

**SOUTHERN COLUMBIA AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT  
800 SOUTHERN DRIVE  
CATAWISSA, PA 17820**

The January 17, 2011, Board Meeting of the Southern Columbia Area School District Board of Directors convened in the High School Library at 7:33 p.m. with President Michael Yeager in charge of the meeting.

The Pledge of Allegiance was said by all.

President Yeager welcomed everyone, followed by a roll call of Board Members.

**BOARD MEMBERS**

Jennifer Oiler  
Charles Porter  
Eric Stahley

Paul Starr  
Richard Steele  
David Stellfox

Timothy Vought  
Michael Yeager  
John Yocum

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Charles Reh, Superintendent; Daniel Rodgers (*Arrived 7:35 p.m.*), Business Manager; Tresa Britch, Board Secretary; Joseph Shirvinski, Brenda Monick, Robert Mehalick (*Arrived 7:35 p.m.*), Administrators; Timothy George, Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds; district residents and members of the media.

President Yeager announced that the Board held an executive session at the Finance Committee meeting on the previous Wednesday.

**AGENDA HEARING PERIOD**

President Yeager announced that all items on the agenda would be action items. District resident, Frank Berger, asked about the two teaching positions that are being replaced from within, and how losing those two positions will affect the students. Mr. Reh and President Yeager both stated that the matter deals with personnel and could not be discussed at the present time. Mr. Reh stated that it will not affect classroom teachers, but the details could not be discussed. District resident, Florey Guarno, stated that he understood that savings would be realized through two retirees being replaced from within, and they would be cutting back on textbook purchases.

**SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT**

Mr. Reh's report included the following topics:

1.) He thanked and congratulated Mrs. Sally Meyer for receiving funding from Cherokee Pharmaceuticals in the amount of \$8,511 in support of her cross-cultural integration program. The money will be used to have resident artists work with the Gifted and Life Skills students, and also provide workshops for the teachers.

2.) He explained the request for a revision to the calendar to coincide with the building project.

3.) Southern Columbia will be adding Computer Forensics to the curriculum. Students will have the opportunity to spend two years in the program at Southern, two years at Luzerne County Community College and two years at Bloomsburg University.

4.) He commented on the article that was recently printed in the Press Enterprise. He noted that Rodgers and Reh did not return calls. He noted that he did receive a message from Kristen Baver on Thursday around 3:45 p.m. in reference to the special Finance Committee

## Board Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2011

Page 2

---

meeting held Wednesday. He planned to call her Friday morning, but the article had already hit the paper. There was a small window for response time. He noted that he always makes an effort to return calls. He also noted that for a school district to file for exceptions is commonplace and the law contemplates exceptions. If there is a need to file for exceptions, it is within the law. The preliminary budget does indicate that staying within the Act 1 index of 1.8 percent without knowing the state subsidy is not feasible. He pointed out that of all the school districts comprising the Vo-Tech, Southern Columbia has the lowest millage, the lowest expenditure per student and the highest 11<sup>th</sup> grade PSSA scores. He referred to a handout he distributed to Board members at the beginning of the meeting (**Appendix A**). He noted that the next lowest millage rate of any of the districts is still 7.5 mills above Southern Columbia's.

5.) He also read a statement regarding a recent letter to the editor written by Mr. Porter on "How Southern Finagled a Cadillac." Mr. Porter stated that he did not write the title. He stated that he was happy to see that Mr. Porter agreed that there was a need for a building project. He stated that to say that they finagled a Cadillac showcase gymnasium is an insult to the intelligence of all of the Board members who approve the project and to him. He stated that from the beginning he recommended to the Board that the middle school, grades 5 through 8, should all be under one roof, and the out of district special education students needed to be brought back to the district; mainly Life Skills and Emotional Support. He noted that back in 2004, there were schematic drawings by E. I. Associates with a gymnasium connecting the two buildings. There were also additional classrooms added to the middle school as the present plan presents. The plans had an estimated price tag of \$9 to 10 million, but were never approved. He stated that seven years later, the need still exists for a building project. The Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) made a site visit to the district to evaluate the need for the project. He noted that PDE visits are rare but are conducted to find reasons why portions of the project are not needed. The reaction from PDE was that the total project was needed and worthy of being completed. Not only would it improve an instructional configuration, but it would provide safer traffic patterns. The School Board also toured the elementary school to observe the overcrowding and the majority of the Board agreed to the configuration of the proposed project. Mr. Reh stated that the only concern expressed to him regarding classroom size was the size of the science labs, which are designed to be much larger than the present science labs. When the base bid plus the alternates were considered, the lowest bid was accepted. He noted that the project could not be piecemealed, as in the long run it would not be feasible. He stated that when the project is completed, the public will be able to see that this is a no frills project and the gymnasium is not a Cadillac, but a Chevy at best.

President Yeager stated that he was also offended by the letter. He noted that all of those things had been discussed multiple times. He referred to the size of the gym and stated that a wall was offset two feet, and they were asked to move the wall two feet to make the building square. One or possibly two rows of bleachers could be added due to moving the wall. He reiterated that the gym is not a Cadillac.

Mr. Steele stated that he appreciated Mr. Reh's comments and noted that he feels the same way. He stated that all of the issues had been discussed and discussed and discussed from day one. He stated that they tried to deal with all of the various issues as best they could. He stated that they dealt with as many as possible without going overboard. He noted that they have not solved every problem in the district by any means, but they tried to solve as many as they could in a creative way. He noted that it seems that they keep putting issues to bed and Mr. Porter keeps bringing them up again. He stated that in this case, it came out in the paper, and he does not think it is accurate.

## Board Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2011

Page 3

---

Mr. Porter stated that this is about financing the project. He noted that it is about buying what the district can afford. He stated that when they went to the Finance meeting and found out that the 1.8 index equates to .5 mills, which doesn't even cover the employees' contract raises, which is now \$300,000. The .5 mills equates to \$115,000; the amount they can raise the income to the district through real estate taxes. He went on to say that it doesn't even come close to covering the .87 mills that was projected to be needed to cover the bond. He stated that at the last Board meeting, he asked that they hold off on voting on the bond issue until after they had the Finance Committee meeting. He also stated that he asked if the bond payment was linked to what they could raise the taxes, and the answer was "no" at last Monday's meeting. He has since found out that it is, because they can't make the .87 mills to make the bond payment. They found out at the Finance meeting that they may need to ask for exceptions; however there was no specific dollar figure. He went on to say that the index was known in September, and they pay people pretty good money, that they should have equated that to millage before they even took on the construction project itself. Mr. Rodgers stated that the 1.8 percent index was disclosed back in September, as Mr. Stahley alluded to. He went on to explain that the 1.8 percent index is for one year. It is not for the next thirty years. He stated that the project is much bigger than Southern Columbia's budget for this year. He noted that a five year projection is on the district website informing every taxpayer that the district has to raise taxes. Mr. Porter stated that they went into the meeting saying that they were going to ask for exceptions. There are forms and worksheets available on the website. He stated that they could have known going into the building project close projections as to what could be done with those exceptions. Mr. Rodgers stated that his projection has been posted on the website for the past year. He stated that it didn't matter what was said in the last month, because there was so much time and money invested into the building project that it was happening no matter what the 1.8 percent index equated to. President Yeager agreed and stated that the Board was aware of all of it. Mr. Steele stated that they have said all along that the millage increase based on the construction did not in any way take into account other operating costs that may occur. He noted that they cannot control what subsidies they get from the state. He stated that they are following Act 1, which allows for exceptions.

Mr. Porter stated that no one in the room could say what kind of dollar amount could be raised in taxes through the exceptions. He noted that the worksheets have been available. Mr. Stellfox stated that they are now aware of the upcoming budget and can look into exceptions. Mr. Reh stated that PDE will not determine what exceptions they are going to approve until they see the preliminary budget. Mr. Rodgers stated that the budget is not due to the state until February 16<sup>th</sup> and the exceptions are not due until March 1<sup>st</sup>. Mr. Rodgers stated that when the index came out back in September, they had no idea that the state subsidy was going to be cut \$400,000, and no idea that healthcare was going to increase fifteen percent. He added that if those two items would not be changing drastically compared to prior years, this conversation would not be taking place. He stated that they would not need to request exceptions if healthcare costs didn't go up fifteen percent and the basic subsidy didn't go down \$400,000. Those numbers are just coming out now. He stated that Mr. Porter was aware of that because he sits on the Trust Board. Mr. Porter agreed. President Yeager stated that they cannot feasibly stay within the 1.8 percent index. Mr. Stahley stated that in his opinion, it would have been nice to have that information before they voted on the bond.

6.) Mr. Mehalick gave a presentation on the Social Worker services within the district. In the past the district received Social Worker services through CSIU. It was determined that it would be more cost effective to discontinue that service and directly hire a licensed Social

## Board Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2011

Page 4

---

Worker. He noted that the program is working extremely well in conjunction with the Behavior Specialist and the building Guidance Counselors. Mr. Mehalick stated that the district now has the ability to bill Medical Assistance for its Social Worker services.

Mr. Rodgers distributed another copy of the draft Request for Proposals for healthcare consultant services to Board members. The Board gave Mr. Rodgers direction to advertise the Request for Proposals.

### COMMITTEE REPORTS

Curriculum, Instruction & Technology - John Yocum, Chairperson, reported that the committee discussed items that were included in the Friday Letter. An overhaul of the Technical Curriculum will take place. He stated that Board members should have a copy of the Technology Hardware handout. He noted an increase in student laptops and pointed out that most of those laptops are in the laptop carts. The district is close to having one laptop per student. There is currently approximately 95 percent wireless coverage for all of the schools. The mobile laptop carts average twenty-five laptops per cart. Individual room inkjet printers are being phased out and being replaced by laser printers, which can service several rooms. He reported that forty percent of the software applications are Level I, which means that the software must be manually installed on each individual computer. Twenty percent of the software is Level II, which are network programs and forty percent are Level III or web-based software program.

He referred to a handout from Mrs. Monick regarding the Cooperative Education Program. There were some questions about confidential information and possible grading. Mrs. Monick will ask Mrs. Force to give a presentation on the Cooperative Education Program. They also discussed Dual Credit. There are questions about the weighted grading. Core subjects are being weighted at 1.06 and non-core subjects are being weighted at 1.04. Mrs. Monick noted that there was a sizeable increase in interactive whiteboards and multi-media projectors. A lot of the increase in the whiteboards, multi-media projectors and laptops is the result of being a beneficiary of the Classrooms For the Future grant. She anticipates the need for more bandwidth and will be upgrading from 10mbps to 20mbps. She noted that bandwidth costs have decreased considerably over the years. Mrs. Monick stated that a Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) portal will be added to the PDE website. She reported that there are hundreds of different reports that can be accessed through the portal. She also stated that there is a professional development component, which will be extremely helpful. Mr. Reh reported that the district held a successful in-service earlier in the day. There was a brief discussion regarding why college courses are weighted differently.

Negotiations & Personnel - Charlie Porter, Chairperson, reported that a request for proposals for healthcare consulting services could eventually dovetail with negotiations. He stated that they will need union cooperation for any healthcare change and putting someone on board at this time could be beneficial.

Transportation Services - Tim Vought, Chairperson, reported that the committee discussed the cameras on the buses, which are working well. Solicitor Roberts recommended that the district record only video and not sound. The bus drivers are turning in their trip sheets signed by the coaches. Ms. Pheasant stated that she needs more training on the GPS units. The plan is to use the GPS units to make the runs more efficient for the upcoming year. Ms. Pheasant attended a conference and brought back some ideas on cost savings, such as consolidating routes. It was noted that parents should be properly notified in the Spring regarding any changes to routes that would take effect in the Fall. The Ashton Hollow bridge construction will not take place until

**Board Meeting Minutes**  
**January 17, 2011**  
**Page 5**

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next Fall. President Yeager stated that it seems that since the Transportation Committee has been developed, it seems things have smoothed out in that department. Mr. Rodgers agreed that there is definitely more communication and transportation is running fairly smoothly. He also stated that the Bus Tracks software has proved to be effective and has helped the department run more efficiently. Mr. Vought stated that there are some instances where two buses are being taken to one event. Mr. Becker stated that it could be for the wrestling teams, as they try to get the younger students home earlier.

PSBA Liaison - Rick Steele stated that most of the focus seems to be toward developing a legislative platform. He received a survey to be completed on behalf of the Board regarding legislative initiatives that may be of interest, however the survey is only available on his computer, and he has been unable to print a hard copy.

Finance - Eric Stahley, Chairperson reported that most of the items covered at the meeting have already been discussed during the other committee reports. He stated that they discussed the RFP, Act 1 and the preliminary budget. He stated that some hard decisions will need to be made. He encouraged all of the Board members and the public to attend the Finance meeting on February 7<sup>th</sup> at 6:00 p.m.

After a brief discussion, a Facilities Committee meeting was scheduled for Wednesday, February 16<sup>th</sup>, at 6:00 p.m.

#### **TREASURER'S REPORTS**

On a motion by Starr and second by Yocum, the Treasurer's Reports were presented for approval. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

#### **MINUTES AND INVOICES**

On a motion by Steele and second by Starr, the following items were presented for approval:

- A. Minutes of December 8, 2010 (Reorganization meeting) and December 8, 2010 (special meeting).
- B. General Fund invoices in the amount of \$620,705.74, Capital Reserve Fund invoices in the amount of \$81,878.35 and Athletic Fund invoices in the amount of \$13,060.49. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

#### **ITEMS – FISCAL**

On a motion by Stellfox and second by Vought, to authorize the display for public inspection, with a starting date of January 18, 2011, the 2011-2012 proposed Preliminary Budget was presented for approval. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

#### **ITEMS – PERSONNEL**

On a motion by Stellfox and second by Steele, the following items were presented for approval:

- A. To designate Robert Delbo as a Volunteer Weightlifting Coach for the 2010-2011 school year (pending receipt of favorable clearances and a negative Tuberculin test).
- B. *(Item B was pulled from the block vote.)*

**Board Meeting Minutes**  
**January 17, 2011**  
**Page 6**

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- C. *(Item C was removed from the agenda as Board action was not necessary.)*
- D. Employment of Kristin Mott as a Half-time Paraprofessional working 3-days of the 6-day cycle effective January 18, 2011 (pending completion of all employment paperwork); salary and benefits per the Collective Bargaining Agreement. *(This is a replacement position.)*
- E. The addition of the following individual(s) to the 2010-2011 Substitute List effective January 18, 2011 (pending completion of all employment requirements):
- Stephanie Gembic (Registered Nurse) - effective January 18, 2011

The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

On a motion by Stellfox and second by Steele, employment of John Marks as Security Personnel effective January 18, 2011 (pending completion of all employment requirements), at a rate of \$30 per event.

#### **ITEMS – POLICY AND PROGRAMS**

On a motion by Oiler and second by Yocum, the revised 2010-2011 School Year Calendar (per Exhibit A) was presented for approval. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

#### **BOARD COMMENTS**

Mr. Porter stated that a lot of the discussion at the Finance meeting was to set up a calendar to apply for exceptions. He asked Mr. Rodgers for what exceptions he would be applying. Mr. Rodgers replied that the decision has not yet been made, but it would most likely be in the areas of special education, PSERS, healthcare and construction. Mr. Porter questions the state's deadlines for filing for exceptions. Mr. Rodgers replied that the deadline to advertise the exceptions that the Board and administration is planning to file for is February 24<sup>th</sup>. The exceptions are due online to PDE March 3<sup>rd</sup>. Mr. Rodgers stated that the next step will be to approve the preliminary budget in February. At that time, the district would be in a position, if necessary; to apply for exceptions to raise local taxes above the 1.8 percent index to support the existing preliminary budget.

Mr. Porter stated that the Board was not his target audience and that as Board members, they have a right to let the public know their thoughts and why they vote the way they do. He stated that he views it as his responsibility.

Ms. Oiler thanked the administration for all the additional work they have done because of the building project.

Mr. Rodgers reiterated that his office is always open and noted that he welcomes anyone who has questions regarding the budget, the building project or any issue. He stated that the administration tries to be as transparent as possible in terms of getting information out to the public. He apologized to the Board for raising his voice.

Mr. Porter reported that he had a request from a resident for a copy of the Friday Letter, and asked if that information was public record. It was agreed that Solicitor Roberts would need to be consulted on that matter.

## Board Meeting Minutes

January 17, 2011

Page 7

---

### RECOGNITION OF THE PUBLIC

Mr. Berger asked if the five-year projection on the website could be updated, and requested that items posted on the website include a posting date.

Mr. Guarno stated that the 5-year projection did not include the building project. After a brief discussion, it was determined that the projection did include the building project. Mr. Guarno asked why the lawmakers make rules that limit taxes and then turn around and allow districts to disregard the rules. President Yeager stated that when Act 1 came about, the legislators anticipated that there could be large increases, such as healthcare or PSERS, and the exceptions allow districts to accommodate those large increases. The exceptions have been part of Act 1 since its inception.

Mr. Guarno asked when the tutors perform their duties. Mrs. Monick replied that tutoring takes place Tuesdays and Thursdays after school. Mr. Guarno asked if there is any plan to put a speed bump in front of the high school. Mr. Reh replied that speed bumps have never been installed due to snow plowing issues. Mr. Guarno asked the administrators for their student enrollment and number of teachers. The administrators responded and Mr. Rodgers stated that the enrollment information is included in the budget packet that was distributed last year and is available on the website.

Mr. Rodgers offered clarification on a millage question, which was brought up earlier in the meeting. He noted that a one mill increase in one district is not necessarily going to generate the same amount of money in another district. An individual fair market value house of \$100,000 in one district as opposed to another district could equate to more tax dollars for a specific house that is worth the same amount of money in a neighboring district. That is where it could be compared "apples to apples." Mr. Stellfox stated that the cost per student seems to be the best figure to use for comparison. President Yeager stated that Standard & Poor's came out with a report similar to Mr. Reh's a few years ago, and its results were the same.

### ADJOURNMENT

On a motion by Oiler and second by Stellfox, the meeting was adjourned at 9:36 p.m. The motion carried by unanimous affirmative voice vote.

Respectfully Submitted,

Tresa J. Britch  
Board Secretary