

Our Mission

***Educating and inspiring each student
to navigate successfully in a global community.***

**East Grand Rapids Public Schools - SPECIAL MEETING
BOARD WORKSHOP – BUDGET AND RECREATION MILLAGE**

Little Auditorium, East Grand Rapids High School,
2211 Lake Drive SE, East Grand Rapids, MI 49506
Phone 616-235-3535.

Tuesday, May 11, 2004

5:30 p.m.

MINUTES

The SPECIAL MEETING of the East Grand Rapids Public Schools Board of Education, Kent County, Michigan, was held on Tuesday, May 11, 2004 in the Little Auditorium, East Grand Rapids High School, 2211 Lake Drive, SE, East Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

Board of Education:

Present: Mrs. Beth Lent, Mr. Joe Camp, Mrs. Natalie Kuras, Mr. Brian Ellis, Mrs. Rosalie Stein, Mr. Charlie Denton, and Mrs. Stacy Trierweiler

Administration: Dr. James Morse, Mrs. Christine Vettese, Mr. Doug Derks, Dr. Ty Wessell, Mrs. Jeanne Glowicki, Mr. Doug Jenkins, Mrs. Jann VanAirsdale, Mrs. Kathy Wisniewski, Mrs. Joann Kuklewski, Mr. Peter Stuursma, and Mr. Pat Cwayna

Meeting Called to Order

Mrs. Lent called the meeting to order at 5:34 p.m.

Acknowledgment of Guests - None

Public Comments Other than Budget Items

No comments at this time.

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Review of Budget Process – Mr. Derks

Mr. Derks presented a power point slide show of the budget overview and process. The budget has been ongoing since October. There will be two Board meetings in May where the budget recommendations will again be reviewed with the Budget hearing scheduled for June 7th.

Clarification of Budget Reductions – Dr. Morse and Mr. Derks

Dr. Morse thanked Mr. Derks for his presentation and his work on the budget. Dr. Morse stated that we cannot maintain the quality of our programs with the loss of funding. He stated many people want to compare the way a school is run to the way a business is run. They ask why we don't cut back expenses like a business would do. In a business setting, when the demand for your product goes down you can cut back. In a school the product is students and East is gaining students, not losing them. Our major expense is personnel and with us gaining students, we need personnel. In East Grand Rapids we get value for our dollars, or in other words, more bang for our buck. We spend more on elementary education than other schools and have excellent programs across all grade levels. Other districts have been cutting their programs over the last couple of years, we are fortunate, we still have most of our programs intact. We now have an opportunity for local control of our destiny, the recreation millage. Dr. Morse went on to thank the PTA's, Foundation, and Booster groups for stepping up to help. Now East Grand Rapids schools need additional help from our community. We have a wonderful opportunity with the Recreation millage.

Board of Education Questions:

Mrs. Lent – What would the Spanish program 30% reduction look like? Would it be a reduction in days? Mrs. Vettese said it could be a reduction of days or introduction of the language at a higher grade level than elementary. She stated there would most definitely be a ripple effect through the years if this were implemented. Children retain more if language is introduced earlier.

Mr. Denton – What are the cost savings for the 2004-05 school year of the Special education staff itinerants going to the KISD? Mr. Derks answered that the change would become effective the 2004-05 school year and then the following year (2005-06) East Grand Rapids would receive additional revenue of \$123,000. The revenue lags one year behind the implementation.

Mrs. Stein – Asked how many Paraeducators would the K-1 cuts effect? Mr. Derks said it would be a total of approximately 20 people. These people work 1 to 2 hours per day per classroom.

Mrs. Trierweiler – Questioned if there would be a way to split the Paraeducators between classrooms? Dr. Morse stated that these Paraeducators help with reading programs. We cannot run the same quality reading programs without these Paraeducators. There have been suggestions of getting volunteers, but then there

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would not be the consistency like there is with the Paraeducators. This is one of the reasons our reading program has been so successful.

Mr. Denton – Asked about the Schedule B cuts and if there were any ideas on what the additional 30% cuts would be? Mr. Derks stated he would give out a list at the Board meeting on Monday evening. Essentially, right now it appears that there would be cuts to any position that is staffed after the school day. Mr. Derks will have the ramifications of these cuts on Monday evening for the Board along with the numbers.

Mr. Denton – Looking at the pay to play recommendation, would the amount now be \$180, if this were implemented? Mr. Derks said that the Athletic Department and Booster groups are looking for ways to bring this amount down. He will have more information for the Board on Monday evening. Mr. Denton questioned what are other schools are doing and how does East compare? Mr. Derks said with the current fee of \$100, East is currently tied for highest per sport fee in the county, but again, we are looking at a variety of ways to offset these projected reductions.

Mrs. Lent – Asked what has been the cumulative impact on building budgets? What has the impact been for this year? Mr. Vettese answered that funding for books has been cut drastically. There is a need for Middle School science books. Some classes are using textbooks on the Internet, but there are very few available right now. She added that elementary students each need a book for classes, but it is getting harder and harder to get one for everyone. Mr. Derks stated that we are now spending less than half of what we were three years ago. Dr. Morse added that currently, after three or four years, textbooks are outdated.

Mrs. Kuras – Stated she is disturbed by the other recommendations shown this evening. Looking at these items we are now getting to the core of what we believe in. The Board has some difficult choices to make over the next few weeks.

Mrs. Stein – Wanted parents and community members to know that the projected cuts will happen unless we find additional revenue sources. If the district does not get any additional revenue then any cuts made next year should come as no surprise to anyone. It is imperative that the residents of this community vote for the Recreation millage.

Public Discussion Regarding Budget Reductions

Review of Procedure for Public Comments

Mrs. Lent – Asked anyone wanting to address the Board to come to the microphones to make their comments and state their name and address for the minutes. She also stated that this is not the time for debate on the issues raised tonight. Tonight is for comments. The Board will be meeting again May 17th, May 24th and June 7th prior to the budget being approved and visitors are welcome to come to those meetings.

Comments from the Public

Craig Wilson - 920 Cambridge - He prefaced his remarks by stating that his comments are not to be construed as a lack of support for the Board. He commented that there was an article in the Grand Rapids Press this evening about Rockford reaching a successful contract with its teachers. He asked rather than locking into a 20-year debt by passing the Recreation millage if we could pass a contract like Rockford? He also asked if it would be realistic if the Recreation millage were passed if it could be anything other than a 20-year millage? Mr. Derks answered that it would depend on how the millage would be levied each year. He went on to say that if we were to offer a contract like the one Rockford offered, we would have a hard time paying for it. One difference is that Rockford offered a 2% wage increase and we have 0% built in. Dr. Morse stated that the Board and administration are committed to working with the teachers on health insurance costs.

Mike McDonald - 2150 Argentina - Asked if the school is limited to 1.4 mills on the millage? Wondered if we can we ask for more but change the time element? He feels that way the schools could do some catch up (books, etc.). Could the schools ask for a renewal in 5 years or are we limited by statute? Dr. Morse answered that we are limited on what we can ask for. Mr. Derks has calculated the costs of what we are spending to run programs in the evening. His conservative estimate came to 1.85 mills. The Board debated the millage amount in April and went with the modest number of 1.4 mills. The Board can go back at some time and ask for an additional amount up to 1.85 mills. The Board has opted for the 20 years because this option may not be open to us in the future. The Legislature may try to shut this type of millage down for school districts. The Board will need to decide each year how much to levy. Also, a reminder that the Hedlee amendment will reduce what we receive as assessments increase in East Grand Rapids. Mr. McDonald asked what items are included to come up with the 1.85 mills? Mr. Derks stated that any after school activities and recreation classes were used. By legal definition we can recoup for the costs of light, heat, facilities, and custodial costs to clean during that time.

Diane Bok - 2709 Oakwood SE - She is the Treasurer of the Citizens for EGR Schools - She thanked the Board and Administration for making the hard decisions. She also thanked them for giving the community this opportunity that we have with the Recreation millage. She stated that not only is state funding flat but the schools are also dealing with increasing rates in healthcare and benefits. The community has a good opportunity with the recreation millage to maintain the programs we have become used to. The schools have cut the fat already and now are getting into the core items. As a community we have become used to being the best. If the proposed cuts are made at the elementary level, a few years down the line we will not have the high MEAP scores or Golden Apple, etc. Many residents stay in East because the property levels stay high, in major part because of our schools. If we lose our top rated schools, then as a community, we lose our focal point. She urged everyone to

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fill out an endorsement card, donate money and get out and vote yes for the Recreation millage on June 14th.

Rita Maddox - 939 Plymouth - East Grand Rapids schools and other schools are facing a financial crisis which she feels will get worse before it gets better. She urged all community members to take back local control and get out and vote yes for the Recreation millage on June 14th. By voting yes we will be able to maintain our programs. A yes vote is a vote for our students. She thanked the Board and Dr. Morse for providing this opportunity for the citizens of East Grand Rapids.

Any Other Matters that May Come Before the Board

No other matters.

Adjournment

Mrs. Lent reminded the people attending that they can feel free to call any of the Board members with questions and comments. She stated that at the next couple of Board meetings the budget would be decided. Future meetings are scheduled for May 17th, May 24th, and June 7th. Mrs. Lent adjourned the meeting at 6:38 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Rosalie Stein, Secretary
East Grand Rapids Board of Education

* Minutes for this meeting will be available in the Superintendent's Office at 2915 Hall Street SE, East Grand Rapids, MI 49506.

** If you plan to attend and have a special need and require accommodation to attend this meeting, please contact Dr. James Morse, Superintendent, at 235-3535.

Superintendent's Office - 05/13/04