

MINUTES
ROCKY POINT PUBLIC SCHOOLS
BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
September 8, 2009

Mr. Nofi called the meeting to order at 7:35 A.M.

Pledge of Allegiance

Present: Michael Nofi, President
Diane Burke, Vice President
Michael Ferrara, Trustee
John Lessler, Trustee
Carla L. D'Ambrosio Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools
Michael F. Ring, Ed.D., Asst. Supt. for Finance and Operations
Patricia Jones, District Clerk

Absent: Edward Darcey, Trustee
Anja Groth, Acting Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

Mr. Nofi announced the purpose of the meeting was to further discuss President Obama's planned televised address to American students and to ultimately make an informed decision regarding the Rocky Point Union Free School District's participation in the viewing and/or hearing of the President's speech. Mr. Nofi invited those in attendance to make public comments concerning the address.

- Jenny Andersson noted that she had read the Message from the Board of Education posted on the district website and voiced her dissatisfaction with the message. Commenting on the thirty percent drop out rates of students in the United States, Ms. Andersson stated it was a great honor to have the president of the United States address the students with his message of staying in school and doing their best while there, regardless of which political party individuals belonged. Ms. Andersson shared that she had since had the opportunity to read the transcript of President Obama's full address and that "it was beautiful." She was appalled that the district was considering not airing the speech and implored the board to reconsider its stance.
- Both Mrs. Burke and Mr. Nofi stated that the reason the board was meeting at 7:30 a.m. today was to decide the course of action the board would adopt following the release of the transcript of the speech on September 7th. Mr. Nofi announced that the board did not want to bar the president's speech, however, the board was concerned over its content, specifically, as it concerned possible "politicking." At the time the board issued its message to the community, September 4th, a great deal was still unknown. The board was further concerned with the age appropriateness of the students seeing and/or hearing the speech.

- Mrs. Burke reported board members were inundated with phone calls and e-mails from parents concerning the airing of the president's address.
- Mr. Nofi remarked that large numbers of parents threatened to keep their children home from school on Tuesday, September 8th. It was this overwhelming response from the public that led to the Message from the Board of Education posting on September 4, 2009. Mr. Nofi further remarked that it was a prudent course of action to conduct this meeting and foster this dialogue concerning this controversial issue.
- Ms. Kara Meyers identified herself as a parent of students in the Frank J. Carasiti Elementary School. Ms. Meyers asked if she should keep her children home because she did not believe the information contained in the speech should be viewed/heard by the students at FJC. She also expressed her concerns as to how the district could be certain the transcript of the speech released to the public would in fact be the speech delivered. Ms. Meyers stated that she is capable of teaching her children the messages purportedly contained in the president's address and that there was not a need for the president to take on this role in place of parents.
- Dr. D'Ambrosio advised information received from the New York State Education Department indicated the speech contained three tenets: stay in school, the importance of setting educational goals, and the importance of good attendance. Dr. D'Ambrosio stated the district was not showing the "I Pledge" video portion of the presentation as the video appeared to be verbally innocuous.
- Mr. Ferrara added the lesson plan called for students to read about President Obama and other US presidents.
- Mrs. Burke offered that it is district policy for teachers to create their own lesson plans, however, teachers may not "politic" in class.
- Dr. D'Ambrosio reaffirmed that the students in FJC would not be viewing/hearing the speech and that participation by students in grades 5-12 would be determined by their specific teachers. The "I Pledge" video would not be shown to any students as its broadcast was to be blocked/filtered on the district website.
- Mr. Ferrara stated the Board of Education was reacting to initial feedback from the community and was concerned that the messages in the lesson plan were consistent with the "I Pledge" video. Mr. Ferrara noted that ninety percent of the content was positive.
- Ms. Andersson thanked Dr. D'Ambrosio and the Board of Education for allowing the heated debate, noting that debate is healthy, but remarked that the arena for the debate was due to "unfortunate circumstances."
- Ms. Irene Giannotti, a parent of high school students, stated she had read the speech on line and believed it to contain positive messages. Ms. Giannotti expressed her hope that the high school students would have the opportunity to view/hear the speech with their peers as it would have more value and the students would be able to bounce their opinions back and forth.
- Dr. D'Ambrosio again mentioned students would view/hear the speech if their teachers chose to incorporate its contents with their lesson plans/Smart Board. Dr. D'Ambrosio stated it was not her intention to have the speech viewed/heard by a "captive audience."

- Mr. Nofi commented some school districts planned to ban the viewing/hearing of the speech today but would be taping the address for viewing/hearing at a later date following the districts' reviews of its contents.
- Mr. Vincent Palifka agreed that it was great for a higher authority to give this important message to students; however, he expressed doubts about President Obama's credentials to do so. Mr. Palifka also expressed his concerns about any subliminal messages that might be contained in the speech and noted the students attending the Frank J. Carasiti Elementary School were too young to comprehend the material.
- Dr. D'Ambrosio stated today's meeting afforded those in attendance the opportunity to participate in a healthy debate concerning the issues. Dr. D'Ambrosio advised she had revisited the educational speeches and subsequent messages delivered by two former presidents, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush. Dr. D'Ambrosio stressed her belief in the beneficial impact of promoting an educated population in the area of citizenry.

There were no further questions and/or comments.

Mr. Nofi announced that based upon the released transcript of President Obama's speech and additional available information, the Board of Education would follow the directives contained in its Message from the Board of Education dated September 4, 2009. Mr. Nofi thanked those in attendance for their input at this meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

At 8:03 A.M. a motion was made by Diane Burke and seconded by John Lessler to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor – Motion carried 4-0

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Jones
District Clerk

