ROCKY MOUNTAIN SCHOOL OF EXPEDITIONARY LEARNING
MINUTES OF BOCES MEETING
May 19, 2010
9:30 a.m.

In Attendance: Jennifer Churchfield, Elaine McCain and Amy Prince
Staff: Leann Asgari, Kerry Lord, Keri Melmed, Julie Stelzer and Susan Tamulonis
Guests: Scott Siegfried

Jennifer Churchfield called the meeting to order at 9:36 a.m.

Open Forum
Jennifer requested a new order of agenda items to insure that any items requiring discussion and/or a vote have a quorum of BOCES members present. Therefore, future agendas will be as follows: Introductions, Approval of Minutes, Items for Review/Discussion/Approval, Director Reports and then Open Forum. Due to a lack of quorum at this meeting, the April minutes and the Items for Review/Discussion/Approval could not be considered.

Approval of Minutes
There was not a quorum present to approve the April 21, 2010 minutes.

Executive Director Report
Kerry Lord noted that May is the time of passages. Elaine McCain participated on a senior passage panel with Keri Melmed, and Kerry was with a long-time RMSEL parent. Both Kerry and Keri are on passage panels for the 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grade passage years.

Kerry submitted the federally mandated safety assurance policies and the other policies were available for reference. Kerry stated that this process has been a summation of her learning curve as executive director, discovering that there is never an easy answer. She mentioned a template from the school's liability insurer, the Colorado School District Self Insurance Pool (CSDSIP) for crisis management which captures all of the NIMS requirements. She will have this available for the June meeting.

The student-led evacuation drill on April 28th went remarkably well. The seniors’ ability to organize and carry out their roles was taken seriously and their equipment (radios, vests and bullhorns) created an air of authority. They served as role models for the younger children and as Kerry noted, the younger children may have felt some pride as they were evacuated by their crew buddies. She and Keri felt the older students were another layer that is underutilized in the community and their age and potential offers a support for scaffolding. Keri noted that during the students’ debrief, details came out about the reality of crises. Not enough people to help and the inability to hear bullhorn directions because of wind were two such factors. As noted in the previous month’s minutes, Camilla Yamada was the graduate student from Philadelphia College who with Anne Burnett, RMSEL’s high school crew leader, put the emergency drill into play.

Kerry updated the board regarding technology. Through grant writing by Elizabeth Spruill, Technology/Media Librarian, and RMSEL’s relationship with the Colorado BOCES Association, the school successfully obtained two Promethean Boards from the Morgridge Family Foundation at the University of Denver, which will be installed in the technology lab. Kerry announced that it is a requirement of the grant to make a presentation of this technology to the school’s board once the boards have been installed. ‘Intentional use’ is the keyword for integration of technology with curriculum, classroom and community-wide literacy with regard to technology, all of which RMSEL is prepared to implement. With help from the PEBC, Kerry plans to move forward with these plans.
Keri described the current activities in the building. The 5th grade students just returned from their landmark sailing trip around Catalina Island. The 8th grade is currently on an overnight camping trip to celebrate their passage from middle school. The middle school’s landmark trip to Memphis took place earlier in the spring, as part of the Civil Rights expedition. Among other benchmarks, seniors have just completed their solos, an overnight camping experience which is based on the Outward Bound principle of reflection on accomplishments over time. The 6th and 7th grades recently returned from a ropes course in Genesee. For senior passages, Keri noted that one student’s presentation included a walk-through at the Denver Botanic Gardens that focused on the student’s Senior Learning Expedition on medicinal plants. Keri sees concrete evidence and great achievement when the standards and expeditionary learning are evidenced in the portfolios particularly during presentation day. Presentation Day will be on May 25th for the other passage years, followed by senior graduation on May 26th at Mile Hi Church from 4:00-6:00 p.m. On Thursday, May 27th, the 10th grade ceremony will be at 10:00 a.m. and the 8th grade ceremony will be at 5:30 p.m., both at RMSEL. And finally, the 3rd and 5th grade ceremony will be at 1:30 p.m. on Friday, May 28th at RMSEL, the last day of school. All BOCES members and service links have been mailed invitations and are encouraged to attend. Jennifer noted that despite the senior program’s length, it is a highly individualized and meaningful ceremony. Keri reminded the BOCES that at the last meeting she requested help with a supervisor for RMSEL’s counseling intern. Since then, she has contacted people at Overland High School and has made some headway. However, if nothing gels, she will ask again for assistance from the board. RMSEL does not have a counselor on staff, and for the past few years she has arranged for interns from DU and UCD’s intern programs. Keri acts as the on-site supervisor but an independent, licensed clinical social worker is also required to supervise this program.

Kerry concluded the report with a plan to decrease the budget deficit for 2010-2011. Parents pay tuition for the second half of full-day kindergarten at RMSEL. The first half of full-day kindergarten is supported by the PPR funding received from the state. For 2009-2010, the tuition paid by parents is $3,350 for the year. RMSEL offers financial aid for families that qualify for free and reduced lunch based on the federal income eligibility guidelines. The amount of financial aid budgeted in 2009-2010 is $12,060 or 15% of the parent paid kindergarten tuition. For the 2010-2011 budget, the amount is $10,000 or 12%. In a recent letter, Kerry solicited the parents of current kindergarten students to pay one extra month’s tuition of $335 to fund financial aid for the incoming kindergarten families that qualify for financial aid. Any funds received would be voluntary and restricted to reducing the amount of financial aid available for kindergarten tuition. This would have the effect of reducing the budget deficit as less money would be taken from the general fund. Kerry emphasized that the additional payment is voluntary for kindergarten parents. Julie Stelzer noted that the school has received spontaneous donations for various school activities from community members. For example, a middle school parent recently made a donation to specifically benefit middle school students struggling to pay fieldwork fees in order to participate on the Memphis trip. Julie stated that the process is double-blind because the donor remains anonymous to the recipient(s) and the donor is unaware of the recipient’s identity, only that there has been a donation toward their fieldwork. The donations toward kindergarten financial aid will be treated in this same manner much like grants received for a restricted or specific use.

Enrollment
Leann Asgari continues to have spaces open for 11th grade, but through her recruiting efforts feels that these will be filled by the beginning of the school year. Building updates include DPS’s work on the replacement of tile flooring funded by DPS bond approval. The work will occur between June 1st and July 30th. Perhaps during the following summer, the windows will be replaced, also through DPS bond funding. This summer, RMSEL will be installing lockers for the high school students. This project is RMSEL’s expense. Leann is hoping to install more interior and exterior security cameras, but has learned that because DPS is in the process of system upgrades, the new software will be different from RMSEL’s, and therefore incompatible with RMSEL’s system. Leann argues that not only is RMSEL not a DPS school but also that RMSEL paid for the security cameras so is under no obligation to take on the costs of DPS’s new security system. She is continuing to work on this issue. The alarm system is a different issue from the security cameras, as noted in the previous BOCES meeting.

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Budget

Julie highlighted some items from the 2009-2010 budget reports. The order for the two new buses has been placed, and they should be delivered by the start of school in August. Due to continuing economic woes, many individuals that made a pledge to the Capital Campaign are unable to fulfill their pledge. Therefore, about $6,000 of pledge receivables were recently written off. The interest earned on the funds invested at CSAFE was budgeted at $15,000 and is significantly under-budget as of April 2010. The deadline for crew leader spending was May 14th, although some fieldwork has either just concluded or soon will and the receipts for these expenses are forthcoming.

Leann asked if funds were allotted for PSEO in the 2010-2011 budget, and it appears this line item remained in tact from the 2009-2010 budget. State law requires that schools fund PSEO costs and PPR is the source. For the current iteration of the 2010-2011 budget, the special education hires have resulted in a $10,000 savings. The current budget deficit is $59,000. If the board approves taking up to $200,000 in total from the reserve over the next three years, it would amount to less than 20% of the reserve balance. For the 2011-2012 budget, the next step would be staff reductions. These cuts would impact student safety, and state compliance would be in question. Since the September BOCES meeting, the deficit figure has been dramatically decreased from $240,000 to the current $59,000. The three board members present support the three-year plan to use the reserve. Amy Prince stated discomfort with the plan, but her view has been tempered RMSEL’s historically conservative spending and the continued efforts to reduce the deficit.

There was discussion about re-negotiating the building lease the lessor, DPS, but the conclusion was that there is great difficulty to extricate small pieces from the whole. In anecdotal conversations, board members learned that some charter schools pay much more for rent than what RMSEL pays. However, what RMSEL does not receive that charter schools do should be considered as part of the agreement. RMSEL does not receive any Title I funds, yet DPS includes RMSEL’s enrollment numbers with theirs. RMSEL funds its own special education staff from PPR funds received, yet DPS counts RMSEL’s enrollment for their special education numbers. The Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) is due for renewal in 2011, and the board stated that these aspects may be on the table for discussion. The board agreed that a financial model, review of the organizational chart, a climate survey and a workable action plan are topics for discussion at the August 18th BOCES work session.

Kerry noted RMSEL’s uniqueness in Colorado as a K-12 Expeditionary Learning school. She has reviewed the existing brochure and found some outdated and inaccurate items. Additionally, she wants to develop marketing materials aimed at donors. Jennifer Churchfield and Scott Siegfried mentioned that their district might assist with printing costs. Kerry sees this revision as summer work.

Although Amy was certain that her board signed RMSEL’s IGA at the last meeting, Julie has yet to receive a signed copy of it. Amy stated that she will follow up with APS. Julie stated that if any board members have reservations or concerns about the 2010-2011 budget, she requests direction from them now so as to prepare the 2010-2011 budget for approval for the June 9th meeting.

Kerry wondered if the school needed approval of the Crisis Management Plan by the board. The student handbook will be updated as this plan may be a regulation rather than a policy. She would present the plan as informational to the board. Kerry noted that the safety policies listed on the agenda were based on those of Cherry Creek. She also announced that the due date for the district improvement plan is April 2011. She will present a working plan in the fall that will detail CSAP results.

Jennifer reminded the board that the 2010-2011 budget must be adopted by state statute in June with 100% members voting. Julie assured her that board members will have the final copy sent to them electronically by June 4th. Jennifer will clarify if electronic voting is permissible by state statute and recalled that Jill Conrad, a past DPS board member, did vote by telephone on occasion. Jennifer also noted that today’s agenda will roll over to June’s due to the lack of quorum, and there will be much business to attend to at the year’s final meeting. A quorum is vital to close business for this school year so that the new fiscal year can open efficiently.
with a clean slate. She will email the absentees about the critical nature of the June meeting. Due to the flooring construction, the June 9th meeting will probably be held in the Technology/Media Library #105.

Jennifer adjourned the meeting at 10:55 a.m.

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Jennifer Churchfield, President

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Sue Chandler, Secretary/Treasurer