ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOCES MEETING

January 24, 2005
5:30 p.m.
Technology/Media Library

In Attendance: Bee Kirk, Elaine Berman, John Dunn, Tim White, Suzanne Plaut and Willie Jones

Staff: Jon Mann, Melissa McComas, Leann Asgari, Mike Barrett and Julie Stelzer

Guests: Dean Johnson

Approval of Minutes
Minutes from the November 22, 2004 meeting were unanimously approved.

Audit
Dean Johnson of Johnson, Holscher and Company presented the 6/30/04 audit. He stated that the audit process went very well and that Julie Stelzer did a great job of record keeping. The format of the audit report is in accordance with the new accounting disclosure requirements of GASB 34. It includes a Management Discussion and Analysis or MD&A. This format gives financial highlights and a summary of net asset figures as well as a statement of activities, capital assets, fund balance and future of the school.

The opinion on the financial statements is unqualified which means it has no exceptions with generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP), and it is as good an opinion as you can expect to receive. The net assets are $559,000. Fixed assets are $23,000, and $67,000 is unrestricted and showing in inventory and prepaid expenses. Working capital is $469,000. There is a deficiency over expenditures of $25,477 which is fairly typical of government entities. No significant audit adjustments were made during the year end audit.

Jon Mann asked if the Colorado Department of Education has new requirements for additional information to be included on our financial statements. Dean responded that they do not yet have the expectations outlined.

John Dunn questioned why the fundraising revenues and expenditures were the same. Julie explained that we do not budget for fundraising because any funds raised are spent. John suggested that it should be worded differently so that expenditures do not appear to be as a cost of doing fundraising.

John also asked if there was any revenue associated with the COMMSTEP program. Julie responded that the federal grant for that program ended in June 2004, but we may continue to see minimal funds roll through.

Elaine Berman questioned what type of insurance coverage we have with regard to dishonesty coverage. Julie stated that we do have dishonesty coverage and wondered if the board was suggesting that the coverage be increased. Elaine suggested that we compare our coverage to that of other charter schools. We discussed that the board should be covered by their own insurance as public officials.

After the audit presentation was complete, John Dunn asked how the new auditors worked out. Julie responded that the previous auditors asked more questions which resulted in additional internal processes being established. She expected to be quizzed more from this auditor. This audit was easier than in previous years because there was no single audit requirement.

Elaine inquired if there was a board member that worked closely with Julie to help monitor the budget. At this point, the treasurer of the BOCES has not had separate meetings to monitor the budget, and the BOCES will hold the Executive Director responsible for monitoring the budget. Some other boards have a liaison that works closely with budget oversight and some do not. We will move forward with Julie working with Treasurer, John Dunn, on a periodic basic to review the budget.
Budget Revision
Julie stated that the reason for revising the 2004-2005 budget was due to receiving additional PPOR funds. We actually have 322 FTE versus the 321 FTE in the original budget. Also, we budgeted the first six months of the 2004-2005 year at the PPOR rate from last July, and the second six months at the PPOR rate before that in the event that a rescission occurred. We also received $2,308 of Gifted and Talented funding that was not in the original budget.

We are proposing to allocate the additional funds received to some much needed construction in our community room in order to provide a water source to that room as well as upgrade the audio/sound system. Additionally, we need to install air conditioning window units to some of the upstairs classrooms. The energy rebates for the air conditioners make the units basically free. The main cost would be running the electrical for the units. Facilities and custodial expense was increased from $31,841 to $35,000. Also, the professional development budget was increased in order to cover substitutes for ongoing in-house labs.

Julie requested that the board approve the revised budget. Bee Kirk moved that the board accept the revised budget as presented. The motion was unanimously approved.

Budget
Julie asked if there were any other questions on the Budget vs. Actual report. Tim White questioned the fundraising breakdown and asked if the budget reflected how the fundraising money for RMSEL was being disbursed. Julie explained that currently we have the RMSEL Fundraising Committee tracking those allocations. All of the fundraising does flow through the RMSEL Financial Director. RMSEL is not able to sustain a PTO that would manage these funds. Julie will provide a breakdown of the fundraising goals and disbursements at the next meeting.

Elaine asked Julie if there was anything the board should know about the budget that she could point out. Julie explained that we have some accounts with extra money. Business Services is money RMSEL receives for providing business and clerical services. RMSEL has also made approximately $11,500 from renting out our facility. Office Equipment shows a negative $686 due to the insurance claim from laptops that were stolen last year.

Bee stated that he appreciates it when Julie points out what is out of the ordinary when reviewing the budget. It helps the board understand the budget and know what is unexpected.

Executive Director’s Report
Faculty Portfolio and Evaluations - Jon stated that the Instructional Coaches have been incredible and are taking directives from the PEBC practices. The coaches have been telling and exposing us to things we are doing really well and things that we have to work on. There have been some tough conversations. Jon feels that RMSEL is in a better place with professional development than we have been in a long time. The faculty portfolios are a result of this professional development. On off-cycle years, the teachers do a faculty portfolio that is focused on a specific practice that they have in their classroom and then they present their work to the whole faculty. On the other year, the teachers have a formal evaluation. Mike Barrett and Jon spent two full days with Gretchen Morgan, the Expeditionary Learning School Designer. The three of them sat in the classroom together to do observations and then compared notes. RMSEL evaluations are lined up to the core practices of Expeditionary Learning. An Expeditionary Learning representative then does an implementation check on the evaluation of the school as a whole. Last year was the first time we did the faculty portfolios and all of the teachers learned a great deal from what is going on in the other classrooms. In addition to these types of evaluations, RMSEL is also doing the in-house labs with the teachers that provide another forum for giving feedback on instruction.

Website - We have a revised website that does a much better job of explaining what Expeditionary Learning is all about. There is a new section that RMSEL has developed with a company called School Fusion. Every classroom or group has their own page that allows them to have enhanced communication with parents and
the community. The teachers are able to put forms, letters, permission slips, etc. on the page for parents to access.

Progress Reports and Transcripts - RMSEL has always been a standards based school, but we have never expressed that aspect in our transcripts. Our new transcript shows a date that the student has met a specific standard broken down by content area. It also shows information about the electives, mini-challenges, internships, adventure trips and most importantly, their senior expedition. We also have a cover sheet that explains what we do in each of the core subjects. Currently, this is a very cumbersome process, so we will continue to look for ways to streamline this process.

Leadership Team and Decision Making - The Leadership Team has spent many hours determining a process for making big decisions. We have clarified the decision making process with staff in order to define an issue and then address and make decisions about the issue. This has helped the staff as a whole understand how to get an issue addressed.

Capital Campaign - We are in a holding pattern right now because we are working on getting materials about our campaign completed. Once we have those materials, we will bring them to the board for review.

Accreditation Report - The board has seen most of this data. The CSAP results have already been discussed with the board. Jon pointed out the compliance with Safe Schools Act section on page 3 of the report. We have to have a bullying policy and a bullying prevention program in place at the school. We are working with Kelly Mitchell of the School Mediation Center to come up with a plan. We will present the plan at the next meeting since both the policy and the program need to be approved by the board.

The accreditation report will be on our website, so that it is available to anyone wanting to look at it. We also have a new Colorado Department of Education representative working with us.

SAR - These reports are set up for grades 1-6, grades 7-8 and then grades 9-12. We have tried to get them to reflect grades 1-5 and 6-8 but have not gotten anywhere with that request. The reports support our primary concerns with math, and we will continue to focus on this area. The discipline reports are reflective of grades K-12, and therefore, our discipline and safety reports are for all grade levels. The only way to change that is to establish three different schools with a separate administration for each school. Data is not provided for groups that are less than 16, so much of our data shows unreported. When the state does reporting, they have all of the data, but it does not show up on the SARs.

Elaine asked about ethnic breakdown at RMSEL. Leann responded that we have 28% non-white students which breaks down as 25 African American, 25 Hispanic and 20 Asian students. This data is also on our website. RMSEL has approximately 19% of students that qualify for free and reduced lunch.

Elaine suggested that RMSEL’s achievement results would be low compared to a comparable school. Elaine questioned if the board should pay more attention to these figures by banding the results with comparable schools. Bee stated that because the academic program is so different, he would not want to compare to any of the Cherry Creek Schools. Instead, he suggested that RMSEL understand how each sub-group does within the school. Leann suggested that we compare with other Expeditionary Learning Schools. Elaine questioned if we should be looking at methodology or the end result. It is not the input but the output that we should concern ourselves with. Bee countered that since this is a specialized school environment, we would not want the comparisons to be broken down to the point of comparing different teaching methods. Jon agreed that our fundamental job is to look at the end achievement results. RMSEL happens to go down a different path to get there, but we are still concerned with the results. Our culture shows that CSAP is not everything, but we still use that data as a tool to help us focus. Elaine pointed out that Charter Schools have to meet certain measurements in order to continue and should RMSEL hold themselves to those same standards. John stated that the public will look at CSAP results and for the most part we are ahead of state results. To break down these results further than that might not be necessary as long as we continue to use results as a tool for improvement.
Vision Statement - The Community Council and staff have been involved in creating and discussing our vision statement. Suzanne Plaut questioned where the intellectual qualities are reflected in this statement. What about critical thinking? Jon mentioned that the re-design of our portfolio addresses the deep knowledge and higher order thinking aspects. Suzanne suggested that since we have this in our portfolio structure, we incorporate it into the vision statement. Bee stated that the vision statement should reflect that when we do ABC, we will achieve 123. The statement would show what we do and what the RMSEL culture is but also include what happens when we are successful. Elaine suggested that the board vote on the vision statement at the next meeting once the suggestions from the board have been incorporated into the document.

Intergovernmental Agreement - Cherry Creek has already signed the agreement, and Douglas County should now have it to sign. Leann is monitoring where the agreement is in order to have it signed by all districts.

The board adjourned at 7:25 p.m.