ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOCES MEETING
June 10, 2009
9:30 a.m.

In Attendance: Sue Chandler, Jennifer Churchfield, Jill Conrad, Emily Hansen and Amy Prince

Staff: Leann Asgari, Jim McDermott, Keri Melmed, Julie Stelzer and Susan Tamulonis

Guests: Mike Aitken, Kerry Lord, Anita Manning and John Stanek

Emily Hansen called the meeting to order at 9:37 a.m.

Introductions
Jennifer Churchfield introduced John Stanek to the other board members, staff and guests. He will assume Anita Manning’s post at Cherry Creek School District as RMSEL’s service link when Anita retires later this year. John is Executive Director of Student Achievement Services. He served as the service link from Douglas County during the early years of RMSEL and is familiar with our program and operations.

Open Forum
Emily announced that by state statute, board meetings must be recorded and recordings must be retained for ninety (90) days. RMSEL will begin this practice with the August 2009 BOCES meeting. Emily asked if electronic signatures will suffice for board documents. After discussion, the board decided that individual documents will be sent to each district and returned with a signature. Jill Conrad asked about availability for an on-line portal for document storage and review. Staff members noted that BOCES policies are posted on RMSEL’s website. Additionally, the school’s website offers on-line discussions. This feature may prove useful for the board’s upcoming needs. Emily emphasized that all processes would have public access and response, and reminded members to conduct conversations in a professional manner.

Sue Chandler informed the board about Littleton’s district policy concerning their teachers on a leave of absence: teachers cannot work elsewhere while on leave (RMSEL’s “released from the district”). RMSEL’s legal counsel, Kelly Dude, recommends removing the statute about “release teacher” from the IGA due to confusion with the interpretation. This means that for the three (3) RMSEL staff affected, their benefits from their district (all CCSD in this case) will end in June 2011. These employees will be paid by and receive benefits from RMSEL beginning with the 2011-2012 fiscal year. The ‘release teacher status’ will be grandfathered in for the three staff members now under this provision, but all future hires will be contracted as RMSEL employees. The school has asked for approval for additional slots for Aurora and Douglas County. The IGA will go out individually for signatures from the districts and PEBC.

Approval of Minutes
Minutes from the May 13, 2009 board meeting were unanimously approved.

Executive Director Report
Jim McDermott noted the following end of year activities in the building:

- Passage ceremonies
- 100% graduation rate
- 100% post-secondary placement
- New hires for middle school - two humanities, two math/science and one .4 math teacher for 6th grade
- New 2/3 crew leader
- Educational aide positions have been announced and the interview day is planned for June 17th
- Professional development will take place this summer as well as “EL101” with our school designer, Colleen Broderick. The EL 101 is scheduled for early August which eliminates travel expenses.
Jim noted the many items up for approval and resolution from the board today. The Safety Assurance Policies, previously sent electronically to board members and service links, are ready for adoption with one exception. The policy that relates to professional staff and recruiting, and NCLB (No Child Left Behind) is being presented for information today. Although RMSEL has a state waiver for licensure, the school does not have a federal waiver from the NCLB which requires licensure for teaching candidates. The school’s goal is to hire NCLB qualified candidates and if not, the reasons for the hire will be brought to the board’s attention. The executive director is responsible for attracting the best personnel, and the school’s policy will state that it is a priority. Despite the absence of the federal waiver, RMSEL does not receive any federal funds. All ‘hard to fill’ teaching hires that do not have a Colorado teaching license will be brought to the attention of BOCES to discuss why the hire is the best fit. Jim will send electronically the correct version of the policy to the service links and BOCES members for review, and this particular policy will be presented for adoption at the August meeting. Emily will check on alternative licensure with Annette Fante, Douglas County service link who may be able to help with licensure with RMSEL’s teaching staff members. The policies presented today are similar in wording to Cherry Creek’s policies.

Jim continued with explanation of the resolutions up for approval. The salary scale for next year includes one additional level, step 17. With regard to the meeting schedule, he recommends eliminating the December 2009 and March 2010 meetings because traditionally, the board has not met during these months. The August meeting may be a work/study session for the board. In addition, he is requesting that $12,320.43 be taken from the reserve for 2008-2009 budget rescission. Jim is requesting a resolution to take $10,000 from the reserve to cover the middle school teaching support. This support is for one year only and is less than the $18,000 cost of the support due to savings on new hires for 2009-2010. He is requesting that the $52,000 required for the Fiscal Emergency Contingency Reserve be taken from reserve, and if the state does not request that for rescission, the amount will remain in the reserve. There is a resolution authorizing the executive director to spend beyond a specific line item but not beyond the bottom line of the budget. This is a formality at the suggestion of the auditors. Additionally, there is a resolution to authorize Kerry Lord as a signatory on the bank and investment accounts. And finally, there is a resolution to set June 30, 2010 as the date RMSEL will be in compliance with NIMS.

Enrollment
Leann Asgari stated that a few enrollment slots remain open for Littleton and Douglas County students: two in kindergarten, one in 9th grade and one in 10th grade. All other district slots are full and have extensive waiting lists. She filled several kindergarten slots from Renaissance School’s waiting list. Leann feels all slots will be filled before school begins; however, she is prepared to ask Cherry Creek for one or two slots for the 2009-2010 year only if the slots cannot be filled from Littleton and Douglas County before the October count. Denver will no longer honor temporary (one year basis) slots. According to Denver, any enrollment slot changes in number must be in the IGA.

She has requested bids for improvements to the playing field and hopes to receive them by the end of the week. Leann added that the YMCA may assist with the cost to upgrade the field because they have an interest in using the field, particularly for younger children’s sports programs. Although the BOCES will be asked to approve the cost of improvements, Denver, as the property owner, must also approve any changes. Jill noted that the newly created Director of Sustainability, Jim Faes, may be able to help with funding, particularly if grounds improvement is connected to curriculum. Leann will follow-up on this.

Budget
Julie Stelzer had distributed the 2008-2009 budget report electronically. Pending BOCES approval giving the executive director authority to spend beyond a line item, unspent funds in the current year’s budget will allow for some additional professional development and revision of the Faculty Field Guide. In addition, there are funds available for travel for two of the new middle school teachers and Keri Melmed, Administrative Director, to travel to Memphis for scouting the upcoming MS civil rights expedition. The middle school teachers will be supported for this effort before, during and after this trip. All expenditures for this are part of the $7,200 amount. Additionally, staff hopes to purchase current CMP (Connected Math Program) materials. Several
teachers are attending a DPS math workshop this summer. There were no additional questions from the board on the 2008-2009 budget.

Julie then presented the 2009-2010 budget. Changes from the version presented at the May 13, 2009 BOCES meeting were noted in blue. Any salary savings were used to reinstate the budget that had been cut, i.e., construction from $6,000 back to $8,000; contingency fund from $5,000 to $7,000; $500 back to office equipment; passage budget increased from $1,000 to $2,000. Staff retreat costs may be used for a different professional development activity because the retreat is not scheduled in the 2009-2010 calendar. Other adjustments to the draft budget including new hire salaries and benefits, the middle school support of $18,000 and the .4 FTE MS math instructor all contribute to the bottom line loss of $10,000.

Emily asked if the directors had considered what the budget would look like if the $12,000 was not restored. Jim noted that items were cut sharply and that the $18,000 of middle school support is for one year only which in effect puts $18,000 back in the budget for 2010-2011. Cuts for 2009-2010 may leave us with step-only increase for the 2010 budget. A $500 line item for BOCES and Community Council meals and entertainment could be put into learning and not restored, and the $15,000 change really comes out of contingency. Because the state budget picture continues to be pessimistic, it is better to act prudently with small items and have a clear strategy, perhaps closer to a zero budget. Emily wants to have some conversation regarding budget strategy during the BOCES work session. Sue outlined the effort to offer different scenarios to meet state funding and rescissions, and Jennifer added that the board should revisit the budget in January, using the 2009-2010 budget as the framework and to keep contingencies in place. The board needs a more concrete strategy for contingencies and reserves as there are no policies to guide expenditures. Jill suggested that different scenarios be created for the 2010-2011 budget showing 3%, 5% and 10% cuts. Jim pointed out that what the board is seeing is a sixteen year accumulation of conservative budgeting, $726,000 in reserve, with general reserve of 10% or $200,000 and a general contingency of 5% or $100,000. All of these point to a significant foundation achieved by prudent management practices which have long been in practice for the school, and should these continue, will allow the school to handle the next three years of fiscal issues. Jim emphasized that one reason for the solid fiscal foundation is that the school has not been paying teachers on competitive basis. Kerry Lord’s recent participation in a finance seminar and a Q & A session with Julie was helpful for her to ask the basic question: ‘Does the budget reflect the school’s vision and mission?’ Kerry identified areas where charitable donations would be applicable, particularly when there is flexibility with the budget. Board members cautioned that such monies should not be used for salaries. Kerry noted that professional development is a charitable fund target. There may be additional arguments for successful funding, because RMSEL receives no stimulus money. All teachers in the EL model are asked to do much more than a typical curriculum and we are losing ground with competitive salaries. The board agreed to not let salaries fall behind, but to develop a long-term strategy. There will be not be a zero budget for 2009-2010, and the BOCES will review it in January. However, with only 2 ½ weeks into the new legislative session, the board won’t know much on figures.

The unusual turn-over of staff this coming year and economic downturn are a perfect storm for budgets. If the school is 5 slots short on enrollment, which has a large impact on the budget, are there places to cut? RMSEL will over-enroll in grades and ask for slots from districts that are full. Historically, staff has offered to over-enroll each school level when applications are short. The board asked, for long-term conversations, how does the cost compare among lower, middle and high schools? Jim said figures depend on staffing and are run on an average salary base. The staff has additional data and it can be looked at in terms of enrollment. In Douglas County, the lower schools run at 95-96% of the budget and high school at 104%. Jim stated that RMSEL’s would be comparable to Douglas County. Julie reminded the board to always take fieldwork fees out of calculations, as they are not connected to the PPR and since paid by parents, are treated as a pass-through line item.

Approval of Safety Assurance Policies
The following policies that were distributed for BOCES review during the May 13th BOCES meeting were unanimously approved:

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Board Resolutions

The BOCES unanimously approved modifications to the BOCES Intergovernmental Agreement, which include changes in student allocations from Aurora and Cherry Creek, ending the “released teacher” program for staff from member districts, providing a two year sunset provision of the “released teacher” benefit program for current “released teachers”, with benefit ending June 30, 2011. The modification also provides that current “released teachers” will continue to be able to renew their leave of absence from their home district on an annual basis.

The BOCES unanimously approved the revised RMSEL salary schedule, which includes the addition of step 17.

The BOCES unanimously approved the allocation of $12,320.43 from the reserve to meet the state rescission from the 2008-2009 budget.

The BOCES unanimously approved the use of $10,000 from the reserve on a one-time basis to provide additional support for the middle school team for the 2009-2010 school year.

The BOCES unanimously approved authorizing the executive director to spend beyond specific line items on the 2008-2009 budget, as long as total spending does not exceed the total budget. The BOCES shall be informed when this happens through the use of the budget management summary. This same authorization would need to be approved for the 2009-2010 budget.

The BOCES unanimously approved the allocation of $52,000 from the reserve to fund the Fiscal Emergency Contingency Reserve. If the state authorizes release of Fiscal Emergency Contingency Reserve funds, they will remain unspent.

The BOCES unanimously approved authorizing Kerry Lord as a signatory on the RMSEL checking and investment accounts.

The BOCES unanimously approved setting June 30, 2010 as the date by which the Expeditionary Learning School BOCES will be NIMS compliant

The BOCES unanimously approved the 2009-2010 meeting schedule with elimination of the December 16, 2009 and March 17, 2010 meeting dates.

Discussion ensued about the August 19th date for a work session. The board decided to schedule the work session on August 26th from 9:30 a.m. – 3 p.m., and allow flexibility for RMSEL staff to attend this work session. The schedule was loosely set as a morning brainstorming session and afternoon discussion with staff. BOCES members will plan the agenda in early August and e-mail it to the others. The BOCES unanimously approved the revised meeting schedule with the change of the August work session from the 19th to the 26th.

The BOCES unanimously approved the 2009-2010 budget as presented.
The meeting was adjourned at 11:15 a.m.

Jim thanked the members of BOCES for the privilege and honor of working with one of the most supportive, productive and helpful boards he has encountered in his career. He feels the school is left in good hands with this board. He acknowledged Emily’s point about how hard the staff works at RMSEL. He is therefore concerned about the sustainability for individuals, this being his only other concern outside of financial structures. Emily responded by offering thanks to Jim on behalf of the board, to recognize his understanding, and trusts that he will enjoy his well-earned retirement. Jill offered that she sees Jim as an amazing leader of education and of RMSEL.

Emily Hansen, President

Jill Conrad, Secretary/Treasurer