

MINUTES

Date of Meeting: February 5, 2014

Type of Meeting: Work Session

Place of Meeting: Long Beach High School Auditorium

Members Present: President Patrick E. Gallagher
Vice President Dennis Ryan
Board Member Darlene Tangney
Board Member Stewart Mininsky
Board Member Roy Lester

Others Present: Mr. David Weiss, Superintendent
Dr. Kenneth Graham, Assistant Superintendent –
Curriculum and Instruction
Mr. Michael DeVito, Chief Operating Officer
Ms. Carole Butler, District Clerk

Call to Order/Pledge

I. **Call to Order/Pledge-President Gallagher**

President Gallagher called the meeting to order at 7:35 PM, led the community in the Pledge of Allegiance, thanked everyone for their input and work concerning the facility use options over the years, and discussed the history of the Master Plan which included educational growth and financial considerations. The purpose of this work session is for the Board of Education to fully articulate in public their assessment and appraisal of the various options presented.

II. **Board of Education Discussion of Work Session Topic**

Board of Education Discussion of Topic

Board Member Roy Lester - In 2000 when our district had a total budget of \$72 million our state aid was set at \$18,124,000. That amount accounted for about 25% of the money needed to run our district. For the upcoming year our budget is anticipated to be \$130,200,000 with state aid projected at \$18,800,000. That amount accounts for about 14.4% of the money needed to run our district. If the percentage had stayed the same we would have another \$13,750,000 for our schools. But we don't and each year we have to come up with money to account for this shortfall. Granted we are also getting state aid reimbursement for our capital improvements and aid for the ceiling collapse but that money is already earmarked and for people to now claim our state aid is going up is disingenuous at best.

The truth is that this district, as well as most others throughout the state, has grave financial issues facing them. Today's Utica Newspaper carried story that starts off with the sentence "With nowhere else to cut, the Utica City School District once again will have to eliminate staff – nearly 94 employees, about 51 of whom are teachers." Utica is a small city school district with a budget of \$146 million, very similar to Long Beach. Last year they cut 91 and ½ positions. That makes a loss of over 185 positions within a two year period. It is anticipated that the layoffs will increase class sizes to an average of 33 children per class.

This district has tried hard not to cut staff. We have gone into our reserves to avoid doing so. But the end result is a diminution of reserves and an anticipated shortage of \$6.4 million dollars for this year's budget. That shortage translates into a over 7% increase in the tax levy which would be beyond the cap. Then take into account the decreased assessment of many of the storm damaged houses (estimates range from a total loss of assessed value from 10% to 30%) and we see how many undamaged house might have to bear a very large tax increase over the next year. And that still doesn't take into account what we are or are not getting back from FEMA.

It was with this in mind that the Board of Ed started looking at the options offered by the Facilities Use Committee. Once the Superintendent narrowed down the options to 5 feasible ones public discussion began. Unfortunately in the ensuing emotion this discussion narrowed down to 2 choices echoed by the vast majority of advocates. Either keep things the way they are or repurpose East School. It was if the three other options did not exist.

Unfortunately the rancor that ensued precluded, in my mind, rational discussion. The board was assaulted with reason after reason why a school should not be repurposed. Arguments were actually put forth with facts that were totally fabricated. One argument stated that by repurposing East School we would lose 25% of our state aid. This, while totally false, was put forth as "fact." Another statement was that repurposing East School would have a more detrimental effect on the community than Super Storm Sandy. I am assuming the speaker who uttered this was not present during the year after the storm as there can be no other reason to so minimize the suffering of those that went through that trial.

From a financial point of view, saving the district over 2 million dollars made sense. Of course there a differing of opinion as to the value of that savings, depended on what school your children went to and what neighbor you lived in. Not once was it mentioned the programs that would have to be cut to make up that kind of money. Not once was it mentioned the effect on the community those cuts would have. In fact the money issued was summarily dismissed as inconsequential by most speakers.

The worst part about the entire issue was the effect it had on the very children the speakers seemed so intent on protecting. I received an email the other day that I would like to quote from – it read: *"I want to make sure that you are aware of the "bullying" that is occurring in our school district. East School has become a highly negative, divided, contentious, uncomfortable place to send our*

children. East School has always prided itself on being a warm, family-oriented atmosphere. It is now a "if you're not with us, you're against us" place. They are keeping track of who is signing their petitions, who is part of their Facebook groups, who is wearing red shirts to the meetings, etc., and if you are not, your child is ostracized and not invited to birthday parties, study groups, told not to sit near other children, etc. Hate mail and email is being sent to people questioning the "status quo". These parents should be ashamed of themselves, and this should not be tolerated."

How did we get to this? This was one of 5 options and proposed with the view of benefiting the district. And now children are being ostracized because of their parents opinions. Is this the message we really want to give our children? Is this how we teach them to handle people with differing opinions?

In my view the emotional discussions precluded the districts consideration and ability to effectuate a change that would benefit the entire district and legions of children for years to come. One of the options lost in the rancor was an option to establish an early learning center in Lido School. When I first heard of the plan I asked the Superintendent what would be the most beneficial thing we could do for our children if we weren't looking to save 2 million dollars. In other words what would be the most academically beneficial move the district could make to advance education. His reply was to decrease kindergarten size and put emphasis on early learning. And when I looked I found that study after study and district after district agreed with that. Granted the savings weren't that great but the benefits were. But very few people wanted to hear that because it was a change from the status quo.

Staying in one place never has advanced mankind. We would all still be swinging from trees or living in caves if we, as a rule, adhered to the status quo. Change is uncomfortable but if we want to improve it is so necessary. We have here an opportunity to advance the district but it requires change, it requires us to get out our comfort zone. Unfortunately this option never got any serious consideration. I am tired of our elementary test scores being in the bottom third of the county. I am tired of hearing people say, "Well you don't move to Long Beach for the Schools." We have smart children and good teachers but things have to change. Here we have that opportunity but not the desire. What a shame.

Is repurposing East the best plan we have right now? Will it save us the most money? Yes. Will it create division in our community? I think the last few weeks show that this may be the case. I know when asked about repurposing a school during my last election I was clear it should be a community decision. Unfortunately that never happened. No impartial polls were taken. No solicitation was made of the vast majority of the public who don't attend meetings. All the feedback came from an very interested group.

That being said, given the lack of dissenting opinion, at this point I would not be able to see myself voting to repurpose East school. I would like to see a more rational discussion about alternatives for moving this district forward but at this time I do not want to guess what the remainder of the community is thinking. I am very worried about our financial condition. We have fought long and hard to get this district on a firm financial footing. Compare our bond rating to the city's. We are about as high as it gets, but that was achieved through careful and watchful planning. Unfortunately with caps and diminishing state aid percentage we are heading into rocky waters. Where we go from here I don't know. I do know you can't fit a quart of water in an 8 ounce cup, no matter how hard you try. But that is a matter for another day and another forum.

For today I am asking that we stop what has become a dividing issue for this community and start to seriously consider options that will put us back on the academic map.

Board Member Stewart Mininsky – I have to apologize if I lose my voice in the middle of this. I am coming down with something. The quality of education for Long Beach's children is and always will be my main vision on this Board. However, this vision is sometimes blurred by financial constraints. The initial proposal and then a shortened version for the repurposing of our system was tended by the Superintendent for our decision. Myself and the other Board Members worked endless hours over pros and cons on each option, reviewing reams of educational and financial data. There were also countless emails and letters, some very poignant, and some filled with anxiety. Then there were the phone calls from LB residents offering opinions on a myriad of alternative plans. Class size, school population, children's transitions and surveys and polls all issues leading towards the decision. A decision solely based on your heart is sometimes not necessarily the right choice. However, a well-informed mind guiding that heart, does work hand in hand.

After a great deal of work, I believe my decision on behalf of our children is to choose Option A, leave East School as is, and let's put this issue and the angst of the community to rest.

Board Member Darlene Tangney – This has been a very interesting process and after hearing from so many people including the Facilities Committee and the Superintendent, I am happy to finally weigh in on this discussion. As much as an Early Learning Center model has its merits of offering a nurturing special setting, for children in Pre-K to first grade, I am concerned that the by time those children go into second grade they have already formed very strong bonds and friendships and have a certain familiarity with the school and its staff. And at that time the transition I think would be very difficult for them to move to another school. There is something to be said for a child in one social school setting from Kindergarten to fifth grade. They build relationships not only with other children, but with the staff as well.

I always felt a sense of comfort as a mother, while my children were at Lindell School. Everyone knew them, cared for them. The teachers could really converse with my children's prior teachers to have a better understanding of their needs from year to year as they traveled through Lindell School. It was easy for them to do that because they were all in the same building from Kindergarten to fifth grade. As my children went through Lindell, they built relationships with so many people that it made it easy for Lindell to become a home away from home. It was a very comforting experience for them and for me. At one point I had all 4 of my children in the same school. What a wonderful time that was. My twins were so excited to be with their older sister and brother; it made their lives so much more comfortable. Their setting at Lindell was perfect in so many ways and to this day they speak fondly of those memories and the wonderful principal, teachers, staff and friends at Lindell. I believe every child who walks through our school doors should experience that same feeling. I believe that we should remain status quo; I am tired of having this hanging over everyone's head. I am sad that the East School staff, parents, and most importantly, the children have had to deal with this debate over whether or not their school is going to be repurposed or closed for again a second time.

Let's put this to rest once and for all. East School is a school of excellence. East School is an important part of the community and that should not be diminished in any way. East School is a school where the principal and the teacher in charge know every child's name, what their needs are and has a plan for every child's educational success. East School is filled with competent, caring and nurturing teachers and staff that makes that building shine like a diamond because it is a diamond. We have come a long way since Sandy devastated our community and our lives. Let us not forget how East School opened their doors to our students from 2 other buildings. East Elementary withstood the storm and stayed strong. But now we are on the road to recovery and it is evident that we are coming back stronger and better than ever in Long Beach. The Superblock is finally being developed with 450 units. Young people and families are moving into LB because they have seen what a special place LB truly is. They see what a community looks like when everyone knows someone and people take pride in their community and care for each other. They see us come together as a family in good times and in tragic times. Let's continue working together to keep status quo and carefully work together to look at every budget line and see where we can meet the savings needed to keep quality education in all our schools for all our children at all grade levels. This is not a time for our community to be divided; we have come too far for that. Let's act like a family and care for each as we have been doing all along. LB community and all of its schools have a lot to offer which makes it a very special place to live and raise a family. East Elementary School is a crucial member of our community and our family.

I ask all my fellow Board Members to join me and recommend that we keep the status quo.

Vice President Dennis Ryan – Thank you Mr. Gallagher. Before I begin my formal comments, Mr. Gallagher extended some thank yous. I would like to extend that list of thank yous. I would like to personally thank the Superintendent, being the front man in terms of this whole operation. It is not easy to go from school to school to present for this BOE so I want to thank you, Mr. Weiss, for doing the job you have done in terms of dealing with the parents and the PTA units and the community in terms of this issue. I want to thank my colleagues on the BOE. We have agreed to disagree. And we still speak civilly and we still respect each other's opinion. But we realize that we cannot always agree on every issue. But once again we are civil. I would like to thank the parents from East School who presented and presented and presented. And to whom I have listened and listened and listened without interrupting. You have given me hope in terms of the future parents here. But I will tell you now as I have told you before – we need to see you. We have common core, we have budget, so many issues that impact children on a day-to-day basis. And you have presented as articulate, bright, responsible and sincere young adults and I applaud you for that and I applaud you for taking the advocacy that you have taken. Lastly I want to thank the staff at East School because this has not been an easy time for them. But they have managed to do their job and do it capably. If they didn't we would have heard about it, so I am grateful to them. And last but not least, I would like to thank Mr. Murray because you have kept the ship afloat and you have been very resolute and steadfast in these very difficult times. So I want to thank you personally for your leadership during this school year and for your tenure so far.

Now to my opinion. I have made the comment up here that for me, this was an educational issue. That was how I first saw it and if anybody wanted to quote me, I said it was not a financial matter; it was an educational issue for me. During the Christmas vacation I gave myself a job and the job was to come up with a list of 50-60 people whom I would poll and that list goes from 18 year old graduates through 93 year old residents of LB, from EAB to Pt. Lookout. And the question was simple. "What do you think about the repurposing of East School?" My last interviewee was this morning and I will present the results of that at the end of my spiel. For me, being in this district for 35 years, the elementary schools are the heart of this district. I think Mrs. Tangney has referred to them as a jewel. Everybody loves the elementary schools and the East School parents love theirs no less than anyone else's. Parents for the most part are grateful for the jobs that the elementary schools are doing receiving their children and working with their children, K-5. And that weighed into my decision. I visited East School on more than one occasion and I would echo what Mrs. Tangney said in terms of the feeling that you get there that many of the parents alluded to in the past. I have also mentioned up here that I wanted an option that was the least disruptive to children. I do not support a K-2; I do not support a 3-5 because I believe after 35 years of public education that kids need as few disruptions as possible. There are enough disruptions in everyday life without adding others.

I also was taken by the comments from the East School parents about the canal community and the impact of Sandy on the canal community and how the community needs to support the canals more than ever. We need to project a symbol of hope; we need to demonstrate a symbol of hope. We have to act purposefully with hope for the residents who decided to return to invest in that part of the community and to invest in the schools. The hospital was a serious blow to this community. We are still dealing with the implications of that and hopefully that will be resolved in an amicable way for the residents of this barrier island. I will not lead you on any further.

I am supporting Status Quo. I recognize the issues that Mr. Lester has raised and you said in the past you have heard them so we need your support in terms of dealing with the financial implications. They are not going to go away. With the tax cap they are not going to go away. With benefits rising, it is not going to go away. We have a very serious issue as far as financing public education today and we need you young parents more than ever. So I thank you for your patience as we have deliberated. We said at the outset we made every effort and I answered every email I received. We've made every effort to listen and to learn. So I support status quo and I look forward to going on to other issues.

President Patrick Gallagher-I am last and my comments will take a few minutes. I hope I have the chance to have everyone listen attentively. I think the time and dedication we took to explore these needs and wants of our community were well spent. I know they were painful but they were well spent. We should be proud of our decision making process, a process that other school districts should emulate. I am a firm believer that we were very open, we were very transparent and we were very honest about how we approached this issue and we listened very carefully.

The plan that I continue to support will provide the best educational opportunity for all of our children contains the following 4 objectives and hope that the community and the BOE will give some time and consideration to the legacy of that investigation and evaluation. These goals will continue to play a role way into the future.

First, create an early childhood learning center at the Lido Elementary Complex thus providing a superior educational environment for our children and a Pre-K, K, First Grade. This would give us the best and the greatest opportunity to maximize our educational efforts in preparing these students for the academic rigor of the second grade and beyond.

Second, maintain and maximize the use of all 4 of our elementary schools so that we continue the tradition of schools of choice. That would allow us for the feel of a neighborhood school or keeping to our national standards which I believe got lost in this conversation. National standards are an integrated educational institution committed to the education of all students regardless of race, color or creed which is the hallmark of the LB School system historically; that we are one of the greatest districts after the Brown vs. the BOE decision.

#3 - an educational plan that allows for the implementation over 4-5 years, whenever the option is implemented. This would allow the community and most importantly, the students, to adjust incrementally to a transitional cycle avoiding the uprooting of children. One of the emails that I received somebody said the uprooting of 100s of children. This would avoid that. There would be no loss of communication on that.

Fourth, an educational plan that recognizes the fiscal constraints that LB is operating under over the next 3-4 years. A plan that would eventually provide a cost savings of about ½ million dollars per year while meeting other potential mandates. And I want to make sure that we understand this. There is a mandate coming down from NYS potentially that we are going to have to go to a Pre-K all day K program. If that comes down the pike, it is going to have a tremendous influence on our decision making even today. This plan gives the LB school district the latitude and flexibility to meet the demands of the common core curriculum while maintaining our rich local tradition.

There are a number of factors that led me to believe that this modification of Option(C) is the best long term solution for the district. Let me take a moment to list some of the factors that had led to my conclusion.

First, this plan maximizes educational growth for our young students. Two, the plan creates a nurturing and comprehensive educational environment for most of our most vulnerable students – our Pre-K, K and 1 students. The plan has a vision for our students and community needs long term. The plan maximizes the use of all 4 of our elementary schools. The plan maintains our racially integrated school system. The plan keeps the number of student transitions at the same present level that we have today. The plan can be implemented over 4-5 years thus allowing for adjustments. The plan as adjusted desired by many of our schools as students can walk to school thus maintaining our neighborhood school tradition. The plan helps address the coming fiscal concerns which are a reality. The plan is sensitive to the community concerns regarding cost savings larger than just the school community. The plan is a timely implementation through the year 2018. The plan prepares the district for potential new mandates by NYS for an all-day Pre-K and K.

Six years ago, I got it. East School has a unique and significant support from its parents and surrounding community. I would dare say it is a symbol and the heart of the canal neighborhood. But I caution the community that while we have spent \$6.5 million over the last few years on the preservation of the building, there are still significant deficiencies that need to be addressed immediately and I am going to ask the Superintendent to speak to those needs and demands within the next month. The building will be celebrating its 100th anniversary within the decade and I want the building to be there so there can be a celebration that the gift of East School has brought to so many of its alumni.

With regards to the housing of Administration, every effort should be made by the BOE and the administration to make a decision immediately so that the long term location of the administration so as to protect our financial opportunities from FEMA and so as to maximize and to minimize our tax payers share of the cost for redoing any administration section.

In closing let me say that change is never easy. Change for the sake of change is never a correct option. But change with an eye for the future, change with specific goals in mind, change that is deliberate and carefully evaluated, is the kind of change that can make a difference. The creation of an early childhood learning center is a change that can make a long term impact on our children and their success in school therefore I favor Option (c) as it was modified: The idea of a childhood learning center.

Now let me go back to an explanation of what has just occurred. If I have figured it out from my accounting, as I am sure you have figured it out from your accounting, we have 3 Board Members who want the Status Quo and 2 Board Members who want to maintain all 4 of the buildings, but want to repurpose one of the building. Thus the decision is clear, there is no need for a vote; there is no need for any future voting on the issue, it is Status Quo and we will move on to that issue at the next meeting on February 11th. The issue is not dead; I hope that actually the community will keep in mind the consideration of the early childhood learning center from my point of view. But as Dr. Ryan said we have a disagreement among the Board. It is a minor one. None of us had a desire to close East School. I use my social studies phraseology; I think that was a red herring in the whole conversation. I don't think that is where the Board wanted to go but we never spoke about it amongst ourselves and we are happy that I guess that the outcome has turned out the way it has. But I think in the excitement that occurred, in my opinion, I think as Mr. Lester pointed out, some of the options got short sighted and were not completely focused on. With that said now we now open up for the community to comment on what we said.

**III. Questions and Comments from the Public on
Agenda Items Only**

**Questions and
Comments from Public**

- Melissa Moss – 512 E. Bay Drive – thanked Supt. and BOE
- Risa Lewak – 604 Lincoln Blvd – thanked Supt and BOE; asked for permanent moratorium of closing East School (no)
- Mindy Warshaw – 15 Boyd St – commended decision; commented about participation on new facilities committee; real estate values.
- Jodi Gusler – Rockette Haberlack – East School PTA Co-Presidents – thanked Supt and BOE

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- Matthew Adler – 410 E. Broadway – thanked Supt and BOE; asked about Dr. Ryan’s consensus (8-2).
- Brette Ocampo – 160 Riverside Blvd – thanked Supt and BOE and asked when the administrative plans would be presented
- Alexis Pace – 660 E. Olive St – thanked BOE and Supt; agrees with Early Childhood Center; promises to be more involved.
- Grace Aroesty – 83 Kerrigan St – thanked BOE and Supt.; committed to East School.
- Carrie Vining – 17 August Walk – thanked BOE and Supt; Option (C) valid.
- Ana Fuchs – commented on her family history and support for East School.
- Kori Schack – 424 Oceanfront – thanked BOE and Supt.; supports Option (C); loves East School teachers.
- Kevin Mannle – 522 E. Penn St – thanked BOE and Supt for their openness to community input; has participated on committees; need more financial input for creative ideas; supports Option (C).
- Sherrie Fackler – 120 Coolidge Ave – thanked BOE and Supt.; learned a lot from attending meetings; happy with status quo; Option (C) is viable; too soon to make changes.
- Lisa McKay – 53 Curley St – thanked BOE and Supt.; denies any East School parent would exclude anyone; reach out to local construction people; a lot of local talent.
- Gerrie Maquet – 523 E. State St – thanked and commended BOE and Supt; prior experience not as transparent or cordial; BOE Member Tangney is role model for PTA; legislative PTA has been created: voiced financial concerns; more money should flow into schools; must advocate more for children.
- Leah Enfield – 73 Hewlett Ave – thanked everyone for status quo; impressed with community process.
- Joanne Meyer – 94 Michigan St – thanked BOE; Option (C) should be looked at.
- Grace Mitchell – 106 Pacific Blvd – Lindell parent willing to re-look at everything; transitions are difficult.
- Tina Hommel – 600 Shore Road – thanks for transparency; commented on core curriculum; thanks for listening.

IV. President Gallagher Called for Announcements

1. Long Beach Classroom Teachers’ Association – Steve Freeman –CTA President - thanked the BOE for prudence before doomsday budget; commented on uncollected monies; eye to balancing budget before cuts.

2. Administrative, Supervisory and PPS Group – None
3. LBPS Group C Employees Association – Billy Snow, CSEA President commended BOE on coming to a decision; hope decision can be made on CSEA agreement.
4. Parent/Teacher Association – Andrea Wayne and Dalila Duffy, Co-President, congratulated Jodi and Rockette for organizing parents; impressed with everyone's behavior; thanked BOE and Supt.; encouraged parents to join PTA.
5. Student Organization - None

V. Board of Education Comments

- Vice President Ryan thanked Mr. Gallagher for his leadership 6 years ago and again this year; set civility standards; led us in all issues.

VI. President Gallagher called for a motion to adjourn at 8:44 PM.

Adjournment

Motion by: Board Member Lester

Seconded by: President Gallagher

Approved: 5-0

Minutes submitted by: _____

Carole Butler, District Clerk

March 11, 2014