

WESTERN DUBUQUE COUNTY COMMUNITY SCHOOL DISTRICT
Board of Education Minutes
Workshop Session
December 12, 2011 – 5:30 p.m.

Call to Order:

Board President Bob McCabe called the meeting to order at 5:32 p.m. in the Board Room – District Administration Office, Farley, Iowa.

Roll Call:

Present were Bob McCabe, Jeanne Coppola, Mark Knuth, and Superintendent Jeff Corkery. Absent: Gary McAndrew and Chad Vaske. Mr. Vaske joined the meeting at 5:34 p.m.

Discussion with Area Legislators on School Issues and Proposed Education Reform:

In attendance were State Senator Tom Hancock and Representative Lee Heins. The following comments were made.

Representative Heins:

- Long and difficult legislative session last year.
- 0% growth for schools this year, hopefully 2% will be approved for next year.
- Property tax reform will receive significant attention in the new session.
- Decisions will be made on education reform.
- A shorter session than last year is anticipated.
- Reality and theory are two different things and some needed education reforms will be difficult to implement.

Senator Hancock:

- Last year's session was a marathon with many conference committee meetings.
- His party worked for 2% growth for schools until the end of the session; but had to settle for 0%.
- The Democrat Caucus Goal for next year is 4% growth for schools.
- The legislature will have to wait until the Dept. of Education and Governor Brandstad submit their detailed plans for education funding and reform before starting to work on legislation that can pass both houses and also receive the Governor's approval.
- He feels that the schools in Dubuque County are very good and should not carry the negative labels that are many times associated with schools and education reform.
- He will again propose legislation to help schools with transportation costs; but, acknowledged that it is a battle between urban school interests and rural school interests.
- Jobs, education and budget will take up the most time in the new session.
- Kids will be used as a political football but hopefully all parties will be brought into the discussions.

Superintendent Corkery presented his views on proposed education reforms and the Iowa Department of Education. The following were noted.

- Schools are not failing. Many are the best that they have ever been.
- The Iowa Dept. of Education is out of touch with what is taking place in Iowa schools.
- The Director of the Department – Jason Glass- and the Governor's Special Assistant for Education – Linda Fandel-have very limited teaching and administrative experience in schools to properly understand the issues that schools are facing.

- Some of the Governor's proposals on reform are well intentioned; but, will need careful review to ensure good results.
- More testing and regurgitation of dated reforms schemes are not necessary.
- Pre-School education is important and should be strengthened and continued.
- Options available to Charter Schools should be available to all schools.
- Comparing test scores with other countries or other states is flawed unless the demographics of each are also compared. He noted that the United States has a much higher rate of poverty than the countries that have been cited in comparative data used by reform proposal advocates.
- The Department of Education is too regulatory and is interfering with local control. He cited examples with non-public transportation reimbursement, enrollment counts, Drop-Out/At-Risk programs, required middle school endorsements for teachers and the Department's failure to complete the Iowa Core Curriculum initiative.
- Good things are happening in Iowa schools and not enough discussion is given to those positives.
- Single parents and poverty issues pose significant challenges to teachers and schools.

School Board Comments:

- Coppola – Teachers have to spend much more time working on significant non-teaching issues with students at the expense of classroom instruction time.
- McCabe – Advocates a separate transportation funding mechanism for schools. Too many instructional dollars are spent on transportation costs in rural school districts.

Adjournment:

Motion by Coppola, second by Knuth to adjourn. Motion passed 4-0. The meeting adjourned at 6:10 pm on December 12, 2011.

David A. Wegmann
Board Secretary

Robert McCabe
President, Board of Education