

**Minutes of the School District 89 Maywood-Melrose Park-Broadview
Board of Education Special Meeting
March 30, 2010
1111 Washington Blvd., Maywood, IL 60153**

The Special Session of the Board of Education was called to order at 6:14 p.m.

I. Roll Call

Present: Diggs, Neely, Rivers, Rivers Jr., Urso

Absent: Anguiano, Gustello

II. Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag

The Board led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance.

III. Presentation

Pres. Urso: The purpose of the meeting is to provide information on the state of District 89's financial situation. The District is facing crossroads in many areas, most importantly the finances. We need to keep the District open. We, and many districts across the state, face difficult decisions. We want to make sure the community understands what it's about. This process started a year ago and continued this year. This is the fourth open meeting we've had. No decisions have been made, other than the items voted on at the last Board meeting, which was a reduction in teaching staff. That was a very unfortunate thing to do, but we have to keep our schools open. If we can't turn things around at the state level, our hands are forced. This is our fifth meeting to explain what is happening to the community. Washington School is in middle of Maywood. Melrose Park School is in middle of Maywood. We have our financial consultants, PMA, here to give a presentation. We need you to understand the financial history of the District and how we came to this point. We want to keep these doors open for our children. We have a moral obligation to educate the children and obligation to keep schools open.

Mr. Rivers Jr: Will the other Board members be able to address the audience?

Pres. Urso: Yes.

PMA Representative Tammy Beckwith Schallmo introduced herself and her colleague, **Steve Miller.**

Mrs. Schallmo: We have worked with District 89 to look at its financial position, past, present and future. (She turned the microphone over to Mr. Miller.)

Mr. Miller: I will present a summary of financial projections for District 89. We work with over 150 districts with these financial projections. We model these different revenue projections based on assumptions provided by information they give us. All the districts we're working with in Illinois are making difficult decisions. This graph (PowerPoint presentation) shows your current budget and where your revenue sources come from in District 89. Property taxes comprise 21 percent. The largest source of revenue is general state aid - unrestricted funding, comprising about \$30 million or 58 percent of the District's revenues - plus another \$3.5 million in categorical dollars, or grants. Another 10 percent of your district's revenues come from the federal government, which is grant-related and targeted toward specific students.

Mr. Miller: Here are some assumptions going forward. Your property taxes are constrained by a tax cap which has been in Cook County for 15 years and which ties the growth in revenues to the rate of inflation. We know this year's rate of inflation and next year's. Your revenue will grow by one tenth of one percent this year, and by 2.7 percent next year. New construction gives additional revenue growth, but we don't see a lot of that in your communities. We expect only a \$150 dollar per child increase in general state aid. Also, for next year, they've projected no more new money for state funds. The foundation level for general state aid per student is flat. Federal revenue dollars to the District will be flat. Next year, we project flat revenue dollars in state and federal funding.

Now I have a chart (PowerPoint presentation) that shows how the District spends money. Salary costs are 58 percent of its spending, with benefits being another 14 percent. The next largest cost is purchased services, contracted out services like buses, food service, etc., which is 14 percent of your spending. Assumptions going forward, on the expense side, are another 2 years with the current MEA (Maywood Education Association) contract from FY2013 to FY2015, which calls for a 3 percent base increase, plus a step increase for salaries. Benefits are 10 percent annual increases in health care. For the projections for the Education Fund and all the operating funds combined, let's start with the current fiscal year on the left (of the chart). Expenditures exceed revenues by just under \$1.7 million dollars. We are looking at a deficit next year of \$3.8 million, and that deficit would grow as expenses exceed revenues.

This would not include any cuts approved at the last Board meeting. The next slide shows the Fund Balance. Next year it would be in a negative position of \$11 million, which is offset by what is in the Working Cash Fund. Next year it would be \$14.7 million. Next (slide) is the Operating Fund projections. You have a deficit in the budget in other funds this year. Here you are looking at a \$2.2 million deficit this year, assuming you collect all the revenue you projected including state revenue. Currently, you have \$16 million in the Working Cash Fund, which is loaned out to other funds to keep them afloat. By FY2012, the year-end Fund Balance is a \$5.2 million deficit. For the financial profile score, this is a metric created by the state to measure a district's health. For the last five years, we've been in the second lowest category, which is a financial early warning from the state.

Mr. Rivers Jr.: When I came on the Board in 2003, we were on the financial watch list. We came off that list in 2005. We have not been made aware of our name on any of these lists until recently.

Mr. Miller: Any district gets a score. In the past, you were either on it or were not. Now, you get a score. You've been on financial early warning for the last five years.

Ms. Neely: Our staff has told us for the last four years that we were not on the early warning list. This is the first time I, as a board member, am learning this. We were told we were in the higher category.

Pres. Urso: I believe we were told we were off the watch list. We never got off the early warning list. This is a new system this year. When our staff said we were not on the watch list, that was correct. Now, with this news we have been on early warning, which is a different category.

Mr. Miller: This score is in our audit each year.

Ms. Neely: I'm saying that staff told us we were not on the early warning list. I want correct information and don't want to come into a crisis situation and find out it is different from what I was told for the last four years.

Pres. Urso: I know emotions are running high. It is not productive if we argue with each other. We need to know what is going on now. This is the history. We have people come here to present to us. It is to inform us what decisions we have to make at this point. We are here to get the word out. If Board members have questions, we will get answers from our staff. We need to operate in good faith with each other. What is at stake is our children. I taught in this District, at Roosevelt, Irving, Lexington and Garfield schools. I have a vested interest in this District. We need to pull together and make good decisions for our children. Thank you.

Mr. Miller: To finish with this year's graph, based on this, you would remain in the early warning category. However, with the decisions you made last month, you'd move to the watch list in two years. Scenario 1 includes reductions that were approved at the March 18th board meeting. Scenario 2 includes the March 18th reductions, state revenue adjusted to Governor Quinn's budget proposal which is a \$450 per student reduction in the general state aid foundation level, and other reductions in other programs in the 13 to 25 percent range. In Scenario 1, you'd cut the deficit to \$1.2 million. But going forward, you would still go into deficit spending in the next several years. If you are on a watch list, doesn't mean take over by the state but is moving in that direction. If you look at Scenario 2, this assumes there is a billion dollar hole in the state budget. So the billion of cuts at the state level, you'd look at a deficit of \$4.5 million in the Education Fund, and would grow each year going forward. By June 30, 2011, you would face a \$5 million deficit and the financial watch list by 2011. The trend in all those scenarios is negative.

Pres. Urso: Thank you. On our website, you have the opportunity to write questions and your questions will be answered. Now, we will go into our question and answer session. Originally, to accommodate the large audience, we had planned to have people write in questions and answer to the best of our ability,

and post the answers on the District's web page. I understand some were not comfortable writing their questions to submit. So you can address us at the podium.

Rivers Jr: The Board was not aware of that. When was it decided that the questions should only be written in? It has not been discussed with any of us. Who made that decision?

Pres. Urso: I would like to answer. I sat down with the interim superintendent to discuss what would be the best way to get our community to give us questions so that we could get answers. We thought if they wrote it in, everyone could see it on the website. So, those who are not here would have an opportunity to see it. It was brought to my attention via our Board members that some people would like to speak. The Board will acknowledge that. Unfortunately, we have to limit the time, as we do at all Board meetings to three minutes. We'll start with those who wrote in. Please understand this is informational; we wanted to let you know what is going on. There will be no decisions made tonight. They will be made at Board meetings. They'll be on the agenda, which is posted. If you have questions, you can come to Board meetings or call the District office. The first question is from Mr. Mobley. (He is a 35-year teacher at Washington School, who is now retired):

Mr. Gene Mobley: I'm not just here for a joke. I served for nine years as a student here, and taught reading, English and coached for nearly 35 years. This is not a joke when I am standing here. My first question is: Why isn't Ms. Gustello here? Please don't say she had a previous engagement. She's not here. She has worked in the District for more than 30 years as a teacher, a principal at Stevenson, curriculum director and assistant superintendent. If her brilliant ideas didn't work then, why would they work now? For the past 30 years, we have simply been hood-winked. Washington School is a home school. It was the only school for blacks during the '30s and '40s. I don't trust you to do the research. Let us do our own research. We have been bamboozled. It's time for all of us to stop telling on each other and simple plantation-mentality all over again. Thank you.

Pres. Urso: Dorothy Lange Thomas?

Mrs. Thomas: No. I don't want to speak.

Pres. Urso: Betty Jane Jordan?

Mrs. Jordan: My first question is, this is the second year I've been involved in attending the meetings. I want to know why the young African-American teachers who came here to teach and why they're the first ones (to be laid off). I'm interested in knowing how much we paid the consultant to do the financial profile. How many teaching positions would have been saved if we didn't hire the consultant? At the Main Office, how was the distribution of the cuts made? Rev. Meeks did a voucher program for part of Chicago for special education needs. I'm thinking if District 89 can't service our students, maybe we need to look into a voucher program.

Pres. Urso: To answer your question about our consultants, that's in our audit. You wanted to know about the teachers laid off. Those are decisions that are out of our hands. If we have a reduction-in-force, to be fair, as other districts have done, they must do it by probationary teachers and, if they are needed later, they will be called back. There is a call-back system. Check the website for further answers.

Mr. Rivers Jr.: Ms. Jordan, the proof is in the pudding about the quality of teachers brought back is how they'll be brought back. Most will probably be called back. The question is the manner in which they're called back. We have to make sure it's quality teachers so that it's not the favorite teachers.

Pres. Urso: The decision will be made by the Board, based on what class size looks like, how many teachers are needed, how many classrooms there are and our budget. We'd like to keep all our programs intact. We'd like to not make changes. If we don't live in reality, we will not be able to keep the District open. I don't think anyone will say they're not committed to the kids. We will do our due diligence as a Board to make sure we have.

Ms. Neely: The lady asked about how many positions at our 906 Walton building were cut. We cut two positions, really only one. The other retired.

Pres. Urso: Pastor Sykes?

Pastor Sykes: I've been pastor 48 years at Second Baptist Church. I don't have any set of questions. I'm 86 years old. I was in New Orleans when I was six years old. Suddenly, they didn't have more money in New Orleans. I don't need to ask why you don't have money. This country has money all the time. Suddenly, Cadillac was broke. I got enough money to run the schools. What is wrong with this

community? We have money. We can run the school. My parents were here in Maywood in 1919. These are a lot of lies. We got plenty of money to run the school. In Maywood, there is a street named after me - Wallace W. Sykes. The Post Office is named after me. I want to share with you what we are upset about is the dishonesty in America. Be fair. We have dishonesty in the schools. I'm willing to put everything in it. My son was in Vietnam, when the going got tough.

Ms. Nicole Thatcher: My question, how are they going to close Washington School if we're a choice school? And then, they said they'll fire 30 to 40 people and now they say they'll fire 140 people.

Pres. Urso: There has been no decision, despite the rumor, to close Washington School. Also we are constrained by deadlines, so we have to keep our financial options open. We had to operate on the scenario that our general state aid will be cut by the state, so it's better to cut probationary teachers, put our house in order and then call them back. Our decisions are made on keeping the schools open and paying our staff. We had to let teachers know by a certain date, and then we can call them back. This is not happening in a vacuum. This is happening all over the state.

Mr. Rivers Jr: Excuse me. Although President Urso is correct that no decision made to close Washington School, at our last Board meeting, our staff presented us with a recommendation to close Washington School. Had we come to a consensus two weeks ago, Washington School would be closing now. They wanted us to vote on it. It wasn't on the agenda.

Pres. Urso: First of all, if, in fact - and it is not exactly true that we said we were going to close Washington School - if you check the agenda, there was nothing on the agenda stating we were going to close Washington School. We are looking at all options. One may be to close a school. That has not been decided, nor has which school been decided.

Ms. Neely: While we are on that topic, let's be very clear. I have the agenda right here from our last Board meeting. On that agenda, Item 18 - Approval of Cost Containment Recommendations - that list, which the public did not get at that time and I, as a Board member, did not get until closed session, it was on that list for us to close Washington School. You can say what you want. A recommendation was made to us on March 18 and we didn't come to a consensus so we didn't vote on it that day.

Pres. Urso: First of all, a school was not named.

Ms. Neely: I have it right here. It says the closure of a school building would provide a substantial savings to the District. There are other schools that could accommodate the students if a smaller building were closed. The recommendation was to close Washington as it would be most physically feasible option, providing a cost savings, but we never got a break down of the cost savings.

Pres. Urso: We were in closed session. You have to give me equal opportunity. You can't buy the rumor and sell the fact. This is what is happening. No decision was made for Washington School. Our administration gave us an option. You need to hear this.

Ms. Kay Sorenson: I'll make this very clear. My home school is Garfield so I'm on this side of the tracks. In July this Board, or whoever was on this board, passed a budget on a deficit reduction plan not required at this time. It is \$1.9 million in the hole and you come to us now and tell us it's a deficit of \$3.8 million? As a taxpayer growing up here, 45 years, and you have the audacity to come back and tell me, 'Well, staff lied.' Well, when you get done firing staff, eventually there is an election. And maybe this time it will not be Melrose Park out-voting Maywood. Hopefully, it will be Maywood out-voting Melrose Park. I'm also looking at the 2010 salary benefit report: Former Superintendent Thea Perkins' compensation was over \$200,000. There are nine administrators whose salaries are listed at over \$100,000. My child goes to a private school and is fortunate. If you close those schools, you have to shuffle those students to the other eight schools.

Pres. Urso: The Board has not decided to close any school.

A large group of students from Washington School gathered at the microphone. One asked: Why are you trying to shut us down? You're trying to make us seem dumb.

Board Member Johnny Diggs: I applaud Principal Boyd and his staff for doing a wonderful job. As all know, this process has been brought about to provide transparency. This information is on our website. Not only is the financial information on our website, but the academic information is for all of our District. Washington is a 'Choice School,' one of 45 selected throughout the state for its past several years of academic improvement. Another concern I have to all those who are here: our community has

suffered and perished for the lack of knowledge. This process has been put in place for all to see where the District is. We need your input, insight, experience. To the students here: I would like everyone to please give them the applause they deserve.

Student Diante Holden: We put a lot into this school, from kindergarten to eighth grade. Why not close down the schools that really need to close? If you sent Washington kids to Irving, that will create more problems for the principal. Kids might not get along.

Student Jimmy Walker: How has your community reached out to the public to keep them informed?

Mr. Diggs began to respond when **Ms. Neely** asked: Mr. Diggs, are you running the board meeting now?

Board Member Diggs: Jimmy asked a question about how the board is keeping the community informed. This process was developed prior to my coming on the Board. This was started a few years ago. This is a process to be a Town Hall meeting, have participants come to the meeting, submit questions to the board to be addressed. I would hope that all our communities, which collectively have 5,500 students in the District, can get along. This recommendation even to host Town Hall meetings in the village of Maywood and in the village of Melrose Park came from a parent in the PTA.

Student Asia Delasantos: I just got here this year. We, as a whole group, got here and we want to do something for ourselves. We want to stay here on this street and be here for the rest of our lives and not go anywhere.

Student Donald Glover: I am the student body president at Washington School. Isn't it true that you're only closing a choice school so the government can keep funding failing schools?

Board Member Diggs: These are recommendations and the recommendation to close this or any other school is just that, a recommendation. We asked the administration to come back to the Board with other recommendations besides school closure. If you have to do the math to find how to cut \$3.8 million from a budget, the state is cutting their funding to schools, including this District. The recommendation of potentially closing a school only comes to a savings of \$1.5 million. We're potentially facing a \$5 million to \$9 million deficit. The Board collectively asked the staff to do more homework and come up with other recommendations. We understand why parents and students are concerned.

Ms. Wanda Sharp: This is a very trying time in the State of Illinois because funding is short everywhere. I have a few questions to the consultant. When I looked at the screen as you talk, I heard lots of assuming. You assume we'll be on the watch list in 2012. You assume. You have to give them a chance. You cannot assume and close down any school. To the Board: How do you target what schools to close? We have got a total of the numbers of students in the schools. We need to divide it up and see what each school is doing. This is an historical school and a lot of schools are historical. You can go in the lobby and look at different things on the walls. My thing is, when you come to a Board, the only thing you have is your word. So when you make a suggestion about closing a school, it should not be done behind closed doors. I applaud you for having this, but it's after the fact. We have a problem in District 89 and across the U.S. in education where funding is being cut. How do you determine when, what you cut, why you cut? Your next meeting is in Melrose Park. Why couldn't they be a combined meeting? It shouldn't be segregated. I was on the Board of the village of Maywood for 12 years, and we were open. There will be cuts. My question is: How do you determine what cuts are made?

Ms. Gloria Clay: As Ms. Sharp stated, this school is history. I'm 72 and I graduated from this school. You said nothing has been done, that there have not been any changes, but your Board doesn't agree with you. How did you determine what was the criteria for closing this school? You want to close this school but you know what? You will have a fight on your hands. And I'm saying to the citizens of this town, to mothers, grandmothers - I'm a great-grandmother - there should be people standing outside. You just did something that we haven't been able to do for a long time. You got us all up and around and I'm glad you did. Does everyone on the board live in District 89?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Most of us do. There are questions about one of us.

Ms. Clay: My next question is, does everyone on the Board have children in District 89 or do you have kids in private schools? We can't afford that. So before you make a decision, I don't appreciate your insulting my intelligence. You did when you say you did not vote to close Washington School. I want to hear the truth. I don't want to hear smoke and I don't want to hear a lie.

Pres. Urso: We did not, as a Board, decide to close the school.

Ms. Clay: It was recommended. Politics plays a big role. Elections come up.

Pres. Urso: If our actions tonight united you, I'm very happy that it did so. Bishop Agee?

Bishop Victor Agee: I'm pastor at Grace Temple of Restoration in the Austin community and State Bishop for the Baptists Gospel Fellowship of Illinois and class president of the Class of '77 for Washington School. I was told of some decisions pending concerning this school. I hope the Board understands there is legacy history here and the spirit of our ancestors that will not die. I learned all my foundational truths from Kindergarten to eighth grade. Two of my most influential searchers in my life - and I've studied abroad - are Mr. Mobley and Ms. Watts. If not for Ms. Watts, I would not be where I am today. Not a day goes by that I don't think about this school. Please don't underestimate the power of this school. We will gather. We are not just talking rhetoric. We, the alums, and everyone else will do all to make sure this institution is here for generations to come.

Ms. Cheryl Ealey: There are many things said that were on my list that I won't repeat. I hope you don't ignore me as you did others. There was mention of a reduction of \$450 dollars per student (in general state aid foundational level). What is the total per student recommended in District 89? Will the PowerPoint presentation shown tonight be placed on the website? There is a rumor of Washington being closed and also a rumor of Emerson being closed. Both were the result of having the lowest enrollment. I'd like you to look at why is enrollment low? Is it a lack of quality teachers? Is the leadership of the leaders the same as others? Is there a difference between schools? If some are better, why is it not being replicated? Another point to make, recently it was reported that the Board elected not to renew the superintendent's contract. You have the right to do that. However, the contracts are always up around one or two years. Why didn't you allow the former superintendent, who is being paid while the new one comes on board, while you pull an HR director over to do the job? Keep in mind the quality of instruction should be the same for all schools. Reductions in staff should be looked at the nonperforming schools first. Once these lists have been created, maybe those teachers who impact students in positive way should be transferred to those needing help. Just as the District replaced a superintendent, they should look at reducing other staff, not teachers first.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Of one issue she brought up, why we didn't allow our superintendent to finish the school year? She is being paid till the end of June 30. A few days before these decisions were made she was put on administrative leave. Then we had the directors of curriculum and finance draw up the list. Our superintendent who'd been here the past three years should have been at that meeting. But the majority of this Board decided we wanted to put her on administrative leave a few days before that meeting because they didn't want her input. That was a big mistake. We were trying to make big decisions without her knowledge. That wasn't by accident.

Mrs. Debbie Muhammed: I am a member of the community and my son goes to Emerson school. I've fought tooth and nail at board meetings. Don't wait till it gets to this point to show up to meetings. Every month, they have a Board meeting. If you come, you can know what is going on. Only four percent of Maywood votes and that's why we are where we are today. I'd like to say if we pile 40 students into a classroom that should have 20 students, there will be more detentions and suspensions. Our children will be at juvenile hall, because they're talking about closing classrooms at PAEC. Lastly, I'd like Ms. Urso to apologize to Grady (Rivers, Jr.) and Lequita (Neely). You called them liars.

Board Member Neely: What we were given were the enrollment numbers, which I should have gotten before I had to vote on something. Our numbers were 5,500 ten years ago. Now, they're 5,591. I wish staff would give us a historical analysis and then project out over the past and project the future. Don't just give us last year's number. Of me being a liar, early on in this Board meeting, questions were asked about Washington School. If we are to be open and honest, I should have gotten this blue sheet with recommendations in the board packet. Our next Board meeting is April 15 at 6 p.m. If four members of the Board vote, it will be done. I will not be voting for that if it comes to a vote.

Board Member Diggs: All who had the opportunity to speak tonight, if you have questions and concerns, fill out forms and the staff will respond to that. Also, I want to make a note that information submitted to all students to take home to parents, that information can be made available.

Ms. Sheryl Green: I have two students here. My first question, I saw the presentation and it discussed the projection of increased revenues. In terms of obtaining revenue, what options are there? If we're not

getting state funding, what are other options? What about not getting a raise? I'm sure there are fat salaries at the top. Second, one of our parents asked why the District doesn't go after TIF dollars owed to the municipalities. You want us to take away information. What is the information you want us to come away with?

Pres. Urso: That answer to your question is, our administrative staff got no increase this year. Our clerical staff is at a freeze. We hope we can go back to our custodial and teachers and ask if we can reconsider their raises. Those are contractual agreements. By contract, we have to give them a raise.

Ms. Green: I'll speak for our community. I don't know how you can allow more management leaders to take an increase while our children suffer.

Pres. Urso: The increase is because we're bound by contract. That is one of the options we have on our list, to go to our unions and see if we can come to the table and see if we can come to an agreement. That would save a lot.

Board Member Diggs: Ms. Green, I have served on the village of Maywood's Tax Increment Financing Review Board. A recommendation I submitted to our administrative staff called for a joint review committee that would include the park district, the library board, and municipalities as we're all facing loss of revenues. Even in Oak Park, their school boards have started discussion to see how they can recoup their TIF dollars. We have to start the conversations. Traditionally, it hasn't occurred in our three villages for District 89. I hope everyone will take a look at the information which outlines next steps. Some of those include making decisions on what are the potential avenues for new revenues to come into the District. Another recommendation was to monitor the state budget. The governor has made a recommendation that if he cuts things such as pre-Kindergarten, how does it impact us? Another is to negotiate with other bargaining units.

Board Member Neely: If this meeting closes now, I will stay, as a Board member, to hear what people have to say. We have had Board meetings that go until 11:30 at night. And we're saying we want to cut off people right here?

Pres. Urso: My concern is that we have children here, and the lateness of the meeting.

Ms. Laura Urso: I am president of the MEA and represent the teachers of District 89. I've been listening to all the questions. From what I gather people are quite confused. I'll ask simple questions. True or false: Did the Board post the agenda for the March 18 meeting that was miraculously amended to include the non-renewal of 120 non-tenured teachers? True or false: In an attempt to non-renew, did they overlook an administrator who is non-tenured? True or false: Did the Board take grant money of \$600,000, plus another \$400,000, to train teachers and principals how to use computers? True or false: Were at least five assistant principals reassigned to positions not based on evaluations or seniority, but from arbitrary lists that someone decided? True or false: The only time the Board came to the teachers union to ask us to make concessions was in the third open meeting after decisions had been made affecting students and the community of District 89. I'm appalled.

Pres. Urso: Why hasn't the union come to the Board, knowing full well the problems we're having?

Ms. Amika Massey: I have put in eight years of service in the District. I have three children who attended this school. I'm one of the teachers you decided to let go. We have so many staff members and executives at the District Office that you don't need. Now we have a lot of administrators making three figure salaries versus all these teachers let go. I have almost a perfect evaluation. Under the leadership of Dr. Cynthia Hines-Butler, I have trained for three years to work with some of the most difficult children and I love them. I've been sitting here two years in a row and never said anything, wondering what you guys are going to do, when you are going to make decisions for our kids. You need to start making decisions based on the kids, teachers and staff. Don't let three people put their heads together and let them make decisions. Look at my evaluations. What about those other five years I gave you?

Pres. Urso: Are you living in a vacuum?

Ms. Massey: Are you that intimidated that you can't answer my question? Why did you choose to let teachers go and keep all these administrators in positions that aren't needed?

Pres. Urso: We had time constrictions. When we do what we have to do, then we can call back teachers.

Ms. Massey: Why do you need financial consultants when you have principals that can do that?

Pres. Urso: We have to keep our financial options open. We did not make this up. Three people did not make the decisions.

Board Member Neely: Three people made the decisions. At the Board meeting I asked the question, how did we get to this list? Who made the decisions on this list? I was told those three people did.

Pres. Urso: Those three collected information, based on information at the other meetings.

Board Member Neely: I asked if this information we received were all the recommendations from the meetings. I was told they narrowed down the information to what made sense.

Pres. Urso: One of the areas was to sell real estate. They narrowed it down to what would give us the most financial sense.

Board Member Neely: One of the ideas was that we pay administrators' health insurance 100 percent. Those three people, on this list, say that would amount to zero savings. What made it that they decided we weren't going to do that?

Pres. Urso: We need to cut where we get bang for our buck. You distort the truth.

Ms. Amanda Blakey: I have been in this District for five years. My daughter went to Garfield where they have different principals each year. At Garfield she was struggling. She has made honor roll at Washington. I came in from San Diego, California. I wish I stayed there.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Of benefits the young lady mentioned, it's \$134,000 for the people you have up there. It was ironic that we had these three administrators bring us the recommendations, where we had discussed at previous meetings that we reward our employees and pay them well. We pay our administrators 100 percent of their health insurance. The point is, when those recommendations should have come from those three administrators, there was no recommendation to change their benefits. For them to come to us and make these recommendations while they say it's not worth our time to cut theirs, there are things we can do other than close Washington School. The \$1 million-plus that we pay for Teachscape could save a lot of teachers.

Ms. Vicky Kozart: I am a teacher and a parent. It doesn't matter what school is closed. It will always be this way. I was cut last year for absenteeism. Does anyone know why? I had cancer. I had to have union representation. I kept my mouth shut because I have two kids. Of Teachscape, I went back and got my master's and did all the courses that Teachscape made me redo. The District paid for my master's degree education. I had to do Teachscape again. Why do we continue to accept another \$400,000 (contract) for next year's Teachscape. The closer the people who get to the students, the less they get paid. Instructional assistants do not have a binding contract. The people at the District office have no idea what I do. They have never visited my class. The only teacher who worked with early childhood special education has now resigned. There is no one. Changing the teacher-student ratio will not benefit us.

Pres. Urso: We have to have the money to pay you.

Ms. Kozart: Where are these 60 special education, pre-Kindergarteners, who are qualified, going to go next year? By age three, if they have a defined disability, they have a right to be served. How many assistant superintendents does this District need?

Mr. Linnell Grace: My family has lived in Maywood for four generations. How much of each dollar is spent towards instruction in this District versus administration and other costs? I've looked at some of the other districts around here and, historically, this District collects a fair amount of money. It is less here than in comparable districts. I also looked at attendance in other districts. I know for a fact that there are houses in this town and other towns where taxes are not fairly collected. If you have a situation where an individual is living in a household and that is being taxed at single family rate and it's a multi-family house, are you doing an investigation to ensure the proper taxes are being assessed? You cannot have a house you are renting as a two-flat, and you haven't paid that extra tax and costs. You all need to do your homework, get with local government, and make sure the code enforcement officers are doing their job to ensure the people are paying their fare share for education.

Ms. Shawanna Glover: I and my siblings attended Washington and have a mom who worked in District 89. How are people who are cut supposed to work for living? Isn't it true you are trying to get rid of Mr. Boyd?

Pres. Urso: You are misinformed.

Another lady: Of the presentation for accounting, can we confirm they followed the Sarbanes-Oxley Act? We just want to know the practices shown are accurate. Second, I want to applaud Mr. Boyd, Dr. Lee, and Board Members Rivers and Neely for being ethical and honest. This is about social justice.

Ms. Angie Prince: I am a former student of this school, as is my mother, other five siblings, and my four children. As I look across the park, my house sits on 10th Avenue. I am angry tonight. Our babies are crying and we don't hear them. For us to make a difference in our community, we have to be responsible for our children. You need to come out here and vote. I applaud Mr. Gene Mobley for mentoring my three boys when they had no father. He was a father to many children in this District. He took his own money when they had no breakfast. It gets no better at the high school level. I was cut last year by my union representative because she didn't like me. One day we'll all have to answer for all the things we're doing. The day of reckoning is right around the corner. You need to do some research and allow this school. I know it's only a recommendation, but I've heard that before. As long as God gives me strength, I will march around this neighborhood.

Mr. Patrick J. Winters: I am a product of District 89. I graduated from Irving in '80. I am an organizer for the local NAACP. I work with Youth on the Move. District 89 has always stood for education. We talk about now the money that has to be spent for education. I am ready to put my whole life on the floor for the children. Teachers, I'm proud of you all for getting a chance to speak up. I'm proud of my village for coming out to speak up for tradition. We don't have men in our school system. I grew up with a lot of men mentors. We had men in authority putting pressure on our kids. We need to support our kids.

Ms. Thelma Herrero: I lived in District 89 all my life and live on the other side of the tracks. I don't believe in any of our schools closing. We are not putting the children first. When I saw the paper that 106 teachers were going and I come here and learn it's for budgeting, why did we not put up the five or six highest salary people and bring the teachers back? Who determined to get rid of the teachers? I'd like to know the name of three people?

Ms. Kozart: I hope my comments didn't jeopardize my being called back. I grew up in Stevenson School District and attended Proviso East. Growing up, I understand the community wants to work with the Board only if they have the truth.

Mr. Greg Anderson: My daughter goes here and is about to graduate. I've never come to one of these meetings before. A lot of us have to be accountable for the situation we're in. Not enough of us have come to these meetings. So you've made decisions that sound to me like it's not based on the kids. It seems like a lot has been based on business. If kids are not the biggest concern, you need to do it differently. I'm not attacking anyone. Sometimes we do things we don't realize we do. The impression you have given is that you're more about the business of doing the business of teaching, not the business of teaching kids. You need to take accountability because you have come off as really disrespectful. We all understand the concept of budgeting. But if you don't entertain all the possible thoughts, you need to look at things that are inconvenient. I suggest you shouldn't be in your position. I had moved out of the District and then came back. I was concerned the school would be on probation. I found out it was one of the choice schools. Choice schools mean they're good at what they're doing. If you have to cut, why cut one of those doing the best jobs? Why wouldn't you look to replicate what they're doing? My recommendation is that if there has to be a school shut, I recommend it not be Washington or the other choice schools. They're modeling what the others should be doing. If you have to shut some down, cut the ones that are not producing. Goal should be to produce kids who are learning. If that's not your goal we have to do a better job of voting. If you have to shut a school down you must find somewhere to get additional help at the choice schools because there will be a flood of students here.

Ms. Tanita Bennett: I graduated from Washington school. Why are you holding another meeting Thursday at Melrose Park School?

Pres. Urso: Because we like all our communities to know what is going on. This is why we're here, to hear from the community.

Ms. Bennett: The meeting could have been done for everyone in District 89 at the same time. I work in Melrose Park.

Pres. Urso: We'll post answers on the web. The truth is not easy. Consider the fact that, yes, we did talk about closing a school. I will not say how Washington came into a possible discussion. No decision was made.

Board Member Rivers Jr. We talked about closing Washington School.

Pres. Urso: If an option is closing a school, we are looking at which might be the most cost effective. However, everyone here has heard your story. It will not go unnoticed. Closing a structure versus not closing a structure, heartless as it is, we have to save money. Now, we keep all the schools open but then we'll have to take other options and some of those will be cutting other services. We compare cutting services for children versus a building.

Board Member Neely: We, as a Board, did not talk about this. Had we talked about it, it would not have come up. This meeting came about two days ago. Ms. Urso, you said it was decided to have a meeting at the last Board meeting. We didn't talk about a date. I was informed Friday afternoon a few hours before it was posted at the buildings. I asked why we didn't give people time to know it there would be a Town Hall meeting. We sent out information to the community last night, the day before the meeting. That's not open and honest. We are all seven members elected. As a Board, we all have a right to the same information.

Pres. Urso: The meetings were posted Friday. We sent a flyer to remind the parents.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Board members got notified Friday evening by email.

Mr. Isiah Brandon: I'm here to hear the facts and discuss the solutions. We have heard the problems but not solutions. My question to the Board is: What are some more solutions? Closing Washington is not an option. We must make sure our students are aware as they must have a voice. You were elected by the community and can be taken out by the community. I graduated from Washington School.

Pres. Urso: The word "more" is options. Any option will not be a solution all are happy with. It's clear you don't want to close Washington School. We heard you and respect that. We're having these meetings because it came as a recommendation to get the word out. Board Member Rivers said last year we didn't do a good job at getting the word out.

Board Member Regina Rivers: Last year, before I was elected to the Board, I worked with Board Member Rivers Jr. and I saw him on the day he had to go to teachers and make an announcement (regarding cost reduction) that a decision was made. By the time the community heard about the decision, the whole cost reduction took on a life of its own. I didn't think it was fair for the teachers or the community. It was an after-the-fact deal. It was what the Board decided. It was law before anyone found out about it. It was my request to ask the Board and the committees to ask the Board what options we had to reduce our cost. We have to have everyone involved in this situation. It's not just the parents, teachers, or school board. We're all in this together and whether we want to admit it or not, we are all family. We all want to do better for our children. This gathering today is the beginning of that change, that improvement. We had a mother, Mrs. Muhammed, say she was on the PTA Board and she couldn't get people to come out to attend those meetings, but they did tonight because people were concerned. Mr. Brandon asked about solutions. We have options. He asked: What are the options? We've heard a lot tonight. We don't have all the answers. We'd like input from people who might know.

Pres. Urso: Our next meeting is April 15th. Of the solutions, there are no really good solutions. If we don't close a structure, other options are to cut student services and increase class size. What do we do? Cut services, benefits for students or close a building? You need to know these things and try to be part of an option that is the most fair and does not impact student learning. We are already at a \$3.8 million in deficit in the Education Fund.

Mr. Brandon: I suggest closing the Van Buren or 906 Walton buildings. Then, there is the property behind Van Buren (that could be sold).

Pres. Urso: I suggest the staff put the information of the value of savings on the sale of schools – the cost reduction of closing Van Buren, 906 Walton and closing the other buildings – on the web, and also post on the minutes of this meeting on the web.

Board Member Neely: When we talk about the closure of the school building and talk about projected savings of \$1.5 million, please tell me how that came up? I have asked Mr. Cushion (Assistant Superintendent for Business Services) for seven years: How much does it cost to operate each school?

How do I know, if we do close a building, that we actually save that much unless I see the breakdown of costs? And please tell me where the children will go to school? Tell the effect on each building. None of that happened. I don't think we should be closing any building this year. Closing Washington was on the list. It was Item #3.

Pres. Urso: None of us agreed to that option. It was an option presented. We said at the Board meeting we were going to get the community input.

Board Member Neely: That was after some Board members had a problem with it.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Every other thing we did at that meeting, we did that night. We were going to vote on it had we not disagreed with it.

Ms. Jennifer Jackson: Ms. Urso, I've been in the back the whole time, listening. Tonight, the way you talked, it felt to me like you were trying to contain a situation that didn't need to be contained. I say that because this is supposed to be open forum and people are going to have opinions and emotions. I felt like you were trying to hush the crowd when we were just trying to get information.

Pres. Urso: This meeting was not to discuss options, but to give information on the financial situation.

Ms. Jackson: The PowerPoint presentation meant nothing to me. A lot of these kids are raised by grandparents and great-grandparents. A lot of these people, still to this day, don't have a computer. All this "go to the website," a lot of people don't have access to the website.

Pres. Urso: There are opportunities to go to the library to go on the website.

Ms. Jackson: I've given you more than 15 minutes, so hear me out. You've been insulting, demeaning, acting like we're idiots. We're trying to get a better understanding for our kids. I want to know: As far as the firm doing these financial projections, who are they financed by? Is it fully funded by District 89? We must have some conflict of interest in who's projecting all these statistics. Secondly, of closing schools, I don't see how that can come up as a recommendation because it takes money to close the school. You are putting people at a disadvantage to those other schools. We'd have to figure out how much transportation costs to ship our kids to other schools. I graduated in '98. Some teachers I went to school with are no longer here. Teachers have a powerful influence on kids' lives. The kids may not get what they need at home, but school is a refuge. In '98, those teachers expected the best of us. It must be hard to give the teachers today the same expectations that they had in my day.

Pres. Urso: The firm has no conflict of interest.

Board Member Neely: (PMA is paid) less than \$10,000 a year.

Mrs. Ladonna Williams: I have three boys who graduate from this school and one is at Proviso East. I still have one at Washington. I have a couple of statements. To President Urso, you've been two-stepping all night. Closing a school, any school, is not going to help. I'm sure you can find ways to move it around. To Board Member Rivers, you say we are family and yet the head can't communicate with each other. I understand you have to work with the figures. To keep it going, the lights have to be paid, etc., but if you close this school and have kids spread out at the other schools, you'll have 45 kids in each class and you'll have products of these streets. I'm a product of District 89 and I'm proud of it. My kids are doing well. You need to stay focused on the children.

Ms. Marcia Ballenger: I have three kids who have attended Washington. The oldest is now graduating from college and has been involved in the college. My son is a graduate of Washington and will go into college this year from Proviso West and the youngest, Gina, is on her way into the Proviso Math and Science Academy. She is interested in studying law. She said, 'Mom, I'm not just going to study law. I'm going to change the law, make policies, and make wrong right.' That's what we're looking at now, a whole platter of wrongdoing. Of the woman who preceded me (and spoke) on the family, there is the head of the family who has to communicate. Also, the Board has housekeeping that needs to be done and it starts at the top. Last quarter, they had opening on the School Board and I ran for that position. I talked to a lot of people. Mr. Diggs eventually got on the Board with the strength of his financial knowledge. With that, this should not have had to go to an independent audit. These things are done at the school with principals and administrators, and then go take it to the auditor. There is no need to fix the problem if it is not broken. The next piece: If you have the property and buildings, give up empty buildings. Another thing we talked about years ago, when we discussed kids who were failing, I had a conversation with Mr. Ballard. My question is: What's wrong with the students and why are they failing? Oh, I was

told, perhaps it's the teachers. Perhaps it's the curriculum. Mr. Boyd is a leader to these children. We cannot afford to have our men out of sight. My children have a relationship with their teachers. So do our young men. Don't come at the 11th hour with information. Prepare our kids now.

Mrs. Edwina Perkins: I graduated from District 89. If you are looking for money, the village of Maywood has TIF money. Do your research. Go after that TIF money. Mr. Diggs, what is your qualification to serve as the head of the Board's Finance Committee?

Board Member Diggs: Of a comment that Mrs. Ballenger made, I was one of eight people who applied. We do have very concerned, committed people who want to help. We need the input of everyone, regardless of our communities. At the end of the day, our District is facing a tremendous deficit. It was mentioned the Board needs to be more receptive to the community. I appreciate Mrs. Ballenger bringing that point to the forum tonight, as well as to answer Mrs. Perkins. As a Board member, we all possess varying backgrounds. I encourage anyone to take this information back to your neighbors, so that we can all understand this is not the end, but a continual process. If anyone is unclear about the information, let us know.

A member of the audience asked if Board Member Diggs will look into the TIF money issue tomorrow.

Board Member Diggs said yes. Another audience member followed up on an earlier question about the possibility of selling vacant District-owned properties. **Board Member Neely** said the Board was told that it's not a viable option. The gentleman followed up by saying that there would be 40 students in a classroom if Washington School were closed. He said he felt like the Board was giving up too easily because their jobs are secure. He said his children don't go to Washington School, but that he knows some of the teachers getting fired and that they're quality teachers. He suggested that some employees are overpaid and could take a salary cut in order to spare other teaching jobs.

Ms. Shirley Higgins: I have always been an active participant. I know a lot of people in this community who are very involved. Of the person who said we're family, well this is an interesting family scenario. In a family there's an interesting household. Parents don't eat first if the kids don't have anything to eat. I went on your website, nine people making \$100,000-plus incomes. Your two options are related to the children and the front line people. You said nothing about administrative cuts. Did you hire anyone since you knew about this deficit? You're hiring people in administration, secretaries and the administrative assistant to the superintendent. You're not cutting as you're all saying.

Pres. Urso: We need to look more closely at all levels of our staff. As to the administrative assistant, that was a request made by a superintendent who is on administrative leave. The position was made by the then-superintendent which was needed to run her office to replace the former person in her position. We agreed to hire, based on the recommendation.

Board Member Neely: Yes, we agreed to the recommendation of the superintendent. You asked when we became aware of the deficit. We have known about it for five years.

Ms. Higgins: In a crisis, you shouldn't be hiring. Then, you go hire someone.

Ms. Paula Henderson Harrison: I am here on behalf of 10 children. I serve as director of Maple Tree Learning Center. I'm not here to sling mud. The word I received from children is that the school would be closed. We talk to children about their day. I said to them the School Board does not have a lot of money to work with. I said with any decisions they make, someone is going to be hurt. They will make the best decision they can. From what I've heard I'm not sure the best decision is made.

Board Member Neely: Tell them that we support them and that we, as a Board, will come together and make the best decisions of all the children for District 89.

Ms. Kozart: Is there any way that we can get the name of the people at the main office, their job titles and duties, and look at how many secretaries each of them needs?

Another lady: I've heard everyone comment and there is a lot of attack going on. What I found is that people talked about the top. You are the top. As I watched you tonight, it was on my heart that if you are going to fight, we tell students to confront each other and be appropriate. Yet when we, as adults, cannot be respectful I take issue with that. I've been in education for a long time. You cannot promote a culture of calm - there were students out here tonight - how can I tell them what we should or should not do when we are not showing adult behavior? I challenge each of you to promote a culture of calm. When you enter a building, you know what that is like. If chaos is at the top, it will filter to the bottom. I watch your

teachers who are so upset about what they hear. I don't think you said the school would close, it was a recommendation in this district. We do not allow our superintendents to be superintendents. Let them do their job. A Board of Education's job is to implement policy. It is the superintendent's job to carry about the policy. If a superintendent makes a recommendation for hiring, accept it. I know Proviso is a political town. The politics have filtered down to our children. Guess what? All three of my kids are college educated. I will not send my grand-daughter to District 89 because you do not let the superintendent do their job. You have gone through quite a few superintendents. Unless people get out and vote, we are going to continue to have this position.

Gregory Badget: I live in Hillside. I graduated from Washington in '71. I had lots of great teachers. Rev. Sykes, I remember as a kid, when he was going to Springfield and getting money then (for the village). We had pride. Parents had pride at what their kids were doing. I listened to you people. My question is: how did you get stuck in this mess in the first place? I have never seen such a display of animosity. You're talking about recommending closing schools. This would never have happened in my time. Let's be realistic. You want to cut the teachers. I demand you take care of these children. Yes, we have to make hard decisions. What did you do to get yourself in such a hole? If you do close a school, what do you learn from that? That pisses me off. I don't have kids. But this school meant something to me. I loved this school. I love arguing with, fighting with Jane Addams School. We did it in a friendly atmosphere. It's a prideful thing. I work two jobs and have no kids. I heard from my wife about the possibility that Washington might close and I said, "That's my school." This building means a lot. It has black history, a lot of black history.

Another parent: My kids will be going to this school for a year in May. They came from Irving. Their teacher is out there watching the kids. It hurts me to hear from my son that they're going to close the school. It hurt me. For them to get rid of the reading teacher, it hurt him. When I went to Irving every day, I didn't see the principal out there, but I do here. I don't know Mr. Boyd but I know he's a good man. When my kids were going to Irving, I was a concerned parent. Mr. Boyd and Dr. Lee are good people. It will be chaos for the kids from Washington. I have a second grader who is doing very well. There are teachers here who care about the children. It's dumb for people not to take a budget cut to save a school. Stop thinking about your pockets and think about these kids.

Mrs. Muhammed: Thank you for demanding that this was about the voice of the people and not to cut people off.

President Urso: Thank you for coming and commenting and staying. Would any Board members like to make a closing comment?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: We talked about solutions tonight and it's hard to come up with things. There are some things we can do other than close Washington School. We're top heavy, administratively. Our benefits that we give to a lot of our employees we can't afford to do anymore. We've got many consultants we can no longer afford. When times were good, we could do it. We've got a computer program called Teachscape; it was a luxury we cannot afford. We need to take a hard look at that. We've got extra personnel. Our director of curriculum is an extra position. At that time, we weren't aware of our financial situation. Our unions have to be asked, politely, because we need them and are bound by our contracts, if they are willing to reopen our contracts. It's in our interest and in their interest. If we can get that accomplished, it can save big dollars. To keep Washington School open, we'll need help.

We need help from our mayor to exert his influence on this process. I don't know why he's not here tonight. It could be it was on short notice. I can tell you if it were in Melrose Park, the mayor would be there. Go to the Village Board and ask for his help. Contact your state representatives and state senator and ask for their help. When I walked in here, I was pleased as punch. We never get this attendance at our Board meetings. You need to be at our Board meeting on April 15. My grandmother, Ms. Hathaway, lived across the street for years. We have four Board members here from Maywood. We are not entirely dependent on the Melrose Park Board members to keep the school open. We have four people from Maywood. If one votes to close the school, it's one of them.

Board Member Neely: I echo comments of Board Members Rivers, Urso, Diggs and Rivers. I respect all of our Board members and President Urso. I think she has the best interest for our District at heart. I attended Irving School from Kindergarten through eighth grade. Not only was my 4th grade teacher here

but a few others were also. I attended Proviso East. I want you to know how vested I am in the District and how much I love District 89. I don't believe I was inappropriate. I don't believe as a concerned resident or taxpayer I was inappropriate. If I was, I apologize. But when you ask for information time and time again and you don't get it until the last minute, what are you supposed to do? I have family and friends who have lived here 90 years and I have to be accountable to all of them. When someone accused me of lying, it was on there (the list of cost containment recommendations) to close Washington School. What you failed to see here is it was presented to us to vote on closing Washington School at that meeting. It's not like it's something that was not going to happen, but it was brought up. If you look at the agenda, it just says 'cost containment'; it doesn't say specifics. Of that list of things what we voted on, do you think we told the public what we voted on? No. When we did the press release, did we say what we voted on? No. Did we read out loud what we voted on? No. When you talk about being honest, you should have said item one is this, item two is this. We should have gotten it out, but we did not. At Melrose Park School, one student asked me about the Board cuts. The teacher and principal didn't know. What do I look at like if I can't tell what we voted on?

Board Member Diggs: Please seek the information that has been shared with you. The Board is obligated by state statute and policy to act on these initiatives. I can only say that this is a very difficult process and behind closed doors, a lot of things that are brought out amongst us. We can only say that it is a difficult process and we cannot do it alone. The Board's responsibility is to set policy for the District. We hire the superintendent, who has a tremendous responsibility, as do principals, teachers, and all other service employees. I'm only encouraged to say we need more of this. We need to heal this community. How can we work together? If that is the will of the people, then that is the will that I, as a Board member, will advocate. We need to create more advocates who care. When I came on this Board, I asked questions. I saw the great and wonderful traditions throughout all the schools. If we need to do fundraisers to offset the costs, we need others to reach out to the Board. Let others know we have another meeting. This Board is trying to be responsive. I looked at the empirical data and the history of this District before becoming a member. There was a nationwide study that showed District 89 as the most segregated district in the nation. I looked at the changing demographics of our communities. Can we treat each other respectfully and in a more productive way? I believe we can. I think some of this information, if we truly digest it, we will all have a better understanding of how we got here and what are the most valuable assets we have. The layoffs come from a collective process. This is what democracy is all about. This process doesn't only limit itself to this Board making these decisions.

V. Motion for Adjournment

A motion was made by Diggs, seconded by Rivers Jr. that the Special Meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 10:45 p.m.

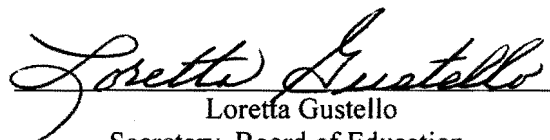
Roll call:

Ayes: Diggs, Neely, Rivers, Rivers Jr., Urso

Nays: None



Marie Urso
President, Board of Education
School District 89



Loretta Gustello
Secretary, Board of Education
School District 89