

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES, THE BRANDON SCHOOL DIVISION, HELD IN THE J. L. MILNE BOARDROOM, ADMINISTRATION OFFICE, 1031 - 6TH STREET, BRANDON, MANITOBA, AT 7:00 P.M., MONDAY, MARCH 7, 2011.

PRESENT:

Mr. J. Murray, Chairperson, Dr. L. Ross, Vice-Chairperson, Mr. P. Bartlette, Mrs. P. Bowslaugh, Mr. D. Karnes, Mr. G. Kruck, Mr. M. Sefton, Mr. M. Snelling, Mr. K. Sumner

Secretary-Treasurer, Mr. G. F. Barnes and Recording Secretary: Ms. S. Bailey.

Senior Administration: Dr. D. M. Michaels, Superintendent, Mr. G. Malazdrewicz, Associate Superintendent, Mr. K. Zabowski, Assistant Secretary-Treasurer.

CALL:

The Chairperson called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. and referred to the Call.

The meeting had been called for the purpose of considering the following:

a) Public Budget Feedback Presentations

The Chairperson reported on the meeting with Dr. Gerald Farthing, Deputy Minister of Education held earlier in the day in Winnipeg regarding the Division's position on the proposed Tax Incentive Grant (TIG). He noted the Department advised that there is no new money available. Mr. Murray explained how the base line for the TIG is arrived at across the Province. He noted the Government had doubled the TIG for the Brandon School Division on budget day, however, given the needs and challenges of the Division the Board did not feel they could accept the TIG. He noted the Government did confirm they are committed to working with the Division in the future and offered "services in kind" for EAL teacher training and other similar resources. Mr. Murray stated four other Divisions in the Province have also asked for more TIG money.

Before proceeding with public feedback presentations, the Chairperson reminded all present of the time limit for presentations and confirmed that the Board would not be responding to any presentations at this meeting.

The following individuals made presentations regarding the Proposed 2011/2012 Budget:

A) Mr. Darren Hardy, President, Brandon Teachers' Association began his presentation by introducing the Vice-President of the Manitoba Teachers Society to the Board of Trustees. He noted due to the seriousness of the topic, high school teacher prep time, the Association had decided on only one voice to speak on behalf of all teachers this year and therefore the Finance Chair would not be making a presentation as has been done in the past.

Mr. Hardy noted the conversations regarding the process to reduce high school teacher prep time had spawned more questions than answers, including the following:

- 1) "Do high school teachers have the right amount of prep time and contact time? When was the last time the people working at this level were asked this question? Why are Brandon High School teachers expected to do more than their counterparts in similar urban high schools? Why should students not have the same opportunity in our 3 high schools as in Winnipeg?" Mr. Hardy referenced a chart comparing the amount of high school prep time Divisions across the Province receive compared to the Brandon School Division.
- 2) "What about the K-8 Level? BTA believes that the proper question here is the comparison of contact time, not prep time. Contact time levels in Brandon are very similar across levels." Mr. Hardy referenced a chart showing samples of contact time across the Division in both K-8 schools and high schools.
- 3) "How will this reduction of prep time affect the relationship between BTA and BSD? A relationship is only valuable when 2 sides are willing to listen to each other, and BTA has spoken out loud and clear on this issue. Many trustees have mentioned that respect between BTA and BSD is extremely important to ensure the best possible level of education for students in Brandon School Division."
- 4) "How does a decision such as this affect bargaining? Contact time and work load have been on the bargaining table in the past, and BTA would like the opportunity to continue to establish the parameters of working conditions through this established process."
- 5) "Vocational Teachers will be impacted greatly by a decrease in prep time. Many of these teachers are working on a different teaching certificate and are only able to teach within their area of expertise, and are not able to teach an academic class."
- 6) "A decrease in prep time will have a negative impact on the time that teachers have to spend on the extra activities that are so important to students and school atmosphere at the high school level."
- 7) "There has been no consultation with any member of BTA on this matter. The hope of the BTA is that we can work together to provide the best education opportunities for the students as possible."
- 8) "The work that teachers do with education students as student teachers within their classrooms is incredibly valuable for the student teachers, co-operating teachers and high school students alike. The effectiveness of teachers to help prepare these university students would be severely impacted in a negative way if prep time decreases."

Mr. Hardy noted the current level of prep time high school teachers receive is needed to continue to offer educational opportunities at their current level. It is not an area to look for efficiencies. Reducing prep time would reduce the quality of education students receive at the high school level.

Mr. Hardy concluded his presentation by noting the Board still has time to change the budget while still providing high school teachers with the current level of prep time.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Hardy for his presentation on behalf of the Brandon Teachers Association. Trustee Kruck thanked the Association for clarifying the difference between prep time and contact time. Trustee Ross requested clarification regarding where the Association received their information regarding contact time.

B) Mr. Deveryn Ross, concerned parent, noted several months ago all trustee candidates had been asked the question “What is your position on increasing school taxes?” He noted everyone at the table had said they would raise taxes to meet the needs of the Division. He further noted that those candidates who had said they would reduce taxes had lost the election. Therefore, he felt the current Board was keeping their promise to the public. He noted the budget had already gone through two sets of cuts. He confirmed the Division’s budget process was exemplary. The volume of information provided to the public was very valuable. He also felt the proposed budget was in the best interest of all students in the Division.

Mr. Ross noted that the Tax Incentive Grant appeared to be designed to divide the community. It causes the Board to look at making further cuts and fight with their teaching staff. He noted it is pure politics and in the end it is the students who suffer. He asked who represents the students. Mr. Ross felt 5.3 % is a small tax increase compared to increases over the last five years.

Mr. Ross referenced numerous articles in the Brandon Sun which confirmed the “divide and rule” approach that has resulted from the Government’s proposal of the TIG. He congratulated the Board on rejecting the TIG noting the budget is about the children. He again confirmed the budget had been through two rounds of cuts and therefore what was left was what was most important to the Division. He encouraged the community to stop fighting amongst itself and to start fighting together for the funds needed to educate students in the Division. He confirmed this is the budget that the public said they wanted at the public forum and warned that should the Board make any further cuts they will not be able to catch up next year as City taxes will be going up.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Ross for his presentation.

C) Vanessa Hamilton, concerned parent, noted she supported the Board’s decision to not take the TIG. Needs vary among communities and differ from year to year, therefore she did not think it was conducive to compare the decision of one school division against another as to whether or not they accepted the TIG. She felt the taxpayer needed to change their attitudes towards funding children’s education with property taxes. As a community, she felt taxpayers needed to share the role in ensuring the learning and well-being of children so that they would grow into responsible, productive adults. She did not think taking the TIG should be at the expense of providing quality education. She confirmed spending taxpayer money on today’s youth will reduce future costs in healthcare, crime, addictions and unemployment. It will address labour shortages and ensure there will be skilled employees in the future. It will mean more young people stay in school instead of committing crimes.

She congratulated the Board on additional funding requests for early childhood initiatives such as full day kindergarten. She felt it provided an increased opportunity to develop

literacy and social skills while providing parents with stability and economic benefits related to childcare. She hoped all Brandon residents would appreciate this important project.

Ms. Hamilton noted Board members have defended the budget even though the chairperson noted he would rather take the Province up on its TIG offer. She inquired as to whether or not the chairperson could be non partisan in this situation given that he is seeking the NDP nomination for Brandon West. She asked the Chairperson if he would be stepping down as a trustee once March 22 to pursue this political opportunity and let a new trustee represent the best interests of children and their families.

The Chairperson thanked Ms. Hamilton for her presentation and noted he will not be stepping down as trustee, but will be taking a leave of absence once the writ is dropped. Mr. Barnes, Secretary-Treasurer, confirmed there is nothing in the Public Schools Act which states a trustee must vacate their position when pursuing another political avenue.

D) Mr. Robert Knight, taxpayer. As Mr. Knight was not in attendance, his presentation was removed.

E) Nathan Peto, General Manager, Brandon Chamber of Commerce began his presentation by thanking the Trustees for meeting with the Chamber's Board of Directors during their joint committee meetings and budgetary consultations. He noted the meetings have been informative and helped the Board understand the funding structure and challenges facing the education system.

The Chamber encourages Trustees to focus additional spending on assisting new immigrants with their transition into the educational system. They also support the funding of early years reading and numeracy support, noting initiatives in these areas have proven to be important investments resulting in significant measurable success. However, the Chamber also cautions moderation in spending and tax increases as a whole reminding the Board that Chamber members pay taxes twice.

The Chamber referencing the TIG offered to the Division felt it was a fair offer that allowed for over a million dollars of new spending on important areas while mitigating the need for a tax increase. Mr. Peto encouraged the Board to seek further information on the TIG formula from the Province of Manitoba.

Mr. Peto concluded his presentation by asking the Board to reconsider their stance on the TIG offer and seek further funding while trimming their new spending to accommodate it.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Peto for his presentation. Trustees inquired as to whether or not the Chamber would be interested in supporting the Division in lobbying the Government should the opportunity arise. Mr. Peto noted the Chamber has participated in joint lobbying on the Division's behalf when addressing such government departments as labour and immigration.

F) Mr. Robert Janz, concerned taxpayer, noted that his taxes have risen substantially over the past few years. He provided the Board with the assessment on his property for 2008, 2009 and 2010 and noted his school tax portion has increased by 10.19% during the past year. He confirmed he has attempted to address this situation

with the Assessment Branch, the City of Brandon and now the school division and has not been able to obtain a clear understanding as to why his tax bill does not coincide with the tax increase the City and School Division have promised.

The Chairperson thanked Mr. Janz for his presentation. Trustee Snelling asked Mr. Janz if his property assessment had increased as a higher assessment would lead to higher taxes. The Secretary-Treasurer explained how assessment increases affect the taxes.

Mr. Barnes, Secretary-Treasurer, noted that the Board had received four letters from the public regarding the proposed budget as follows:

A) Joanne Brooking, February 26, 2011, asking the Board to give more thought to the proposed tax hike proposal. In times of cutbacks, rising costs for groceries, gasoline and hydro, it is ridiculous that the Board would consider such an increase. As a retired teacher she knows what it takes to educate a child, but as a taxpayer she is on a fixed income. There were times when teaching that she wished things were easier, but managed and believes she gave all students a good education. She also expresses concern with the possibility of flooding this year and the cost to the taxpayer. She does not feel that education should be placed on the backs of taxpayers and asks what was wrong with the government proposal? She asks the Board to consider sharpening their pencils.

B) Lindsay Metruk, March 2, 2011, expressing dissatisfaction with the Board's decision to cut prep time for high school teachers. She notes she left a prestigious employer to take a position as the AP Biology teacher at Vincent Massey and during her time at Massey her week days consist of a minimum of 10 hours at school. She notes this time was spent preparing labs, calling or meeting with parents, creating tests or exams, working on lessons for the next day, helping students, marking tests and assignments, supervising the bus students, and putting together her resources so that she was prepared for students. She references the number of evenings and weekends she also spent at school. She notes every year teachers are burdened with more work, the amount of overtime expected increases without the pay other professions receive. She feels students will be impacted by the Board's decisions. The Division will lose some of the best teachers and cause others to choose between their jobs and families. She hopes the Board will take the perspective of a teacher or better yet a student, and give some serious thought to your proposal.

C) Marcia Hamm Wiebe, March 7, 2011, noting she has been following the events of this budget and is concerned that the people of Brandon are being manipulated by the Province in this situation with the TIG process. She agrees that the Province should increase the funding to the students of the division. Playing the Division against the Department is wrong and it is the students who end up losing. All budget items were discussed during the consultations and are needed programs in the division. She is willing to invest her tax dollars in the education of future generations of the community. She feels the TIG process distracts the community from the real needs of students and confuses the public about what is actually being offered to the Division. She asks the Board to continue to push the Province to fund the Division at the needed levels and not give into manipulation.

D) M. Main, S. Newman, M. Cochrane, S. Carnegie, T. Munn, March 7, 2011, noting for seniors and people on fixed incomes the proposed 5.3% tax increase is crippling as most had homes that were reassessed considerably last year. Pensions won't rise to cover this increase. Listen to the public voice and practice some restraint. She asks the Board to take the grant offered and defer some of these requests until the upcoming year.

Dr. Ross – Mr. Kruck

That the Board do now resolve into Committee of the Whole In Camera.

Carried.

IN COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE IN CAMERA

- a) Confidential #1 regarding CUPE negotiations was reviewed and discussed.
- b) The 2011/2012 Budget day discussions were referenced in relation to correspondence circulated.
- c) A Board operations matter was discussed at length.

Mr. Karnes – Mr. Sumner

That the Committee of the Whole In Camera do now resolve into Board.

Carried.

IN BOARD

25/2011

Mr. Karnes – Mr. Sumner

That Confidential #1 presented at this meeting be agreed to.

Carried.

Mr. Sumner – Mr. Kruck

That the meeting do now adjourn (9:30 p.m.).

Chairperson

Secretary-Treasurer