



MEETING MINUTES

Date: April 29, 2008

Time: 5:30 PM

Minutes recorded by: Jake Camara

Minutes approved on: May 13, 2008

Interpreters: Carol Fay and Jon Henry

I. Call to Order

- a. Trustee Travis Zellner called the meeting of the RI School for the Deaf Board of Trustees to order at 5:40PM in the RI School for the Deaf Conference Room.

II. Roll Call of Board of Trustees

- a. **In Attendance:** Mary Bird, Carol Dorros, Kathleen Ellis, Neil Leahey, Jennifer Milone, Travis Zellner
- b. **Excused:**

III. New Business

- a. **Selection of Pro Tempore Chairperson**
 - i. Trustee Zellner described the purpose of this Board meeting and the desire to move forward as a Board.
 - ii. In light of the recent resignation of the Board Chairperson, Trustee Zellner volunteered to serve as Pro Tempore Chairperson.
 - iii. **MOVED (Trustee Dorros) AND SECONDED (Trustee Milone):** That Trustee Zellner be appointed as Pro Tempore Chairperson for the Board of Trustees. Approved unanimously.
- b. **Discuss and Focus on Improving the Board's Functions / Purpose and its working relationship with the Director.**
 1. Trustee Zellner described the history of the Board and its original intended purpose and how, in his position as

chairperson of the RI CDHH Board, they have decided to not micromanage but to look at the big picture and to allow the director to deal with the day-to-day issues.

2. Discussion took place regarding new member orientation to the Board.
3. Trustee Bird stated that she received no orientation packet, and that she would appreciate a training and orientation.
 - a. Trustee Zellner stated that there are bylaws, but the documentation for the Board is not well coordinated. An orientation/training would certainly be useful.
 - b. Trustee Milone agreed and stated that she would like to have one as soon as possible.

IV. Public Comment

- a. A parent, Denise Marshall, expressed her concerns regarding recent events involving the Board of Trustees. She asked why Marc Gursky resigned as chairperson. She was very troubled that she and other parents are not receiving information regarding events at the school.
 - i. Trustee Zellner stated that he would have to refer her to Mr. Gursky as he did not give the Board or Department of Education a detailed reason for his resignation.
 - ii. Trustee Milone stated that her concerns are greatly understood, and to please realize that the Board was also taken by surprise.
- b. Discussion took place regarding communication between the Board and the public.
 - i. Keith Olivera from the RI Department of Education stated that:
 1. Board communication should always flow through the Chairperson and school community communication should always flow through the Director.
 2. Communication also must be coordinated between the chairperson and the director – they should both be on the same page.
 3. Communication with the media is an administrative function and should happen through the Director, unless the

Media is looking for information specifically from the Board and this would happen via the Chairperson.

- ii. Mr. Olivera discussed the current need to stabilize the Board.
 - 1. There are currently 2 vacancies on the Board, including the chairperson and appointing a chairperson and the other vacancies is a function of the Board of Regents.
 - 2. There should be a board training to inform the Board of their roles and responsibilities but this should not happen until there is a fully seated Board including a permanent Chairperson.
 - 3. It is the role of the Board to set policy. It is the role of the administrator to implement the policies.
 - 4. Ms. Dunsmore stated that she would like roles of Board members to be clarified, especially in regards to parents on the Board.
 - a. Mr. Olivera stated that the functions, roles and responsibilities of the Board members are uniform. The members are not acting as parents, but as Board members that have the insights of a parent. Board training will go into more depth regarding this.
- iii. Trustee Dorros suggested that this week, through Lori, the Board could provide some information to the parents.
 - 1. Mr. Olivera suggested holding a forum/town hall meeting where appropriate information could be shared. People resign for personal reasons and that would be inappropriate to share, however, how it impacts the school and how to move forward is appropriate to share.
 - 2. The chairperson of the Board or a member of administration should moderate the meeting.
 - 3. Mr. Olivera discussed lines of communication at the school.
 - a. For the unions: there should be a direct line of communication between the administration and union leaders.

- b. For the parents: there should be direct line of communication between the leader of a parent group and the director.
- c. Parents stated that they have nothing but praise for every teacher that has been involved in their children's education. Expressed that they want to see communication happen.
- d. John Carty said that the staff wants to see things move forward, but there's a problem that exists and is being ignored.
 - i. Lori stated that the students are the focus and what is best for their education is the priority. Issues regarding personnel matters cannot be discussed.
- e. Mr. Olivera stated that there are either no lines of communication or disruptions in the flow of communication. When this happens, people begin to speculate.
- f. Mr. Olivera suggested setting up a communication plan.
 - i. The chair should establish a plan with other members for a system of communication.
 - ii. The director should work out a system of communication between herself and the parents and community.
 - iii. The plans should be implemented and communicated with the school community.
- g. Mr. Olivera will meet with the chairperson and administration to provide some insight and counsel from this point forward.
- h. Trustee Dorros commended Ms. Dunsmore for her monthly communication and asked if a communication plan could be developed before the next Board meeting.
 - i. Mr. Olivera suggested that the Board begin working on some type of communication plan with a goal to have it complete and presented at the next Board meeting.
 - ii. Trustee Bird stated that she would like to be involved in the development of the plan to provide feedback.
 - iii. Trustee Zellner will meet with Ms. Dunsmore and RIDE and would appreciate the feedback.
- i. Trustee Dorros reiterated her concern that there is some degree of urgency to communicate with staff and faculty.

- i. Mr. Olivera suggested that some information be shared in the meantime while working out a communication plan.
- ii. Trustee Dorros asked Mr. Olivera if the Board be looking for members or if RIDE appoints them.
 - 1. Mr. Olivera stated that RIDE's position is that the Board knows best what skill sets would compliment the community. RIDE may take recommendations from the current Board and they come up with their own recommendations.
 - 2. Ms. Dunsmore will be communicating with RIDE to appoint Pro Tempore chairperson. She has had a meeting with RIDE to try to move things forward.

V. **Motion** made by Trustee Bird to adjourn the meeting at 7:29PM. Seconded by Trustee Leahey. Approved unanimously.