

School Board Meeting
February 13, 2012
Special Programs Workshop

Attendance: All board members were present

Consent agenda: approved

Special recognition: Jasmine Case-Smith was recognized for her service as student board member. Mr. Wallin recognized part of Jasmine Case-Smith's history in the OHSD.

Morgan Young took the oath of office as new student board member.

Special Programs Workshop:

Dr. Schulte gave a background on OHSD School Board workshops and their purpose. He then talked about Special Education funding. OHSD does not have a local levy to help fund Special Programs. The district needs to consider whether or not to include Special Programs in the upcoming levy. We received two years of federal stimulus money for Special Education and Title I. That funding is gone now. We should not expect any new funding from the federal government for Special Programs.

Dr. Gibbon commented that these are categorical programs. The money designated for these programs can only go to these programs. The idea of the stimulus money was that after two years the economy would have rebounded and then we would have other money coming in to replace those funds. That of course has not happened. We added things but then had to take them away once the funding was gone. Dr. Gibbon pointed out the guiding questions for the audience to consider during the workshop.

Janice Gaare, Director of Special Programs, gave an overview of the OHSD Special Programs. (A copy of the handout is posted on the OHEA website.) We are serving about 750 students in programs that are mandated by public law. The challenge is that federal and state funding is not enough to cover the costs of serving these students. Special programs include Title I, LAP, and ELL. Her overview included the students served, funding sources, and challenges. Ms. Gaare also covered budget cuts that were made in the 2011-2012 school year and OHSD Special Education average caseloads. Paperwork for Special Programs' staff is at an all time high. 20% of the Title funding has to be set aside to cover the cost of bussing students to schools that are not in improvement and for Supplemental Educational Support from private tutoring services. She recognized the accomplishments and dedication of the Special Programs staff members.

Christine Abbot reiterated that the middle schools do not receive funding from Title I and LAP. She stressed the importance of early intervention. She also asked about Title and LAP funding for 11th and 12th grades. Ms. Gaare said that funding was cut this year. Dr. Gibbon said that funding had to be diverted from those programs to keep other programs afloat.

Peter Hunt asked how much we receive for LAP funding currently. The answer was about \$750,000. Peter Hunt commented on the loss of ARRA money and that there was really no expectation of replacement funding for those monies. The loss has not been talked about because it was assumed.

Corey Johnson said that in the past OHSD has gone to the general fund to bolster Special Education. Unfortunately, there is no money left in the general fund to use for that purpose. The board is going to have to consider moving librarians into classrooms to free up funding. Mr. Johnson asked if the required 20% of the funding was being spent. Ms. Gaare and Dr. Gibbon answered that the majority of those funds were being spent. Mr. Johnson asked what additional money from a possible levy might be spent on.

Peter Hunt said that we need to identify where the greatest needs are for funding.

Janice Gaare said that the highest priority would be for additional staffing, particularly Instructional Assistants. She would like to increase IAs' hours so that they would have planning time with the certificated staff members they work with.

Dr. Gibbon also noted the increase in caseloads over the past years and the impact that those increases have on both the students and the teachers. He seconded the need for staffing as the highest priority. Enrollment in the higher needs programs is increasing although overall Special Ed enrollment is decreasing.

Dr. Schulte added that one student may cost \$50,000-60,000 a year but the district receives no extra money for that student.

Christine Cribb asked for a comparison of numbers of Special Education students in our district and in other surrounding districts. Ms. Gaare said that numbers are comparable although we are much high in some areas, such as autistic students.

Christine Cribb also inquired about the number of students who are able to exit the programs after successful interventions. This led to a Dr. Gibbon commenting on the amount of paperwork required for students to enter and exit the programs.

Gary Wallin noted that it often difficult to recruit personnel to fill positions in Special Programs.

Peter Szalai, president of OHEA, made comments on behalf of OHEA members. See his comments posted on the OHEA website.

Dave McCool asked Mr. Szalai for specific recommendations for ways to fund the needs. Peter stated that last year he had provided a list of cuts that he thought could be made that would free up funding for other programs.

Holly Worrell, OHHS Life Skills teacher, gave comments about the importance of representing students with special needs and doing what is best for them.

A grandparent of a special needs student told the history of his grandchild's educational experience. He said that it is imperative that staff and services not be cut. He has voted for every levy but he knows that many people do not. He thinks that it is time for us to go to the government and make them pay to fund education. He thanked all of the special education educators.

Peter Hunt stated that we do go to our legislators to lobby for funding. He wanted the audience to know that the board is trying to get funding. Mr. Hunt noted that it would be helpful if more people, such as families who are passionate about funding, would lobby for funding.

Dr. Gibbon commented that legislators have commented to him that they rarely hear from people who want more funding for education. He stressed that everyone needs to contact their legislators to let them know how important it is to fund education.

An audience member said that many parents do not know who to contact. She said that it would be helpful if the school district would let parents know who they need to comment. She said that we need to make sure that there are teachers to help students with special needs.

Corey Johnson said that what board members could do is run a local levy. He said they would try to do a better job getting information out to parents.

Dr. Schulte said that legally OHSD is not allowed to ask or encourage parents to contact legislators regarding specific issues. The school district can provide contact information for legislators.

Dave McCool, former board member, spoke as an advocate of education. He recommended that everyone in the room bring a community leader to hear the issues that are facing OHSD. This will help garner support for a levy.

An audience member who is a grandparent of a student with special needs endorsed the idea that any funding from a levy be put in increasing staffing for special programs.

Linda Preder, president of PSE and Special Education bus driver, told about driving a regular bus integrating students who have high needs. She stated that it is difficult to drive a bus with students who are difficult. The level of intensity is such that you worry about other students. Linda said that it would be helpful to have assistants on the buses.

An audience member asked about using a buddy system on buses to help on buses. She said that it was used in a district where she previously lived. This can be a win-win situation that can save the district money. Ms. Gaare commented that it is a great system.

Morgan Young, student member, said that she liked the idea of a buddy system. She told about a recent experience that she had at OHHS with a student who has special needs.

Another audience member stated that she had no idea how to help. She was grateful that the Special Ed teacher who works with her student had told her about the board workshop.

Dr. Schulte commented that OHSD is trying to find the best ways to communicate with parents.

Amy Coleman, OHEA lead bargainer and OVE teacher, asked if someone could set up a Levy Information Facebook page. She said that we need to try to get together and be part of the solution. How can we get the information out so we can all work together?

Dr. Gibbon said that there is an existing Facebook page for the levy. As we define what is in the levy, then we will get that information out. He asked the audience if they believed the community would support a levy that included Special Education.

An audience member said that being specific and breaking the information down to educate community members would be important.

Christine Abbott said that she would be happy to visit organizational meetings to help educate the community about the levy.

Peter Hunt said that currently the board is soliciting information on what to include in a levy. Then we will organize a community. He noted that there will be a concerted opposition to a school levy.

Another audience member spoke. She is the parent of three children with autism and she works with PAVE which is an organization that helps parents who have students with special needs.

Bill Weinsheimer, parent of OHSD students and OHHS assistant principal, said that we need to be careful not to have a narrow focus. We need to think about the levy as an opportunity to fund the entire OHSD and not just small, isolated groups. We need to be careful not to pit groups against each other.

Gary Wallin said that he did not think that community did not know the number of students in Special Education programs. He thinks that many people do not realize that Special Programs includes such a large percentage of our students.

Diane Fesler-Macaluso, OHHS transition teacher, said that we are trying to produce happy, productive community members. We need to collaborate with community members but they also need opportunities to interact with their neuro-typical peers. We need to run a levy for ALL of our students.

Larry Falcon, NWMS Special Education teacher, commented that we need to make sure that any levy that is run benefits all students.

Dr. Gibbon handed out contact info for State Legislators, School Board members and OHSD administrators. He also gave a handout with information about local levies.

Future Meetings:

February 21 at 6:00 P.M. – Budget/Levy Forum

February 27 at 6:30 P.M. – Regular Board meeting

March 12 at 6:30 P.M. – Board workshop on pay and benefits