

ROCHESTER BOARD OF EDUCATION

Special Meeting Minutes

March 14, 2013

Attendance: President Evans, Vice President White and Commissioners Adams, Campos, Elliott, and Powell. Superintendent Vargas and Board Clerk Shanai Lee.

President Evans convened the meeting at 5:37 p.m.

Commissioner Elliott arrived at 5:40 p.m.

Speakers Addressing an Agenda Item

Community member John Laing presented the Board with the results of a survey administered by the 19th Ward Community Association to assess the community's desire for educational facilities in the 19th Ward neighborhood. Community member John Boutet presented the Board with a position letter received from parents of Walter Cooper Academy, School No. 10 addressing their want to keep the school in the 19th Ward and in close proximity to community resources.

Commissioner Campos arrived at 5:46 p.m.

Superintendent's Proposal for the Facilities Modernization Plan

Dr. Vargas delivered a presentation on his proposal for the Facilities Modernization Plan. He stated that several of the District's school buildings are in need of renovation to allow for better classrooms and amenities to improve student achievement, noting that nearly half of the buildings are more than 75 years old. Dr. Vargas mentioned that the District has experienced declining enrollment due to families choosing charter schools and surrounding districts. He also spoke about District's buildings that are underused and those that can be used to house programs and schools that are currently in leased space.

President Evans spoke about the importance of moving students back to John Walton Spencer, School No. 16. He also asked the Administration to guarantee that students that reside in the immediate neighborhood of General Elwell S. Otis, School No. 30 be guaranteed seats in the school's current building which is slated to house The Flower City School, No. 54. President Evans mentioned that the 19th Ward community has a desire to have the Walter Cooper Academy, School No. 10 remain in its current space at 353 Congress Avenue, within the 19th Ward community.

Dr. Vargas called on Steve Reboltz, architect, to respond to President Evans' concerns about the current condition of the Walter Cooper Academy, School No. 10. Mr. Reboltz noted that the school is a citywide school and noted that the relocation of previous citywide schools experienced little disruption. In speaking of the building condition, he mentioned that the renovations necessary to update the School No. 10 facility to maximize educational benefits would call for building additions and land acquisitions. Dr. Vargas mentioned that given the Expeditionary Learning model implemented at School No. 10, the facility housed at School No. 1 would be idea to complement the school's existing programming. Mr. Reboltz also noted that though the merger with School No. 1 would require an addition, there are no necessary acquisition costs associated with the renovation.

Commissioner Campos expressed concern about School No. 10 moving to School No. 1, she suggested that the move may have adverse effects on the 19th Ward community.

Vice President White asked about the role of the Zone Improvement Teams in deciding the future location of the School No. 10, as well as the use and location of the School No. 6. He expressed appreciation for Dr. Vargas efforts to modernize as well as his work to improve academic programming. He also requested that the Administration consider using the excess space as an opportunity to reduce class-size and improve student-teacher ratios.

Commissioner Powell noted that though we have a relatively low student-teacher ratio, a number of the District's teachers serve as resources for curriculum development and professional development efforts and are therefore not instructing students on a daily basis. She also suggested that School No. 10 is prime real estate in a viable neighborhood and should not easily be sacrificed.

Commissioner White left at 6:55 p.m.

Commissioner Adams acknowledged that the District has an excess of space available, and should be mindful of the NYSED maximum cost allowance for proposed facility renovation and construction. She suggested that the Board accept the State's offer of technical assistance in reviewing projects and the determination of student needs in relation to swing space. Commissioner Adams referenced zone by zone inequity of adequate facilities and excess space in areas with low-density of District families, i.e. School No. 1, 23, 52. She also mentioned the need to reduce leased space, the need to close underused and poorly-conditioned buildings such as those housing School No. 25 and 54, expressed support for neighborhood schools, and the need to better serve the Special Education needs of the District's student population.

Ms. Anita Murphy, Deputy Superintendent of Operations noted that we are bound by the availability of local resources and the Maximum Cost Allowances for the reconstruction and renovation of each building which are predetermined by the New York State Education Department. She noted that elementary schools have lower MCAs than middle and high schools.

Commissioner Elliott asked about the estimated timing of the projects. Dr. Vargas stated that all renovations are slated to be completed by 2022. Commissioner Elliott asked about rising costs in Phase I and how the District plan to compensate for the costs in subsequent phases of the modernization program. Ms. Murphy noted that we bound by \$325 million maximum allowance that has been allotted by the legislation, and if costs are high during one project they will have be decreased in another to offset the difference.

Dr. Vargas assured the Board that the Administration is considering both programming needs and facility needs as they work to maximize educational benefits for the District's students and families.

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Campos at 7:22 p.m. Seconded by Commissioner Powell. Motion carries 5-0 with Vice President White and Commissioner Cruz absent.