

Minutes of Federation Board Meeting on February 28, 2002

Call to Order

President Art Wells called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the Packard Center

In attendance: Board members Peter Brinitzer, Charles Dane, Bill Hanks, Mary Anne Lecos , Sally Ormsby, Jean Packard, Wade Smith, Ray Steele, Art Wells; and Education Committee members Jack Knowles of the Mt. Vernon Council, and Jan Auerbach of the McLean Community Association.

I. Conversation with Superintendent Daniel Domenech

Dr. Domenech expressed appreciation for the opportunity to meet with the Board because the schedule for School Board meetings has prevented his attending Federation membership meetings. (Paul Regnier, the school division's liaison to the Federation, also was present.)

The Superintendent reviewed the current budget crisis, which is created largely by projected enrollment growth and reductions in state funding (estimated to be \$46M). He noted that the only increases in his Proposed Budget for FY2003 were for costs related to increased enrollment, a 2% COL increase in salaries (in addition to step increases of 2.6% on average), and compliance with state accountability mandates for students and schools. The School Board Advertised Budget includes an additional \$.5M to complete tech labs at the two middle schools lacking such facilities.

Dr. Domenech estimated that 1500 students in FCPS may not graduate in 2004 because of failure on the SOL tests; 70% of these are in special education programs or do not speak English as their first language. He noted that changes in graduation and accreditation criteria had been made by the Virginia Board of Education since the inception of the SOL testing, and he predicted additional changes by 2004 to prevent an unacceptable failure rate statewide. In the meantime, remediation efforts will continue at every level in FCPS because the Standards of Learning have had a positive effect on at-risk students by raising expectations, focusing attention on needs, and requiring accountability for all—including students in special education and ESL programs.

In response to questions about the relative costs of educating different groups of students, Dr. Domenech explained that the average cost is misleading because it covers a range from \$35,000 for severely disabled students to \$6000 for students in the general education program who are not receiving special services. Programs for gifted and talented students and language immersion programs are not significantly more expensive than regular education programs. The tuition paid by out-of-county students attending TJHSST is supplemented by the state because TJ is a Governor's School.

Little relief is expected from the recently approved federal legislation for education because it is focused on schools and school districts with high rates of poverty and low achievement. In fact, the federal legislation may be another unfunded mandate because it requires language arts and mathematics testing of all students in grades 3-8, which is more than is now required by Virginia.

The School Board will be seeking input from individuals and groups on where/how to cut costs because it is not likely that the Board of Supervisors will be able to cover the \$74M deficit between what has been requested and what the County Executive has recommended. Town meetings have been scheduled tentatively for April 2 and 3 at Fairfax and Edison High Schools. Guidelines for budget cutting will be provided at or before these meetings.

Reductions in staffing or proposed salary increases must be considered because 80% of the operating budget is for personnel—mostly school-based. Further cuts in administrative staffing would endanger support for instruction and supervision because of sharp reductions made in the past several years.

State and federal mandates account for approximately 70% of the budget; however, what is not mandated is strongly supported by the community, e.g., low pupil:teacher ratios, counselors, music and arts programs, reading specialists, sports and other extracurricular activities. As the recent JLARC study reported, the school divisions in Virginia already exceed state mandates, which are significantly underfunded.

Although the Superintendent seeks salary increases to keep FCPS competitive, he does not favor salary increases for teachers alone because such action would devalue the contributions of other instructional and support staff. In addition, it is difficult to attract and retain strong employees in many categories.

There are two audit functions in FCPS: internal auditing of management and program implementation; and external auditing of financial operations.

The Speaker and other Virginia legislators who oppose local taxing options for education may be expressing their own communities' values and expectations, and their satisfaction with the revenue received through application of the Composite Index.

The Superintendent favors limiting any tax referendum(s) to infrastructure and construction because FCPS has a \$2B deficit in funding for facilities, and the public is more aware of facilities needs.

He has no preference for a referendum on sales tax or on income tax because either could produce badly needed resources to meet short-term needs: ½ cent on the sales tax equals \$50-\$80 million depending on the distribution formula; .25% increase in state income tax could produce \$100M. However, the public has been more accepting of sales tax increases than income tax increases.

When challenged about allocation of resources for elementary and middle school remediation when some high schools have up to 25% of their students at risk of failing to graduate, the Superintendent defended the Board policy of working to improve achievement at every level and preparing young children for success in school.

At the elementary level, the Advertised Budget includes extension of Project Excel to additional schools because of documented success in raising student achievement to meet state standards at 13 of these schools—ahead of the 2007 accreditation deadline. Project Excel costs \$1M per school for all-day kindergarten, teacher training focused on reading and technology, and accountability for all school staff.

At grades 6-8, the new Benchmarks for promotion combined with compulsory summer school and remedial programs are designed to prepare students for success in high school. At the high school level, the budget includes funds for SOL-focused remedial programs during and after the school day and on Saturdays.

FCPS is exploring public/private partnerships as a means for building a South County high school on the Lorton property. This might involve a lease-back arrangement or whatever arrangement might reduce the time or cost for building a badly needed school.

A facility for centralizing some of the administrative staff now spread across the County in former schools could be funded by sale of properties owned by the School Board.

Board members recommended that the Superintendent get out information about realized savings or cost avoidance from management actions to counteract inaccurate claims made by opponents of taxation for public education. The Superintendent used his draft response to Melanie Scarborough's column in the Post as an example of how he is attempting to refute unfounded charges.

As examples of savings, Dr. Domenech cited the Facilities Accommodation Plan, the reorganization from three administrative areas to eight clusters, and reduction of \$10M in expenditures during FY2002. He contended that the bottom line for education in Fairfax County is what parents and other citizens value and are willing to pay for quality.

Federation members explained the need for more examples of how discretionary expenditures make a difference in the quality of schooling, using QPAS evaluations or anecdotal data. The Superintendent mentioned resistance to change based on evaluative studies, e.g., that time-out rooms are not achieving their objectives or operating as designed, or that the ABA program for autistic children is not superior to less costly alternatives.

B. Treasurer's Report

Charles Dane reviewed the attached report.

C. Letter of Incorporation

The Federation has received a letter from the State Corporation Commission reinstating its incorporation as of January 17, 2002. (The incorporation had been suspended as of January 31, 2001 because of failure to file an annual report when forms had been missent to the Federation.)

D. Domain Names. Both new and old names will be retained.

E. Federation Representatives and Committee Chairs

Mary Tycz, Mason District representative on the Education Committee, has been appointed to the Superintendent's Advisory Committee. Vic Mutai, a technology specialist at Ft. Belvoir, will replace Glenn Stroup on the Technology Advisory Committee. Deputy County Executive Verdia Haywood and Marlene Blum are helping to recruit a chair for the Federation's Human Services Committee.

F. January Board Meeting Highlights. The summary prepared by Art Wells was accepted as prepared.

G. Policy and Procedures Manual

Bill Hanks distributed a second draft which draws from Glenn Stroup's work of several years ago. Art Wells asked board members to review this draft with comment to Bill before further discussion—and to focus on content rather than format at this point.

H. Pilot Program for Education

Bill Hanks distributed a proposal from the Braddock District Council which was referred to the Education Committee for review.

I. Planning for the Banquet

Art Wells distributed a sheet of questions and comments re the program and the process for selection of the Citizen of the Year. Jean Packard and Sally Ormsby will respond as they implement the SOPs for this year.

Nine nominations were received by the deadline. A planning session to include Art, Sally, Jean and Merrily was scheduled for March 3. A letter is being sent to Lt. Governor Tim Kaine, the main speaker, with information about the Federation, the event, and a copy of the Federation's current Legislative Program.

J. Drafting a Position on the Fairfax County and School Budgets for FY 2003.

Art asked the Board to assume responsibility and distributed some recommendations on format and contents. (These will be typed and distributed electronically by Mary Anne Lecos.) The County Executive will present the Advertised Budget at the Membership meeting on March 7, and the Board must draft a position on March 14 for distribution to members before the meeting on April 4. The Board of Supervisors' public hearing is scheduled for April 8-10.

Sally Ormsby will send out last year's budget position as a proposed format. The resolutions being

Prepared by member units or district councils should be collected for review.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:45 p.m.