

Secaucus Public School District

Superintendent's Report

The Public BOE Meeting of May 27

To: All district staff

Date: June 7, 2010

The Public BOE meeting of May 27 reflected the best of times, when it provided an opportunity for the educational community to honor our "Teacher of the Year" recipients. These four teachers represent those traits of caring and dedication to the profession that scores of teachers throughout our schools possess. It was gratifying to see so many teachers come out in the evening to honor their colleagues.

The meeting also reflected the worst of times when people from within and outside of the educational community used a public forum to air issues and concerns, either out of ignorance, refusal to follow established SEA contractual procedures, or worse, out of personal or political animosity.

Perhaps, the district needs to remind everyone, from time to time, that in each of the state's 600 districts, there are laws and procedures that control the governance of a public school system.

A Board of Education, elected or appointed, has two functions. The first is to provide and implement the Policies or laws that govern the district. The second is to provide fiscal oversight. District policies, while in some ways unique to Secaucus, are aligned with statutes adopted by the Department of Education and the State of New Jersey.

It is a common mistake by some parents, residents and even staff to assume that issues involving students, teachers and staff are resolved by the Board at a public meeting. In fact, quite the opposite is true. The Board is prevented, by a legal separation of powers, from involvement in the day-to-day management of the schools. Any issues brought to their attention must in turn be reported to the Superintendent, who by law, in concert with school administration, seeks equitable resolution.

Additionally, there is an established set of procedures, agreed upon by management and labor, for the resolution of staff issues. The first step is to bring any problem to an immediate superior. If unresolved, the issue would be taken to the building principal. If neither party were satisfied, they would seek redress with the Superintendent. In addition, staff always has the option to utilize the grievance process, which also triggers a pre-determined series of procedures.

While it may make for interesting forum postings and sell newspapers, the business of a public school system is, by law, conducted by administrators with the education, experience and certification to manage a school district. The SEA leadership has the obligation to guide its members through the contractual process for addressing concerns or filing grievances. It has continually failed to do this, opting for a public forum.

In that context, I must attempt once again to clarify some lingering confusion. I challenge the SEA president to produce one written or televised quote wherein I said no jobs would be lost as a result of the 2.6 million dollar cut to the 2010-2011 budget. The public was well aware of my assurances that if the budget passed, there would be no cuts to non-mandated programs such as pre-school, kindergarten, athletics, etc. There were no budget related reductions to staff. I was assured by building principals that all transfers or building reassignments were discussed with staff prior to any such moves. Yet, Mr. Anderson continues to call me a liar in public and through the press, even during my absence from the district during a bereavement leave when I had no opportunity to respond. Bullying tactics on issues with no factual basis are cowardly.

I am pleased that the parents and residents, who passed the budget by a large margin, found cause for celebration in how Secaucus escaped virtually unscathed from the state's unprecedented cuts that devastated many districts. It is sad that the SEA leadership and a handful of malcontents with political agendas seem intent on snatching defeat from the jaws of victory and causing further divisiveness and confusion about the effectiveness of the Board and administration.

In my opinion, it is becoming obvious that this public posturing, and these continued attempts to discredit the administration, business administrator and board attorney, are pre-cursors to what promises to be very difficult salary and benefit negotiations, given the struggling economy.

Beyond following well-established points of law, those in the educational community are, and should be, held to higher standards. We should conduct what we do, particularly in a public setting, to set examples for students in respect, empathy, civility, honesty, and collaboration. As professionals entrusted with a community's most valued possessions, educators must strive to follow the recently enacted legal guidelines for educational professionals.

Cynthia Randina
Superintendent of Schools