

A special meeting of the Board of Education of the City of Vineland was held Monday, February 25, 2008 at 7:00 p.m., in the Board Room, 625 Plum Street, Vineland, New Jersey, pursuant to notice with Mr. Giordano presiding and the following members present: Ms. Arroyo, Mr. Bernardini, Mr. Fanucci, Mr. Franceschini, Mrs. Gavigan, Mr. Snyder, Mr. Spinelli and Mr. Ulrich. Absent: None.

Also present: Mr. Ottinger, Superintendent, Dr. Figgs, Dr. Gruccio, and Mr. Peters, Assistant Superintendents, Mr. Franchetta, Board Secretary, Edward Rochetti, Executive Controller and Mr. Shapiro, Board Solicitor.

Mr. Giordano announced that in compliance with the New Jersey meeting law commonly referred to as "The Sunshine Law," the Vineland Board of Education has caused notice of this meeting.

Flag Salute:

Public Comments:

Recommendations: See page 9 of this document

Mr. Giordano said at this time the board will participate in a Board Self Evaluation Workshop with Jane Kirchner of New Jersey School Boards Association.

Ms. Kirchner distributed a composite document for the board's review and presented an overview on some of the highlights of the Board Self Evaluation. She explained that in the judging categories you will see that commendable/good are positives and adequate/unsatisfactory are negatives. Ms. Kirchner said if there was a line between good and adequate the majority of the board judged themselves to be less than that. She said anytime a person judges something to be the highest or the lowest it can be, there is a specific reason. When you are talking about this as a tool for professional growth that is really what you want to see. Ms. Kirchner said normally when she has a workshop like this there is no public attending and feels it is unfair for the board to be as open as they can be. She said that she may need to return another time. Mrs. Gavigan said she knows that another workshop will have to be scheduled to address the issues that were brought about in the QSAC Report. She asked Ms. Kirchner to review some of the highlights of the board's self evaluation sighting positives and negatives. Ms. Kirchner said on the graph the higher average often is the board member as an individual member. She said it is very common that board members, as individuals, are doing what they think they should be doing as board members. Ms. Kirchner said often the board is judged to be slightly lower. When she sees a large discrepancy, which this district does not have; it indicates to her the amount of potential frustration that exists on the board. Ms. Kirchner said this board is pretty much in agreement and are exactly the same in the instructional program. She said under finance the board judged themselves as a board to be higher than they are as individuals, which is a compliment to the business administrator. Ms. Kirchner said the board clearly showed effort in filling out the evaluation. She said in the two year comparison you can see the growth in the board from one year to the next, which is increased in every area. Ms. Kirchner said on the last page each of the areas corresponds to the area the board filled out. She said there was one area with a 4.0 and that was the board superintendent relationship. Ms. Kirchner said the board felt that was absolutely vital. Mr. Snyder said he liked the comparisons that were done and asked if he could have that information over a five year period. Ms. Kirchner said that would be an individual field service representative's decision. She said if she could get the documents she would be able to make a graph. Mr. Giordano asked who the new field service representative is. Ms. Kirchner said we are training a couple people. Mr. Giordano asked Ms. Kirchner if she will be coming back in May. Ms. Kirchner said to call her and a date will be scheduled. Mr. Giordano thanked Ms. Kirchner for attending the meeting tonight.

Mr. Giordano said the proposed possible cuts or reversed priority list for the 2008-2009 budget will now be discussed. He said prior to the March 5, 2008 work session the board will approve the tentative budget, which is due on March 6 to the Department of Education.

Mr. Ottinger presented an overview on the 2008-2009 budget. He said we have an approximate six million dollar shortage of funds. Mr. Ottinger presented a list of tentative recommendations to make up the shortage. He said this year we asked the principals to present three different percentage lists of cuts 3%, 5% and 7%. He said the list that was presented to the board will require the district to use the 7% cut list. Mr. Ottinger said if funds were raised two and a half cents through taxes it would give us approximately \$500,000.00, which would be used as an offset for some of the cuts.

Mr. Franchetta said we are required next Thursday to submit a balanced budget to the State of New Jersey. The budget that was compiled is a balanced budget and includes all of the cuts outlined in these documents at the 7% level.

Mrs. Gavigan asked what dollar figure is 7%. Mr. Rochetti said approximately 5.2 million dollars. Mrs. Gavigan asked if we are only looking at school based budgets for possible cuts. Mr. Ottinger responded no the assistant superintendent for secondary education has been removed, two alternative school positions and other items that are not listed such as the before/after school programs, contributions, and contractual services.

Mr. Giordano asked if the other items that Mr. Ottinger mentioned come into play, would some of the positions be reinstated. Mr. Franchetta said the increase in taxes would raise additional revenue. He said all the other items have been cut from the budget except the contracted services.

Mr. Bernardini mentioned that a tax increase would have to be approved by the voters. He asked if the scenario would change under the new regulation. Mr. Ottinger said we would receive help from the State of New Jersey with the tax increase as long as we are in the 4% cap and it is board approved.

Mr. Ulrich said since we have two principals retiring, would it be feasible to float two principals in those spots within our system and cut the executive principal position that we currently have. Mr. Ottinger said he believes that Mr. Franceschini at the board retreat wanted him to support the concept of an executive principal.

Mr. Ottinger said his feeling from most of the board members is the set up we have with the executive principals is what they wanted to keep. Mr. Ulrich said he is concerned that we have open positions that could be filled within our district. Mr. Ottinger said the individuals he thinks Mr. Ulrich is referring to are not entitled to those positions because they are not tenured yet.

Mr. Spinelli said he thinks the concern is that we are asking the schools to cut 7% but we are not asking administration to cut 7%.

Mr. Bernardini questioned if we need to have an executive principal to have small learning communities.

Mrs. Gavigan asked if it is fiscally sound for us to continue with small learning communities and risk cutting other things. Mr. Ottinger said the cuts have nothing to do with small learning communities.

Mr. Fanucci asked what we can look at cutting or scaling back in the district that is non-teaching or administrative and what services could we privatize if we had to.

Mr. Giordano asked how many home school liaisons we currently have. Mr. Ottinger said he thinks fourteen. Ms. Arroyo asked how many literacy coaches there are in each elementary school. Mr. Ottinger said they share four at the elementary level. Mr. Franceschini asked how many basic skills teachers we have. Mr. Ottinger responded nine. Mr. Ulrich asked how many literacy coaches there are at the middle school level. Mr. Ottinger said one per school. Mr. Fanucci asked how much the liaisons make a year. Mr. Rochetti said approximately \$15,000.

Mrs. Gavigan asked how we would serve the students without the SAC Coordinators. Mr. Ottinger said you would not have the same services and it would have to fall on the guidance counselors. Mrs. Gavigan asked if we still have a social worker at each middle school. Mr. Ottinger responded yes.

Ms. Arroyo asked how many librarians we have in Vineland High North and South. Mr. Ottinger said there are two in each building.

Mrs. Gavigan asked if we have any existing vacant positions. Mr. Ottinger said we do not know that exact number yet due to retirements.

Mr. Giordano asked if cuts were included on the district side. Mr. Franchetta said the before and after school program is based on an annual registration fee of \$10.00 per student. If a student receives free or reduced lunch they can be placed in the program for the entire year at only the \$10.00 registration fee cost. Mr. Franchetta said the majority of our students are free or reduced lunch so most of the people who utilize the program do not pay. Mr. Franchetta said annually this would cost the district approximately \$125,000 to fund the deficit.

Mr. Franchetta said what we are proposing to do for September is to place a bid where the successful bidder would run the program in all of the elementary schools and we would contribute the space. Mrs. Gavigan mentioned that there are grants for after school programs where the grant would support the program.

Mr. Ottinger said that is one suggestion. He mentioned that we also we have an arrangement with the parochial schools where we provide transportation for them. Mr. Ottinger said Mr. Callavini is reviewing this to see if anything can be done. Mr. Spinelli asked if the latch key situation will go out for bid and is already included in the balanced budget. Mr. Franchetta responded yes. Mr. Franceschini asked for the cost of the latch key. Mr. Franchetta said \$3.50 for the morning and \$4.50 for the afternoon.

Mr. Ottinger asked if there were items that were taken out to balance the budget that were not provided to the board. Mr. Franchetta said there were items that we had to put into the budget that we did not have this year. He said the pension contribution for people who are in the Public Employees Retirement System (PERS) has drastically increased. Mr. Franchetta said fuel costs have increased along with our utilities and gasoline. Mr. Giordano asked if we could have held off a year with the #2327 settlement. Mr. Franchetta said that is in this year's budget and we are waiting for a settlement with IRS issues. He said if that money is not spent he will re-appropriate the money in this year's budget. Mr. Rochetti mentioned that the costs that were born by the board for many years for the Impact Program will be taken on by South Jersey Hospital for about \$500,000.00.

Mr. Ulrich asked if we should have a consistent staffing level at all of our schools. Mr. Ottinger said if they are critical positions there should be concern.

Mrs. Gavigan asked if the LEAP Program is being cut. Mr. Ottinger responded no.

Mr. Fanucci asked how we handle the fuel for the buses. Mr. Franchetta said the buses go to Riggins Gas Station.

Mrs. Gavigan asked if we have any property we could sell. Mr. Franchetta said under the new SCC Regulations if we sell any property the proceeds go to them.

Mr. Franceschini asked if we looked at bringing more special education students back into the district. Mr. Ottinger said Mrs. Polof is reviewing this and it is a possibility.

Mr. Spinelli questioned if changes can be made after the budget is sent. Mr. Franchetta responded yes.

Mrs. Gavigan asked what happens to the person who is being cut from the Assistant Superintendent position. Mr. Ottinger said the individual is a long time employee in the district who has tenure as a principal, assistant principal, and teacher. Mr. Ottinger said this individual is entitled to all those positions.

Mr. Ottinger said all the individuals that were mentioned this evening will be speaking to their principals whether or not their positions will be cut. He said if the board does not agree with these cuts then now would be the time to say.

Mr. Spinelli said he would rather see basic skills and literacy coaches than school liaisons. Mr. Ottinger said that exchange does not equate it is only half the amount. He said there has not been a school tax increase in many years and we will be criticized severely by the State about that. Mr. Ottinger said a tax increase would be a way to generate \$500,000 without any cuts. He questioned why the board is reluctant to do this. Mr. Giordano asked if raising the taxes would put all of this back. Mr. Ottinger said it would put the basic skills teachers back in without cutting anything else. Mr. Fanucci said if we are going to try to get support from the public, then we need to give something back even if it means cutting three to four hundred thousand in positions. Mr. Ottinger pointed out that in the school funding formula Vineland raises about twenty four million in taxes and what the state said we should be raising is double that. Mr. Spinelli said if you are going to raise taxes you have to show the public that you are also willing to cut. Mrs. Gavigan said the reality is that the tax payers are not going to vote for a tax increase. Mr. Spinelli said liaisons should be cut and two hundred thousand dollars could be found somewhere else so taxes do not have to be raised. Mr. Ottinger said the list of cuts that were given to the board is what the principals have recommended.

Mr. Ulrich said he is not opposed to a unified leadership at the high school, where you have an executive principal. He feels the two principal position openings can be massaged into the budget. Mr. Ottinger asked Mr. Ulrich if he is saying to have one executive principal for the high and no principal in either building. Mr. Ulrich said correct you would have assistant principals. Mr. Ottinger asked if the assistant principals would be running the buildings. Mr. Ulrich said the executive principal would be responsible for the overall operation and his subordinates would report to him. He said there are too many chiefs. Mr. Ottinger said he is hearing that the bottom line is to cut two associate principals at the high school. Mr. Ulrich said yes two positions should be cut at the high school.

Mr. Snyder said on an administrative point of view you will see chaos if you take away an assistant principal in the high schools. He understands that we have to make cuts but the board received some really good recommendations from the people who work in those buildings. Mr. Snyder questioned what knowledge the board has to make these recommendations.

Mr. Ottinger said four principals at the intermediate level said to him that they think they can cover basic skills without basic skills teachers. Mr. Spinelli said he would like to know how they are going to do it. Mr. Ottinger questioned why the cut list was even done. Mr. Giordano said you need a starting point. He said this is a serious issue and we need this kind of discussion.

Mrs. Gavigan asked how much does the seven percent equal that was cut from athletics. Mr. Ottinger said about \$50,000. Mrs. Gavigan asked if there was any more wiggle room there. Mr. Ottinger said that is another area that can be discussed. He said the high school administration did not think that was beneficial at this time and they did not include it. Mrs. Gavigan questioned if it is fair to fund athletics when you have students participating in various clubs that are enriching experiences for them as well. She would like to look at athletics a little more. Mr. Ottinger said that is absolutely a legitimate point.

Ms. Arroyo asked what the amount would be if freshman sports were cut. Mr. Ottinger said approximately 150 to 200 thousand dollars.

Mrs. Gavigan asked if we are allowed to charge a fee to participate in athletics. Mr. Ottinger said there are many districts that charge a fee for their student athletes to participate.

Mr. Spinelli feels a one or two cent tax increase needs to be entertained. Mr. Ottinger said a 2.5 cent tax increase would be \$500,000.

Mr. Giordano wants the board members to think about all the options and a decision will be made on March 5.

Mrs. Gavigan said she would like to hear from the principals in regards to if they really need the basic skills teachers. Mr. Ottinger said he will ask the principals what their plan is.

Mr. Franchetta asked if he was hearing that right now the budget stays as is and the board will decide Wednesday night what to do. Mr. Ottinger said any changes that the board makes on Wednesday has to be done that night because the budget has to be in on Thursday. Mr. Franchetta said his recommendation is to leave the budget alone at this point and approve it on Wednesday. He said it could be tweaked for the public hearing, which will be held on March 27, 2008.

Mr. Ulrich asked if the exact dollar figure includes an increase at this point. Mr. Ottinger responded no. Mr. Ulrich feels if there is support among the board about a position, then it should be considered.

Mr. Franchetta said it would be helpful to know the board's thoughts now on a 2.5 cent tax increase. The board took a straw vote and Mr. Fanucci, Mr. Bernardini, Mr. Spinelli, Mr. Franceschini and Mr. Ulrich voted "yes" for a tax increase reinstating the basic skills teachers at the middle school level and cutting the liaisons and Mr. Snyder voted "yes" for only the tax increase and Ms. Arroyo, Mrs. Gavigan and Mr. Giordano voted "no" for a tax increase.

Mr. Fanucci asked if we could provide the newspaper with the tax increase amount per house. Mr. Giordano said that is a good idea because we do want the information reported accurately.

Respectfully submitted,

Kevin J. Franchetta, CPA
Board Secretary

KJF

Vineland Board Of Education
 Report to the Board – February 25, 2008

G I O R D A N O	G A V I G A N	A R R O Y O	B E R N A R D I N I	F A N U C C I	F R A N C E S C H I N I	S N Y D E R	S P I N E L L I	U L R I C H
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RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that:

1. The Board approve travel for district members as required by NJAC 6A:10A-8.3 and/or school field trips as per lists provided and on file with the Secretary of the Board.

All Members
 voted "yes,"
 (9-0-0)