ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOCES MEETING

November 16, 2005
5:30 p.m.

In Attendance: John Dunn, Sherry Eastlund, Bee Kirk and Suzanne Plaut

Staff: Leann Asgari, Mike Barrett, Melissa McComas, Jim McDermott and Julie Stelzer

Guest: Michael Aitken

Introductions
Sherry Eastlund from Denver Public Schools’ School of Choice Department was introduced and stated that she will be returning as our Service Link with DPS.

Michael Aitken, Chair of the Community Council, introduced himself. He is a parent of two students, a son in 4th grade and another son in 5th grade. Both of his children started at RMSEL in kindergarten.

Open Forum
Sherry stated that the new DPS board members will be sworn in this Thursday. After being sworn in, they plan to assign a board member to join the RMSEL board. There is concern at DPS that the new board member may not be able to attend all BOCES meetings. Bee Kirk suggested that DPS assign an alternate board member, so that there will always be voting representation at the BOCES meetings.

Approval of Minutes
Minutes from the October 17, 2005 board meeting were not approved as there was not a quorum of voting BOCES members.

Bylaws Review
Jim McDermott recently met with Elaine Berman and Ethan Hemming of DPS to discuss some of their concerns. One of those concerns was the ability to have a DPS board member attend all BOCES meetings. DPS' legal counsel understands that there needs to be a DPS board member on the BOCES. They would like to explore the option of having someone serve as proxy for a board member’s vote. DPS would like to consider revising the bylaws and constitution to allow this option. It was noted that the Intergovernmental Agreement expires in 2006.

Bee asked if RMSEL has legal counsel. Jim stated that RMSEL does have legal counsel, but we are billed by the hour. Bee stated that Cherry Creek has Mandy Hesterman as in-house legal counsel, and we should prepare something for her review. Jim and Bee will work together on this.

John Dunn stated that based on our discussions last year, we should continue with the existing BOCES structure and address the BOCES attendance issue with legal counsel. The question for the attorney should be to define the scope and limits of board members. Suzanne Plaut stated that as a member representing the PEBC, she is considered to be an at-large voting member.

Executive Director Report
Jim followed up with the Colorado Business Bank to see if they wanted some publicity through the districts with regard to their donation. While they appreciated the offer, they would rather not have the publicity. CoBiz was recognized in the monthly RMSEL newsletter.
With regard to assessment, we discussed at the last meeting that we are trying to get MAPS testing available to our school. We have a solution, but it would run approximately $7,500. We are currently trying to determine if there are any other advantages to having a server that would translate from Linux to Windows. We just completed a writing assessment with our 4th and 5th graders that involved expository writing, and these writing samples have been submitted to be scored. We will get a norm group to compare to, but the norm group will most likely be comprised of private schools. This assessment is connected to the Educational Records Bureau (ERB). John says that Littleton has gone to the MAPS testing and is very pleased with the results. He suggested that we approach the district foundations for funding to support the MAPS testing. John stated that he will check with his CFO to explore other options available for this support.

Jim is continuing to work with the CDE regarding RMSEL’s accreditation.

The 6th, 7th and 8th grade students will be at Café Europa reading excerpts from scary stories and poetry on stage Thursday night. Half the middle school had the coffee house readings last Thursday, and there was a wonderful turn out.

As mentioned at the last meeting, some of the districts have a negotiated rate for natural gas. Jim is pursuing this option with Cherry Creek to see if we could take advantage of that rate.

Bee asked if we had followed up with the school districts to get some publicity for RMSEL’s contribution to the Hurricane Katrina relief effort. Jim will pursue this with the districts to periodically put something in the district newsletters.

RMSEL has three Lego League/Robotics teams participating in FIRST® Lego League. These teams will be competing this weekend in the Poudre competition and the state competition is coming up soon. We have two lower school teams and one middle school team that construct robots to perform various tasks using the Lego Mindstorm technology. Everyone is welcome to attend these competitions, and our kids are focused and excited to be a part of these teams.

**Fieldwork Fee Structure Revision**

Every year, our parents pay fieldwork fees to help fund expeditions. The Community Council has created a Fieldwork Oversight Committee to review the fieldwork fee structure. First, the committee established an overview of the acceptable uses of fieldwork fees as well as the accountability measures currently in place. The committee followed some guiding questions to ensure that the fieldwork fees are spent as intended. Sherry questioned whether we have checked the legality of charging fieldwork fees. This issue has come before the BOCES in the past, and the fieldwork fees at RMSEL compared to the activity, lab or equipment fees charged at other schools. Families make the choice to attend RMSEL knowing that fieldwork, and the related fee to support fieldwork, is a requirement of our school curriculum. No child has ever been excluded from fieldwork because the fee could not be paid.

If a crew does not use all of their fieldwork fees, those funds roll to the next major trip scheduled for that class. For instance, if kindergarten fieldwork fees are not used in full, the leftover funds will roll to the year that those students go on the sailing trip in the 4th or 5th grade. If a major trip were scheduled for 2nd and 3rd grades before they got to the year of their sailing trip, then it would be earmarked for that trip. Unspent fieldwork fees do not follow each individual student, but rather the funds are applied to the next major trip for their grade level. The idea is that fieldwork fees balance out for families over a 3 or 4 year timeframe.

The Fieldwork Oversight Committee determined that RMSEL has a shortfall of $44,825. Our fieldwork fees have remained the same since their inception in 2000-2001, even though fieldwork costs have increased substantially. This committee is proposing a 35% increase in fieldwork fees to be spread over 2 years to minimize the financial burden to families. Starting in 2008-2009 and for every year thereafter, the increase to fieldwork fees is tied to the Consumer Price Index (CPI). After the 2007-2008 increase, the increase to fieldwork is not to exceed 4% in any one year regardless of actual increase to the CPI. Families with 3 or more students are offered an optional 10% discount on fieldwork fees.
Bee questioned if we anticipate families with only one or two children raising concerns that they are being charged more. Undoubtedly, we will hear some complaints of that nature, but do not expect that it will be overwhelming.

John was concerned about how this might impact enrollment. Leann Asgari didn’t think this would have too much of an effect. She is careful to state our fees when marketing our school and also mention that we offer payment schedules as well as financial aid.

### Proposed Change to Fieldwork Fee Structure

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A BOCES vote is required to implement this proposed change. We will include this item for approval on the December 21, 2005 agenda. Jim thanked the Community Council, the staff and the parents for working so hard to present us with this comprehensive proposal.

Currently, there is an informal mechanism when we have families that do not qualify for financial aid but have a hardship in paying the fees. Some families have made anonymous donations to assist these families. We would like to formalize that structure and create a list of those families that are able to assist. When we have a family that has a hardship, we would have a formalized process for assistance. Jim suggested that we might call this group the Belay Committee. This idea would promote a culture of philanthropy in our community.

**Budget Report**

Julie Stelzer stated that missing from the management summary is an expense of $500 for repair to one of our minibuses. We had a mishap and the repair estimate is $3,400 with a deductible of $500.

Suzanne questioned the entries for the Boettcher Program. Julie explained that the year before last we had a Teacher Prep Program and last year we were not able maintain the program. We were working with Boettcher and part of that program was to have the fellows use RMSEL for their alternative licensure. Boettcher was to pay RMSEL a certain amount per fellow to cover the licensure. Those funds were received in 2004-2005, and we did not use them. The revenue was deferred into 2005-2006, and will most likely defer into next year when we have reinstituted the Teacher Prep Program.

Bee questioned why our expense for the minibus lease was deducted from contingency. Julie stated that the board agreed in 2004-2005 to let Jon Mann, the former Executive Director, borrow from contingency to purchase the minibuses, and these funds were to be repaid from the capital campaign. This expense was not to be budgeted from the general fund. We have a two year lease purchase on these minibuses, so this expense line item, without a corresponding budget, will show on the financial statements for two years.

Bee asked Julie what her level of confidence was on the pledges receivable of $11,550. Julie stated that she was 100% confident and that $10,000 was a pledge from one family.

Bee asked why we do not have show a budget for after school programs and fundraising. Julie explained that a previous board member, Paul Hanley from Cherry Creek, did not want to see fundraising budgeted for as he did not feel they were real numbers. The intent was that whatever funds were raised would be expended, so he did not want to see those numbers. Bee stated that we couldn’t really use this profit and loss statement...
relative to the budget because the actual column would always be inflated. Julie and Bee will get together outside of the meeting to determine what options are available.

Bee questioned what period of time this report was for. Julie explained that it is for the current fiscal year, July 2005 through June 2006, generated on the date shown in the upper left corner of the report. This report was generated on November 9, 2005, and reflects actual financial activity through that date and the budget for the entire year. Bee questioned why the report was not pulled at the end of the month instead of in the middle of the month. Julie explained that if she put a date range for the report that the budget numbers would be limited to that date range as well and the budget should be reflected for the year. Using a month end report date would work fine for the actual figures but would show numerous variances if the budget for the year was not included. Bee and Julie will meet to discuss options and determine the best way to present this to the board.

School Improvement Plan
Jim stated that the BOCES has reviewed most of the achievement goals in the past, and this plan has been presented and reviewed with staff and the Community Council. Jim suggested that RMSEL coordinate our timing with the Expeditionary Learning Implementation Review in order to be able to use that data in conjunction with our achievement results. Bee asked if this plan was a big change for the staff, and Jim stated the staff reaction has been relatively positive.

We are looking at a value added process with the CSAP results. We are analyzing assessment data for patterns to provide information that translates into helping all students to grow. Originally, we were focused on helping struggling students, and staff pointed out that our goals should be to help all students. We have interventions for struggling students such as a Reading Specialist and Special Education support. We will continue to explore additional assessment tools.

Bee pointed out that some of the suggested increases are gigantic, and Jim responded that while the increase seems large, it only involves maybe two students. Many students are right on the bubble, so the increase is reasonable.

RMSEL’s instructional coaches are working with our math teachers and the math department at Prairie Middle School. Our teachers spent time at a workshop at Prairie and will continue with workshops here in the Denver area.

Bee stated that the plan looked good and that it is important to continue to raise our academic standards. Our reputation will improve with increased standing and that will have an impact on recruiting and retention.

The next meeting is scheduled for December 21st at 5:30 p.m.

The board adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

Bee Kirk, President

John Dunn, Vice President