

BATTLE CREEK BOARD OF EDUCATION
Special Meeting
September 18, 2014
5:30 p.m.
Miller Stone Building – Assembly Room

PRESENT - BOARD OF EDUCATION

William Burton
Susan Buckley
Todd Stagner
Art McClenney
Scott Cubberly
Kellie Thomas
Karen Evans

Present – Administration

Dr. Linda Hicks – Superintendent
Deborah Gregory – Executive Director of Financial Services
Dianne Hatley – Personnel Manager
Tim Scott – Manager of Facilities & Operations

MINUTES

The meeting was called to order by President Burton at 5:30 p.m. All board members were present. Approximately 40 citizens were in attendance including school personnel.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The agenda was unanimously approved as presented.

Moved by Ms. Evans, and supported by Dr. Stagner to approve agenda as presented.

Motion approved 7 – 0

OUTDOOR EDUCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

An Assessment overview of the Outdoor Education Center was presented to the board. The assessment started with a brief description of the Outdoor Education Center's deeds including the gifting of land and parcels from W.K. Kellogg Foundation in 1957, 1962, and 1967.

The business plan was then discussed and how innovative programming will offer more reasons to utilize the camp. It was stated that it is really about improving and expanding on what's already at the camp. There were 3 reasons for people to come visit the camp at Clear Lake discussed:

1. Learn- teach academic programs with a STEM focus
2. Stay- Offer family camps. Grandparent camps, family reunions, group camps, band camps, individual cabin, lodge, and dorm stays
3. Gather- Offer weekend nature and recreation events, No Child Left Inside programming, Festivals and music events

It was stated that these academic programs would be aligned with current BCPS programs and partners.

The marketing plan included a marketing analysis that listed potential camp clients, competition and marketing outreach as well as the management and operations structure. The financial strategy, operating budgets and facility investments needed were also discussed.

Program reinvention framework has already been created. These programs would involve research, be STEM focused and be fully aligned with state standards. There were six different comparison camps discussed:

- Sherman Lake, Augusta MI
- Hartley Outdoor Education Center, St. Charles, MI
- Walled Lake Outdoor Education Center, Walled Lake MI
- Wolf Ridge Environmental Learning Center, Finland MN
- Bradford Woods, Martinsville IN
- Camp Joy, Clarksville OH

The comparison showed that Hartley and Walled Lake are run by a school district or their intermediate school district and the other camps have established marketing and fund raising accounts to maintain their camps. BCPS needs to have purposeful programs created as well as fund raising efforts.

Based on all that was reviewed it was noted that with a clear vision of the future, innovative and targeting programming as well as strategic investments the Outdoor Education Center would be sustainable and possibly even profitable.

The assessment of the property was also reviewed. Based on the evaluation of the property it was noted that there are several outdated structures but that those structures were well built and could be renovated. This would also allow for energy efficiency to be improved. Each structure was reviewed and a building assessment as well as the cost to build a new structure versus renovating the old structure was included. The Outdoor Education Center would need 1.668 million within the next year for operating and renovating costs. The total cost needed for all current renovations is around 2 million dollars.

The following is a summary of considerations according to the business plan:

- Executive Director position

- Comprehensive program development and marketing
- Comprehensive Business Plan implementation protocol
- Regular financial and business meetings with new Advisory Committee, Superintendent, BOE committees
- Establish an “Enterprise Fund” within BCPS accounting system to ensure “break-even” operation of OEC
- Electronic reservation system
- Majority of staff through third-party leasing
- Capital improvement dollars set aside annually

The financial summary showed that 1.668 million is needed to open, run and renovate the Outdoor Education Center. This dollar amount includes estimated revenues, operational costs and the capital campaign combined. Currently, the Center needs \$177,000 to operate through the 2014-2015 school year because of an \$83,000 remaining balance from a grant that was not depleted last year. It generally takes \$284,000 a year just to operate the Outdoor Education Center. It was discussed that if the Center is closed it will cost the district \$175,000 the first year and then \$109,000 every year after that to maintain the property. It was also discussed that all students attending camp need to pay the same rate. Currently, BCPS is not paying for their students to attend. It was estimated to be around \$50,000 that was spent last year sending BCPS students to camp. There is also the possibility of selling the farm and one acre of land to offset the cost of operations.

Mr. Cubberly asked how long it would take to align new programming. It was stated that the process should only take months once an executive director is hired.

Ms. Buckley asked if the \$284,000 included the hiring of an executive director, it was stated that the salary was not included in that number.

The Superintendent commented that the Kellogg Company continues to be interested in the Outdoor Education Center but that they have been clear that they cannot be the sole funder of the project and is not making any commitment at this time.

Dr. Stagner asked if other school districts have been asked why they have stopped attending our camp. It was stated that those districts decided to attend other camps such as Sherman Lake because our facilities are outdated. There is a possibility to gain those customers back if updates to the facility and programming are made. Dr. Stagner stated that we need to prove that our programs work so that funding will become easier for the district to obtain.

The Superintendent expressed to the board the need to ensure our students are taken care of. She asked the board to offer another year to give the district time to seek interested parties for funding and program growth.

Mr. Cubberly is interested in viewing how much the property could sale for. He would like the district to consult a realtor before deciding to continue funding.

Ms. Buckley is concerned that the district will miss an opportunity to offer solid STEM education that will enrich our students and offer these vital opportunities.

Mr. McClenney stated that there was a lot of information given and that he personally has no interest in closing the Outdoor Education Center and that he would like to see another year given to work out the kinks.

Ms. Thomas agrees with Ms. Buckley and Mr. McClenney. She stated that the students benefit from camp. She does not want to see it close.

Moved by Dr. Stagner, and supported by Mr. Cubberly to suspend making the decision regarding closing the Outdoor Education Center until the September board meeting to have time to gather more information.

Roll Call Vote:

Mr. McClenney – yes
Ms. Evans – no
Ms. Thomas – no
Mr. Cubberly – yes
Dr. Stagner – yes
Ms. Buckley – no
Mr. Burton – no

Motion Denied 3 – 4

Ms. Evans suggested that waiting until September does not allow enough time because of the start of school.

Moved by Ms. Buckley, and supported by Ms. Thomas to accept the report as presented to the board including the recommendations and to pursue all recommendations as stated in the report allowing the Outdoor Education Center to remain open and running the remainder of the 2014-2015 fiscal year.

Roll Call Vote:

Dr. Stagner – yes
Mr. Cubberly – no
Ms. Thomas – yes
Ms. Buckley – yes
Mr. McClenney – yes
Ms. Evans – yes
Mr. Burton – yes

Motion Approved 6 - 1

PUBLIC COMMENT

Rachel Simmons – Travels from Coloma Michigan to attend Clear Lake Camp bringing her classroom with her. She stated that camp changes lives and she hopes there is a way to save it.

Kelly Blanchard – A Valley View teacher who wished to voice her approval of keeping Clear Lake Camp open. She also read a letter from another Valley View teacher expressing her concern that camp would be closed. Both parties stated that the camp changes lives.

Cindy Cheyne – Stated that Battle Creek Central has cut everything. She stated that her job is in real estate and she is finding it hard to sell BCPS because of these cuts. She is running out of ways to promote the district.

Adrian Bass – Read a letter from Dr. Charles Blackman a Professor from Michigan State University which stated that the Outdoor Education Center is the crown jewel of the Battle Creek Public School District.

Bettina Hasty – Invited all to attend the Outdoor Education Center to see what it has to offer. She stated that she is the current Program Coordinator and that she is currently re-writing the curriculum for the camp and would welcome visitors.

SUPERINTENDENT COMMENTS

The Superintendent commented on the following:

- Currently, the district did not receive funding for After School Programs to be offered at: Urbandale, LaMora Park or Valley View Elementary schools. The district is in the process of writing a grant to assist with the funding of these programs. It costs around \$85,000 a year per building to run these programs. A note will be sent home to parents explaining the current situation.
- The district is well on its way to be prepared to open the doors for the first day of school.
- Opening Day is scheduled for Monday, August 25, 2014 at 8:00 a.m.
- Announced the 1st Annual Wellness Expo that will be held on Opening Day due to the initiatives of Dawn DeLucca.
- Scheduled to be a speaker at the General Session meeting for Kellogg Community College and give Closing Remarks at a United Way event.
- Welcomed Monique Wells new Director of Student Services as well as Jim Sherman the new representative from Battle Creek Enquirer.

BOARD MEMBER COMMENTS

Ms. Evans – read a couple of comments from students who attended Clear Lake Camp: one comment was “I learned I need to have more confidence in myself” another was “Before I went to camp I didn’t like going outside but now I respect the outdoors.”

Mr. McClenney – expressed his enjoyment watching the Marching Band perform. He stated that Ms. Thomas did a great job. He also mentioned attending Michigan Adventure with some district students and wanted to express how well they represented the district.

Ms. Thomas – invited all to attend the Battle Creek Invitational, she stated the Western Michigan University would be performing. The Invitational is on September 27, 2014.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 7:47 p.m.