

**Minutes of the School District 89 Maywood-Melrose Park-Broadview
Board of Education Special Meeting
April 1, 2010
1715 Lake St., Melrose Park, IL 60160**

The Special Session of the Board of Education was called to order at 6:11 p.m. Mr. Chris Ferraro, principal of Melrose Park School, welcomed the audience and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to present the financial status of the School District. He noted that agendas and forms for people to submit their questions to the Board were at a table near the entrance to the gymnasium, where the meeting was held.

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 by PMA

Mr. Mike Francis and Mr. Steve Miller, of PMA, the District's financial consultant, gave an overview of the District's financial situation. **Mr. Francis** said schools in Illinois are suffering financially. An estimated 20,000 teachers in Illinois will lose their jobs this year. The District's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30 every year. In his PowerPoint presentation, he showed that two-thirds of the District's revenue comes from state funding; another 10 percent comes from federal funding. Together, the federal and state governments provide 75 percent of District 89's revenues. Property taxes provide less. This is the opposite of most school districts in the Chicago area, which are heavily reliant on property taxes. Property taxes are the only thing a district knows it can control as a revenue source. School districts in Cook County are also constrained from raising taxes by a property tax cap. They could only seek to increase property taxes by .1 percent in the next fiscal year, by 2.7 percent the next year and by an estimated 2.5 percent the year after that. New construction also drives new property tax. The District has, like other places, a record number of foreclosures so the economy is also affecting the taxes it receives. Finally, there is a Tax Increment Financing District (TIF) within the boundaries of District 89. A TIF district is a defined geographic area that the village considers "blighted" and wants to redevelop. The village then freezes the assessed value within the TIF district at a certain level and any additional tax revenues generated above that level go directly into the TIF fund that is used to pay for economic development projects within the TIF district. So, they are taking the additional tax revenues generated within the TIF district away from the School District and other affected taxing bodies that are located within the TIF district. On the revenue side, the Illinois General Assembly is going to hold the state funding flat next year.

As for spending, the District's budget is \$54.5 million during this fiscal year. The District had a deficit budget. Most of the expenses are for salaries. The District projects a 3 percent-plus increase in salaries for the teachers group. On the employee benefit side, the Board projects a 10 percent contribution for employee health insurance. The next bar graph showed revenues versus expenses for the current fiscal year, with expenses already exceeding revenues. The District's Education Fund has a deficit of almost \$1.7 million. If no spending cuts were made, this deficit would grow to \$3.8 million next year. The Education Fund balance, at the end of this year, is almost \$11 million dollars. Unlike other districts that are tapping into existing fund balance reserves to cover costs, District 89 has no reserves to draw from in the Education Fund. The next chart showed aggregate projections of all operating funds. In the current FY10, it has a \$2.225 million deficit, and that will grow to \$6 million by FY12. In the next chart, there are four categories that the state rates school districts on a financial basis: Recognition is when a district has the highest financial strength; Financial Review is when the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) is monitoring a district for potential downward trends; Early Warning is when ISBE is monitoring a district closely and will offer assistance; and Watch List is when a school district is at the greatest risk financially and will be closely monitored by the state. PMA forecasts District 89 will be on the Watch List starting next year because of its unstable financial situation. Presently, the District is on the Early Warning List. The next chart showed two scenarios, based on \$2.8 million in spending cuts that the Board made on March 18. One scenario shows those same cuts, as well as the impact of Gov. Quinn's budget projection which includes a \$450 per pupil reduction and a cut of 13 percent to 53 percent in categorical funds, such as special education, transportation and bilingual services. The governor proposes an increase of 1 percent in income tax which, if passed, would restore the District's Education Fund to its base scenario. In the next chart, the \$3.8 million deficit in the

Education Fund drops to just under \$1.2 million dollars with the cuts the Board made two weeks ago. It would mean the Education Fund balance would not drop as fast, but it would continue to fall throughout the life of the projections. The other scenario has all the reductions the Board considered, but also has a different look at what the state revenues will be next year. It incorporates what Gov. Quinn has proposed. Remember, the District gets two-thirds of its revenue from the State of Illinois. The General Assembly will vote in two months. Unfortunately, what you see here - the Education Fund will be worse on a base case scenario, despite the cuts the Board has made. On another chart, also Scenario 2, the current \$2.2 million fund deficit this year falls to \$5.2 million next year. If they go into a negative fund balance, the District will have to borrow on a short-term basis to cover the months when the revenues are not coming in. Then, you have higher interest rates. In the last slide, the red line is the base scenario. It all slopes downward. The blue line represents the funding cuts that the Board made a few years ago. It's less severe, but is still showing deficit spending. Then, the green line is *with the cuts* from the state, which would be even worse than the current scenario (blue line).

In summary, there are four options:

1. Raise revenue. With 75 percent of your revenue that you don't have control over - besides exerting political pressure on your state legislators - the only way the district could raise revenue is to increase the property tax value.
2. Or, it can reduce spending.
3. The third option is a combination of the first two options.
4. Lastly, you could do nothing. If you do nothing, the state will take over the School District in a few years. On the revenue side, the District is also suffering from property tax collections in that there are more housing foreclosures. That makes it harder to collect property taxes. If there are areas redeveloped, the village can share some of those revenues with the School District.

After the PMA consultant concluded his presentation, **Pres. Urso: if anyone would like to speak, we have some speakers here who will go first. Then if you;d like to speak further....as well as, will have the presentation translated into Spanish.** said the Board would respond to questions that had been written down and submitted to the Board.

Question #1: How do TIF districts impact revenue for the school districts?

The PMA consultant said: When an area is determined to go into a TIF - a tax increment financing district - and the taxes paid into the TIF Fund go directly to the village to be used for economic development within the TIF district. The village, when it creates a TIF district, freezes the property tax value of the area within the TIF boundaries. If the land within the TIF grows increases in value, those incremental property tax revenues generated within the TIF district go directly to the Village, not the School District or other taxing bodies within the TIF.

Question #2: Can you go over the state's reduction of bilingual funding and special education reduction?

Pres. Urso: We hear what you are saying. We'll have this presentation translated into Spanish and distributed to all our communities. We want to hear from everyone. So speak we will address these questions and then if you have specific questions relating to this, ...if you need to speak for this presentation, please come up to the podium and we will answer your questions.

Mr. Jesse Martinez stepped up to the microphone to directly ask the Board two questions. He said: There are five to six TIFs in Melrose Park and I'd like to know how much they've impacted the financial loss to District 89 based on those TIFs over the years. We need to know how TIFs really impact the School District. There are some benefits and some negatives. That is one question. The other is on the cuts the Board has administered; I'd like to know what percent of the cuts are administrative, meaning they have no direct impact to the kids, and what percent was adverse to the teachers because they teachers are directly impacted.

Pres. Urso: You have valid questions. I feel the same as you do, and will address those questions. We want to get you correct answers and we will address those. I don't have the answers right now.

Board Member Neely: Mr. Martinez, it seems like you're a little frustrated. We apologize for the first issue you raised about translation. The audience wants to make sure what we are translating is exactly what they are hearing. We will try to translate verbatim as much as possible so people don't feel like we're saying something different.

Pres. Urso: That is why, as I said before, we'll have the entire document translated.

Mr. Martinez: Excuse me one second.

Pres. Urso: We need to translate what Board Member Neely has just said.

Mr. Martinez translates to the entire audience in Spanish.

Rivers jr. asked about his question.

Mr. Martinez: My question regarding the 5 to 6 TIFs in Melrose Park is how has that negatively affected the schools?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: We are supposed to get a certain percentage of the revenues from the TIFS. I'm hoping this Board does something soon to try to reclaim some of the incremental revenues generated by the TIFS. There are TIF districts in all three of our villages in District 89. To my knowledge to this point we haven't gotten any TIF money from Melrose Park, Maywood or Broadview.

Board Member Diggs: If anyone is bilingual, please state your question in English and Spanish so everyone understands. Everything tonight will also be translated into Spanish. To clarify something Mr. Rivers Jr. said about TIFS, the village of Maywood has a TIF Joint Review Board and its actions are on its website. The Park District, Library Board and the school districts all are affected by the TIF. The different governmental districts in Maywood have been having conversations with their village manager about the TIFs and how they may be able to try to get some of the money back. Contact the local municipalities to find out where the TIFs are located, how much money is in those TIFs and how those funds can be utilized.

Mr. Martinez: Do you know the dollar amount over the years of these 5 to 6 TIFs, and how much it has impacted the school district?

Mrs. Sandy Sifuentes: You should have known this information before standing before these parents. You should have been better prepared for this meeting. They have left work early and gotten babysitters so that they could be here tonight. The community deserves to know. They deserve answers. Not in the future. Today.

Mrs. Thelma Herrero: I have lived in this district all my life. I care about the children in Broadview, Maywood and Melrose Park. I saw what happened on March 18; 106 teachers were let go and there is a recommendation of a school being closed. That is not acceptable. I think all of us should give this panel some peaceable solutions so they don't close this school. My point of standing here is so we can get it together and have a moment of silence and pray. Join me in prayer. Let's all stand and hold hands and say the Lord's Prayer. (All in the room stand, join hands and recite the prayer.)

Mrs. Sandra Sifuentes: Mrs. Urso, how can you not apologize for coming to this meeting totally unprepared? How dare you insult the Latino community? You don't have proper translations. Young lady, I don't know what position you hold in this District but you were probably thrown out there to translate. That is probably what happened to you. Mrs. Urso, why do you come here and insult our intelligence? Shame on you. Shame on all of you.

Pres. Urso: I can understand how angry you are.

Mrs. Sifuentes: You cannot understand how angry I am right now. This young lady is not translating verbatim. There is no way this young lady can translate everything the presenter said, verbatim. Why can't we, as a voting community, hold you all accountable? I am not asking for you for an apology because you cannot do it. You don't come to a meeting of this magnitude unprepared, Mrs. Urso. Our children and this community deserve better. One, two, three, four, five of you and you're missing two Board members.

Pres. Urso: Apparently you will not accept anything I say.

Mrs. Sifuentes: Your apology is unacceptable. It's an insult. How can I come to your home and tell you that I'm going to take it over, that you can no longer live there and you can't understand what I'm saying? You don't get it.

Board Member Neely: We understand that you are angry. We hear you. We hear you. You're saying we're unprepared. Regardless of whether we are or not, we hear you. You're saying that, as our constituents, we need to hear you. We hear you. What would you like for us to do that will make this meeting a little more proper?

Mrs. Sifuentes asked the crowd if they wanted to postpone this meeting until the Board could hire a professional translator to translate the entire meeting in Spanish.

Pres. Urso: If this Board will agree to reschedule another meeting, and it is better prepared, as you ask, before April 15th, ma'am, we will try to reschedule this meeting.

Mr. Martinez translates this to the audience.

Mr. Martinez: The community wants the other two Board members at the meeting. There are a lot of us who understand both languages, but there are some who don't understand English. What about if you have another in Spanish and have PMA have their report in Spanish and have a translator?

Pres. Urso: My understanding is that we'll do one to accommodate you, and have the entire meeting done in Spanish. Correct?

Martinez: They want two meetings. They want to go on with this meeting and have another meeting strictly translated properly in Spanish.

Urso: We will endeavor to do so. Do you want to adjourn this meeting?

The audience shouted, "No!"

Man: We want to keep going with this meeting.

Urso: If you want to keep going with the meeting, that's fine. I want to ask your help. How can we do this so all can hear correctly and have a profitable meeting? Would you stand up here and translate for everyone?

Mr. Martinez: What you have to do is what I was doing. You translate every 30 seconds, OK?

Urso: OK.

Martinez: Mrs. Urso, I have a lot of questions. I have several questions about PMA. I teach Sunday school for kids 8 years old, OK, about the Bible, as an example. When I speak to them, I go down to their level. That's what you guys have to do. I went to the meeting at Washington and I didn't understand anything. PMA, I want them to do the same. I am now upset. I don't understand all this. Everything he (the PMA presenter) is doing there are assumptions or statistics. For example, there is no transportation reimbursement. There is no special education reimbursement for monies there. Miss Urso, I'm very upset. I know you got hit hard the other day at the meeting at Washington. I'm upset because you gave us two days notice of this meeting. I was on my computer all day. I was on my computer eight hours trying to find out what was going on. I'm upset that you did not give me enough time to investigate PMA. I am upset that the education is being considered is not top priority for our children. I want to read something to you. I want to read something to you that Miss Perkins wrote when she was your superintendent. This is what she said: Our goal is to involve the community to address the status of our school and district. I know that working together will make a significant difference in the education of the students and lives of the families we serve. Whatever it takes for our kids is what we strive to do today. You are not doing this.

A parent: Why do you want the teachers to leave the schools? Our kids need them more than all of you. Our kids depend on the teachers. We don't want one class of 50 students. They don't learn enough. We don't want the teachers to leave.

Another parent: I have two questions. The first is, if last year's expenses keep rising but the revenue stays the same, why did you wait so long? Why is it so extreme all of a sudden?

Board Member Diggs: One of the recommendations that came from a parent from the PTA is that we share this information to the public. We have 10 schools within the District. This information that has been provided by the financial consultants and the consultants have worked with the Board for many years. This information has been available. The Board has taken the recommendations that came from members of the community at the previous meetings and it has encouraged all parents and stakeholders to come to the meetings. Once a suggestion came from a parent, that's when the District scheduled these meetings. This is one of the first opportunities that many have had to see this information.

A parent: This is my first year in this District. This whole year I have never received a letter. We're not going to worry about whether it is doing good or bad. It's in your hands. We assume it's doing good. We're worried about our payments. You have a deadline in two weeks.

Board Member Diggs: We have a statutory deadline to inform the state which teachers will be let go, based upon the budget we had. Most of the teachers, depending on what the state does, may be called back. This is the layoff process.

A parent: My question is: You guys are in the hole. Now you are saying how it happened. This has occurred over years. Now we're supposed to fix it in two or three weeks.

Board Member Diggs: You are right. The information that went home to all parents only shared basically what the deficit is. What it relates to is how the District recommends funding. If our revenues are not matching a balanced budget, then before this board makes a decision, we are calling upon the community to help us.

A parent: You have already started making decisions. You have started laying people off.

Board Member Diggs: That's not the end of it. The process started last year, working with the unions, etc. We have unfunded mandates to provide special education services to all children but we are limited if the governor says he's going to cut the state budget.

President Urso: I understand you are frustrated. Why now? The state has been troubled for quite a bit of time. However, this year it has been the worst because the State of Illinois is bankrupt practically. They are cash strapped so what happens is, unfortunately, you know who suffers, our kind of district. The districts like New Trier in the north suburbs have a lot of money reserved. Their funding doesn't come from the state.

One mother: Why are we waiting till now to figure out what to do? Of the schools that are said to be closed, what will happen to the kids? What will happen to bilingual, to special education?

Board Member Neely: The answer to your question is, will we have 50 people to a class room? No. We voted to have no more than 25 students in a classroom. There are some classrooms that have 25 now. What we're saying is you may have a class, say 6th grade, with 35 kids. We're not supposed to have 35 kids in the classroom. But, in our contract with our union, we have a stipulation that if it exceeds that, we have to open a new classroom. If there are 35 now, there should be an additional aide in the classroom. There are seven board members. You have to hold each of us accountable. If the majority of the Board agrees to do something, the Board does that. Make sure you come attend Board meetings and hold us accountable.

Board Member Regina Rivers: You are absolutely right. Why did we wait so long? We're in a position now where we have to find additional sources of revenue. The TIF district money that Mr. Rivers talked about and Board Member Diggs discussed, that is a possible source of revenue. We also need you to find out who your state representatives are. They are the people who will make the decision on the budget in Springfield for the next fiscal year. We need your voice.

We need you to tell them, and let them now, what our District needs. Do you think that New Trier does not have all their residents going to tell their state legislators what they need? Now we have run into that problem and we have to go to that same revenue stream. We need your help. Besides what we have on the website, we will also provide information on what the state legislature will decide. We will get those answers to you on the website.

Mrs. Dawn Fortuna: I have a son who goes to Stevenson. I am disappointed and I want to be part of the solution. I came here to find out how I can be helpful as a parent. I want to be more involved. My son's school has a PTA, but I don't go because I work. I think we should all be accountable. Parents need to be involved as well.

Pres. Urso: The superintendent's office has a parent advisory committee. I know it is frustrating. We're the face of the administration. Our hands are tied because the state owes us millions of dollars.

Another parent: Obviously, we're all on a totally different page. Are these meeting minutes available to the community? How soon are they available to us?

Board Member Neely: Once they are approved at the next Board meeting, they are available and will be posted on the website.

Mr. Hogan (parent): Why are you cutting from the bottom to the top?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: I'm in agreement with you. We have a million dollar program called Teachscape. This program is of dubious value to our District. That is where real savings can be had. Instead of cutting teachers and making our class sizes bigger, we have extra personnel in the District office and I'm hoping there is something more than can be done. Please be there at the Board meeting on April 15.

Mr. Hogan: I believe there should not be a school closed until there is no one but you guys left at the administration. There are assistants to assistants and there are people making over \$100,000 a year. Give them your properties that are vacant. 906 Walton is seven years old. It's almost brand new. It makes it ludicrous that you would close down a school before moving your District office to Van Buren. I want to see some compassion from you. What are you going to do?

Pres. Urso: As a Board, we collectively discussed this and will make sure that children will not suffer.

Mr. Hogan: I know a lot of teachers already have gotten a pink slip.

Board Member Diggs: To address the issue, cuts were made in all components throughout every component of the district. How many administrators have been cut?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Two.

Board Member Diggs: One administrator and one position have been eliminated. Now, again, this is an ongoing process. This board and administration is evaluating everything. Teachscape is a professional development program for the principals and teachers.

Mr. Hogan: Why it is making me wonder why you can't answer that question? Why would you cut from the bottom up?

Board Member Diggs: As a Board member, we receive a list of dates of deadlines of actions that have to be taken. This is public information. So, by the last Board meeting, by state statues, we had to take action. We had to inform administrators. If you are not familiar with this, we'd be happy to share it with you. That explains why some cuts were made first and other cuts have not been made yet.

Mr. Hogan: There was a point made by a 22-year-old gentleman at the meeting at Washington School, about selling other District-owned property. Did you even look into that for the past two days?

Board Member Diggs: One area that people are concerned about is school closure. If we have a hole and it takes \$5 million to fill that hole, people said if we have buildings, why can't we sell? We are in position to share with the Board. If we have to make adjustments to move the administration building, how much could we sell this building for or rent that building for? The Board asked the administration to come back with more facts.

Board Member Neely: I'm going to answer a couple of your questions. You asked how we got to the point where we cut only one administrator. Of the cut from teachers, April 1 is not the deadline by which we have to notify them. The teachers did not have to be notified until 45 days before the end of the school year. But the teachers have been notified and were voted on at the last Board meeting. How did we get to the cuts? Every time we had a meeting, there was a list. Then the staff of the Board of Education decided what action they were going to take and put in their recommendation that there was only one administrator's position to cut. On the sale of land, on that regional list the sale of land was on there. When we got to the final list, it was taken off. We were told it was not viable.

Mr. Hogan: I just feel doomed. I just don't understand what you will do next year. It will be the same thing next year. A woman who said she was one of the teachers who was cut said that it's better to cut administrators than to cut teachers. She asked if it were possible for the Board to emergency meeting then and there and vote to cut more administrators than teachers. She said she had taught in a basement classroom that had no windows. The students were always getting sick as a result. She said some teachers who were cut may not wait for a call back, but will look for jobs elsewhere instead.

Ms. Meaghen Russell, Attorney for District 89: To hold a special meeting by any Board action, we would need to post an agenda 24 hours in advance. We cannot by law do that. We could ask to hold a special board meeting in 24 hours but we cannot do it here.

Board Member Neely: Can the Board president poll us to put this on our next agenda? Then we'll vote on it at our Board meeting.

Pres. Urso: All of us will be polled and the other two members will be polled also.

Board Member Diggs: What she is stating is, if the Board chooses, before the April 1 deadline, to call a special Board meeting to discuss administration, the answer was yes. Then she asked the attorney if the president can poll the Board. Board Members Rivers Jr. and Neely said they favored placing the matter on the next agenda.

Board Member Neely: You'll know at the next meeting. We'll have to vote publicly to go on the record at that April 15 meeting if a poll was done. It takes a majority. If all of us don't agree on something, it takes a majority. One person can't do that. You all have to come to the meeting to find out how we are voting.

One gentleman said: Miss Urso and Johnny Diggs, the two of you disrespect our community, Miss Urso especially. She doesn't care about our school or buildings. She hasn't shown up at all. The money has been up to Miss Urso. She doesn't care because she doesn't live here. Miss Lequita, you should be in her position. You are replacing Ms. Perkins with Sue Flanagan. Who is she? What kind of credentials has she? Does she care about our community?

Ms. Ann Prentiss: I attended the first meeting at Washington. I have prayed that God will not let me offend anyone tonight. But that may be more of a struggle. First, I am appalled. Miss Urso, because we believed at Washington school we would have an opportunity to speak. I filled out a form and was told we'd be the first to speak. We need to be consistent with the order. The other thing is, you said each person could speak three minutes and that you'd notify us after two minutes. That has not happened tonight. You have been very disrespectful at Washington.

Pres. Urso: Yes, we started that way and we didn't end that way. We let people speak their minds. That is what we are doing tonight. At Washington, we realized people needed to speak their minds and I'm doing that again tonight.

Ms. Prentiss: That leads me to the next question: Are you really considering what is best for our children? I say no. You sit up here and take a stand. Our babies are crying and we don't hear them. We have to come to these Board meetings. There are people here who are lying on us. I will not stop on that. I have no children in this District anymore but because I am part of this community and I work in the high school and have the children's best interest at heart. I will not sit back. I will take it to my grave until I cannot fight anymore. Also, this question is to Mr. Diggs: If Miss Urso is the Board president, why are you controlling the meeting?

Board Member Diggs: She is the Board president. I'm not controlling the meeting. I'm addressing questions as they are fielded, as others here are responding, too.

Mrs. Sifuentes: From what I have observed, you are not qualified for this position, Miss Urso. You do not have the answered the questions. What is your fear? If Washington is slated to be closed, has it been determined where those displaced students will go and how do they get there? Are you going to provide transportation for them? As we can explore other options, and there are some, is it true that the 7th grade class of Washington school will be the 100th graduating class next year on Washington School? Now I'm talking about history. Washington has been always tops for a long time in basketball. We have to go out and vote. We can be angry at these people, but we have allowed them to make these decisions. Go to the polls when it is time to vote. Thank you very much. I will be at the next Board meeting.

Ms. Katherine Sorenson: There was a gentleman translating for me tonight. First, tell everyone to check the website. There is nothing on it. But, the Illinois State Board of Education has a lot of information. Let's start with what I said Tuesday night. You passed this budget July 1st of a negative \$1.9 million. Let's go back to 2006, when you had a budget of \$49 million – \$3 million over budget. In 2007, you passed a budget of \$51 million. You were over on that budget, at \$56 million. This goes on. So you have been taking from the surplus, taking what you said was a balanced budget and spending millions of dollars over it for the last four years. I think you need to start telling the truth. I found another report. District 89 reported on June 29, 2009, that \$35 million went to vendors. You also have 34 employees, certified and non-certified, on this payroll that are earning over \$100,000 each, or \$3.4 million in salaries. That also does not include 463 non-certified employees still on the payroll. You need to stop spending. You need to refocus on the six schools that are on academic warning list. Four of those schools have been on the academic warning for nine years. Here's what I proposed based on the fact that \$20 million dollars is gone and you want more. You need to cut. You need to cut your spending, your vendors, your political favors and whatever else it takes. You knew back in September when the State Board mailed the complete listing of all the school deadlines for the year to every school district within the state. So now you are waiting till the last minute, thinking that you are going to shut down the school. Our teachers need to remain employed. Our schools need to remain hopeful because if you make the wrong decision, you have two communities that will never forget and never forgive you. I want to take a moment to explain for a moment about a TIF fund because they weren't able to. Your communities decided, let's say in 2005, to make a selected business district a TIF district. They will then decide for how long they will freeze the taxes of that area. In order for them to put all that money they save back into that area. It can go for like 5, 10, 15 years. So if Melrose Park can go back to the economic development board, you can ask them to see report on the TIF funds. This will let you know the exact dollar amount that has been frozen by each TIF district. Does that answer your TIF question? You can't get the money back because it is frozen until the expiration of the TIF.

Mrs. Yolanda Luna: What is going on with the classrooms and what is going on with APOP? My next question is: why not cut administration, too? Why were non-tenured teachers let go?

Pres. Urso: We are not speaking about personnel matters. Those are closed session items. We are looking to redesigning the APOP program.

Board Member Diggs: For those of you who asked how we came to be at this meeting. I want to applaud this parent who is president of the Stevenson PTA. She asked that we bring the information to these communities. I appreciate that.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: It was great idea to have these meetings. But the way they were put together they were not put together the way it should have been. The rest of the Board was notified through e-mail on Friday evening that we were going to have two meetings. We were not asked if we were available. You should have talked to the full board. He said it was done by Ms. Urso and Flanagan.

Pres. Urso: That is not quite right. We knew the public wanted to be more informed. We talked about this as a Board in closed session. If it was a mistake I'll take responsibility. You cannot fault me for trying to get the information out. I will make sure you will be better informed.

Mrs. Luna: Yes, but our children are paying for all those mistakes.

Another mom: I'm a teacher. I'm one of the RIF'd teachers. There are a lot of RIF'd teachers that passed out flyers. I hope after having this series of meetings, you realize parents haven't just started asking questions. The kids are paying. They've already paid. I have 28 students now. I don't know what kind of numbers you'll have next year. You say you're going to hire people back. I came for information. We have to be truthful. Everyone has to be accountable. I'm accountable for my 28 students. I'm always accountable. Everyone has to be accountable in this District if you expect it to work. I was thinking with this being a town hall meeting, they'd be open for suggestions. That didn't happen. We got a presentation from an outside group that gave us no information we could take to any table that we could understand. You didn't give us any solutions other than to cut and close a school. Now we have to go to the April 15th Board meeting. How many meetings are we supposed to go to? We deserve more than this and you should be ashamed of yourselves.

Three girls: We're here because we're worried about all of the programs being cancelled. Our question is: Are you going to be cancelling all the programs? If you are, there is nothing else for us to do. We do the after-school programs because it's important.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Are you referring to extracurricular activities?

Girl: Yes, anything that helps us.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Volleyball was cut.

Girl: Is there a way we can raise money privately to keep these programs?

Board Member Neely: The gifted program will not be in school anymore. We should not be telling you this now. This was voted on three weeks ago. We voted on three weeks ago. We cut extracurricular activities. Volleyball has been cut. Basketball is still in existence. Also soccer.

Girl: The reason we can attend APOP is that it's during school. There is no way we can continue doing that before or after school. Will you be cutting any more programs?

Board Member Neely: I can only tell you that the Board has to agree to that. We already have cut several things. I'm hoping the district staff, parents and students will get a listing of what has already been cut. I don't have a problem (with saying who voted which way) and if not here see me afterward.

Student: We're worried because you're cutting all these teachers. We're all going to be stuck together and it's going to be hard to learn. We're used to the teachers we have already. It's easier to learn if you know your teachers already.

Pres. Urso: It is heartbreaking we had to cut teachers. We're not going to take that program away. We will still service our students next year. We want to have our doors open and not be taken over by the state. At least understand that. We will have the minutes posted on the website and at the schools. When have you had the opportunity to come to meetings like this before? We listened to the community say that it wants a bigger voice. We said we'd come out to you, to a Maywood school and to here.

Student: All I want to know is that you keep trying. We appreciate it. We just want to be informed. We want to know you guys are trying your best.

Pres. Urso: Ms. Sorenson, thank you for coming.

A Parent: My son is in Melrose Park School. He is in special education. He is working with a social worker. If you cut special education support, my son will be affected next year.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Most of special education is mandated by law. We have to serve kids in special education.

Board Member Diggs: There are federal laws - what are described as unfunded mandates. Those are certain standards across the country that we must provide certain services. Special education is a component. There will not be cuts, only adjustments in the numbers of teacher's assistants based on class size.

Pres. Urso: I know PMA's presentation is a lot to digest. As for special education, bilingual and transportation, those are unfunded mandates. This means that the government requires us to provide services and they're not giving us all the money owed us to pay for these services. That is why so many districts are in trouble.

Another parent: I have two children. One was in special education 15, 20, 25 years ago. In that time, special education was for people with a disability, behavioral problems, or autism. My children had a learning disability. She was in a regular classroom. How much do you think she took in? Today, my second child, my son, is a special education teacher. Isn't that something? And he's one that's RIF'd. He's a dedicated teacher. Are we going to revert to the education of special education children 25 years ago? Let's put them all together in the classroom. We can justify the hours. What are we going to do because the special education teachers are all leaving? My next point is, our minutes will be on the website. I've gone on the website before. There is nothing there. Are these questions going to be on the website with the answers?

Pres. Urso: We had the questions posted on the website. You open the website and you will see a bunch of questions. Not one question posted on the website. There were budget questions. Click on it. They'll have to do a better job of letting people know. You can rest assured that all special education children will be served next year to the fullest.

Mom: I will be holding you accountable. I remember what I went through. I want no child to go through what I went through.

Board Member Neely: I'm sorry I can't answer that because I didn't agree to have the questions posted on the website. My first time hearing that was when I came to the meeting Tuesday at Washington School. That question should be directed to whoever decided it would be on the website.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Most of the Board has not been even asked. We've got one or two Board members that are directing our administrators. We can't answer the questions because we haven't been asked. You have to ask the one Board member who knows.

Pres. Urso: A president of the Board, as part of her job, is to work with the superintendent. We discussed all of this in closed session to inform the public about our finances. We were under a time constraint to get this done, as the attorney states. We had no choice but to get some meetings set up. As you know, two board members could not make it. I knew when the other four members were informed, I knew they would do everything possible to attend the meeting.

Board Member Neely: That is not fair. This is an example of how our meetings are done. Something as small as setting up a Board meeting is an example of how the District operates. Our finances have been this way in terms of us being in debt for a long time. We have been over budget every year. This is not the first year. We cannot realistically cut \$6 million in two months.

Board Member Diggs: Your question is: When will you see it in the minutes? Ma'am, we all have input. My suggestion is the same as at the other public forum. If you have specific additional questions, we'll make sure you get that information.

Parent: Of the questions that have been asked already, I would like to know answers to those.

Board Member Diggs: Information will be available at the schools, on the website and at the District office. How soon, I can't say. We have the superintendent and staff here tonight.

Parent: Will you be polling them this evening about considering cutting an administrator?

Pres. Urso: Yes, I will call the whole Board. I will be polling the whole Board.

Parent: So you will be polling the whole Board this evening so they can have this on the agenda?

Board Member Neely: She is going to poll us. When we vote that is all we'll do. The answer will already be decided.

Mom: Can we get an extension on the deadline?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: If you can't reach all seven board members at once, if you have a majority, that is the answer right there. If you have four votes, that's done.

Board Member Neely: So, if you have two Board members this evening it's ... if four agree it's done.

Pres. Urso: As board president, I need to call all board members.

A parent: I have a question regarding the superintendent's position. I would like to know what process will be used and the timing. I really don't think this was a good time to not renew the superintendent's contract because we're in a critical situation here. We need all of the information and intelligence that we have on the Board and in the District for the decisions that need to be made. I don't know if the Board can open up that again and reconsider. You can always extend the contract. I would think the superintendent should be given more time to do the job that needs to be done. In this District, we have a revolving door of superintendents. It seems they're hired at will and let go at will. When we hire someone, we ought to empower them to do the job and not micromanage them as a Board, so that they could do the job. The superintendent has assets that are necessary in this District. She is bilingual. That is a plus? What is your process for hiring a new superintendent? When you release someone, that is a costly action. It will take money to replace that person. The students will lose the continuity. When you don't have someone who is truly in power, decisions don't get made.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: A few days before our last meeting, which was our most important, our superintendent was put on administrative leave. Now we hadn't had the benefit of our superintendent who was working all year with our administrators. She would not be at that meeting to give the valuable input.

A parent: I hope there was good reason for doing that and that she represented some hazard to the district.

Board Member Diggs: I've looked at this District and others, the instability of this District and its administrators. Those familiar with the district's history, financially and academically, are aware that a majority of our schools are not meeting state standards. This Board, by law, only hires one employee. Even as the other two previous superintendents left, we have continued to operate in a deficit mode. We can't borrow as we have been doing. We, the Board, act as one voice. The process, procedure, accountability of this Board is all through one employee, the superintendent.

Parent: If we've been operating for the last 6, 7, or 8 years in deficit, what plans are in the process to reduce that deficit situation?

Pres. Urso: When Grady Rivers Jr., Lequita Neely and I came on the Board, in our first term, the District was on the state watch list. We hired PMA to work with us and they got us off that list, with the help of the assistant superintendent. However, because of our funding problems – "No Child Left Behind" was an unfunded mandate - we were required to provide services that the government did not pay for so we had to use our reserves. Our grants money has been underfunded for years. (Pres. Urso explained that some grants require that the District spend money upfront on an initiative in order to be reimbursed later with the grant funding.)

Parent: You mentioned grant money. You have a person responsible to do grants. Can't you bring money in from other sources to offset that? Have we been successful in bringing in funding from other new sources? Private grants?

Board Member Diggs: Yes. There was recently an announcement of a grant that was competitive throughout the state that was awarded to schools. All federal grants are available on the ISBE website. Illinois also applied for the Race to the Top grant. Unfortunately, Illinois made it to the final deadlines but not to the final cut. Those grants that come to the district can come from administrators, individual teachers, as well as the community, working with the District. I think the District has worked to pursue grants.

Board Member Neely: We were successful in what we could do. Next year, we will not have a grants person.

Mr. Hogan: Why hasn't the person who handles the finances for the District been present?

Pres. Urso: I asked if you could wait until the woman after you.

Parent: How long did it take for you all to come up with these two meetings at Washington and Melrose Park?

Interim Supt. Susan Flanagan: This meeting was planned with the Board president and myself so that we could get information to the community about the financial status of the district. This meeting was planned a week ago.

Parent: I, the parent, received a phone call from the District on Tuesday about a meeting that was supposed to take place that night and another today.

Pres. Urso: Both of these were posted last Friday, on the website and at the schools 48 hours before.

Parent: How long did it take you vote on the teachers who were fired?

Pres. Urso: As we said, we have been talking about cost containment for two years. This is the second year. Last year, there was only a 10 percent reduction in force. This year, we started talking at our Board retreat. We have had three public meetings talking about cost containment. Our biggest expenditure is salaries and benefits.

Parent: Where did the superintendent that was here all year long go?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: She is on administrative leave.

Mom: Does the superintendent that we have now, does she have ties to District 89 previously?

Interim Supt. Sue Flanagan: I have worked with District 89 for 34 years, as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, and a director. I still continue doing my director's job along with being interim superintendent.

Mom: I find it strange that the superintendent was let go before an extremely hard position that we are in right now.

Could it be she was let go because she would not have fired 106 teachers? She would probably have figured another way to sort this out.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: She was prepared to serve out the rest of her contract.

Pres. Urso: With all due respect for Board Member Rivers Jr., he is speaking from a personal opinion.

Mom: I asked why.

Board Member Neely: I can't answer that. I can try to answer the other questions. One is about how the meeting was planned. I, as a Board member, was informed in an e-mail on Friday afternoon, a few hours before it was posted. I did not give input. I wasn't told. Even at our last Board meeting, it wasn't said that from then until our April 15th meeting that we'd have two more meetings. Some of us asked for another meeting after our meeting in March. We were told, "We're not available and we're not going to have another meeting until April 15th. I never thought, until Friday that I would get a notice of two more meetings. I was so upset I had to calm myself down. I called the superintendent and asked, How is it that a town hall meeting was called and I get notice of it as a regular member of the village? We

couldn't even get notice of it in the paper. I agree it was too fast. It was needed. Then, you asked, How long did it take us to vote to let go of our teachers? We did it on the same day that we voted to put the superintendent on administrative leave. We get a Board packet 48 hours in advance. Then, when I got to the Board meeting that day, there was a whole new personnel listing on the agenda with more names listed. We, as a District, need to do better, not only on informing you all but on informing each other.

A parent: So I take it that the decision is already made.

Board Member Diggs: We are notified as a Board by several different ways. I got it via e-mail. Each Board member, when they get information of a special meeting, also will receive an agenda. Each Board member is entitled to contact the Board president to add items on the agenda. The process that the superintendent did to notify the parents and set meetings up, that's the work of the superintendent and her staff. We can inquire and ask the question. There was only one explanation to the reason of these meetings. That was to explain and express to the community the financial statement of the District.

Pres. Urso: The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the financial situation.

Parent: You still haven't answered parents' questions.

Pres. Urso: We, as a Board, have not voted to close a school.

Board Member Diggs: From the previous meetings, the Board made recommendations. Information was shared, starting from Dec. 15th of last year on staff negotiations. The Board asked staff to talk about if a school is closed, what would we do to make up the difference? There were other recommendations that the Board asked the staff to work on. This is a process. Bring the topic to the community. If you read the paper, listen to the radio, watch TV, you'll see what other districts are doing.

Board Member Neely: You asked about the closure of Washington School. It was recommended, even though I respectfully disagree, it was recommended to close Washington School. It was not stated where the children would go. At that time, no one told us that information.

Parent: Is there a recommendation for redistricting the kids, outside of Washington School closing?

Board Member Diggs: Yes. Based upon discussions in closed sessions, we're obligated by law not to discuss what was in closed session.

Board Member Neely: Board Member Diggs is implying that I broke the law. I did not break the law.

Parent: Was the recommendation made to redistrict kids at Melrose Park School?

Board Member Neely: Yes.

Mom: What part of it?

Board Member Neely: That's still being discussed.

Board Member Diggs: I'm only saying, aren't you curious to find out what the other recommendations were made? What if, as a parent, how many teachers do we have? How many teachers were RIF'd and recalled? There is a process.

Parent: You haven't answered my questions.

Mr. Hogan: Why wasn't the person who is in charge of finance replaced?

Pres. Urso: I can't comment on that.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: If you keep the same people and you keep doing the same thing over and over, you can expect the same results.

Mr. Hogan: It feels like it is a little bit set up. The deadline for the administration people is tonight. How is it legal for you to make decisions without all board members present? How did the dates fall in place?

Board Member Diggs: We're guided by the state deadlines on the number of days before the end of the school year that we have to notify certified staff and non-certified staff if they are going to be RIF'd.

Board Attorney Meaghen Russell: The deadline for nonrenewal is April 1st. That does not mean that moving forward, the Board can decide to not renew an administrators' contract but there are ramifications contractually, financially to do that.

Mr. Hogan: Like the superintendent being put on leave. I find it coincidental.

Mr. Martinez: There has been a lack of communication from the Board to the residents, the parents and so forth. Some of these problems are not problems that came yesterday. They have built up over the years. As far as communications I commend all of you for being here. Of the Board members not here, there is one down the street sitting on his front steps. Of the vendors, can you please make sure you cater to the audience you serve? Some do not have internet access.

In hiring teachers and principals, do a better job at communicating. You say there is a process where you collaboratively come to agreement, but it isn't yours to make. You must ask parents and teachers what they think. As for as the Board member, I've heard it said there is a process. Why, when you look at the minutes of the Board meetings, are there four who always vote the same way? Why do you always vote the same?

Board Member Rivers Jr.: We have a 7-member Board. Come to the meetings and see how Board members vote. You can hold us all accountable for our votes.

Board Member Diggs: Yes, the agendas and issues are important. Our votes, doesn't mean that we have not had thorough discussions. As a new Board member, when there was not an unbalanced or majority of board members, there was a split. So what happens when there is no agreement? How did the Board act in the best interest of the schools, students, etc.? One other thing you suggested, the staff does the best to reach out to the community. This district has employed a PR staff person who also has responsibility of grants. The district seeks competent, qualified employees. Even from what I'm hearing tonight, as Board members, even if we have our next retreat, can we get along? We represent you and the children. What will happen if new Board members are here and you have the same issues?

Pres. Urso: We have a moral obligation to vote our conscience. Yes, we are acting in the best interest of our students. We make mistakes. But we made the attempt to reach out. You don't plan that the state had financial problems. Now we have projections. The company that does that for us said we have to act now. The whole state is in a financial crisis.

Board Member Neely: You asked about two of our Board members. In defense of Loretta Gustello, she did inform us she would be out of town. She attends 80 percent of our meetings.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: Mr. Anguiano doesn't show up at all the meetings.

Pres. Urso: He makes an attempt to attend. Of the voting bloc, you do have that.

Mrs. Sifuentes: It's sad to see how divided this Board is. You've made a perfect display today. Mr. Anguiano is sitting on his front stairs, on 18th Ave. I'm letting you know, as a member of this community, where he was on such an important night. A lot of valid, important questions were asked and no one stepped up to the plate. There were kids here from Melrose Park School and this is what they saw. The Board members don't get along. You guys came ill prepared.

Board Member Neely: There are times when we disagree. What I want you to take away from this is that, as a Board, they do not communicate with each other.

Pres. Urso: With all due respect, thank you for coming and let us know what we can do to do better. Board Member Anguiano does make regular board meetings.

Mrs. Sifuentes: President Urso, I commend you for trying to stick out your neck to stand up for your board member, but on such an important night, the whole community saw him at his home. Next time, just leave it. Don't come back with a comment.

Pres. Urso: Since you are being so honest, I'd like to be honest. By not responding, that means I would agree with you.

Mr. Martinez: I think it's time now to try to work together. We have to start set up PTAs. We don't have them at Melrose Park School. We have to start doing this for our kids. The interim superintendent who is on leave. I saw it on the website. That really impacted me. I didn't know who she really is. It's is sad she is not here. We have to start working together. We're going to have to have get together and work. This was just a discussion. It is not really done. Should have had this done weeks, months ago. There is no change.

Board Member Rivers: I wanted to be on this Board because I saw things happening before I came to the Board that you saw tonight. It was my hope and desire I could help us move forward. I'm part of this community and have lived here 33 years. I have a vested interest. I don't have children here anymore, but I have grandchildren here. Once I was on this Board, I saw some of the barriers and challenges that our Board was faced with. Sometimes you can't see the forest for the trees. But I, as one person, could not have convinced my colleagues of what we need to do to move this District together better than all of you did tonight and on Tuesday. So now we can't say that we have not heard what we need to do. What we need to do is act like adults that the community, teachers and staff expect us to do. We volunteered and said we would do this for our children and our community. Now we have to accept it for what it is. We should have been sharing this information with the village years ago. It's not too late. We can improve. Now that we know where we are, we should know that we can do better. As members of the community said tonight, "If you are not going to do what you said you're going to do, you should step down." If I don't do what I set out to do, I should step down. We, as a Board, are going to do our best to work better together. We have to hear each other. We don't all have the answers.

One thing is that I cannot make an informed decision when I don't have all the facts. We have to hold each other accountable and most importantly ourselves. I'm optimistic that District 89 is going to get better.

Board Member Rivers Jr.: I want to thank everyone for coming out participating. I encourage all to attend on April 15.

Board Member Diggs: As a new board member thanks to everyone. I hope all will hold to their faith and convictions and that this meeting encourages people to take more active involvement in the schools.

Board Member Neely: As a Board member, I appreciate the concerns that all you have made today. I hope that, as a Board, we all hear how we need to operate and how we get that information out to the communities. All three towns need to work together. Board Member Rivers said we need to hold each other accountable. You will see us holding each other accountable and if I ask questions of others, or they ask questions, I hope I will get those questions answered. We had a great time at both schools. This puts us on notice about who we serve and what we are here for.

Pres. Urso: You run for the Board and want to serve, thinking that you have something to offer. Whether you succeed or not is not the point. We all have something to offer. That's why we had these two meetings. It is never too late to do something that hasn't been done before. That's why we are here. We have heard what you are saying. We need PTAs at every school. The best thing about this country is that you have a voice.

V. Motion for Adjournment

A motion was made by _____, seconded by _____ that the Special Meeting of the Board of Education be adjourned at 10:55 p.m.

Roll call:

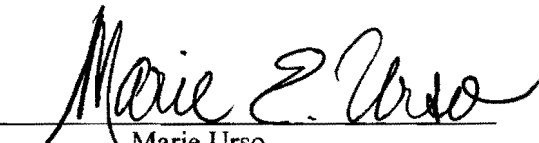
Ayes: Diggs, Neely, Rivers, Rivers Jr., Urso

Nays: None


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

Nays: None

The meeting was adjourned at 10:55 p.m.



Marie Urso
President, Board of Education
School District 89



Loretta Gustello
Secretary, Board of Education
School District 89