

**LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT  
810 WEST MARKHAM STREET  
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS**

**MINUTES  
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING  
December 12, 2006**

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District held a special meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, December 12, 2006, in the Boardroom of the Administration Building, 810 West Markham Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. President Katherine Mitchell presided.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:**

Katherine Mitchell  
Charles Armstrong  
Melanie Fox  
Larry Berkley  
Dianne Curry  
Baker Kurrus

**MEMBERS ABSENT:**

Robert M. Daugherty

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Roy G. Brooks, Superintendent of Schools  
Beverly Griffin, Recorder of Minutes

**I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL**

Dr. Mitchell called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. Six members of the board were present at roll call; Dr. Daugherty was absent.

**II. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING**

The meeting was called in response to a petition by members of the community. A copy of that petition is attached to these minutes.

**III. PRESENTATION BY COMMUNITY MEMBERS**

Prior to the presentation by members of the petitioning group, Mr. Kurrus made a motion to suspend the rules to allow discussion, comment and interaction between the presenters and the board. Mr. Berkley seconded the motion. Mr. Armstrong suggested an amendment to the motion to convene a committee of the whole and Ms. Curry seconded the amendment in order to allow interactive discussion. The amended motion **carried unanimously.**

Presenters introduced themselves, made statements of personal perspective, read prepared remarks, and asked questions of the board and administration.

- *Terrence Bolden* opened the meeting by stating that the request for the special meeting was not related to the pending desegregation litigation, but for the purpose of addressing issues related to improved student achievement and opportunities to build better relationships between the community and the board. He stated that strong leaders recognize the importance of diversity of views when making the necessary decisions to improve the LRSD.
- *Dennis Burrow* stated that Little Rock is still a divided community, even after 50 years of school desegregation litigation. He stated belief that there is fear about what is going to happen now that the board consists of a Black majority and he wondered how that will influence the decisions of the board. The media and the community have placed emphasis on the board's membership as a racial issue for 2007. He asked, "What do we want to look like 50 years later?"
- *Xavier Muhammad* introduced himself as a member of Concerned Citizens United and as a parent of children who attend school in the LRSD. His topic of discussion was accountability and how parents must be held accountable for their own children as well as other children in the community. He reminded the board that accountability starts at the top and that they are accountable for ensuring that everything possible is done in the best interest of all children. He assured the board that the racial make up of the board should be irrelevant to parents; what is relevant is that the board deliver on their promises. His question was, "Are there things in place to make sure that we make good on promises made to the community?"

Later in the meeting Mr. Muhammad stated that the problems that exist in Little Rock are evident across the nation; that the way education is delivered to the students does not work for Black students. He suggested bold initiatives to change the curriculum and find something that works with black students.

- *Carol Roddy* reminded the board of their goals - - with the first one being "Students will demonstrate improved achievement." She reviewed achievement data and statistical information taken from the ADE website and published district report cards comparing achievement between Black and White students. She asked the board to define the programs that will improve achievement in the LRSD.
- *Andre Guererro* introduced himself as a patron and member of Concerned Citizens United. He questioned achievement disparities between White, Hispanic and African American students as reported in the state's school report card and asked, "How is staff development implemented in advance of putting programs in place to assist our students?" and "What information are we providing for our parents?"
- *LouEthel Nauden* questioned the reasons for disparities in achievement between Black and White students when they are "sitting in the same classroom." She reviewed a report that included a listing of programs implemented in the LRSD to provide remedial assistance. She asked whether the district is learning which programs are working, which are successful in meeting the needs of the students, and if any are making a significant difference in addressing the achievement disparities? She also stated that it was important to balance staffing at the schools, both racially and by teacher experience and educational levels.

- *Annie Abrams* stated, “Human capital in a global economy is our best defense against ignorance.” She expressed enthusiasm for the goals established by Dr. Brooks when he first arrived in the LRSD - - noting that he set high expectations for the LRSD to be one of the best school districts in the nation. “Education is the mechanism we must use for our own survival.” She asked: “What data does the board have that supports progress toward closing the achievement gap?”

After listening to board member comments later in this meeting, Ms. Abrams discussed the difficulty in getting parents motivated to become involved, noting that many parents are working hard to support their families and aren’t able to be as involved in schools as they would like to be.

- *Joyce Elliott*, chairman of the state legislative facilities oversight committee, provided a personal view of her experiences as a fifteen-year-old “guinea pig.” She was one of a very few Black students hand selected to attend an all White school in a very small Arkansas town. When given the choice to return to the all-Black school in her community, she chose to stay because she thought she would receive the benefit of a better education at the majority White school. Ms. Elliott stated that she was determined to provide facilities resources to the LRSD and she encouraged the board and Dr. Brooks to stand firm on receiving a fair share of facilities funding from the state. She encouraged the board regarding the efforts to build a school in the western part of Pulaski County, stating that “we must assure every parent in the school district . . . that we will provide facilities that are equitable.” She asked: “What do we have in place to ensure that our ten-year plan guarantees each child will be treated equally?” and “How will parents be kept informed?” She closed by stating “Equitable facilities are also a part of closing the achievement gap.”
- *George Blevins* referred to Dr. Burrows comments regarding fear in the community. He stated that the fear should be about losing the intellectual and technological edge in the United States, not about the racial make-up of school boards. “It is time to make sure that every child in the country has an opportunity to have an excellent education.” He stated that the citizens present at this meeting weren’t here to be adversarial, but to offer assistance to in making sure that our children are learning. He offered resources to assist in any way possible with bringing about academic and social improvement in our schools. Since buildings and facilities have an impact on parents’ decisions to send their children to our schools, he asked, “What are we doing to ensure that our facilities are well maintained and equitable?”

Later in the meeting Mr. Blevins reported that Dr. Brooks had asked him to help build more parental involvement in the district, and he asked what could be done to help parents feel more welcome in the schools. He stated his plans to become more aggressive in getting parents involved and encouraging them to feel that they are a part of the school system.

Dr. Mitchell opened the floor for discussion and questions.

- Mr. Kurrus thanked the presenters and addressed several of the points made: He agreed that the achievement gap was troubling, nationally, statewide and within the LRSD. He stated that all board members want to see all kids achieve, and all board members and administrators want to see a narrower achievement gap. He asked the audience to consider what is being used to measure the achievement levels of our students and how a decreasing number of White students, with an increasing number of Hispanic and Asian students, and stable number of African American students

would be measured now and in the future. He quoted a publication by Gary Orfield regarding "resegregation" and white flight, resulting in additional problems in inner cities. He noted that the achievement gap had narrowed slightly in the LRSD, not enough, but small amounts of improvement have been measured. He asked Ms. Nauden and Mr. Guerrero to put aside the racial achievement gap issues and to focus on how our students are doing with the required state standards.

Mr. Kurrus continued, stating that achievement disparity does not in itself denote discrimination; that the achievement gap is impacted more by socioeconomic factors than by race. He restated the importance of eradicating racism whenever possible, but that it was more important to remediate the students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds. "Our efforts need to focus on all under-performing and underachieving students."

Mr. Kurrus briefly reviewed the district's facilities needs, noting that most of the district's facilities dollars have been spent in the central part of the city, in zones one and two, but that the schools in the western part of the city were full and over capacity. He agreed with the comments made earlier by Joyce Elliott, and thanked her for supporting the district in ongoing efforts to increase state facilities funding for the LRSD.

- Mr. Berkley expressed appreciation for the speakers' comments and their tone of cooperation. He stated that "Even though we haven't been successful in completely closing the gap, the board has remained committed to continuing to do whatever it takes to address the problems of low achieving students." He stated that he was encouraged to hear from the public and that the district needs everyone to focus on helping the district to address the problems of low student achievement and to communicate that message to others in the community.
- Ms. Curry expressed concern regarding the major differences in success rates within our schools, comparing students from Magnet Schools to those who attend area elementary schools, including differences between professional development and other resources provided to the staff. She discussed tracking individual student progress from one grade level to the next in order to determine whether current programs are effective.
- Dr. Mitchell reiterated previous remarks regarding her firm belief that the achievement gap would be narrowed significantly by reducing class size in pre-k and kindergarten to 15 students. This would allow teachers to address specific and individual student needs early to provide a firm foundation. She also suggested providing an aide in every classroom and involving the teachers who are implementing the programs in the decision-making to determine which programs they feel are most effective.
- Mr. Armstrong agreed with Dr. Mitchell's remarks and encouraged more parents to become involved in their children's education. He stated that board members had a responsibility to hold the district accountable for action and he encouraged the board and administrators to pull together and to work as one, closing by stating that "A house divided will fall." Later in the meeting, he called for unity and asked that we build high expectations for our students by bringing in members of the community to work together, possibly establishing a task force, to gather input and make recommendations to the board.

- Ms. Fox thanked the audience and the speakers. She referred to an article from the New York Times regarding the NCLB legislation, and the socio-economic factors that impact district success or failure. She encouraged parents and teachers to set high expectations and to let the kids know that they can be anything they want to be.
- Russell Ruck, introduced himself as an operations analyst who attended the Bronx High School of Science. He discussed differences in management style, with the most successful organizations being controlled by “bottom up management.” Regarding lack of parental involvement, he suggested first finding out why they aren’t involved and then addressing that as a starting point.
- Ms. Nauden thanked Mr. Berkley for his positive comments, but expressed concerns regarding the media announcement that was distributed regarding this meeting. She suggested caution when making public announcements that carry a negative tone.
- Ms. Elliott expressed appreciation for Dr. Brooks’ and his vision to make the LRSD the highest achieving urban district in the nation. She thanked him for his commitment to “hope in the unseen,” and stressed the importance of continuing dialogue about setting high expectations and taking the “can-do” attitude to achieve the district’s goals.

Mr. Bolden closed by thanking the board for their time and stating his agreement with Mr. Berkley’s suggestion to continue interaction between members of the community on a continuing basis.

#### **EXECUTIVE SESSION:**

Ms. Curry moved to convene an executive session at 7:40 p.m. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion. The board returned from closed session at 8:10 p.m. and reported that no action had been taken.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

There being no further business before the board, Ms Fox moved to adjourn; Mr. Kurrus seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**. The meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

APPROVED: 01-25-07

Originals Signed by:  
Katherine P. Mitchell, President  
Melanie Fox, Secretary