



West Northfield School District 31

Board Briefs

A Summary from the Board of Education Meeting— November 19, 2009

Board Briefs is a regular report that is posted on the District web site to keep parents and staff up-to-date on developments at Board of Education meetings.

2009-2011 Board of Education

David A. Handler, President
Jeffrey M. Silver,
Vice President
Mary Crowe-Richards,
Secretary
Michael Berkowitz
Shel Leshner
Bonnie Schoenberg
Robert Spector

Dr. Alexandra Nicholson
Superintendent

Board of Education meetings are held on the second and/or fourth Thursdays of the month at 7 p.m. in the Learning Center at Field School. The public is invited to attend.

Writing Curriculum Presentation: The District's Literacy Specialist team including Angie Kaczowski, Kathleen Murphy, Lori Shames from Winkelman and Lisa Klein from Field presented the progress made with the first year implementation of the new writing curriculum and its corresponding adopted instruction materials, Step Up to Writing Program and 6-Plus Writing Traits. The Literacy Specialists highlighted the strengths of these programs and how teachers are differentiating writing instruction to meet the needs of all students. They showed examples of the instructional strategies used, such as pre-writing planners and graphic organizers that help students synthesize their thoughts into writing. They also explained how teacher and student friendly grade level rubrics have been developed, as well as anchor papers, in ensure consistent and progressive assessment for student writing throughout the grade levels. Superintendent Alexandra Nicholson complimented the literacy specialists and classroom teachers for their collaborative work that has resulted in a comprehensive and progressive K-8 writing program. Winkelman Principal Maria Kalant commented that the students and teachers have responded favorably to the writing program. She also noted that the program's comprehensiveness and consistency through the grades is key for the success of our students.

Overview of Outstanding Debt and Financing Options: Director of Business Services Cheryl Roberts summarized the current financial situation that the District's last bond payment is coming due with the 2009 tax levy in the amount of \$1,528,800. As a result the tax rate will drop in 2010 by approximately 18 cents per \$100 of equalized assessed valuation. The District has the option to approach voters with a referendum proposition keeping the tax rate the same to provide the funds that are needed. Mrs. Roberts noted that one of the challenges for the District in going forward with this possible referendum is that by law the referendum question required by the State must follow lengthy legal language standards which may be confusing to the voters. The Board felt that communication will be very important in helping the community to understand that District 31 wants to keep them the tax rate the same, not raise taxes. Mrs. Roberts will present a second option, the debt service extension base, to the Board of Education and audience at the December meeting.

Proposed 2009 Tax Levy: Cheryl Roberts gave a report on the proposed 2009 tax levy which will fund the 2010-2011 fiscal year. The consumer price index was .1%, which is the percentage used to determine the maximum increase in the 2009 tax levy, excluding new construction and the amount to be levied for the Bond and Interest. Mrs. Roberts reported the proposed 2009 levy is \$10,833,105 and the 2009 bond and interest is \$1,456,000. New construction was estimated at \$20,000,000 to "capture" all new construction dollars. In the levy year 2008, the actual new construction was \$3,359,970. The Board voted to tentatively approve the 2009 Tax Levy. The Board will hold a public hearing on the levy preceding the December 17th regular meeting. The levy must be filed with the State by December 22.

PTC Report: Suzanne Kahn, PTC President, reported on upcoming PTC programs and events.

Administrative Reports: The Principals reported on the success of parent teacher conferences and other school programs and events. Director of Student Services Joanne Panopoulos reported on a new collaborative for preschool screenings with Districts 28 and 30. Director of Communication Nancy Wasielewski reported on a new podcast on the website for American Education Week and other press coverage of District events and programs. Dr. Alexandra Nicholson reported on the latest enrollment reports which have been stable.

Board Reports: Jeffrey Silver reported that members Mary Crowe-Richards and Shel Leshner will attend the Triple III Conference in Chicago. Bonnie Schoenberg reported that the Education Foundation's 5K race made over \$7,000 and the annual winter benefit is coming up in February.

Return from Closed Session: Board Member Jeffrey Silver stated that the Board received an anonymous letter signed "Concerned District 31 Parents." The Board reviewed and discussed the letter in closed session. The Board will research content of the letter, and during the open session of the December 17th Board meeting, will respond to the anonymous authors by answering the questions they asked within the letter and by providing accurate information regarding the data within it.

Next Meeting: The next regular meeting is planned for 7 p.m. on Thursday, December 17, in the Field School Learning Center.