ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOCES MEETING

April 9, 2007
5:30 p.m.

In Attendance: John Dunn, Emily Hansen, Suzanne Plaut and Susan Tabacheck
Staff: Leann Asgari, Meg Blair, Jim McDermott, Keri Melmed and Julie Stelzer
Guests: Michael Aitken

Open Forum
Michael Aitken, Community Council Chair, reported that he is reviewing architectural drawings for the new air conditioning system. The Community Room is the only non-original part of the building. At this point, the plans are 70% complete, and the rest will be completed by the end of the month. This includes getting the approval from Denver Public Schools. The project will then be sent out for bid. Construction will hopefully get underway in June. Emily Hansen inquired as to whether there is any asbestos in the building. Leann Asgari stated that the only asbestos is located in the basement crawl space.

Susan Tabacheck advised the board of her intention not to run for another term for the APS Board of Education. There are three positions that will be open on the Aurora Public School board for the next term. They will still have one person handling all the charter schools and RMSEL. Susan is not sure at this time who that person will be but will advise us when the information becomes available. Susan also announced the opening of a new Pre-K to 8th grade expeditionary learning charter school called AXL in Aurora. Emily asked if this is the first charter school in Aurora, and Susan stated there are five charter schools in her district. The William Smith High School was an alternative high school and is in the process of adopting the EL model.

Approval of Minutes
Minutes from the January 17, 2007 board meeting were unanimously approved.

Executive Director Report
Exhibition Night was a success with a good response from families. However, due to inclement weather, the kindergarten and first grade students postponed their presentations until the next week. There is discussion about changing Exhibition Night to more than one night. On the one hand, having one Exhibition Night is good because it brings everyone together. The downside is that sometimes the students aren't prepared to present information on their expedition as it may not be completed, or it is completed but the students need to revisit the information. The 2nd and 3rd grade students did not present on Exhibition Night since they had an Ant Symposium earlier in the year and will be having butterfly presentations later this year. We received positive feedback from parents on the staggered schedule. The schedule enabled families with multiple children to see and participate in more activities. In the future, we will probably scale back the activities, and crews that have not completed the expeditions will need to plan accordingly.

The middle school had a successful trip to Memphs, and kudos to all of the staff and parents that accompanied them on the bus ride across the country. Jen Wood, 4th and 5th grade crew leader, was a chaperone on the trip. She commented that the trip was a prime example of authentic fieldwork. The students had prepared extensively and done background work, so the trip was not a field trip. You could see the students pulling together all the background information they had gathered through their studies. Standing on the street of Little Rock High School had a huge impact on the students when they realized that they were 200 feet away from the building where the nine students had to walk through angry crowds each day. A local paper wrote a feature article on our students. The students visited other middle schools and represented RMSEL and Colorado well. The students had an experience that will last them forever.
The staff retreat which occurred in February was a day longer than originally planned due to inclement weather. Berthoud Pass and I-70 were closed, so no one was able to get in or out. Typically, we buy too much food, so they were able to feed everyone for another evening.

The accreditation contract was due this June, but all schools were granted an automatic extension. Jim McDermott received information from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) that we were approved for another five (5) years with the understanding that any changes will be in an addendum to the contract. Jerry Difford, Assistant Commissioner for Regional Services, congratulated us on our CSAP scores and said we are looking good. He also said that Jim should prepare a first draft of the accreditation report, and then he would make any changes and return it to us. Suzanne Plaut asked the reason for the extension. Jim responded that it was extended to everyone due to the redundancy in the contract this year and would cause many changes for next year.

Jim stated that we will send out the revised salary schedule before the next meeting. Jim will review the revisions with the Salary Structure Committee next week and then forward to BOCES. It does not contain any big changes as we cannot afford them. The base salary for first-year teachers will increase to $30,000. For a master’s degree, $1,050 has been added to the base salary and then indexed up. As each step increases a certain percentage, so does the $1,050. Even with these changes, the new salary schedule still does not make us competitive for teachers with a master’s degree. The other change is that new hires will be capped at step 7, and then max out at 15 years. This will keep us relatively competitive. Teachers at the top of the salary schedule will receive COLA increases based on inflation.

Regarding staff hiring, last year we had two .50 FTE instructional coaches. We were unable to fill the one of these positions this year, so one of the coaches increased her time to .80 FTE with the other .20 FTE allocated to staff development stipends. Next year, we are going back to two .50 FTE positions. RMSEL will share one of the coach positions with the Odyssey School. Interviews will be conducted together to hire one full-time person. The new employee will be contracted out to Odyssey for .50 FTE plus benefits to avoid bookkeeping issues because RMSEL and Odyssey have two different retirement systems. Jen Wood, 4th and 5th grade crew leader, has been a school designer in the past and was recommended for this position. She performed well in her interview, so in all likelihood we will now have a 4th and 5th grade crew leader opening. From a process standpoint, we will interview internal candidates first and then will post externally with the other position. Maggie Smiley, high school Art/Humanities teacher, has decided to take a new direction in life after seven years at RMSEL. Pablo Stayton, high school Spanish teacher, after nine years at RMSEL, has decided to take a year leave of absence. This leaves two openings in the high school. There will also be a new .40 FTE math position in the Middle School. This position will focus on 8th grade math. Right now, middle school teachers are teaching 6th, 7th and 8th grade math together in the same classroom, and there is a question of sustainability. The lower school has decided to teach math by grade level next year, so the 2nd, 3rd, 4th and 5th grades will not be combined for math instruction as they are now.

We received a request from Cherry Creek to carbon copy their service links on any board communication. If you would like us to do the same for your district, let us know and the service links will be added to that list for board communications. Susan Tabacheck requested that we not send anything to Linda Ruder right now because she is out on medical leave. Susan instructed us to send any communication to Tony Van Gytenbeek, APS Deputy Superintendent.

With regard to the intergovernmental agreement (IGA), Denver and Littleton have signed the IGA and passed it on. We are waiting to hear from Aurora to see if the IGA was approved by the board, should be presented as is or if an addendum should be added for Special Education as well as the language for changing benefits. Jim questioned whether we should wait until the changes are completed or continue to seek approval as is with an addendum added later. Emily would prefer that that we make the other changes before it is returned to the board for approval. Suzanne questioned how changes would be made if the IGA did not go through to district boards. Jim stated that we would take the IGA back to Denver and make sure changes are implemented. One of the proposed changes concerns release teachers who are on leave of absence from their district, yet still receive benefits through their district. RMSEL is required per the IGA to pay the districts for the benefits.
and reimburses the home district for these costs. This benefit was first added to attract teachers to RMSEL when it opened. This refers back to the need for certified teachers fifteen years ago when RMSEL was established. We generally do not have a problem attracting teachers anymore. This change will give the board the ability to modify this structure for release teachers. The change has not been recommended, but it would be more efficient for the board to have the ability to make this adjustment without having to revise the IGA. John Dunn stated the reason the IGA was approved was because it is better to operate under some kind of an agreement than none at all. Emily stated that it has been approved by her board, and she will follow up to see if it has been signed. Susan inquired as to whether an addendum will follow. This is an issue for the APS board. An emergency meeting can be called to sign the IGA if necessary. Jim explained that there isn’t a need to call an emergency meeting. Susan then stated that Aurora wants to wait until it is completed. Once there is an approved IGA, we will hand-carry the agreement for signature to each of the boards.

Finally, Jim stated he is working closely with the high school to ensure that we are doing the most we can do academically. Since he has started this process, Jim has committed to 2-4 more years, beginning next academic year. He wants to fulfill his commitment to implement changes. Suzanne asked about the changes in the high school. Jim stated that they are trying to make changes with the following questions in mind: What is it we want our students to achieve on their graduation from RMSEL? And are we doing it? Specifically, systems and structures need to be tightened. Time is being looked at, particularly solid blocks of time in the second semester. Jim is trying to ensure that there are quality expeditions and high-quality senior expeditions. Failure is not an option; students will be successful. We are exploring the possibility of having senior expeditions as four to six weeks of fieldwork. This year’s senior class is strong and well prepared. Suzanne asked whether the outcomes for the lower and middle schools are stated. We are in the planning process with them. Some are in place; however, they could be more explicit. We do not have the same concern about structures in the lower and middle schools. Emily asked if it would be helpful if the BOCES was engaged in the process. Jim stated not at this time; however, he would bring any important issues to the BOCES. At the retreat, the staff worked on the school’s vision. This work is being compiled for staff review. One of our visions is to have students ready and very capable of being accepted in any learning institution they choose. John inquired if the national standards are being utilized to help inform those guidelines. There are some national expeditionary learning guidelines. Keri Melmed attended the national convention and spent some time at a high school. The problem is that most EL high schools are not yet four years; this is fairly new in the process. Most new high schools operate with 400 students and are considered small high schools, so we are considered a very small school at 96 students. Jim stated that minor expansion of the high school is under consideration. Any major expansion would be discussed with the board before any decisions are finalized.

Budget
With regard to the Management Summary, Emily asked about the discrepancy with PPOR budgeted vs. PPOR received and whether this had happened in past years. Julie Stelzer explained that this occurs fairly frequently. She sends a request to Velma Rose, DPS Controller, requesting what the per pupil revenue, capital reserve and special education fees will be for the next school year. When we receive our funding check, it is either the number they provided to us or it isn’t. Often, there are line item deductions that relate to state audits or rescissions from previous years. Emily asked if the change to the special education services fee was indicated when the figures were originally requested from DPS. Julie explained that the $3.00/FTE increase was not indicated for special education services. Emily also asked about the status of DPS’ payment for the concrete pan in the parking lot. Julie stated that to date, DPS had not paid for the drainage work. Jim explained that there has been a change in personnel at DPS, so we are still hopeful about receiving some payment for the work.

John asked if the positive variance in interest income was due to budgeting low. Julie stated that we budgeted conservatively at $30,000, and interest rates have stayed at 5% or more. All of the school’s investment funds are in CSAFE. We should be able to make the final residual payments on the minibuses from interest earned, and not have to borrow from the reserve. Jim also informed the board that we received our $25,000 check from the Boettcher Foundation. This was a matching grant for the capital campaign. Susan asked for clarification about the PPOR funding. Julie stated that we receive our funding from DPS in July and January.
With the check, there is a calculation showing the number of FTE from each district as well as any deductions for prior year state audits or funding rescissions. The budget is created based on the best estimate.

Another issue has been brought to our attention from CDE. Our auditors, Johnson, Holscher and Company, have recently completed the June 30, 2006 audit of the financial statements. Once completed, the state requires that we send the audit to CDE as well as the State Auditor’s Office. In addition, the data from the financial statements is submitted electronically to the state via the Automated Data Exchange (ADE) system. CDE then compares that ADE transmission to the audit. This was the first year that RMSEL has been required to submit data through the ADE, and it took the summer to translate the school’s accounts into CDE account numbers. CDE reported to us that the beginning fund balance for this year (7/1/06) did not equal the ending fund balance for last year (6/30/06). The discrepancy is $7,528.40 that is not accounted for in the audit. For clarification, this is missing on paper and not from the school’s bank account. Julie has had numerous conversations with Dean Johnson, the independent auditor, attempting to correct this situation. She did not receive a satisfactory answer, so Adam Williams, CDE Public School Finance Unit, talked with him, but to no avail. Jim suggested that we write a letter to Dean Johnson requesting a resolution. The letter stated that the problem needs to be corrected in the audit, and a prior year adjustment (journal entry) should be made to fix the discrepancy. This issue refers to June 2005. Julie stated that the $7,528.40 is probably indirect costs charged to the National Science Foundation grants for clerical services. We have great support from CDE and the State Auditor’s Office. The State Auditor’s Office will be calling CDE and letting us know exactly what needs to be done to rectify the problem. John asked which beginning fund balance figure is correct, and Julie advised that $762,889 should be the ending fund balance for June 30, 2005 and the beginning fund balance for July 1, 2005. There should be an adjusting journal entry to show 2005 was overstated. The adjustment needs to happen in 2006 as a prior year adjustment. But, it is actually a line item showing up as a prior year adjustment that relates back to 2005, and this will make our ending balance correct. Then, we need to resubmit the financial data via the ADE to the state. Emily asked if this correction needs to occur before June 30, 2007. Julie stated that it needs to be corrected either by the new auditor or Dean Johnson.

Enrollment
Leann reported that enrollment is going well. She is in the process of writing the enrollment priority policy since it has never been put to paper. She will distribute this to the board when completed. Susan expressed a concern with regard to giving enrollment preference to staff and siblings. She stated that it has the potential to become one ethnicity. Jim stated that this is an issue being addressed in our vision statement. Susan stated that this school is in a “lily white” area. Jim responded that RMSEL is not “lily white,” but we need to do a better job with ethnic diversity. Leann stated that it is important to have families together who travel a long distances. Jim explained that we are looking at diversity as a whole, but of course, part of problem is where we are located. Suzanne stated that at this time, Cherry Creek is actually comprised of 1/3 students of color. John asked if we know the ethnic make up on the application during the lottery/enrollment process. Leann explained that she only knows after the fact. When pulling applications, she does not know ethnicity or gender. Susan expressed another concern about a statement at the one of the early meetings, that the Hispanic families were not supportive of their children participating on overnight fieldwork. Since then, Susan has been watching the ethnicity numbers. She stated that the school can become a very cliquish community when friends and relatives are asked to come to school. Jim again explained that this is an issue the staff is aware of and working on with our vision. Susan explained that she had worked on the Governor’s board for mental health funding in Pennsylvania. They were not allowed to have a part in pulling the information. This had to be done by an impartial party who was not involved at all. In her opinion, this should be an outside party pulling the lottery. Jim replied that he appreciated her opinion though he might not agree. Emily recommended that we look into other charter schools and their application process.

Leann informed the board that we will have full access to Infinite Campus (IC) next year, and correspondingly, it will cost more. Increased access will allow for period attendance and high school schedules. In the future, we will be looking at using IC for transcripts.
Consent Agenda
Emily stated that on the BOCES Conflict of Interest Policy, “employee” should be changed to “board member.” Jim stated that this policy was taken directly from Cherry Creek and DPS; however, we will check the wording and get corrected policies to you next meeting. Susan asked who is informed if there is a financial issue. Emily explained that any financial issues should be disclosed to the board, as it states in the Colorado Revised Statutes. The Staff Conflict of Interest policy was unanimously approved in a one by one vote.

Audit RFP
This year is the end of our three year engagement with our independent auditor, Johnson, Holscher and Company. A copy of the request for proposal (RFP) was distributed to the board. Out of seven letters sent for bid, two firms declined to bid and five firms responded. Out of the five responding firms, the Watkins and Schommer bid was surprisingly low, which makes Julie uncomfortable. Some of the better auditors were located out of the metro area which would incur traveling and lodging costs. We did send a bid out to Johnson, Holscher and Company, our present auditors, for a baseline comparison. Clifton Gunderson was our old auditor firm; however, their bid was 34% higher than we are currently paying. Julie approached them advising of their high bid, and they resubmitted a revised bid. Emily asked if there was a need for a decision tonight. Julie stated she would like to have a decision if possible. She is leaning toward Clifton Gunderson because of previous experience, and they did good work. The next couple of years, there will be some changes to GASB, and Clifton Gunderson is the only firm that brought up this issue. Susan stated that she is not comfortable voting tonight. She also requested the RFP information be e-mailed to Rod Weeks in APS. Suzanne deferred to Julie’s judgment but questioned if Clifton Gunderson would be offering any additional services for the higher price. Julie did voice concern about whether Swanhorst or Bondi would provide the same level of service since they are smaller firms. There was discussion of the board setting a cap for the cost of services, and if the first choice would not meet that cap, then we would move onto the second choice. John stated he would like to show Littleton’s CFO the RFP before making a decision. It was agreed upon that a final decision would be made at the May meeting.

BOCES Calendar
May 16th and June 13th will be our last two meetings for this school year. Dinner will be served at the May 16th meeting, and the June 13th meeting should focus primarily on budget approval. Michael Aitken will miss the May 16th meeting, but will have another Community Council member attend.

Compensation
The board would like to see comparative salary figures showing increases between 3.5% and 4.6% for all non-scheduled employees. This information will be provided with the budget presentation at the next meeting.

2007-2008 BOCES Meeting Schedule
The possibility of changing the meeting to either Tuesday or Thursday was discussed. The board members will bring one alternative day to the next meeting for final discussion.

The meeting adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

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Emily Hansen, President

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John Dunn, Vice President