

**MINUTES**  
**McLean County Unit District No. 5**  
**BOARD OF EDUCATION**  
**Town Meeting**  
**November 3, 2004**

The Board of Education of Community Unit School District No. 5, McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois, held a town meeting on November 3, 2004, at approximately 7:05 p.m. at the Laborers' International Hall, 2012 Fox Creek Road, Bloomington, Illinois.

**1.0 Welcome/  
Introductions**

Board Members present: Gail Ann Briggs, Tom Ellsworth, Meta Mickens-Baker, Steve Whittington, and Board President Rick Percy. Members absent: Scott Lay and Martin O'Connor.

Administrators present: Superintendent Dr. Alan Chapman, Assistant Superintendent of Operations/Human Resources John Pye, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction Jim Braksick, Executive Director of Secondary Education Bruce Boswell, Chief Financial Officer/Treasurer Tod Altenburg, Director of Elementary Education Cathy Greene, Director of Instructional Support Linda Chizmar, Director of Special Education-Instruction Cory Tello, and H.R./Community Relations Specialist Meghan Leiseberg.

Others present: Representatives of five media outlets, including three TV stations, WJBC and Ed Pyne of The Normalite; approximately 25 public attendees, including Mike Williams, John Elliott, Susan Schafer, John Arbogast, Rich Schroeder, Steve Barr, Kurt Podeszwa, Dave Moravec, George Ellis, Tony Ferrara, Joe Adelman, Paul Vogel, Jeff Beach, Ted Ratajski, Jim Russell, Jerry James, Kathy Fulton, Nell Fleming, and others.

Mickens-Baker opened the meeting with introductions of board members, district administrators, and Unit 5 stakeholders. She also outlined the timeline for the evening's agenda.

**2.0 State of the District –  
A Unit 5 Update**

Superintendent Chapman addressed the group regarding the Unit 5 Mission Statement and Strategic Plan (Attachment #1). He described the process by which the new mission statement was devised and the prioritization of a concise message in its development. The strategic plan, centered on five themes, was introduced with special attention to a description of its dissemination. Chapman indicated the plan would be continually evaluated and revised.

Dr. Chapman shared the following:

- Unit 5 has experienced substantial growth this year. Class sizes at the elementary level have grown by one student this school year, while some classrooms have higher and lower class sizes than the average figure.
- For the first year in five, the District has a balanced budget in the Educational Fund. The District has some carryover funds as only 94 percent of last year's budget was expended. More revenue than expenditures is also projected in the Educational Fund.
- Several comparisons of Unit 5 with LUDA and area school districts were noted. Unit 5 is the 16<sup>th</sup> largest of 54 LUDA districts and has a lower tax rate than the other LUDA and area districts.
- A sampling of some of the successes that have been recognized at recent Board of Education meetings was presented. The award of a grant for the "Belted" program at NCHS and Jessica Thornton's receipt of the Harry Hightower Youth Community Service Award were noted as remarkable achievements.

### 3.0 Communications

Briggs asked the audience how they learned about the meeting. Notification methods included *The Pantagraph*, newsletter publications, and website postings. Almost all audience members indicated they have Internet access.

Briggs shared the following:

- A school board election will occur on April 5, 2005. The audience was provided with information regarding the logistics of pursuing candidacy.
- The Unit 5 Connect service is available and may be accessed by signing up on the website. Additionally, a daily event listing is available on the Unit 5 website that details current and upcoming events throughout the District.
- The Board and administration will also meet with the Organization of Chinese Americans in a similar format on December 1, 2004.
- Another town meeting will be held on April 11, 2005.
- Town meetings will be held away from school locations due to feedback received in the strategic planning process. The Board and administration is also seeking opportunities to meet with small groups and organizations. Interested individuals may contact Meghan Leiseberg, H.R./Community Relations Specialist.
- A summary of tonight's meeting will be available on the website for reference of those who were unable to attend.
- Participant Response Forms are available for those who would like to provide additional input or to ask questions in a written format.

### 4.0 Community Conversation – Questions/Input

Dr. Chapman welcomed questions from the audience.

- *Audience Member:* What happened to the CAC's Tiering Report? Are we pursuing those recommendations?
- *Dr. Chapman:* We will report on the potential for tiered busing at the December board meeting and will bring the topic for a board vote in January. We will be on track for implementation next year, if the Board approves tiered busing.
- *Pye* provided a basic description of a three-tiered busing system and indicated that different beginning and ending times for the schools will be necessary if the system is to be implemented. The Board will consider this recommendation in January.
- *Audience Member:* Why isn't the budget constantly updated so we know how much is there? Why were we surprised that so much was left in surplus last year?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The balance at the end of the year reflected what we didn't spend. We do have a budget comparison document that will more closely compare balances between years.
- *Audience Member:* We've experienced a lot of growth, but made cuts last year which greatly impacted special education. Since we currently have more funds than we expected, have we considered enhancing special education services to better meet the needs of all students?
- *Dr. Chapman:* While we tried to make cuts in special education, we did not make any cuts to items required by IEPs. The cuts we made in special education were minimal and were not intended to have a large impact upon direct student service. We will not fail to serve special education students this year or any year in the future. We received over \$500,000 from the Governor for a Fast Growth Grant this year that we can use for any purpose.
- *Audience Member:* What will the Fast Growth Grant funds be used for?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The funds will be used to maintain a surplus, to fill in needs as they arise, and to assist with growth. We will also prioritize items that were reduced and will consider replacing them.

- *Audience Member:* We are new to the District and know that the District has experienced cuts to the music program in the past year. I understand the desire to balance the budget, but now there are extra funds. Will we use some of them to rebuild the music program?
- *Dr. Chapman:* We will be meeting with building chairs in all departments, including music, to determine department needs.
- *Audience Member:* My family is from Carpentersville, and it is one of the few districts that passed a referendum. Do we have a long-term plan for an Educational Fund increase to offset growth?
- *Dr. Chapman:* One of our strategic plan themes is Fiscal Responsibility, and the CAC is studying this topic. Issues will be carefully considered. The Superintendent of Carpentersville said that district's elementary class size average is 35. It is important to look at the bigger picture--we have issues and are looking to improve those issues, but things could be much worse.
- *Audience Member:* Watch growth closely, because growth at this rate becomes a large problem very quickly.
- *Dr. Chapman:* We are charting and watching growth very carefully. We will not have a referendum this school year.
- *Audience Member:* Can you speak to the issue of open attendance areas?
- *Dr. Chapman:* described the open attendance area process and indicated it had been successful in narrowing classroom size ranges. He felt the system, while not perfect, had helped to ease the class size issue. Chapman felt open attendance would continue to be an important issue, at least in the short run.
- *Audience Member:* Has this eliminated attendance exceptions? If not, how many were done?
- *Dr. Chapman/Pye:* About 120 elementary attendance exceptions were granted. They were only granted if the exception would be advantageous to us in terms of balancing class sizes.
- *Audience Member:* Where are we in terms of educational help in the legislature? What is happening?
- *Dr. Chapman:* There won't be any significant reform of school funding until there is a reform of the Illinois taxation system. The state simply doesn't have enough money to fund its expenditures. House Bill 750 incorporates a plan to change the Illinois income tax from 3 percent to 5 percent with property tax relief. Unit 5 is involved in a local coalition that is supporting an effort to change school funding. Nothing will happen with school funding unless the state gets more money. There should be no move on any of this in the 6-day veto session. This could be addressed in the spring, but is driven by the leadership in the House and the Senate. The probability is low that this issue will be pushed forward in the spring. A two-thirds majority would be needed to overcome a Governor's veto.
- *Audience Member:* A number of referenda have failed, so hopefully that is sending the appropriate message to the state.
- *Dr. Chapman:* Many agree that there are issues with educational funding, but there is a great deal of disagreement on how the situation is best remedied. It is hard to predict how the timing will work out.
- *Audience Member:* Where do the teacher negotiations stand?
- *Dr. Chapman:* described the process by which the contract was drafted and voted upon. He indicated the position of the District is that we have a proper, lawful agreement. Help has been sought from the Illinois Labor Relations Board. The District is waiting on a ruling, but has been moving ahead.
- *Audience Member:* Where are the costs for the legal issue coming from?
- *Dr. Chapman:* They are being charged to the Tort Immunity Fund. It is expensive, but we need the help of lawyers. Everything is really okay in the district though.

This is a peripheral issue right now. We are still focused on the business of educating students.

- *Audience Member:* There was a three-week lag in speech and language pathology services at Pepper Ridge. Why?
- *Dr. Chapman/Tello:* It was mainly a personnel issue that was related to the sudden resignation of an employee in a hard-to-find position. It had nothing to do with funding issues. Speech pathology is the single hardest position in special education to fill in the state.
- *Audience Member:* What are we doing to recruit and retain minority teachers in Unit 5?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The strategic plan prioritizes this and John Pye is working on it. Our results don't demonstrate the level of effort we've put forth. We know we need to do it. However, there are a finite number of candidates, and we don't always have the most attractive scenario for them.
- *Audience Member:* We need a community partnership to keep people here and feeling comfortable.
- *Audience Member:* Why are people leaving?
- *Dr. Chapman:* Other larger communities are frequently more attractive and have more to offer.
- *Audience Member:* Are we looking at large budget cuts again this year?
- *Dr. Chapman:* We hope not, but we haven't begun budget planning for next year yet. We're finalizing the levy currently. I don't want to predict one way or the other, but I'm hopeful that we won't have to make drastic cuts.
- *Audience Member:* I'd like to see the enrollment listings on the website on a regular basis.
- *Dr. Chapman:* We'll see that it is done.
- *Audience Member:* Is Unit 5 participating in the Minority Teacher Recruitment Project?
- *Dr. Chapman:* Yes, since its inception. We've tried to tap into students, but they may have other ambitions. We're also trying to tap into our local adults for a "grow your own" staff that would allow individuals to keep their day jobs while studying to become certified teachers.
- *Audience Member:* Need to incorporate mentorship as a component of minority recruitment to the teaching profession. By connecting new teachers with another minority educator, we can help to increase the comfort level of incoming individuals. This is the only way to retain them.
- *Dr. Chapman:* We will note that and welcome your help and suggestions.
- *Audience Member:* Do Unit 5 students know that specialized, needed fields like speech pathology can result in scholarships and assistance? ISU offers special programs that provide benefits to students studying in high-demand fields.
- *Dr. Chapman:* Our guidance counselors are very focused and do a good job of informing students of their options. We do our best to provide a wide range of options.
- *Audience Member:* I am new to the community and chose to come here. We like it and appreciate its benefits.
- *Audience Member:* I want to echo that comment. We feel very welcome here and the schools are great. We feel very connected and the school personnel and communities have made us feel included. People are very committed here and are personally engaged. We came here because of the school system.

- *Audience Member:* What is your philosophy regarding educating kids in the arts? What do kids get out of those subjects and how important are they?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The Board is committed to educating well-rounded students and the arts are certainly a part of that. We are cognizant of that issue.
- *Whittington:* My daughter was praised for a diversified art portfolio at college. She is a product of the Unit 5 system.
- *Audience Member:* But your child went through the arts programs prior to cuts. Are current students going to be able to have the same quality experience?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The main change to the arts in the budgeting process is that 15 used to be the minimum course size, now it's 20. If a class doesn't meet that threshold, then we don't hold it. Very few courses got cut with this method, but there were a few. Perhaps 10 individual courses between the two high schools were cut as a result. The opportunities continue to be present.
- *Briggs:* A number of districts around the state are cutting the arts, but the Unit 5 Board opted to reduce programs instead of eliminating them.
- *Audience Member:* There is concern about 5<sup>th</sup> grade band. If the child waits just one year and doesn't get band in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, they may never start and may not have adequate preparation.
- *Audience Member:* How will students even know how to plan for the future if low-interest classes are never held? You can't reach the threshold of 20 if students if students don't know that the option is available.
- *Dr. Chapman:* The courses that didn't reach the threshold were not removed from the curriculum and will continue to be offered. There is a chance that in future years there may be enough student enrollment to teach the class.
- *Audience Member:* You won't let students move between the high schools, right?
- *Dr. Chapman:* Logistically that is difficult, but we have made arrangements for students to spend half days at the other high school to accommodate particular courses. This is doable although most students choose not to do so. When the high schools were closer, it was possible on an hour-by-hour basis. Now it is tougher.
- *Audience Member:* Last year, I attended an open house at U-High and they discussed Illinois Virtual High School. This offers a number of opportunities including graduating early, preparing for college, etc. I got a less than satisfactory answer from Unit 5 regarding Illinois Virtual High School. Where does it stand?
- *Boswell:* We recently became involved with the program. There is one student involved in the program now, so we're underway. The program is limited to courses that have been cut at this time. The Board approves the curriculum and that is the limit that has been established.
- *Audience Member:* What if I have a gifted student who would like to take an Illinois Virtual High School class that is not offered, like astronomy, and get high school graduation credit?
- *Boswell:* You can take Heartland Community College classes or classes at ISU as well. Currently, the only Illinois Virtual High School courses that have been approved are those that have been cut from Unit 5 this year. However, this may change.
- *Ellsworth:* From a board member's perspective, we'd like to know what kind of demand there is for this type of program.
- *Boswell:* Currently, Illinois Virtual High School is offered as a 7<sup>th</sup> class, so the District doesn't have to pick up the fee.
- *Dr. Chapman:* We'll do some additional research to come up with a more in-depth answer.
- *Audience Member:* Is No Child Left Behind having an impact upon the District?
- *Braksick:* Now, it isn't, but in the future it will. The demands will continue to increase and it will eventually impact us financially. We aren't in the penalty stage yet, but NCLB will have a bigger impact in the future.

- *Audience Member:* Does Unit 5 have the flexibility to move teachers around from school to school and from position to position?
- *Dr. Chapman:* The teachers' contract has specific language regarding voluntary and involuntary transfers which restricts our ability to do so.
- *Audience Member:* I'd like to see the District work within the contract and with the union to make more of these moves.
- *Dr. Chapman:* A fair number of our teachers do move voluntarily, and a number are very successful staying where they are as well. Change is often a growth opportunity.
  
- *Audience Member:* We want to have better communication, but the turnout is low tonight. Does the public not care what you're doing until you do something wrong? Board members need to have personal communications with members of school communities. You need to have called the Field parents at home to ask them how they are doing this year. Please add more of a personal touch. We need to be actively reaching out more – whether it's a child having problems or a principal reaching out.
- *Ellsworth:* We are trying to hear from you in whatever venue works well for you.
- *Audience Member:* What is the intent of these meetings?
- *Dr. Chapman:* We are simply trying to speak to everyone who is willing to come to speak to us.
- *Audience Member:* People only come out to meetings hosted by any organization if there is a hot button topic. This turnout is pretty typical in Bloomington-Normal for a non-issue oriented meeting.
- *Audience Member:* Communication through teachers is not as possible at the secondary level. The communication to the secondary level is less than at the elementary level and could be enhanced. Use of the website is helpful to me. Post things there that I need to see. The single-page summary of the board meetings isn't very helpful – especially in comparison to the entire packet you can get at the meeting. I'd like more information to know if meeting topics are pertinent to me and if I should be in attendance at board meetings. Note specifics on Board agendas; i.e., the type of textbooks to be adopted instead of only the "textbook adoption" notation.
  
- *Audience Member:* The District should survey parents to have them rate the teachers and principals. It is important to have feedback from parents in addition to just the administrative or board opinion.
- *Dr. Chapman:* There is some history in the use of this kind of survey. It's not a foreign idea.
- *Percy:* Would a survey on the Internet help?
- *Audience Member:* No, because not everyone has Internet access and they need to know that it's anonymous. If you want communication and to turn the system around that's how you need to go about it.
  
- *Audience Member:* Wednesday is a church night and that is a conflict for a bunch of folks. Keep this in mind. Not every household has access to the Internet – it is unfair to assume that is the case. Get a lot of "use the Internet" as a response instead of answers to questions. Need to encourage communication by doing a random phone survey of 10 to 15 minutes in length. This could reach some folks who don't have an automobile or means to attend a public meeting.
- *Briggs:* The April 11 town meeting is on a Monday.
  
- *Audience Member:* We've added a whole building's worth of students this year and the high schools are 10 percent different in enrollment numbers currently. When are we going to deal with redistricting again?

- *Dr. Chapman:* We need to be looking at all of this. The middle school level is especially critical right now and we're feeling the pinch there. There are more students at NCHS than NCWHS and more growth to the east as well. We are already considering projections. We don't have an answer yet, but are working on it.
- *Whittington:* The CAC is working on several projects this year and we will be working from those suggestions.
- *Audience Member:* I think that Unit 5 is doing a lot to communicate and that good efforts are being made. We shouldn't be shortsighted about what is being done. Anyone who is a part of an organization knows that turnout is generally low if there isn't a hot button issue.
- *Percy:* We'll be happy to come to you too, just let us know and we'll be happy to visit in small groups.

#### 4.0 Closing

Mickens-Baker closed the evening by thanking everyone for attending the meeting. She also thanked the Laborers' group for the use of their facility free of charge.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

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Richard B. Percy, Board of Education President  
Community Unit School District No. 5  
McLean and Woodford Counties, Illinois

ATTEST:

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Gail Ann Briggs, Board of Education Secretary Pro tem

*Approved:* November 10, 2004