

**Meeting Minutes  
Community Review Committee (CRC)  
Wilmette Public Schools District 39  
September 14, 2009**

**Committee Members Present:** Maria Baird, Steve Becker, Cassie Black, Kathleen Boehm, Laura Born, Rebecca Boyd, Beth Cormody, Mindy Douthit, Susan Fortier, Debbie Greif, John Gridley, Julia Grosh, Jane Hornstein, Ray Lechner, Daniel Murray, Frank Panzica, Tracy Peacock, Diane Phillips, Pam Resek, Carolyn Sennett, Monica Thompson, John Walker, Denise Welter

**Committee Members Absent or Excused:** Karee Wallach

Additional committee members and teacher representatives to be added as they are chosen.

### **1. Introductory Remarks/President's Report**

Susan Fortier called the meeting to order at 7:05. She introduced herself and welcomed the members of this year's committee. The meeting attendees introduced themselves. Mrs. Fortier noted that Carolyn Sennett is the CRC's Vice President and Maria Baird is the Secretary.

Mrs. Baird passed out several sheets to collect member information, attendance signatures, volunteers for attendance at Board of Education meetings, and snack volunteers for future CRC meetings.

Mrs. Fortier stated that the Minutes from the last June's meeting of the CRC contained an error to member Frank Panzica's name that is being corrected. The minutes from the June 1st meeting were then approved.

### **2. Superintendent's Report**

Dr. Lechner reported that the opening of school had gone very well this year at all six buildings.

The budget deficit issue facing the District last year has been largely eliminated through various efforts including a reduction in administrative expenses. Savings came from, among other things: 1) replacement of the District's old and expensive-to-maintain telephone system with a new less expensive one; 2) renegotiated vendor contracts; 3) better prices through a purchasing cooperative; and 4) an adjustment in class size for 4th grade. Dr. Lechner noted that while 4th grade class size was being allowed to float

up, it would remain within Board of Education guidelines. He stressed that no cuts to student services were being contemplated.

Dr. Lechner stated that with the budget nearly balanced, a tax hike referendum can now be put off, although it remains on the horizon. This is a good thing given current economic conditions. Responding to a question from CRC member John Gridley about the timing of a future District 39 referendum in relation to the upcoming New Trier District referendum, Dr. Lechner explained that after New Trier makes its decision (expected in November), District 39 will move ahead with plans for referendum in a different year to avoid an overlap.

Dr. Lechner discussed the plans for new science facilities at the Junior High to replace the “woefully inadequate” ones that currently exist. The Board of Education is in the midst of studying plans that may include tearing down the library as part of the project. He stated that money for this type of capital project is separate from the operating budget and that the District 39 Educational Foundation is working on ways to raise the money, including the possibly raising private funds.

Dr. Lechner summarized his “Response to the Community Review Committee (CRC) Reports” (Green Schools and 21st Century Learners reports were submitted to the Board of Education in June 2009.) He remarked that this year was about taking many of the recommendations in the Green Schools report and implementing them. He specifically described how each school will collect and document individual school data to form the baseline measurements for a “Biggest Loser” contest, which will begin the following year.

With regard to the 21st Century Learners report, Dr. Lechner explained that the primary goal is to integrate its ideas into a new five-year plan to be developed this year. The previous plan ended in May. He suggested that he would be pleased if the CRC “took up the challenge” of developing the plan as a topic for this year.

### **3. Discussion and Approval of CRC By-Laws**

Mrs. Sennett discussed revisions to the bylaws drafted over the summer and specifically mentioned the changes being proposed to increase membership and allow for members to extend their time of service in instances where their expertise and experience was considered important to the continued work of the CRC. She noted that changes to Articles I-III of the bylaws required the approval of the Board of Education and that the Board would take a final vote on the proposed changes in September. Changes of Articles IV-VII require a vote by the CRC

Mrs. Fortier stated on a related issue that a review of the bylaws had led to discussion about whether final presentations to the Board of Education should happen in May rather than June in order to reduce stress at the end of the school year. The June meeting could then be one to prepare for the following year. Mrs. Laura Born pointed

out that the June Board meeting falls after school is out for the summer and can, therefore, be difficult for CRC members to attend.

CRC members then voted unanimously in favor of amending the Articles IV-VII of the bylaws.

#### **4. Discussion of Potential CRC Topics for 2009-2010**

Susan Fortier opened up the floor to a discussion of topics for this year's CRC to consider. She reminded the group that the work done by the CRC in the past has been very influential in determining the direction of District 39's schools. She asked for feedback on Dr. Lechner's request that the CRC formulate the 5-year plan based on the information in the 21st Century Learners report but also encouraged members to suggest any topic/ideas they have.

Diane Phillips began the discussion by remarking that she supported the idea of extending last year's work of the 21st Century Learners subcommittee to develop the 5-year plan.

McKenzie Principal, Dr. Denise Welter, pointed out that initiatives were already underway at the schools based on the reports and that any additional work the CRC would do this year would further help get things done in this regard. She explained that each of the District's six schools has chosen one of the themes delineated in the 21st Century Learners report as a goal for its SIP (School Improvement Planning) committee. At McKenzie the chosen theme is critical thinking. Dr. Welter and Dr. Lechner indicated they would let the CRC know what the other schools had chosen. It was also noted the work of the Green Schools subcommittee had given the District a clear direction for action on this topic.

Mrs. Pam Rezek, one of the co-chairs of last year's 21st Century Learners subcommittee, remarked that it would be a good idea to dig deeper into one or more of the themes presented in the 21st Century Learners report because the subcommittee had done extensive but very broad research on the topic of 21st century learners last year to identify important themes, but more focused work was now necessary on each individual theme. Mrs. Laura Born, the other co-chair, pointed out that, for instance, one of the themes -- technology -- had been seen in the research to have an affect on another theme -- communication. Modern technology appeared to be diminishing our children's face-to-face communications skills. This issue, she noted, was very interesting and complex and is new to the 21st century. Teachers face new challenges in dealing with it and lots of work could be done by this year's CRC to dig deeper into the issue. Mrs. Rezek further noted that a major concern of last year's committee about how to communicate with parents any relevant new findings and initiative's was an important item that the CRC might want to address this year. Mr. John Gridley, a

teacher at New Trier High School, told the group that outside consultants had also pinpointed communications as key area for improvement at the high school.

Mrs. Fortier suggested that one way to do things this year would be to have two subcommittees -- one that worked on the 5-year plan and one that worked on one or more individual 21st Century Learners themes to get them ready for implementation in the coming years. But she suggested we continue to discuss other ideas at this point and encouraged new members to provide their input.

Mr. Gridley, suggested the topic of benchmarking -- comparing how District 39's schools compare to other top schools in the U.S. and in other countries -- might be a good topic. Several committee members commented on this idea. Mr. Frank Panzica mentioned a *Time* magazine article from some years back discussing "the best schools in the world" and wondered what criteria had been used to collect the list of schools. Mrs. Carolyn Sennett found a website called "The First In the World Consortium" that included 17 school districts in Illinois but noted that the consortium didn't appear to be active any longer. Dr. Lechner explained that he meets with a group of like-minded/ similar school districts across the country to share information on best practices.

Some members wondered if there was information on how well District 39 students did at New Trier versus the other feeder schools. Dr. Lechner stated that high school performance information on District 39 students wasn't currently available but that the township superintendents were working with New Trier to get more detailed data.

Mrs. Rezek commented that the issue of how well our students perform versus students in other districts and other countries is enticing but reminded the group that last year's research strongly indicated that: 1) test score comparisons can be difficult to find and make; and more importantly, 2) success in the 21st century is based on skills not currently being tested for. These were skills such as persistence, communication and creativity.

Mrs. Mindy Douthit brought up the idea of how students can be assessed on skills such as creativity, etc. and commented that the new report card embedded some of these assessment criteria already. Several CRC members questioned how certain skills could/should be taught. Dr. Lechner responded by stressing that the teaching of all such skills must be embedded in the core curriculum and that there would not be a "creativity class" or anything like this.

Several CRC members commented that we should be trying to get our kids passionate about learning rather than worrying so much about test scores and that, furthermore, the definition of "success" is not clear cut. Going back to the issue of parent communication, Mrs. Beth Carmody, stated that communication with parents is a big part of moving away from test scores as the only measure of student success and that enhancing communication could be an important job for the CRC.

Dr. Welter brought up a recent lecture by Tony Wagner, educator and author of the Global Achievement Gap, that was attended by parents and administrators in the District. She noted that he had discussed “seven survival skills” that dovetailed well with the themes identified in the 21st Century Learners report. She suggested that along the lines of Mr. Wagner’s “learning walks”, the CRC might go into the classrooms and see if and how we are already teaching the themes/skills. Mrs. Rezek concurred that in order to do a “deep dive” into any of the them, the CRC would benefit from teacher input.

Dr. Lechner told the group that the District is currently beginning a review of the science curriculum and that it might be very helpful and timely if the CRC looked at best practices in science education. He was asked if he could provide more information for the next CRC meeting about the needs and plans of the committee charged with reviewing the science curriculum.

Finally, when again asked his view on what topics the CRC should take up for the year, Dr. Lechner stated that he was still in favor of the CRC taking up the job of the 5-year plan but would support any of the ideas discussed at tonight’s meeting.

## **5. Concluding Remarks**

Mrs. Fortier explained that the challenge over the next 3 weeks is for CRC members to develop clear and concrete ideas about what topics they want to address this year so final decisions can be made at the next meeting on October 5th. She thanked everyone for attending. The meeting was adjourned at 9:00.