



Olympia School District

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Draft

Board of Directors

Carolyn Barclift
Russ Lehman
Allen Miller
Bob Shirley
Frank Wilson
Adam Buchholz,
Student Representative

William V. Lahmann, Superintendent

MINUTES OF A PUBLIC HEARING OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS JUNE 5, 2008

A public hearing on the 2008-2009 budget was called to order by President Carolyn Barclift at 6:30 p.m. on Thursday, June 5, 2008, at the Knox Administrative Center, 1113 Legion Way SE, Olympia, Washington 98501. Vice President Bob Shirley, Directors Russ Lehman, Allen Miller and Frank Wilson, Student Representative Adam Buchholz and Superintendent Bill Lahmann were also present.

President Barclift led the Pledge of Allegiance.

President Barclift opened with instruction to the audience for the flow of the evening, and called upon Assistant Superintendent Jim Crawford to provide an overview of the budget recommendations and timeline to adoption.

Kristi Sogn, a Garfield parent, spoke on behalf of the less represented students, including those students most at risk and who represent those most likely to fall into the achievement gap. She noted Garfield's large percentage of students on free and reduced lunch, the largest number of ELL students, the highest number of IEP's and students whose families speak little or no English—families who are not likely to know of the importance of this meeting, much less attend. She said Garfield's PTA doesn't have the resources of many schools, to supplement its programs, and Garfield really needs the District's help.

Randy Spaulding, a Garfield parent, also advocating for Garfield's programs and needs, asked the Board to spread cuts evenly across the District, not impact those students with the least alternatives.

Director Miller asked what Mr. Spaulding thought about reducing bus transportation; Mr. Spaulding said he believed instruction should come before any other considerations.

Eileen Thomson spoke for special education funding and was disappointed to see a recommendation that would leave special education without leadership. She noted the potential liability risk for the District in the area of special education.

Robert McIntosh spoke on behalf of the Olympia High School Site Council, specifically the increase in class size and the potential loss of four teachers. He said the larger classes at high school level could impact two critical groups: the at-risk students would be likely to drop out in greater numbers; and the faculty and staff who are asked to do more and more each year. He said though they are wonderful, dedicated people, they are reaching their limit of what they can be asked to do, and losing four more teachers seems disproportionate. He added that the Site Council was also opposed to the loss of zero hour as a credit elective.

Director Miller asked about transportation; Mr. McIntosh spoke as a parent he would look at 1) the short distance busing, 2) sharing some of the burden with the elementary schools and 3) using the ending fund balance.

Tim Snodgrass, a teacher at Olympia High School spoke on behalf of his students regarding the zero hour music program, and read a letter written by Toyo Garber, a chamber orchestra student who wanted the Board to see the music program as equal to an honors class, not a sport. The importance of music was noted as a learning experience, significant to their future, and not an extra-curricular they should have to pay for.

Director Lehman said he agreed students should not have to pay for music or sports, and class sizes should not be increased, and he asked if Mr. Snodgrass had any suggestions as to what to cut. Mr. Snodgrass said, philosophically, he would keep it as far away from students as possible.

Jimmy Robert is a sophomore at OHS, active in zero hour music courses. He opposed the focus on zero hour music as opposed to other school programs. He asked the Board not to classify it as an activity, and not to require a fee to participate. In response to the transportation question, he said he thought less busing availability for students living closer to school would be a good idea.

Gretchen Van Dusen is parent to a son entering 5th grade at Garfield, with a projected class size of 31 for next year. She said it is incomprehensible to think a teacher can teach and students can learn in that environment, or that cuts should be made to one of the most diverse and neediest schools in the District. She said smaller class sizes are needed in order to close achievement gaps, and the proposal to cut 2 of 5.5 proposed teacher cuts at one out of 11 elementary schools, given Garfield's needs, appears to be counter to the goals of the Strategic Plan. She added that reduction of para-educator hours would also have a big impact on Garfield.

Karena Hauser is also a Garfield parent and addressed the recommended reduction of the 3rd grade from three classrooms to two, resulting in projected class sizes of 26 and 27, but with the highest special needs grade level in the District—14 with significant academic individual education plans, 4 have significant behavior and learning difficulties—34% versus the average of 2.2% districtwide. She said Garfield's population is just different from those schools who can raise annual support of \$30,000 through fundraising activities, to \$5,000 at Garfield. The same is true with volunteers, she went on, with Garfield not able to attract anywhere near the number of volunteers other District elementary schools have. She asked the Board to respect the Strategic Plan and the special needs Garfield has.

Marianne Wieland asked that middle school sports not be cut. She said she heard little or no support for substituting an intermural sports program, which doesn't have the same competitive drive or edge, and won't provide the same level of motivation to stay active in school and maintain grades. She said it would also put them behind in achieving a skill level necessary to compete at the high school level. She added that she supported reducing busing at middle and high school levels.

Mike Snodgrass asked the Board to avoid balancing the budget on the backs of the poor, by cutting the homeless coordinator position, eliminating funding for the South Sound Reading Foundation, increasing class sizes which has a disproportionate effect on special needs, minority and low-income students. He went on to say that eliminating middle school sports also has a disproportionate impact on those who can least afford it. He suggested cutting the assistant curriculum director position, looking at the cost overruns on the math curriculum adoption, and not spending money on projects such as researching science curriculum. He suggested eliminating Navigation 101 since it is no longer funded by the state, particularly since he can find students or staff members who support it. He said we would cut all busing of middle and high school students within one mile of their school. He suggested cutting \$50,000 off the District travel budget and \$80,000 off the Board budget.

Director Lehman asked whether Mr. Snodgrass would rather his your tax money go to more teachers to reduce class sizes, or fewer teachers who are paid better. He responded that he would pay more teachers less.

David Doan is a freshman in Olympia High School, in the choir program, and said OHS has the best zero hour groups in the state. Kids get up in the morning for the program because it's fun, they learn a lot and they receive credit for it. They would not be as likely to participate if they had to pay for it, and had to chose only one activity to pay. He added that kids who live within a mile should walk or bike. He added that more teachers would be is choice over better paid teachers.

Charles Norman spoke as a parent of four children in OSD, ranging from kindergarten to 9th grade next year. He said the proposed budget reflects much of what he heard in the forums. He said children have only one chance at a good education, which is important now, but even more important in the future. He

said students are motivated differently: for him it was swimming, for others it can be music or another program. The need is to give students a well-rounded education. He added that middle and high school students within a mile should walk, and the City of Olympia should be encouraged to make improvements to sidewalks and transportation.

President Barclift asked Superintendent Lahmann to clarify the number of high school students living with a mile currently being bused, and he responded that there were currently 15, some as a result of unsafe walking routes and some where the bus goes right by them.

Randy Weeks is an elementary school principal in a neighboring district who lives in Olympia and has a son at Olympia High School and a daughter at Washington Middle School. He said he thought the administration had done a pretty decent job on the budget, but asked the Board to take another look at 4, 10, 11, 13, 18, 19, 33, 34. He noted that his son's hour music class would not succeed as an activity, and spoke about the excellence of the music program as a vehicle of amazing success for kids. He also asked the Board to save middle school sports.

Barbara Burch spoke of her concern about the potential loss of the zero hour program. She said music is an essential part of our students' lives and asked why the academic credit would be considered to be taken away. For many students it is their reason for staying in school and would be devastating to kids who can't afford it as an activity. She added that the budget item is only \$7,000, and it's not worth the hardship.

Director Lehman answered that changing it to an activity would allow the District to charge a fee, which Superintendent Lahmann verified. Ms. Burch added that she would rather see more teachers.

Josh Henderson Cox is a junior at OHS, who said sports and music are so different. He said zero hour classes are an integral part of education for some students, and taking it away would be like eliminating all honors classes—it keeps kids accountable. He said it is not an extra-curricular activity.

Deanna Molenda said one of the reasons she came to OHS was because of its music program. She said it has been a classroom learning experience that has matured her as a vocalist and provided her with the opportunity to be challenged and become more responsible, and it wouldn't be fair to require students to pay for one of their classes.

Cristel Hutchinson spoke on her own behalf and on behalf of her daughter, Christofen. She told the Board she was a huge proponent for competitive sports as a means of building kids self esteem, but also as a way, in many cases, of providing the opportunity for students from more economically-challenged homes to attain scholarships to colleges. She asked the Board to not withhold sports programs from kids, and she suggested the Board look into internships as a means of providing more support in classrooms.

Jennifer Overmiller is a freshman at OHS and in the choir. She said the year had been a wonderful experience. She said the zero hour classes produce a family-like feeling and she can't wait for next year, unless they have to pay to participate, as her family can't afford it, at least not for both herself and her brother. She agreed that it is like an honors class and students work really hard to succeed, and it teaches life skills as well as music. She was in favor of making changes in bus transportation.

Kris Blakeslee spoke against replacing interscholastic sports with intermurals. She said her high school son loved his years in middle school sports, and her 6th grade son is looking forward to his turn. She noted the team-building aspect of competitive sports and promoting school spirit. She suggested raising fees at middle school level.

Laura McDowell spoke on behalf of both of her kids, agreeing that Garfield is one of the neediest of OSD schools and shouldn't be cut. She also spoke against cutting sports, including drill team. She asked the Board not to pit music and sports against each other and would favor raising pay-to-play fees.

John Jones asked the Board not to cut para educators, because of the impact it would create, and he asked the Board to continue middle school sports and music programs as ways in which kids connect.

Katherine Davis Delany spoke on behalf of her daughter, who is now at Avanti High School. She said her daughter was a reluctant learner who had difficulty at middle school, at high school, and at online school. During those years she became involved in drugs and the street culture, but finally they came to Avanti and were relieved to find she loved it. She asked the Board to look at it from a parent's perspective and not reduce the counseling position at Avanti

Jennifer Forster is Executive Director of the South Sound Reading Foundation (SSRF). She said her two kids are doing very well for two reasons: one because they are in the Olympia School District, and two, because she got the message early and read to her kids often from birth. She said the message was everywhere, because of the SSRF and their message about the importance of reading to our kids. Their goal is to getting every child ready to read, and they work to put into the hands of kids who might not otherwise be as exposed to reading. She urged the Board to continue their partnership with the Foundation.

Brian Wright is a National Board Certified teacher at Olympia High School. He spoke of his concern with reducing FTE in science classes and the impact it could have, particularly on laboratory classes. He said science teachers are 50% more likely to become injured in the classroom than their industry counterparts. He said statistically injuries to students increase by 150% when you increase the class size from 26 to 28 and beyond, with major injuries defined as those requiring professional medical attention. Professionally and legally, he said, science teachers are held responsible if their students become injured. He stated that the safety standard is for each student to have their own lab space, and most of our labs provide for 26 students. He suggested reducing the mailings, supplies, the Board budget and central administration. He also suggested looking at the cost of running a small school in an isolated area. He also suggested that no curriculum adoptions be considered until the budget is resolved.

President Barclift called a brief break at 8:10 pm, reconvening at 8:25 pm.

Anna Sayre is the parent of a recent graduate and a current sophomore. She supports the budget format used this year and asked the Board to support the input from the community. She said she found several elements in the Strategic Plan that support athletics. She also talked about the recent Avanti presentation and saw it as providing the same level of community, acceptance and self esteem as drill team gave her daughters. She also spoke in support of SSRF for the good work they do in the community and the benefit to kids from the books they distribute.

Director Shirley asked if the Board should consider defraying the costs of parking management with a fee for parking. Ms. Sayre said she would not be opposed to a fee for parking.

Jim O'Sullivan suggested looking at staff development, but definitely put kids first—they should take the last hit. He said this might be the time to dip into the cash reserve. He suggested providing the Board with the history of the Ending Fund Balance over the past several years.

Director Lehman asked where the money would come from in the event of an emergency and ongoing budget issues in the future. Mr. O'Sullivan responded that he didn't have a clear answer to that question, but when you harm the present, you harm the future. By cutting staff positions you are harming the present and affecting every kid in the District. He also suggested perhaps the Board members could voluntarily pay their Washington State School Directors' Association dues, just as the teachers and other employees pay their own dues to their bargaining units.

Tracy Jamison said her children have been in six school districts and they are happy to be in Olympia School District because of the music program. She said her children are not currently involved in zero hour classes, but she is in support of them. She also spoke in favor of middle school sports, and the important role it played for her son at Washington Middle School. Intermurals are fun, she said, but just not enough.

Scott Pierson teaches band at OHS, including **zero hour class**. He said the grade the kids receive is a token reward, 95% of the kids are intrinsically motivated. He said taking away the academic status devalues the program; it is a class, not an activity, and not comparable to sports programs. He said there seems to be a little chipping away at the budget every year, but no plan for restoring cut items. He noted that concerts are essentially finals in music.

Annie McManus said she has heard lots of people say they don't want the budget to impact kids, but we're going to have to accept the responsibility for the impact. She said she was most concerned about low income families and kids with **special needs**, as well as the need to balance access and environmental responsibility related to **transportation**. She said people need to get out of their cars, and we should work with the city for safe walkways and bikeways. A district-supported program that would offer families no way to get to and from alternative programs would be significant to low income and single-parent families.

Todd Gay spoke in favor of **zero hour music classes** and the positive impact on his son. He said the music educators have not been consulted and they are the experts. He said the zero hour classes are not activities, but are essential keys to the music program—the honors and AP classes of music. He said the OSD music program is regarded statewide as one of the strongest in the state, and the zero hour students are the leaders who bring inspiration and motivation to the regular classes. He asked the Board to consider the damage to students seeking to enter music programs at colleges and universities.

Michael Kiefer spoke about the connection **sports** and other activities gives to students, something to belong to and be a part of. He added that one of many benefits to students is that these activities force kids to organize and prioritize.

Matt Love has a 4th grade daughter at **Garfield**. He said he is perplexed and troubled by the lack of state funding, and while he understands cuts need to be made, they shouldn't affect the classroom. He asked the Board to please consider the budget in the context of the Strategic Plan. He reiterated much of the testimony of other who spoke on Garfield's behalf and asked the Board to keep Garfield's needs in mind.

Eric Miller spoke in support of **zero hour music classes**, pointing out that they are not the same as sports programs, which typically occur following school hours. He said he had heard that his daughter's jazz band would be \$200, on top of all the other school fees, and it would not be easy. He said the students need to get credit for the learning they do and getting up early. He asked where the fee would go.

Bob Firth spoke in favor of **zero hour classes**. He noted that \$200 for jazz band on top of cross country and swimming would be difficult, but his son is interested in pursuing music in college, where music studies are not considered extra-curricular activities, but a demanding academic pursuit. He said he would support changes in bus transportation, as long as walking routes were safe.

President Barclift asked the community to continue to provide input by sending emails.

Director Shirley said he noted the special meeting to start at 5:45 p.m. on June 9th, and wanted the directors to know that he would be asking them to talk about the process before the recessed into Executive Session.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,