



MEETING MINUTES

Date: March 16, 2010

Time: 6:00PM

Minutes recorded by: Paula J Campagna, Allied Court Reporters

Minutes approved on:

Interpreters: Carol Fay, Jon Henry, and Maureen McEntee

Call to Order

- a. Chairperson Travis Zellner called the meeting of the RI School for the Deaf Board of Trustees to order at 6:12 p.m. at the Dept of Administration, Conference Room B

Roll Call of Board of Trustees

- b. **In Attendance:** Iraida Williams, Jodi Merryman, Marie Lynch, Mary Wambach, A Donnelly-Roche, Harvey Corson

Attorney for the Board: Sara Rapport, Esq., of Little, Medeiros, Kinder, Bulman & Whitney

Lori Dunsmore, Director, RI School for the Deaf

Roll call was taken – all present

Public Comment:

Amy Lupica: Teacher at the school – commented about the communication philosophy and the wonderful job Joe Fischgrund did leading the process; fabulous leadership – thanks and hope to work with him again for the next step.

Acceptance of Previous Meeting Minutes

February 23, 2010 – tabled till next meeting

Travis Zellner requested that a motion be made to seal the Executive Minutes from the February 23, 2010 meeting.

Motion was made by Mary Wambach to seal the Executive Session Minutes of the February 23, 2010 minutes; Seconded by Iraida Williams – record to reflect that the entire Board supports the sealing of the Executive Minutes.

REPORTS:

Chairperson – Travis Zellner – reported that the board had their third orientation and training as a board, provided by RIDE; going well; wonderful support from RI Association of School Committees; board is actively meeting and ready to get involved with business at hand; hoping to satisfy Board of Regents and address need to become leaders of record at the school.

Director – Lori Dunsmore – requested to discuss personnel recalls (New Business) in her report – Mr. Zellner agreed, as long as questions could be asked and answered; Ms. Dunsmore: my report may seem small this month, next month will be three or more topics; included the Board of Regents information; invited board to join her at their work session; good opportunity for BOT and BOR to build relationship and understand budgeting process. Race to the Top information – RI one of 14 finalists; winners will be announced in April; there will be a second round in June. Request for board member bios on the school website; secure website will be up for BOT to share information. Invited the board to visit the new school; she can set up a day and time. We have been doing a lot of planning; great decisions; went to Gallaudet University for language planning convention (CAEBER), two teachers also attended. Re the staffing plan – under New Business – we are addressing the Commissioner to provide RISD full statute assignments so that every student that's enrolled are fully taught by a fully certified and highly-qualified teacher; we are focusing first and foremost on students' needs. Commissioner requires that we modify our staffing assignment plan by June 1st, 2010; teachers will know their status before the end of the school year. We have been working over the last few weeks to project the enrollment for 2010/2011, including number of students per grade, per grouping; minimum and maximum intensity. Proposing course profiles that will be submitted to RIDE for PBGR; highly-qualified, especially in content area, is needed to implement the PBGR system; have been reviewing courses to ensure that students meet proficiency in math, English and science. We are working to develop a matrix of different courses to comply with IEPs; to determine special education needs and related services. We received the draft from RIDE re the staffing plan; will work on action plans; met with staff one-on-one to move ahead with RIDE requirements. Question from Ms Donnelly-Roche: will we be receiving a copy of the draft? Ms. Dunsmore: we just received the draft on Wednesday, it is not finalized – we have to make some calculations; adjust it and send it back to RIDE; lot of factors to focus on that would attest to students' needs.. Mr. Corson: confused; please explain situation a little more – normally the statute requires that when people apply for a position at a school, certification is reviewed before hire – were some people hired and certified later? How do they show certification/qualification?

Ms. Dunsmore: the letter from the Commissioner relates to the audit findings; we are still getting guidance in this process; Paula Jo Gaines or Mary Pendergast can help you get a better understanding.

Mr. Corson: I was asking if there are staff, hearing or deaf, not highly qualified or not certified, how did they get hired?

Ms. Dunsmore replied that some answers would have to come from the certification office – introduces Mary Pendergast, Special Ed Director, to speak....

Ms. Pendergast: reported that most teachers were hired prior to the 2004 No Child Left Behind Act. Under previous administrations, staff went through a process using the rubric provided by the Dept. of Ed to deem teachers highly qualified; certain new requirements around being highly qualified in content area, or the area that you teach. So it's not just being highly qualified as a Deaf educator, but it could also mean being highly qualified in the content area of science, math and social studies. The Title 2A Audit that RIDE conducted at our school found that there were some discrepancies and inconsistencies – they are generating a final report for us. We currently have a draft that we're working with.....from this information, we are looking at students needs to figure out, based on the personnel that we have, who is highly qualified to do what; are there any position that are missing; and are we lacking highly qualified staff to provide education in some areas. It wasn't that they are not certified, but that that may not be highly qualified in a certain area that they are currently assigned to teach. Every teacher has a certification; first to assure everyone; every teacher is certified in some area, and it may not be the area they are teaching in. Some teachers are highly qualified in some areas and not others; that what we are working out – to tie into student needs and requirements.

Mr. Corson: clarifies it, thank you.....Mr. Zellner brought up the fact that information was supposed to be in a final form; we're still working with a draft. It's only 35 people we're talking about; mystery why that information has not been released to the Board; we would like to have a better idea of the situation.

Ms. Dunsmore responded that she was informed today that we will be receiving the final copy with the email that was sent out today.

Mr. Zellner responded that the email from Ken Swanson was puzzling; don't know what's taking so long; really anxious to see it.

Mr. Corson spoke out referencing his many years he has working in the field, where schools hire certified teachers, teachers are trained in elementary and secondary areas, quite often what happens is that they find they're not competent in a certain subject area, and now there is more emphasis on making sure the teachers have the background and the knowledge in a particular content area.....is this what has happened at the School for the Deaf...I am relieved to hear that

all the teachers and faculty are certified...issue here is content areas, esp. in high school. We hope to get more information by the time we convene again as a Board.

On questions from Ms. Lynch re the draft/final copy, Ms. Dunsmore answered that she would get some guidance from RIDE about the appropriate process....she wants to meet with the teachers first....

Ms. Donnelly-Roche: since we are the Board of Trustees, we all plan that this Board will have the only power to make sure and trust that the kids' needs are met; would like to formally go on record as requesting that draft be given to the Board of Trustees.

Mr. Zellner asked if there were any other questions from the Board.

Ms. Dunsmore: would like to add something – met with Wayne, Ken, Corsino, and Travis – we came to an agreement that we believe – not sure if it's new business or not – but, during my report, you received a letter from Mary's request for 20-year employment to have their layoff letter rescinded. I want to let you know that we're waiting for RIDE to give us guidance of this issue.

Mr. Zellner interrupted: that was part of a brief email that was sent by Ken Swanson, two paragraphs, about Title A2.

Mr. Dunsmore: That was Title A2, this is separate.

Mr. Zellner stated that the Board will be reviewing the draft and the 20-year statute issue and giving it to the attorneys for advice on how to proceed.

Mr. Corson asked if there is some kind of statute related to the 20-year as part of consideration for continuing. Ms. Dunsmore answered that the 20-year statute is for state employees, to which Mr. Zellner remarked that the statute is obviously there and the union is using it, RIDE reviewing. We will get more in depth with personnel issues in Executive Session.

Ms. Dunsmore remarked that the fee structure bill (House Bill 13) is under advisement; not yet voted on under revised budget.

Mr. Zellner questioned Ms. Dunsmore on what the process would be if the Bill gets passed, to which Ms. Dunsmore answered to wait for the Asst. Director's report on financing.

There were further comments by Ms. Dunsmore from her report – re parent communications, open-house, workshops, opening ceremony at new school; RIPEN conference – parent networking opportunity; RIHAP conference – booth set up.

Mr. Zellner: re NECAP scores/results, to which Ms. Dunsmore replied that she will provide those for the April Board meeting.

Assistant Director for Academics: Mary Smith – reported that we celebrated Read Across America Day, Comm Gist came in and read to the students the following week, lot of fun, decorated door contest; good morale booster, uplifting. Commented on professional development activities; language planning. CAEBER conference-motivational; learned more

about bilingual approaches-helps students get the best of everything. East Bay Collaborative came to school to present Scientist's Notebook; working on new schedule and staffing assignments – have finalized some options for the calendar next year with the calendar committee; waiting for feedback from staff.

Assistant Director for Operations & Finance – Corsino Delgado – reported briefly on the new building construction, invited Board to visit the new school; there is a lot of progress; bathrooms tiled, fixtures and cabinetry in classrooms; hearing center booths installed; cafeteria complete; the library is the jewel; expected that interior work will be complete end of April – as soon as weather clears, exterior work will happen, along with the landscaping, parking lot, soccer field, track, et cetera.

In respect to finance and the budget: I would be happy to meet with any of the Board if you want a crash course on our budget, or will present that at our next meeting; we are well within our budget target, as far as Fee for Service – the legislation not voted on yet, but basically it gives RIDE the power to recall state aid to those districts. There should not be an impact on our budget because our budget does rely upon collecting the fee for service.

We have had some resistance to paying, but the districts are getting the message and payments have been coming in.

Mr. Corson: What is the next thing happening with the budget; when is the next time it gets approved; when is the next time the Board will have to consider anything.....just to give us an idea of a timeline...so that in the future we can get up to speed with the budget and form a Finance Committee?

Ms Dunsmore responded that we could present a summary for the next Board meeting.

Mr. Delgado answered that the next involvement of the Board with the budget would be in the fall – when we will start work on FY12 budget; and also the revision of the FY11 budget – start on that in August – you can vote by September or October.

Sub-Committees: Mr. Zellner noted that they do not have an official subcommittee at this point; will create some down the road.

Policy Committee: We did sit down with Wayne and Ken to talk about guidelines related to using the services of the attorney. We have four guidelines for requesting the services of the attorney – all requests must be cleared through me, the Chairperson, or Lori Dunsmore; this includes correspondence with the attorneys. Decisions will be made in advance by the Board or the Director if we need an attorney at our meeting. We need to be sure that expenses are appropriate and well monitored and we communicate in the appropriate way.

The Student Handbook is another policy matter – hold for New Business?

Mr. Zellner further noted that he has questions about the integrated plan, the Statewide Service Plan presented to the Board of Regents in September of 2011 – what policies do we have?

Mr. Corson asked if we had a Policy Handbook for the Board of policies that may have been adopted over the years...to which Ms. Dunsmore answered that there is no policy book, but that the Board has bylaws; the Emergency Procedure is the only one that has been approved since I started here three years ago. There is nothing that I am aware of.

Mr. Zellner quizzed further that before his and Lori's time, the Board did in fact develop a policy – question is – where are those policies – does somebody have them – is there a packet from previous boards? Ms. Dunsmore asked that he describe the policies he's looking for; to which he replied that he is looking for any policies that were passed by the Board.

Ms. Dunsmore answered that in the past there were several policies submitted to the Board, however, they were never approved and that was before her tenure; the student handbook or policy handbook was presented, but never approved; all were drafts.

Mr. Corson noted that instead of reinventing the wheel, they would like to review the previous drafts or proposed policies, so that they could revise those and not start from scratch.

Ms. Dunsmore answered that she would try to find an answer by the next meeting, or she would forward anything she can find to the board before the next board meeting.

Building Committee – Corsino has already given the update. There will be a large sign “RI School for the Deaf” on the building.

Mr. Zellner noted that they do not have anything from the Personnel Committee, and there is no Budget and Finance Committee as this time.

Take a break before New Business.....(BRIEF RECESS)

NEW BUSINESS: Trustees Officer Nomination – Vice Chairperson and Secretary positions are open; anyone interested may raise their hand....floor open for discussion. Vice Chair is Chair's sidekick; will receive all communications between director and chair – if chair is absent, or something happens, vice chair will have to run the meeting – they must be aware of everything going on.

The Secretary position – the school provides the resources for the recording of the minutes; the secretary would receive the draft minutes; compare them with the cart transcript to be sure that everything was appropriately recorded and to make sure that the meeting was posted in advance – this is a broad description, changes can be made as we go along. Mr. Zellner noted that the board could use a stenographer for the committee meeting and have a specific format. He noted that he was tired of being alone and asked if someone had some interest in becoming an officer.

Ms. Williams asked how long would a person be in the position; to which Mr. Zellner answered that the term is not very clear; he would guess it would be on school year and then during the summer we would have the opportunity to change officers; positions, not sure. Ms. Wambach suggests a one to two year term; set-up a bylaw review, too vague; needs clarification.

Ms. Williams suggested they table it and get clarification for the role and responsibilities, including terms. Mr. Zellner answered that he would talk with Scott Mueller and Sally to see if it's possible to talk to Sara to review those positions and approach bylaw revision; that would be the topic for our fourth orientation meeting – to include bylaws.

Next item – **Language and Communication Philosophy Statement:**

Ms. Dunsmore noted that the draft document “Language Communication for School Policy Practice” is in the packet. She expressed her appreciation to Joe Fischgrund and faculty who were involved in the policy draft; acknowledged their good work and would like Joe to provide you with a summary and agree to work with us for another year or so...

Mr. Fischgrund: I am privileged to work with RISD Director and staff, initiating discussions related to language communication policy, philosophy and principals at the school. We started in October with a series discussions involving all staff; in November we broke up into four learning circles and brainstormed ideas – I found staff to be really wonderful; they addressed some very, very difficult, long held beliefs and everyone was respectful of each other – made for a very unifying process for the faculty and staff; in December we had visitors from the Learning Center in Framingham MA and the Beverly School for the Deaf, and the Pennsylvania School for the Deaf – they explained how they had developed approaches to language and communication practices. As well as the implementation of the language planning approach they are using; in January we had a couple of working sessions; summarized statements from staff and edited them. On March 3rd, we did a group editing and developed the draft that is presented to you – based on three sets of statements: Belief statements; school supports; and what the School for the Deaf provides – this is just the beginning of the implementation process...those that are not provided currently, need to be provided to make the belief statements a reality...what you have is a census of the faculty and staff. There are still many remaining, implementation questions but this statement reflects what are currently considered the most promising practices in Deaf education.

Ms. Wambach and Mr. Zellner expressed their appreciation to Joe, Lori and the staff for getting this piece done – it's a very complex, sensitive issue and they have high respect for everything addressed. Mr. Zellner added that he was concerned about the enrollment in the new school; parents and the ASL process; we want to be at full capacity – anticipated 160 in the new school – we have 80 students – we want to be able to provide an environment where all programs will be accessible; don't want to push anyone away; were other aspects of education part of the decision?

Ms. Dunsmore answered that many teachers brought up that question. The draft does focus on instructional practices; we are still reviewing other details; focusing on the implementation...

Mr. Corson noted that it does say that: the Rhode Island School for the Deaf will support the use of ASL and spoken and written English, and the essential components of language development and instruction for all children – it does not specify the use of hearing aids or cochlear implants, that's a mechanical thing; the most important piece of the concept is that all children will have the opportunity to learn and be exposed to written and spoken English, as well as sign language; ASL is part of this. The tricky part is the implementation – how do you implement that?

Mr. Zellner replied that he is concerned that the school doesn't restrict ourselves; we want to provide the opportunity for other groups and their beliefs that don't necessarily include language development or communication.

Mr. Fischgrund: We need to be very honest, especially for the parents and families who all want what is best for their children. The school is a signing environment; so we can't say that we can provide a strictly oral program, because there are deaf professionals, staff and children who need sign language. Trying to run what used to be called the Dual Track Program has never been proven successful; so at some point the school needs to say what its belief system is; this is based on the principle that language is good for the brain, and we read so much about how hearing parents are encouraged to teach their children sign language because it's good for their hearing children's cognitive development. If a parent wants a strict oral approach in which their child will not see sign language, I don't believe that's possible within a school where there are a large number of highly qualified professionals; we can't be all things to all people.

Implementation is going to be the tricky part.....there's a section that determines the balance of language in the child's development – there can be children using sign part of the day and just use spoken English for another part of the day. It really revolves around the assessment of the child's language abilities, and developing a balance in the program. We must be honest and tell families that we can provide a strong auditory environment, but that they will see sign language and will actually learn from it; we think it's good for them and there's no research that says sign detracts from the development of speech intelligibility. The question is – how do we market that approach? As long as the school does it with integrity, people will respect those principles. It won't be easy and some parents and families will not like it, but I don't believe it's going to defer enrollment and, in fact, I think after having it for a long time, they will know what they are going to get at RI School for the Deaf. I have seen this success at other schools with enrollment going up.

Ms. Williams commented that as a parent of a deaf child with bilateral implants, we need support and options; daughter does not sign, but we're learning to sign now because it is important and I do see that, although my daughter does hear, she is deaf. She needs to know sign for when she is in an environment with deaf friends, she can choose one or the other. The development of

language is very important at a very young age, but because I chose a different option for my daughter, I had to leave the state. It is very important that the school be very clear about what they have to offer. If a child can continue learning and also learn ASL and get a profession out of it, that might be an option many would choose.

Ms. Wambach commented that the world is a different place than it was 20 – 30 years ago with different modes of communication; hope that this policy will continue to develop to make it possible for parents to know that there are options for their children – to learn both ASL and English.

On questioning from Mr. Corson regarding implementation of this policy, Ms Dunsmore answered that this is not a policy – this is operational procedures related with instructional practice. It's a work in progress....we will have it done before we enter the new building.

Mr. Corson noted that we can announce what the school's goals are, what it means when children are placed at the school, and more so to announce to the world that we have an accessible environment – that is the key – that accessible environment – access to language. Also suggest that you include students in both of the statements; and not just instruction, but communication in the entire environment.

Ms. Lynch wanted to note that the Bilingual approach is very important and needs to be emphasized...Ms. Donnelly-Roche wanted to also confirm the board's need to involved in this – are you seeking board approval? Also students have an IEP – the individual needs to be addressed when you're talking about the instructional piece. This is a new direction for the school and, if that is the case, then I would suggest it is a policy and we need to take this very seriously; instructionally, enrollment-wise and that to me is a policy, policy sets direction and expectations for the school. There needs to be Board action, something we discuss in a subcommittee on policy.

Mr. Zellner: Heard all comments and concerns – we'll table it. Want you to know that the Board is very pleased with the process and the progress; we support it – you've been proactive and we support that.

NEW BUSINESS: Student Handbook

Lori Dunsmore: We do have a draft copy which has not been approved – needs review – before presenting to the Board. Mr. Zellner suggested to send the handbook in advance with possible statements from legal counsel, the director, administration, and all that would be in support of the handbook.

Legal Access Guidelines – that was part of the policy issues. We did officially vote on four policies for next month, so they will be on next month's agenda.

Board of Trustees meeting schedule: Decided on Tuesdays – the 27th for April and May 18 and then will meet the first Tuesday of the month starting in June. There is a conflict for July 6th for the Director – maybe will start in August.

Mr. Zellner asked if there was anything the members would like to cover for the next meeting.

Ms Merryman had questions in terms of the personnel structure of the school, what each individual does; how many teachers and different curriculum and more about the budget in relation to the new school.

Ms. Wambach asked that they not do the elections next month, but instead set a date for them.

Ms. Donnelly-Roche asked whether they need additional meetings because they have a lot to do

Mr. Zellner asked for a motion to go into Executive Session. Discussing three items – Selective Bargaining, Litigation, ULP 5983 and Union Grievance.

Adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5 (a)(1) and (2)

- c. **MOVED Mary Wambach AND SECONDED Ms. Williams, that** the Board would adjourn to Executive Session pursuant to RIGL 42-46-5 (a)(1) and (2) at 8:17 p.m.. Approved unanimously.
- d. **MOVED Mary Wambach AND SECONDED Harvey Corson:** That the Board would return to Open Session at 8:56 p.m.. Approved unanimously.
- e. **MOVED Jodi Merriman AND SECONDED Iraida Williams:** That the Board would seal the minutes of Executive Session. Approved unanimously.

Motions from Executive Session: None

Agenda Items and Next Meeting Date: April 27, 2010

II. Adjournment

- a. Meeting adjourned at 9:04 p.m.

