approval so they can implement the standard dress/attire at Humboldt. Mr. Bianchi noted when parents were surveyed sixty-percent (60%) voted "yes" or approved standard dress.

School staff from Humboldt Sr. High, Israel Moses and Mike Sodomka and Timothy Williams, Humboldt Jr. High, expanded on the ideas developed for improving program and instruction. David Mergens, Athletic Director, discussed enhancing the environment by upgrading the outside field area and the front entrance. Tom Kranz, Humboldt Sr. High School, stated Humboldt Sr. High School would be the first public high school to require standard attire. Mr. Kranz discussed the need and Humboldt's vision to increase student achievement (test scores) by implementing Standard Dress/Attire at Humboldt Sr. High.

Mary Williams, Principal, Humboldt Jr. High, reiterated they are requesting the same one year exemption on uniforms as the senior high school. She remarked the same letter had been sent to parents and a vote was taken with parents, students, staff and their site council.

Ms. Kong-Thao thanked the Humboldt principals, staff, parents, community members and students for doing a great job with their presentations.

Discussion followed. Committee members expressed their support for Humboldt Jr. and Sr. High Schools and discussed their concerns and opinions regarding the three (3) proposals before the Committee: 1) program/instruction, 2) environment, and 3) standard dress/attire.

Committee members expressed the need for additional feedback from administration and after further discussion, the following motion was made:

**MOTION:** It was moved by Mr. Conlon and seconded by Mr. Oertwig that the Committee of the Board recommend the Board of Education approve there are no plans to close Humboldt at this time and offered Board support for the schools future success.

**Motion Carried.**

Ms. Carroll and Mr. Goldstein left the meeting at this time.

## 2. School Choice

Mary Chorewycz, Executive Director of Research and Development, provided background information regarding discussions on school choice that were presented to the Committee of the Board in August 2002-April 2003; resulting in The Choice Report: Ideas and Issues Raised during the Saint Paul Public School's Community Conversation on School Choice, March 2004-October 2004; The Superintendent's School Choice Task Force Final Report: Ideas For Expanding Transportation Service to Neighborhood Schools and For Connecting All Schools More Closely to Their Neighborhoods and in the October 2004-November 2005 Report of the School Choice Taskforce. (Copies of this document were distributed to committee members and audience members.)

Ms. Chorewycz remarked the last discussion with the Committee of the Board regarding school choice was on December 12, 2005 with considerable conversation about next steps. It was determined that further discussion would be needed and objectives reviewed to ensure everyone was moving in the right direction.

Ms. Chorewycz stated that while administration stands ready to assist and go forward with further study of School Choice, the Task Force would request the Committee of the Board clarify the purpose of School Choice in 2006. Administrative members present from the School Choice Task Force were Patrick Quinn, Jill Cacy, Steve Schellenberg and Mary Chorewycz.

Discussion followed. Committee members discussed areas they would like to explore further such as duplication of successful programs (i.e., Spanish Immersion) in other schools, transportation and desegregation issues, magnet school programs, waiting lists, etc.; all critical issues that affect academic achievement district-wide.

Mr. Quinn stated the School Choice Task Force meetings usually came back to "What is the purpose of choice? If it is to desegregate Saint Paul Schools to the point that every school is desegregated then you will make compromises on savings and choice. If the purpose is academic achievement then we are there. If the purpose of school choice is to save money then let's throw out city-wide option. If the purpose is to meet every parent's demands – the task force needs to know that. If the purpose is equity – we can achieve that." He added it is the desire of the task force to know

After lengthy discussion, between Committee members and members in the audience, it was agreed by committee members that the academic component should be the driving force behind school choice. Discussion also centered on the pros and cons of the current school choice system.

The following motion was made

**MOTION:** It was moved by Mr. Conlon and seconded by Ms. Street-Stewart that the Committee of the Board recommend the Board of Education approve that the School Choice Plan should be driven primarily by the academic component with the other components given due consideration.

**Motion Carried.**

Administration was directed by the Committee to return to the Committee of the Board (COB) before the next COB meeting with the list of priorities that Committee members would review for solutions.

**3. Work Session**

Board members' external committee assignments and responsibilities were discussed.

**II. ADJOURNMENT**

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m., by Ms. Kong-Thao, Committee Chair.

Respectfully submitted by  
Diana J. Sanders  
Recorder