

THE BOARD REPORTS

Highlights of the White Plains Board of Education Meeting

November 14, 2011

HONORS: Superintendent of Schools **Dr. Christopher Clouet** introduced Co-Director of Special Education **JoAnn Doherty** who presented certificates of appreciation to two Teaching Assistants. **Maxine Gentry** and **Margaret Indelicato** of Ridgeway School were honored recently by the Westchester Foundation for Autism for Outstanding Service to the Community. The Foundation also donated \$500 to the district in honor of these staff members.

CALENDAR CHANGE: The Board approved a change in the current year's calendar, moving the Superintendent's Conference Day from May 17th to April 26th. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction **Jessica O'Donovan** explained that this is due to the State's very late announcement of a revised testing calendar and the need to plan for districtwide scoring sessions.

DIVERSITY POLICY: In response to the Supreme Court ruling which prohibits the use of race as the sole factor in determining student assignment, the Board discussed revision of Policy #5117, (formerly the Racial Balance Plan). The committee addressing the issue, in accordance with advice from District counsel, has proposed a change of language in the policy. Socioeconomic status is being added as one of the criteria to be used and parent choice continues to be the key factor. Board Vice President **Charlie Norris**, a member of the committee, said the group was unanimous about preserving the culture of the district and celebrating diversity. That remains the goal of the Controlled Parents' Choice Program.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT: Dr. Clouet mentioned the IBM award of a \$10,000 Community Impact Grant to the Highlands Middle School, submitted by Assistant Principal **Narci Medina**. This will bring three wireless science classrooms to the school and students will take a more active role in their own learning.

Dr. Clouet asked Assistant Superintendent for Business **Fred Seiler** to comment on the facilities report in today's newspaper. Mr. Seiler addressed the statement about three "unsatisfactory" buildings in the district. He said a mandatory survey was sent to the State last year and our own report named only one unsatisfactory situation, which is under examination. He stressed that there are no unsafe conditions. The Finance Committee is looking into the matter.

In an update on the tax levy situation, Mr. Seiler said the law passed by the State last June will have a major impact on the district budget. The tax levy is limited to the lesser of 2% or the annual increase in the CPI. The cap is on the tax levy, *not on the budget expenditures or the tax rate*. The district believes the amount permitted will end up being slightly more than 2%, after calculating the tax base and exemptions. This presents a real challenge and will be a factor in the upcoming teacher contract negotiations. Two choices are provided: adhering to the tax cap amount, which requires a simple majority to pass, or proposing a budget higher than that amount, which would require a vote of at least 60% in favor.

BOARD MEMBERS: Rosemarie Eller, President; Charlie Norris, Vice President; Peter Bassano, Sheryl Brady, James Hricay, Donna McLaughlin, Randy Stein

GUIDANCE PROGRAM REVIEW: Director **Lesley Tompkins** introduced a presentation on the review of a consultant, **Dr. Carol Dahir**, which focused on current practices and how they align with other models and the district's goals. Meetings and focus groups were held and data was collected and analyzed.

Focus group findings were discussed and one of the challenges cited in the conclusions is the fact that the caseload for counselors is significantly higher than in comparable districts in this area. Among the new initiatives recommended are expansion of the use of the Naviance computer program, classroom student development presentations for all secondary students, and a strong focus on transitions. Many members of the Guidance team were present and were commended for their willingness to undertake these new initiatives.

DONATIONS: The Board accepted the following donations: \$300 worth of school supplies for Mamaroneck Avenue School and miscellaneous classroom supplies from for Post Road School from **Walmart**; binders from **Carlos Vila** and **Morgan Stanley** for Mamaroneck Avenue School; \$1075 for bus transportation to the New York State Court of Appeals from the **White Plains Bar Association**, for Criminal Law students; a violin from **Jeffrey Karson** for Highlands Middle School; a set of CDs on the arts from **Roselyn Katz** and **Helicon Records, Ltd.** for each elementary school library; and \$500 from the **Westchester Foundation for Autism, Inc.**, in honor of Teaching Assistants Maxine Gentry and Margaret Indelicato. Dr. Clouet thanked these donors for their generosity.

PERSONNEL: Two Teaching Assistants were awarded tenure by the Board: **Oulea Choukri**, at Church Street School, and **Christine Telesco**, at Post Road School.

Frank Stefanelli is the new Director of Facilities and Operations, coming to the district with varied experience in all aspects of facilities, including holding a similar position in the Clarkstown School District for eight years.

The Board appointed **Tina Kelly** as a Grant Writer, in an effort to obtain additional outside revenue for the district.

OTHER MATTERS: Tax certiorari refunds to two commercial property owners, for almost \$500,000, were approved by the Board. This brings the total to over \$7.5 million in payouts approved since July 1st.

UPCOMING MEETINGS: November 21: Special Meeting, Education House, 7:30 P.M.
November 28: Special Meeting, Education House, 7:30 P.M.
Technology
December 12: Regular Meeting, High School B-1 Room, 7:30 P.M.
Scholar-Athlete Recognition

Editor: Michele Schoenfeld