

**MINUTES OF THE CLEVELAND HEIGHTS-UNIVERSITY HEIGHTS
BOARD OF EDUCATION**

Special Meeting of May 22, 2008

The Board of Education of the Cleveland Heights-University Heights City School District, Cuyahoga County, held a Special meeting in the public meeting room of the Board of Education building at 2155 Miramar Boulevard, University Heights, Ohio, on Thursday, May 22, 2008.

Michael Cicero, President, called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

Present at Roll Call: Mr. Michael Cicero, President
Mr. Kal Zucker, Vice-President
Mr. Eric Coble, Board Member
Ms. Nancy Pepler, Board Member
Mr. Ron Register, Board Member

Also Present: Mrs. Deborah Delisle, Superintendent
Mr. Scott Gainer, Chief Financial Officer
Mr. Michael Dougherty, Coordinator of Communications &
Community Engagement
Mr. William Wendling, Wendling Communications, Facilitator
Members of the Central Office Staff
Patrons of the School District
Representatives of the News Media

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Second Reading of the Revisions to 5133 Policy – Rights and Responsibilities of Students

Deborah Delisle, Superintendent, acknowledged the second reading of the Revisions to 5133 Policy – Rights and Responsibilities of Students: 1) Bullying and Harassment, and 2) Attendance Procedures. Michael Bailey, School Psychologist, was present to address any questions or concerns concerning the revisions to 5133 Policy. The Board of Education agreed to proceed to the third reading at the next regular Board meeting.

WORK SESSION TOPIC: Effective Communications

Mr. William Wendling facilitated the work session on the subject of effective communications. He reminded the Board members of the homework assignment recommended at his last work session. The assignment was to develop a “take five” strategy, building a short list of positive messages about the

District that Board members would communicate to friends, colleagues and constituents in a five-minute conversation. Mr. Wendling stated the purpose of the assignment was to see how each Board member views the strength of the District and what the common messages are.

Michael Cicero, Board President, commented that he deals with many non-public school individuals typically at sporting events with his sons. When talking with others, he says: "...the District got a bum rap for a number of years. We have climbed out of the academic watch situation in a short period of time and reached a state of effectiveness in accordance with the District report card as is governed by the State." He said he speaks about value-added a lot; once we have a child for three years, we can show dramatic improvement. He says the Superintendent and her administrative team have instilled a system of accountability. The accountability began with academics. We have significantly improved professional development. The teachers themselves are still learning, and it reminds them what it is like to be a student. Every building has an educational plan. The curriculum is driven by the District motto, which Mr. Cicero said he really believes in. The accountability extends to the extra-curricular and athletics. We have a wide variety of extra-curricular activities, including band, journalism, vocal groups, and vocational education programs. We deal with financial constraints that change often. The foreclosure crisis has been the more recent topic. Mr. Cicero continued that being on the Board is a difficult job because as an attorney, he is used to being in administration and working at a particular pace. Whereas the Board creates policy and direction, the administrators run the District. He tells people that the Board does not run the District. The Board sets the budget, sets policies, and hires and fires based on the recommendations of the top two administrators and the administrative team. "The Board does not do the day to day things," Mr. Cicero stated, "and people are surprised about that." He tells people they can call him if they have a problem, and he will direct them to the appropriate person to talk with.

Mr. Wendling said he would like the Board to keep in mind the audiences they are talking to when having these conversations.

One of the newest Board members, Nancy Pepler, said her message is usually more personalized based on what she sees as a parent and her children's experiences in the District. She would talk about the orchestra and choir performance at Boulevard Elementary, how nice it was to see several hundred children participate, how special it was to see the room packed full of parents, grandparents, aunts and uncles, and how proud everyone was to see their children. Ms. Pepler added that she worked with other families on the Boulevard playground. Recently, she has been talking about the student council presentation. She was impressed with the students and the preparation that went into the presentation. When she talks about the school experience, she talks about her daughters and their differences. Their teachers know them and know how to communicate with her as a parent. Over spring break, her family went to Chicago and her ten-year old, who is not as motivated to get things done, did not want to leave Chicago without going to see the Robie House because her teacher did a special section on Frank Lloyd Wright. Unfortunately, Ms. Pepler continued, many of the questions she hears have a negative slant to them. She said she encourages others, particularly new neighbors, to visit and really experience our schools.

Mr. Wendling commented that a strategy for dealing with negative issues is called "bump and run" or "touch and go." When someone touches on a negative piece, you can respond by touching on it and

then turning the conversation toward a strength that you want to discuss. This keeps the conversation from solely focusing on what is wrong.

Mr. Wendling asked Ms. Peppler to address how she handles more global issues concerning the District as opposed to the more personal issues involving her children.

Ms. Peppler responded that she talks about the improvement of test scores, No Child Left Behind, and the extra-curricular and athletic programs.

Eric Coble, another new Board member, said he tends to discuss the more global issues. He also references his children since they have been in the District since kindergarten and have had amazing experiences here. He said that his seventh grader is learning things about American history that he did not learn until high school and college. He feels his children are getting a tremendous education. What excites him the most about the District is that it is in transition; test scores are going way up, the graduation rate is in the 90 to 96 percentile, and everything is moving in the right direction academically. Most interesting to him is that we are preparing students to thrive in a global economy. There is a subtle, but profound, shift from teaching to learning. The teacher is not just spouting information, but the focus is on making sure every student gets the information, assessing whether students received the information, and then re-giving the information to those who did not receive it. This means teachers must know their students and be able to provide more individualized attention to them. This District is turning the questions around and teaching students facts but is also teaching them to probe deeper.

Mr. Wendling asked if there are opportunities for Board members to invite people into our school buildings to see what is going on.

The Board replied yes. Mr. Coble said he always asks residents where they live and encourages them to visit the nearest school.

Mr. Cicero commented that the Heights Youth Theater and the Summer Concerts are great opportunities he uses to bring people from the community into Wiley Middle School.

Mr. Wendling asked if Board members had the opportunity to stress how the classroom is different now from what it was ten, fifteen or twenty years ago. The practice of teaching and learning and the outcomes we look for are different. Mr. Wendling said he often finds during his travels around the state and from conversations with legislators and others, that people are stuck in time warp. Their image of the classroom is chairs arrayed in a row with the teacher standing in front giving a lecture. They do not have an idea of how technology-driven our classrooms are. He asked if Board members were addressing these topics with people who have not been in schools in a while, or whether most of their conversation is with people of their same generation and circumstances such as neighbors with children in the schools.

Nancy Peppler stated it was difficult for her to respond to Mr. Wendling's question. Due to her work schedule, she has not volunteered in the classroom. She mentioned that she has taken the PATH tour, but could not really answer any questions particularly about the High School.

Mr. Wendling posed this question to Nancy Pepler and Eric Coble: How has being a Board member changed the statement you would make about the District? He asked them if they felt much more informed or were they still in the same position with their statements being centric to their children.

Ms. Pepler responded that it has not changed that much for her.

Mr. Wendling asked Mr. Coble if the lens of being a Board member has been helpful. Mr. Coble responded yes. He feels he has more knowledge and a broader base from which to draw. He said being a Board member has not changed the way he answers certain questions because he has found that most people, in his experience, do not care about AYP or other statistics. They seem to care about anecdotal things. The people he speaks with care about narrative, but he does have more facts at his disposal to add to his anecdotes. Although he has much more to learn, he feels his knowledge has definitely increased.

Board Member Ron Register said he does not usually receive open-ended questions. Normally, the questions he receives are about specific issues. His five-minute spiel would read similar to this:

“There are some very good things happening in our schools. We have just completed our proficiency exams, and we expect to show some tremendous improvement over last year’s ratings. We are absolutely grateful for our dedicated and committed staff. We think they do an outstanding job and they are able to motivate the students to achieve the way we expect them to. We are also doing well in other academic areas and in athletics. Our baseball team is much improved from last year, capturing first place in our division. Our men’s track team is one of the best in the state, and we have a number of athletes that are recognized regionally, statewide and nationally. In fact, we have a number of student athletes, both male and female, who have received full scholarships. In addition, we have an excellent music department. Our high school vocal music group recently returned from a trip to New Orleans where they had opportunities to perform as well as participate in community service. They worked with Habitat for Humanity to build desperately needed housing in the devastated neighborhoods of New Orleans. The vocal music department and the instrumental music department just finished their annual spring concerts, which are a big hit for the community. Additionally, the elementary and middle schools perform their spring concerts. As you know, we have excellent music in our schools. We tend to try to start them out early in elementary school and continue to build on that in middle school. We receive the benefit of excellent musicians at the high school level. In fact, our acappella choir just won the Fox 8 Gospel Music Contest this year. I encourage you to visit our schools. You can arrange a tour through our PATH program, which was created by a group of parents to showcase our middle and high schools. We have a number of volunteer activities, which we encourage you to explore. After all, these are our schools, and our involvement makes a difference.”

Bill Wendling asked Mr. Register, as the longest serving Board member, what questions he gets that might differ from what Nancy Pepler and Eric Coble might get. Mr. Register said people have a tendency to think that he can pull levers and make things happen for them. Mr. Register said recently he received a phone call from a student’s father. The child’s mother had enrolled him in the wrong small school at the high school, and the parents wanted some consideration for that. Many times parents will contact him when they feel the system has not worked for them. Ron said parents think there is some power in being on the Board that can override the proper channels they have to go through or to circumvent the rules.

Kal Zucker, Board Vice President, expressed a different experience than Mr. Register. Mr. Zucker said when parents contact him they have usually not even tried the system. He usually asks questions to see if they have gone through the proper channels. Kal said he encourages people to give the District staff the chance to do the right thing. In terms of anecdotes, Mr. Zucker said he includes anecdotes about things his children have done, discipline was administered, and the system indeed worked.

Bill Wendling pointed out that Board members need to realize that their Board member “hat” is always on, whether they are out in the community, at the Board of Education, or in another building in the District. When you engage anyone in the buildings, staff members may be intimidated; they do not know if you are coming in as a resident or if you are there with the mantle of the Board behind you. Mr. Wendling said this brings up the question: What engagement should a Board member have with school staff? The challenge for Board members is taking in a problem or an issue, bringing it to the appropriate District personnel, and not trying to solve the problem themselves. Mr. Wendling said you have to be able to say, “I’m out of it now.”

Ron Register responded to Mr. Wendling that you can never say you are out of the situation, because people have a way of coming back around to you. An alternative response, Mr. Register continued, might be to say, “I’m turning it over to the Administration; I’m sure they will take care of it.” If people still are not comfortable or do not feel their situation has been taken care of, the Board member will hear from them. You cannot simply extricate yourself from these situations. Mr. Register reflected that early on as a Board member, he would take everything to the Superintendent. As he grew more familiar with the District and its staff, he began to exercise more judgment.

Michael Cicero voiced his agreement with Mr. Zucker and Mr. Register. He commented that Kal Zucker’s experience of dealing with parents who have not yet gone through the channels to resolve an issue is an easier situation. In such cases, you simply point people in the right direction. Mr. Cicero stated that the more difficult scenario is when people have already gone to staff or administration, are not satisfied, and are now dragging you into it. Mr. Cicero said he does not want to ignore the person, because to do so would be a reflection on District administration. He stated he also tries to check with the Superintendent or other administration instead of taking matters into his own hands.

Mr. Wendling cautioned Board members to realize that whether they are wearing the Board “hat” or not, people see it, and Board members must realize their ability to make decisions and the impact they have on others. Over time, Mr. Wendling said he wants the Board to examine how they will deal with complaint resolution as a collective body.

Kal Zucker mentioned he felt the most difficult people to deal with in this position is your friends. Your friends, Mr. Zucker continued, have tremendously unrealistic expectations. Mr. Zucker took the take-five assignment and organized his statement into five categories. His conversation would flow along these lines:

“First and foremost, I am proud of our focus on all students. Our motto, ‘Every Student, Every Day, Some Success, Some Way’ and our vision of P.A.S.S.A.G.E. (Preparing All Students for Success in A Global Economy) articulate our driving motivation. We believe in all of our students and recognize each of our students is unique, in both talent and challenges, and that we will provide them the tools to

be college ready and life prepared. This drives the formation of professional learning communities, a proactive, data-driven, collaborative approach that focuses on learning and stresses high expectations and accountability at all levels of our organization. As an example, all of our buildings must submit academic achievement plans for their students, and building leaders are held accountable to achieve their plan goals. Evidence of success in this approach is that we have grown from one building rated effective in 2004 to eight buildings currently rated effective on the state report card.”

“We proactively meet our challenges with a solutions-oriented approach. We are the first school district in Ohio to pilot the AVID program, which is Advancement Via Individual Determination. It is a program which addresses middle performing students, a classically ignored group, and exposes them to rigor and expectation by creating strong relationships. We are founding members of the Minority Student Achievement Network, which addresses issues specific to African Americans and barriers to learning. We were recently awarded a Seniors to Sophomores grant from the state of Ohio, which is an early college program allowing high school seniors to travel in a cohort to college classes and receive college credit. This, along with our expanded post-secondary education offerings, gives self-starting students a leg up on their college careers. Our proactive approach has led us to great success: a graduation rate of 96.4 percent and an African American male graduation rate of 95.5 percent and college scholarships this past year in excess of three and one-half million dollars.”

Mr. Zucker continued, “We embrace all of our different diversities with a rich diversity of programming. Our schools are filled with innovative focused programming with an eye on the future. We have a plethora of educational extra-curricular offerings, such as Japanese culture, anthropology, biotechnology, a wide array of music offerings including conducting, computer networking leading to a CISCO certification, forensics, drama club, poetry club, a large number of sports teams, and a competitive economics team. Our Superintendent recently won one of ten E-School News Tech Savvy Superintendent National Awards. Along with her team, she has brought forward-looking programs such as a one-to-one laptop program, which will eventually partner every middle school student with a District-provided laptop, and the use of smart boards in elementary classrooms.”

“We value partnerships and have a unique partnership with the Children’s Television Workshop, which will bring Mandarin Chinese to our Early Childhood Program. Other innovative examples include our pre-K through 16 focus, most readily seen in the Gearity Professional Development School, which recently was one of eight nation-wide elementary schools to be named a model school by the International Center for Leadership in Education. At Gearity, education students from John Carroll University teach and are taught in a pre-K through 5 setting. We offer sixteen different AP courses, and all students in grades 9 through 11 sit for the PSAT.”

“We recognize that education goes beyond the classroom. Our students learn the value of giving to the community and the world. Our singers just returned from a trip to New Orleans where they worked on a Habitat for Humanity project to help displaced hurricane victims. One student described the experience as ‘life changing.’ Our automotive technology students annually spend a day providing free oil changes and car checkups for senior citizens. Our diversified health occupation students can currently provide blood pressure checks for the same group, while the pharmacy tech students help the seniors record their prescriptions. This year cosmetology students even created a ‘Pamper Yourself From Head to Toe’ day, again for seniors.”

Mr. Zucker concluded his take-five conversation, “All these accomplishments are occurring within a framework of fiscal restraint and laudable accountability. Our Chief Financial Officer and his team have garnered the two most prestigious awards for standards in fiscal accountability each year since 2003. This year, Cleveland Heights-University Heights received the coveted ‘Making Your Tax Dollars Count’ award from state auditor Mary Taylor, an award achieved by fewer than five percent of government offices. This is in large part due to the dynamic collaborative efforts of the Superintendent with the Chief Financial Officer, along with their respective teams. It is thanks to their effective and efficient collaboration that we have been able to accomplish so much while keeping our annualized budget growth below the inflation rate over the past five years. I feel we have a sweeping vision for this District which encompasses all children and a proven strategy that is making it work. “

Board Vice President Zucker explained that normally he does not get the opportunity to say all these things, but he does manage to get much of this message out.

Michael Dougherty and Deborah Delisle introduced the notion of a view book, which would act as a vehicle to document and articulate the vision of the District as well as communicate the myriad of District initiatives and accomplishments. Mr. Dougherty shared an example of a view book from another district, and Mr. Wendling commented that this type of document is an outstanding way for the District to inform residents and could serve as the basis of a common set of talking points for Board members. Mrs. Delisle asked Mr. Dougherty to begin drafting a view book for the District.

Michael Cicero commented that a clear platform creates a consistent message. It is important to have a consistent voice among the Board and the Administration. Mr. Cicero is hopeful that the overriding principles contained in the view book will be adopted as policy.

Bill Wendling mentioned that one of the difficulties that this Board, and every board in Ohio, faces is the uncertainty about what the state public policy will be with respect to pre-k through 12 education in particular. The next eight to ten months will be very significant on funding and on policy in general.

Board Member Ron Register raised a concern about who should respond to the e-mails that the Board receives. He feels a systematic way of handling broadcast e-mails should be in place.

Mr. Cicero reminded Board members never to hit the “reply all” button when responding to e-mails. He said it is important to respond to e-mails in some way so as not to negatively reflect on the District by ignoring the communication.

Superintendent Deborah Delisle agreed a consistent e-mail response system should be established to avoid the conveyance of dissimilar messages.

Mr. Wendling said if the e-mails deal with administrative detail, the Board should let the administration resolve the issue. He added that Board members must remember they should handle the policy matters; not the administrative matters.

Mr. Zucker stated he feels Board members should not reply to e-mails. Communication should always be routed through administration in light of lawsuits that may come up. Mr. Wendling replied he feels

the solution is somewhere in the middle. Residents deserve a response; yet we must keep the law in mind.

Superintendent Delisle asked Nancy Pepler for clarification on her concerns about facilities. Ms. Pepler mentioned she has struggled lately with questions surrounding Coventry, Milliken, Taylor and the International Academy. Nancy said she needed more understanding of the vision for District facility usage so she could better answer questions that arise. She wanted to know how the District makes decisions about the long-term expected use of facilities.

Mr. Wendling suggested when considering facilities, grade school configuration, the future of the middle schools, and the international academy, the Board asks itself such questions as: What is the financial impact of this program? What do we have to give up to get this program? How does it fit structurally in our buildings?

Superintendent Delisle said it has always been the District's practice to think decisions through before bringing them to the Board. Mrs. Delisle said the idea of the international academy is at the beginning stages of consideration, and Administration does not have all the answers at this time. The Superintendent reassured the group that at the time such a proposal would come to the Board, the immediate and the long-term needs would be very clear. Superintendent Delisle acknowledged that our programs drive the use of our facilities, not vice versa.

Eric Coble, Board Member, said his concern is that we may decide to sell certain of our facilities and later realize we need the space to put a program we have decided to implement.

Superintendent Delisle said Board members should be aware that more information concerning facilities is forthcoming at future work sessions. Mr. Wendling said when Board members are unclear about specific matters, contacting Superintendent Delisle or Chief Financial Officer Gainer is the appropriate step to take in order to achieve clarity. Board member Eric Coble said he has always felt very welcomed to do that; Deb Delisle and Scott Gainer have always been very approachable.

Facilitator Bill Wendling reminded the Board and the Administration of the importance of maintaining emphasis on end results for the students of the District.

Mr. Wendling commented he feels the purpose of the "take-five" assignment accomplished just what it was intended to for the session. Each Board member should now have a deeper appreciation of the three or four topics he would talk about with citizens in the community. Mr. Wendling remarked that sometimes it is necessary to subjugate personal views, interests or opinions to the will of the Board.

Board President Cicero thanked Mr. Bill Wendling for his work in facilitating the work sessions on Effective Communications.

MOTION TO MOVE TO EXECUTIVE SESSION

It was recommended that the Board move into Executive session pursuant to Ohio Revised Code Section 121.22(G)(4) to prepare for, conduct, or review negotiations or bargaining sessions with employees concerning compensation and other terms and conditions of employment.

No. 08-05-072 It was moved by Mr. Cicero, seconded by Ms. Peppler, that the Board move into Executive Session.

Vote on the Motion was as follows:

Ayes: Mr. Cicero, Mr. Register, Mr. Coble, Ms. Peppler, Mr. Zucker

Nays: None

The Board moved into Executive session at 8:40 p.m.

Present: Mr. Michael Cicero, President
Mr. Kal Zucker, Vice-President
Mr. Eric Coble, Board Member
Ms. Nancy Peppler, Board Member
Mr. Ron Register, Board Member

Also Present: Mrs. Deborah Delisle, Superintendent
Mr. Scott Gainer, Chief Financial Officer

The Executive session ended at 9:25 p.m.

The Board reconvened in public session.

MOTION TO ADJOURN

It was recommended that the meeting be adjourned.

No. 08-05-073 It was moved by Mr. Coble, seconded by Mr. Register, that the meeting be adjourned.

Vote on the motion was as follows:

Ayes: Mr. Register, Mr. Coble, Ms. Pepler,
Mr. Zucker, Mr. Cicero

Nays: None

The meeting adjourned at 9:30 p.m.

Michael Cicero, President

Scott Gainer, Chief Financial Officer