

Evanston/Skokie School District 65
1500 McDaniel Ave. – Evanston, IL 60201
Regular Board Meeting Minutes – March 14, 2022

Meeting called to order at 6:07pm

Roll Call

Present: *Biz Lindsay-Ryan, Sergio Hernandez, Donna Wang Su (Virtual), Soo La Kim, Joey Hailpern, Anya Tanyavutti*

Absent: *Marquise Weatherspoon* (arrived at 6:11pm);

Also present: *Devon Horton*, Superintendent; *Adeela Qureshi*, School Board Secretary, *Andalib Khelghati*, Asst. Supt. of Human Resources; *Raphael Obafemi*, CFO

Motion to Recess into Closed Session

It was moved by *Soo La Kim* and seconded by *Hernandez* that:

The Board of Education move into closed session to discuss Appointment, Employment, Compensation and Performance of specific employees and Negotiations, and Litigation.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Absent: *Weatherspoon* (arrived at 6:11pm);

Convened open session at 7:00pm

Stephani Veloz, Bilingual Support Specialist announced and invited anyone needing Spanish translation of tonight's meeting to seek her out.

Roll Call

Present: *Biz Lindsay-Ryan, Sergio Hernandez, Donna Wang Su (virtual), Marquise Weatherspoon, Joey Hailpern, Anya Tanyavutti*

Absent:

Also present: *Devon Horton*, Superintendent; *Raphael Obafemi*, CFO; *Andalib Khelghati*, Asst. Supt. of Human Resources; *Stacy Beardsley*, Asst Supt. of Curriculum; *Romy DeCristofaro*, Asst. Supt. of Student Services; *Terrance Little*, Asst. Supt. of Schools; *Melissa Messinger*, Exec. Director of Communications; *Sarita Smith*, Director of Student Assignments; *Adeela Qureshi*, School Board Secretary

Land Acknowledgement was read by *Tanyavutti*

Approval of Meeting Agenda

It was moved by *Weatherspoon* and seconded by *Hernandez* that:

The Board of Education approve the meeting agenda as presented.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Hailpern, Tanyavutti*

Nayes:

Absent:

Motion passes 7-0

District/Board Update

Superintendent, Dr. Horton acknowledged the large crowd present and the monumental moment of determining the board's decision of a fifth ward school. He also acknowledged the hard work of the educators to support the students, families and district. Parents and community members were all acknowledged for the investment and care that continues to be invested in the work of the district. February recipients will be recognized at tonight's meeting.

High Five— Melissa Messinger, Executive Director of Communications explained that now in its fifth year, the *High Five: Celebrating Excellence in District 65*, has received hundreds of nominations and honored over 80 licensed and support staff members for their tremendous work. Nominations are accepted throughout the school year from staff and members of the D65 community, and forms are available on our website at district65.net/highfive. D65 staff selected as award recipients for January and February were presented with the High Five Award. Also, honored was licensed staff, *Eric Blum*, a 2nd-grade teacher at Orrington Elementary School and has served our students and families for 14 years. The February award recipient honored was educational support staff, *Lori Coutts*, a Paraprofessional at Park School who has supported students in our community for 16 years.

Board/Superintendent Comments—

Soo La Kim took a moment to address some of the resistance to change that has come the board's way in recent weeks since the SAP's final recommendations were announced. Noted that when people come late to the conversation, they should at least attempt to catch up, to seek out information already shared through multiple channels, at a minimum search the Evanston Roundtable site, before demanding answers to "unanswered" questions or claiming that the district has not been transparent. Thanked the community and parent volunteers who engaged in this thoughtful, meticulous process. Concluded that right now, armed with the best information that the board could gather from experts and the community, which provides financial and moral clarity, it's time to act.

[Comments included as part of records]

Biz Lindsay-Ryan – Acknowledged that change can invoke fear and uncertainty and noted that tonight the board will make a historic vote which will move towards having a neighborhood school for everyone, programs aligned for every student to get what they need at that school, all in the hopes that every student reach their fullest potential and expressed gratitude of being part of the process.

[Comments included as part of records]

Joey Hailpern – Noted that this action is not rushed. The process Dr. Horton and his team have undertaken is extensive, inclusive, and makes sure the right people are included in this conversation. Tonight's vote for a Fifth Ward School will give everyone in this community a chance to see that we can invest in our children and their learning spaces. We can prioritize neighborhoods in our community where schools are the center. Where the playgrounds after school, on weekends, and in summer, are the hub of activity. Where your ability to participate in after-school activities is not dictated by the need to catch a bus.

[Comments included as part of records]

Marquise Weatherspoon— Shared her experience of growing up and being bussed out of the neighborhood for school, missing out on opportunities to play in the playground after school, walk to school, participate in after school activities or have friends nearby. Passionately explained that tonight is bigger than a walkable neighborhood school, providing programming proximate to our students and families and equipping every student with equitable school options. This is a gift of hope, dignity, trust, worth, confidence and care for 50+ years to come.

[Comments included as part of records]

Segio Hernandez – Shared his experience of working with community members in Chicago to bridge the access to resources for Latino families. The work goes beyond tonight's vote or working as a community and with partners to move together as institutions to ensure resources are accessible to all.

Anya Tanyavutti— Noted that tonight's efforts and accomplishment is a story for the whole community. Shared her story of being bussed to school and navigating a school far from home as a kindergartener. She also noted that the residual consequences for closing foster are still with us today, 53 years of trauma and neglect deserves attention, care, and repair. The work of this Board has been to repair past neglect and harm while also casting a bold and rigorous vision for our future. This work has been energizing, Inspiring, challenging, scary, and painful all at once. Expressed appreciation to the entire community.

[Comments included as part of records]

Public Comment- The board president noted that:

Members of the public are welcome and invited to address the Board during open public meetings. Speakers are discouraged from using the public comment period to air specific concerns about staff members, being mindful that the public comment period is not a suitable forum for fact-finding or resolution of disputes. Rather, we encourage members of the public who have concerns about specific district employees to follow district communication guidelines, found in the Student Handbook. Please remember to state your name and that you have three minutes to address the Board. Also note that it is not customary for the board to respond to public comments. The best way to correspond with members of the board is by emailing schoolboard@district65.net

Maria Barosso, DEC President read a statement noting that DEC Stands in unity with the administration and board for Green and sustainable buildings. DEC supports and calls for an amazing school and all that our students deserve and supports the efforts of a Fifth ward school as the district rectifies this harmful practice. DEC supports a move towards walkable neighborhood schools and a significant decrease in bussing. On another note, DEC is happy to report that the Superintendent and the DEC President have made great strides in creating a bridge with the best intentions to make our district a great place for all children. *[Statement included in permanent records.]*

Dan Coyne, Social Worker at Lincoln and Oakton as well as a community member expressed his ongoing support for the Fifth Ward school.

Jaimie Harris, part of Advocates for Action 2.0 shared her experience of having to walk across the bridge to get to Haven and Kingsley, on hot days and winter days only to have her mom call the school office to ensure that the kids made it to school safely.

Kimberly Holmes Ross a member of the 5th ward shared her appreciation for the boards hard work in returning a school to the ward. Also read a statement on behalf of her mother and former 5th ward Alderman supporting the work of the board.

JoAnn Avery, staff member of Family Focus for the last 40 years. Works with 3rd-8th grade students who wrote letters regarding the history, significance and need of a 5th ward school. It is important for kids to be in a community that supports, loves and is familiar with them. Shelby a student also read a statement supporting the 5th ward school as an opportunity to go to a great place.

[student letters are included in the permanent records]

Fuscia Winston, a fourth generation Evanstonian asked community to stop speaking on behalf of black families. Shared a story of her cousin who was one of two black students that was bussed out of the 5th ward. Returning a school to the 5th ward is one of the first steps to correct a wrong. Her family has had over 200 descendents in Evanston, of the 100 that are still alive only 2 live in Evanston. The city is not affordable and moves on the backs of black families.

Sarah Peterson a Willard parent shared that all the district's communication and openness for community feedback has offered a thorough process. Appreciates and supports the effort to restore a vital school in the 5th ward, has great trust that the needs of students is centered and drives the decision.

Henry Wilkins, community member and founder of 5th Ward STEM School initiative worked to gather knowledge and movement from several community and education leaders. STEM School supports the district and will work to collaborate on the Foster School Campus.

Carlis Sutton community member and former D65 and D202 Teacher and 3rd generation Evanston resident, shared his support for the 5th ward school that is long overdue. Challenges the board to think about how to keep the black families in the fifth ward so that they can finally attend school in their neighborhood.

Robin Brown, parent of the district and community expressed support of the Board's and districts efforts to bringing a school to the 5th ward.

Mark Rochon, 5th ward resident, did not grow up in Evanston but learned the history of the 5th ward school and supports the district's efforts.

Roger Williams, former board member of OPAL which challenged several issues with District 65, in 2016 flagged the deficiency of black student achievement. Appreciates the work of this board, Dr. Horton and the administrative team of bringing a school to the fifth ward.

Oliver Ruff, a community member and former D65 principal spoke as a former student of Foster School. Expressed his appreciation of the process that included community input and reflection of historical loss, focus on equity and noting the toll transportation takes on students. No referendum was used to remove the 5th ward school and today it is good to see it does not take a referendum to create a school in the 5th ward.

Beth Brady, parent and educator in the district shared her perspective and appreciation of the SAP process that was a responsive and inclusive effort.

Amy Brissette, community member, parent of D65, an alumni of D65, and also served on SAP committee. Returned to Evanston to give kids a sense of community – a support system with a sense of security and resources offered by a neighborhood school. There has no been rush to return a school lost by a community 53 years ago – it is past time. It is not the responsibility of the 5th ward kids to satisfy diversity in schools of the district.

Chris Nieusma, 4th ward resident, community member and parent of the district pledges to speak out again unjust actions and systems of oppression that have an unjust racial impact. Asked other members of the white community to stand in support of the pledge.

Michael Emanuel, father of Sarita Smith, alumni of King Lab school on the corner of Foster and Dewey, which laid the foundation for a career in the army that led to traveling the world. It is time to lay the foundation for other black students in the district.

Suni Kartha, former D65 Board member and SAP committee member, proud of the recommendation brought to the board. Also recognized, the Citizens for a Better Evanston (C4BE) effort 10 years ago that worked on a referendum that did not pass. Congratulate the board, Dr. Horton, and the SAP committee and noted that this moment belongs to many that became

Megan Kennedy-Farraell, parent of D65 Washington student, support the 5th ward school and value the benefits that come with a neighborhood school. Reflected on a last day of school event at Washington when students were celebrating but students that were bussed were not able to participate. A neighborhood school should be a reality for all students in Evanston.

Terri Shepard, former board member reminded Sarita she was not selected to be part of the SAP committee. The result of Brown v. Bd of Education tried to right a wrong but caused more damage. This was the right board and right superintendent even under many threats continue to do the right work.

Bessie Rhodes is the most diverse school in the district – even 15 years ago there was hope for a school within a school and a community campus, believe that the today's proposed plan has positive potential.

Michael Nabors, President of NAACP and pastor of 2nd Baptist Church, on behalf of clergy of Evanston, offered words of support to Dr. Horton, the school board and the wider community. He shared the many moments since 2015 that the community has taken a leap of faith to voice against harm to members of the larger community. Offered words of support in the board's work of correcting a historical wrong and keeping in mind what is best for students.

Katie Brick, parent of the district, spoke out as a white parent and community member. Noted that Evanston becomes a target when Evanston does work around equity. Grateful for the district and board leadership. It's not what's good for my kid, or the kids in my school it is what is good for our kids.

Gilo Kwesi Logan, 5th generation Evanstonian, graduate of D65. Today we are on the right side of history. 1967 Evanston worked for integration but it was the worst thing that happened to the black community. Integration w/o equity is just drive by diversity. Black children were exported out of their communities and imported to the white community and schools in the name of integration and diversity. This decision is data driven and calls for a 5th ward school, this is not an effort to resegregate the community. The 5th ward is one of the most diverse wards of Evanston and no one is saying that the other less diverse wards are segregated.

Jasmine Sebaygala, employee in the district at Willard, attended Willard and lived in the 5th ward school for three generations. Moved out of the district/Evanston to ensure her kids were not bussed. Shared that black students and students that are bussed in often don't get selected by kids to be a leader or on a team. Today we have the opportunity of returning a school to the 5th ward that gives a chance to have students seen.

Student Assignment and School Plan— *Sarita Smith*, Director of Student Assignments walked through a presentation highlighting the Student Assignment Planning (SAP) Recommendation [*Included in the Board packet*]. The presentation reviewed the scenarios that were considered by the committee and provided details on the proposed recommendation of Scenarios A 2.0.

Elementary and Middle School Boundary Changes— The proposed plan recommends revisions to student attendance boundaries for the following elementary schools, effective for the 2024-2025 school year:

- | | | |
|---------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| ● Dewey | ● Orrington | ● Willard |
| ● Kingsley | ● Walker | ● Addition of a 5th Ward |
| ● Lincolnwood | ● Washington | school boundary |

There are no recommended changes to attendance boundaries for Dawes, Lincoln, or Oakton elementary schools at this time.

The recommendation also calls for the revision to student attendance boundaries for the following middle schools, effective for the 2024-2025 school year:

- | | |
|---------|--|
| ● Chute | ● Nichols |
| ● Haven | ● Addition of a 5th Ward school boundary |

There are no changes being recommended to the middle school feeder pattern. The District recommends the creation of attendance boundaries to assign K-8 grade students, living within the designated area, to the proposed 5th Ward School upon construction.

As outlined in the D65 Student Assignment Planning memo, the District 65 Administration is seeking Board approval to pursue financing and construction of a new school building located in the 5th Ward that would serve students living in the designated attendance area.

In addition, the newly constructed facilities would be home to the Dr. Bessie Rhodes Magnet School community and programming (dual strands of the Two-Way Immersion Program). The magnet school would operate independently from the 5th Ward neighborhood school.

The proposed location of the 5th Ward Campus would be at the existing site of Foster Field (located at Simpson and Asbury Streets). District 65 already owns this land.

District 65 has been exploring various ways to fund the 5th Ward School for over a decade. The District 65 Administration is recommending that the Board approve a resolution to issue Lease Certificates to fund the new construction. The estimated cost of building a new school in the 5th Ward is \$40 million. The annual debt service payments on Lease Certificates are estimated to be \$3,200,000 per year for 18 years.

Transportation savings resulting from the recommended Student Assignment. Overall, the District could save over \$3 million in FY25 and beyond. These funds would be transferred annually to the debt service fund to pay debt service on the \$40M lease certificates beginning in FY2025 through FY2042.

The issuance of lease certificates is a long-term financial commitment by the District that requires financial discipline to assure that the dedicated operating funds from savings in the transportation fund are budgeted annually to pay the debt service. Because the debt service payments are from operating funds, there is no separate tax levy increase for debt service or corresponding increase in taxes to the community.

The closure of Bessie Rhodes is contingent upon the construction of the 5th Ward School. The earliest that the school would close and students and staff would transfer to the new building is estimated to be at the start of the 2024-2025 school year.

With the board's approval the Student Assignment and School Plan, the District will enter into the implementation phase which will occur over the next one and half years. During this phase, the Student Assignment and School Plan would be further reviewed to address staffing needs, student programming, building usage, transition support, and possible further revisions to boundary lines.

The CFO stressed that the cost of bussing is going up astronomically. At the end of the year cost is projected to be \$6.3 million in transportation for this year which may actually be higher. The district contract with the bussing company is expiring at the end of the year. Shortage of bus drivers is also an issue. The cost of the lease is set for the next three years.

Additionally with the cost to repair several of the district's old school building in particular Bessie Rhodes – one of the oldest schools of the district - it makes more sense to build a new school.

The Director of Student Assignment noted that there are community sessions planned for the summer and there will be continued effort to gather community partners including city alder persons to engage in the planning process.

Board members questioned that in the new middle school map Chute students are being bussed -will they be the only ones to be bussed in middle school? The administration team responded that there is a need for potential changes to facility that will help resolve any issues remaining around bussing.

Currently as it is the district can only handle 6,000 students within the buildings although the buildings should be able accommodate 9,000 but the buildings are not used properly – they need to be modernized.

Board members inquired about the process of selling a school building. The CFO explained that when the new school is opened and slowly starting, the district will begin the process of selling the Bessie Rhodes building - the state requires the district to go out to bid, for the highest bidder.

In response to board questions about at what point will the district feel lessening bussing fees, the CFO explained that the transportation cost is based on the number of routes – fewer routes less cost.

The Director of Student Assignment noted that there is an interactive map to reflect the proposed changed, the tool allows anyone to drop and address and see which school boundaries result.

The Director of Student Assignment also noted that in an analysis of all the programs found that there are kids in TWI that are not proximate to where they live. There is thought being put into how to offer programs to the community based on where they live. TWI educators have expressed interest in a two strands of TWI at schools to avoid the feeling of isolation.

The superintendent pointed out that a district is required to review boundry lines every 5 years due to population shifts and new development – the district has lapsed 20+ in this process. He also noted that the best pract is to also conduct a Master Facility Plan (which was also last done in the district over 20 years ago) in order to really understand the demands and opportunity of building a new school. The MFP also allows the district to be creative in making repairs and thinking about the schools.

The board president questioned what or how many capital projects have been done over the past year. The CFO explained in the era of COVID there have been sections of roofing which have been done at several schools, added some office space in Lincolnwood, Installation of secure entrances, and the expansion of two schools just off the top of his head.

The superintendnet further explained that a MFP offeres a tool for equity work. The district needs to prioritizie work of where it is most needed rather than where which school makes the most noise.

Approval of Resolution Adopting Student Assignment and School Plan—

It was moved by *Tanyavuti* and seconded by *Lindsay-Ryan* that:

The Board of Education approve the resolution to adopt the student assignment and school plan in substantially the form presented to the board.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Approval of Lease Certificate— *Elizabeth Hennessy*, Managing Director of Raymond James and *Anjali Vij* partner at Chapman & Cutler, the district’s bond advisor, provided a presentation reviewing the lease certificate financing. Highlighted was the district’s new debt limit which is \$195,996,163 along with a market update. The pesentation reviewed the process affecting a new school noting that in order to build a new school building, per Illinois law the District can either get approval via voter referendum or lease a school. By issuing Lease Certificates a school district may finance a new school building; Lease Certificates are repaid from the operating budget; *There is no tax increase – existing funds must be used for the repayment of the debt.*

The District must annually budget for the debt service payment from its operating funds including but not limited to education, O&M, transportation and working cash funds and transfer the funds to the debt service fund via resolution.

It was described that General Obligation Lease Certificates:

- Are payable from all available funds of the District including tax levies from the education, O&M, transportation and working cash fund, state revenues including corporate and personal property replacement taxes, EBF funds and interest earnings.
- Because the pledge is all available funds it is considered a general obligation of the District, even though there is not a separate debt service tax levy associated with the lease certificates.

- Lease certificates are rated on parity with general obligation bonds; the District's current general obligation bond rating is Aa2.
- Lease certificates are debt and do count against the District's debt limit.
- Depending on market conditions, lease certificates may have slightly higher interest rates than unlimited tax general obligation bonds estimated currently at 0.0%-0.10%.
- The impact of .10% on total debt service over 20 years is estimated at \$465,000 or \$23,230/ year.

In regard to transportation:

- Student reassignment committee recommends neighborhood schools.
- A new school building in the Fifth Ward would allow children living there to walk to their neighborhood school instead of being bussed, saving the District transportation costs.

Estimate on \$40 million lease certificate:

- Because the revenue from student reassignment and savings in transportation will not be available until the new school is opened, interest is capitalized until FY2024/2025 school year.
- The interest rates below on \$40M lease certificates are for tax-exempt, Aa2 rated Illinois bonds plus a .50% interest rate cushion given current market volatility.

It was moved by *Weatherspoon* and seconded by *Lindsay-Ryan* that:

The Board of Education approve the Resolution authorizing and providing for a lease agreement for the purpose of building and equipping a new school building and improving the site thereof, and for the issuance of not to exceed \$40,000,000 General Obligation Lease Certificates (Limited Tax), Series 2022, evidencing the rights to payment under said agreement, providing for the security for and means of payment under said agreement of said Certificates, and authorizing the proposed sale of said Certificates to the purchaser thereof.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Consent Agenda— It was moved by *Hailpern* and seconded by *Kim* that:

The Board of Education accept the recommendations outlined in the attached group motion and approve the:

- *Personnel: Appointments, Leaves and Separations*
- *February 2022 Board of Education and Committee Meeting Minutes*
- *Destruction of February 2020 Closed Session Meeting Minutes*
- *January 2022 Treasurer's Report, List of Bills and Budget Amendment*
- *March 2022 Contracts above \$25,000*
- *Building Use Fees FY23*

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Superintendent contract

It was moved by *Kim* and seconded by *Tanyavutti* that:

The Board of Education approve the Resolution authorizing the Performance Based Superintendent Contract between the Board of Education and Dr. Devon Horton through the 2025-2026 school year and direct the Board President and Secretary to execute the contracts regarding Dr. Horton's employment with the District in substantially the form attached to the Resolution.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Approval of Head Start Grant Application & required attachments

It was moved by **Hernandez** and seconded by *Weatherspoon* that:

The Board of Education approve the Head Start Grant Application and required attachments as presented.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Approval of EHS-HS Program Governance Bylaws

It was moved by *Lindsay-Ryan* and seconded by *Hailpern* that:

The Board of Education approve the Early Head Start/ Head Start Program Governance Bylaws as presented.

Ayes: *Lindsay-Ryan, Kim, Hernandez, Su (virtual), Weatherspoon, Tanyavutti, Hailpern*

Nayes:

Motion passed 7-0

Adjournment— With no further business to come before the board the meeting adjourned at 10:36pm

FYI— Monthly FOIA Report