

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
HELD MONDAY, DECEMBER 7, 2009
141 PARK STREET, GEORGE INNESS ANNEX

A. STATEMENTS

Let the minutes reflect that adequate notice of this meeting has been approved in the following manner:

1. On November 30, 2009, notice of this meeting was faxed to the Montclair Times, the Herald News, and the Star Ledger. The time, date, and location of this meeting were accurately set forth therein.
2. On this same date a copy of said notice was filed with the Township Clerk and was posted at the public bulletin board in the first floor main hall of the Board of Education Building, 22 Valley Road.
3. Copies have also been mailed to all persons who have requested same at no cost.

B. ROLL CALL

	Present	Absent
John Carlton	__x__	_____
Shirley Grill	__x__	_____
Robert Kautz	__x__	_____
Leslie Larson	__x__	_____
Shelly Lombard	__x__	_____
Ronald Riddick	__x__	_____
Carmen Taylor	__x__	_____
Staff Members	__ 4__	
Members of the Public	__75__	
Members of the Press	__ 1__	

C. RESOLUTION FOR EXECUTIVE SESSION

At 5:30 p.m. Shelly Lombard moved the following resolution:

WHEREAS, pursuant to N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b), the Montclair Board of Education may exclude the public from that portion of a public meeting at which the Board discusses any of the matters described at N.J.S.A. 10:4-12(b) (1)-(9);

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Montclair Board of Education shall forthwith enter into closed session to discuss the following matters concerning: Personnel Matters.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that said discussion may be disclosed to the public when the reasons for discussing and acting upon it in closed session no longer exist.

Seconded by Shirley Grill and approved by a vote of 7-0.

D. EXECUTIVE SESSION

E. RETURN TO OPEN SESSION

At 7:50 p.m. Robert Kautz moved that the Board shall return from executive session; seconded by Ronald Riddick and approved by a vote of 7-0.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Pledge of Allegiance occurred at 8:55 p.m.

a. Discussion of New School

John Carlton presented a recap of the process. Mr. Carlton reported that the district has seen a growth of approximately 1800 students since the late 1980's, which is equivalent to about the size of a middle school in the state of New Jersey. Mr. Carlton noted that since the planning process began approximately seven years ago, the district has added 600 students.

Mr. Carlton stated that in 2003, the Board of Education hosted meetings with both the Rand community and neighbors of the future school, that the architect revised the original plans after listening to neighborhood concerns and due to the increase in cost of materials. Mr. Carlton noted that the original design was to replace both Rand and Renaissance Schools, replace community resources which were lost from the Washington YMCA and protect public investment in the neighborhood as described in the redevelopment plan approved by the Town Council.

Mr. Carlton noted that in 2009, budget hearings were discussed and a flat budget with no increase was suggested. Mr. Carlton stated that in order to have a flat budget, there would have to be a reduction in the number of teachers and the closing of a smaller school in the district; i.e. Rand, Edgemont or Renaissance but the Board rejected this option and looked at alternative options. He also noted that the Board of School Estimate voted to support the budget and continue the existing programs in the schools.

Mr. Carlton informed the public that the School Task Force looked at maximizing space options and presented its recommendations, which met the three mandates they were charged with:

1. reduce class size at the elementary level
2. create space to allow some special education students to return to district
3. find a permanent home for Renaissance School

Mr. Carlton stated that the Board met with members of the school community to hear their concerns and suggestions and that after those community meetings, the Board had additional concerns such as:

- funding from the State
- internal budget goals to be fiscally conservative
- partial integration of special education students at Rand
- creation of self-contained special education options at Renaissance

Mr. Carlton stated that the recommendation tonight is to move Rand School to the new building on Washington Street and to move Renaissance School to the Rand building with some modifications.

Mr. Carlton noted that his personal recommendation would be to recreate Renaissance and create self-contained special education classes as part of the Renaissance program. Mr. Carlton suggested that by doing this, some space problems in other schools would be eliminated, a saving of personnel dollars would be seen, buildings would be less crowded, the current home room structure of Renaissance would be preserved and there would be a significant reduction in the operating costs; i.e. rental fee to Immaculate Conception and costs from some out of school programs. Mr. Carlton agreed that there is some essential work which must be done at Rand but there are also other schools in the district which are in need of essential improvements.

Mr. Carlton stated that by moving Rand to the new building, a reduction in class size can be realized and that the Renaissance staff along with Central Office, will have to re-work their curriculum, especially with regard to the out of school programs.

Mr. Carlton informed the public that he felt the recommendation meets the three mandates and preserves the essence of the existing programs, creates an opportunity to enhance the district's special education program and responds to the Board's budget concerns. He stated that the Board had not been able to agree unanimously and then asked the Board Members for their comments.

Shirley Grill thanked everyone for attending all their meetings to show their support for their individual schools. Ms. Grill stated that parents stating their concerns will no longer be in the building in a couple of years and felt that the final recommendation made should be made for the entire district. Ms. Grill noted that taxpayers with no children in the school system may feel that having a new school with only 250 students is a real luxury which the town may not be able to afford.

Ms. Grill stated that, after deliberating over many concerns and suggestions, she:

- feels it is doable to have fifth and sixth on same floor
- feels if both schools were combined in the new building and Rand was closed – it may not be perfect and may not allow us to bring special education classes back to the district

- thought about the comment – “do no harm” - leave Rand where it is and put Renaissance in the new building

Ms. Grill also stated that the reality for her is the longer day and the intensity that Renaissance brings to the students and would like to see more families opt for the Renaissance program since she feels it is a great model.

Ms. Grill noted that her colleagues have given the same amount of time and consideration that she has but have arrived at a different decision. Ms. Grill stated she would like to see Rand remain where it is and move Renaissance into the new building so that the Renaissance model may be explored further and close the achievement gap at the middle school level. Ms. Grill also added that a more fundamental concern to her is the overcrowding at Northeast and Watchung, that she feels our magnet system is no longer working and that our schools are becoming neighborhood schools.

Robert Kautz noted that he realizes how important the decision is to everyone and feels that the Board adhered to the process of selecting the right recommendation. Mr. Kautz stated that the Board has paid attention to everyone’s concerns and has taken them all into consideration prior to making their decision.

Mr. Kautz stated that he is an advocate of moving Rand into the new building and moving Renaissance into Rand. Mr. Kautz added that the recommendation from the School Task Force was a starting point and then the community added their important and relative issues. Mr. Kautz stated he felt it will be in the district’s best interest to bring special education students back into the district, reduce class size and give the district the opportunity to expand the Rand population

Mr. Kautz stated that he is very pleased to make the recommendation to move Rand into the new building and will vote for the resolution.

Leslie Larson stated that after the School Task Force’s recommendation, the Board continued discussions and this was the beginning of the process. Ms. Larson noted that every possible scenario was considered and that the Board could have gone a couple of different ways but feels that the recommendation to move Rand into the new building would present the least amount of problems. Ms. Larson stated she would vote for the resolution but wanted everyone to know she respects Shirley Grill’s opinion.

Ms. Larson extended an invitation to everyone to continue attending future board meetings and continue being part of the process.

Shelly Lombard stated that this was an interactive process with much discussion on many important issues. Mrs. Lombard noted that most of the e-mails received were from community members with their individual concerns but the Board had to make a decision based on the entire district – families with and without children.

Mrs. Lombard expressed her appreciation to Ms. Grill for all the time she spent considering the different options.

Mrs. Lombard stated that she will vote for the resolution and feels that the district has two popular programs and feels they both should be maintained. Mrs. Lombard noted that allowing special education students to return to the district was a very important factor to her. She also noted that this is a very rough time fiscally and the Board, at budget time, will have to look seriously at renovations to buildings as well as out of school programs.

Ronald Riddick wanted everyone to know that he came to his decision after much thought and consideration on:

- having two different schools in the same building with staggering times
- least impact on the traffic pattern - Elm Street
- the section of town for the new school
- best school for the children

Mr. Riddick stated that he agrees with Ms. Lombard but disagrees on the process of getting things done. Mr. Riddick agreed that there will be fiscal problems but children should not be short changed in the process.

Mr. Riddick stated that he will vote for the resolution.

Carmen Taylor wanted everyone to know, that as the Board had stated previously, a decision had not been made prior to tonight. Mrs. Taylor stated that the Board had met and that the very difficult decision made was in the best interest for children and the entire school district. Mrs. Taylor agrees that it is a tough time fiscally but she will support the resolution.

Shirley Grill wanted to add that she feels the discussions on the new building have been very helpful and have raised additional important issues such as:

- how do we raise test scores for children not achieving
- how do we regain what we had from our magnet system
- how do we continue to integrate our special education students and bring them back into the district

Ms. Grill stated that she feels that this has been a wonderful opportunity, does not want to lose passion from the community and hopes that conversations will continue.

John Carlton stated the Board will explore:

- refocusing magnet themes
- reaching out to attract free and reduced students to Renaissance
- special education opportunities at Renaissance
- afterschool middle school programs

John Carlton expressed his gratitude to everyone who served on the original Task Force in 2003 as well as Julie Cerf, Wil Adkins and the members of the School Task Force. Mr. Carlton also expressed his thanks for everyone input.

COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC:

Nina Cooke John, 336 No. Fullerton Avenue, thanked the Board for allowing the community input. Ms. John stated she was representing the Rand community and asked that the Board support the resolution to move Rand to the new building.

Ms. John stated that the Rand community wants to move Rand intact as a K-5 program. Ms. John noted that the move will provide a long term solution for the district, preserve the Rand program and the Rand philosophy that educates children and their families. She stated that parent involvement is critical for children's education and this is what the Rand program provides.

Beth Wilensky, 5 Briar Hill Road, stated that she appreciates Shirley Grill's comments and agrees that changes are and will be difficult. Mrs. Wilensky noted that she feels many of these changes should have been presented to the community at an earlier time so parents knew that changes may be down the line. Mrs. Wilensky stated that she hopes the right recommendation is made based on information that was presented.

Shelly Lombard responded that if information was presented to parents two to three years ago, some of those parents would not be in the same school; therefore they would be affected by the changes.

Maggie Goldberger, 194 Alexander Avenue, a seventh grade student at Renaissance and former student of Rand, stated that whatever decision is made, it will affect her. Ms. Goldberger noted that teachers are a vital part of education and that expresses what type of school is Rand. Ms. Goldberger agreed that Rand was crowded, did not have all the bells and whistles but was a great school. Ms. Goldberger added that Renaissance is like Rand, a community based school. Ms. Goldberger stated that she feels if both schools were in the same building, it would take their individual identities away and that each school deserves their own buildings and their separate identities.

George Prell, 17 Fairmount Avenue, stated he was upset by the process and feels that the community should have been told a month ago that classes were going to increase by combining the two schools in one building. Mr. Prell stated that parents who visited Rand felt that the move could be a positive experience and many volunteered their time and materials.

Mr. Prell expressed his feelings that discussions and information should have been more transparent.

Leslie Larson expressed her thanks for the enthusiasm and noted that is how the Renaissance program was started. Ms. Larson noted that is very hard to arrive at concrete doable suggestions; therefore more people should get involved and see what is realistic.

John Carlton defended the process and stated that groups visited the buildings, came up with suggestions, requested data from Central Office and that is how a decision was made.

Kevin Sullivan, 38 Godfrey Road, parent of a Renaissance graduate and current Renaissance student, stated that Renaissance has some very enthusiastic teachers in a very limited facility and the important factor is to preserve the core of the Renaissance program. Mr. Sullivan noted that whatever Rand has to offer is better than what the students now have at Immaculate.

Ronald Riddick moved to approve the following resolution:

b. Moving Rand and Renaissance Schools – September 2010

WHEREAS, the Montclair Board of Education is building a new school on Washington Street, and

WHEREAS, the construction will be completed in the spring of 2010 and ready for occupancy in September 2010, and

WHEREAS, the Board convened the School Reorganization Task Force to review the options for the new school, and

WHEREAS, the Board of Education has reviewed the recommendation from the School Reorganization Task Force and received input from the community at several public meetings,

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Montclair Board of Education, after a thorough review of the School Reorganization Task Force recommendation and the various options considered, approves moving the Rand School to the new building to remain a K-5 program and moving the Renaissance school to the current Rand building to remain a 6-8 middle school program.

Seconded by Shelly Lombard and approved by a roll call vote:

	AYE	NAY
John Carlton	___x___	_____
Shirley Grill	_____	___x___
Robert Kautz	___x___	_____
Leslie Larson	___x___	_____
Shelly Lombard	___x___	_____
Ronald Riddick	___x___	_____
Carmen Taylor	___x___	_____

F. ADJOURNMENT

At 8:53 p.m. Shirley Grill moved to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Ronald Riddick and approved by a vote of 7-0.

Respectfully submitted,

Dana Sullivan
Board Secretary