

UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 113
Bern School Gym
Bern, KS

Special Meeting Minutes, Monday, February 21, 2011, at 7:00 PM

President Roger Brockhoff called the meeting to order at 7:07 PM. Roger Brockhoff, Brent Lortscher, Sandy Aberle, Cheryl Wenger, Julia Alferts, Mary Jane Ronnebaum, and Ed Reznicek were present; also present were Superintendent Dennis Stones, Board Clerk Dr. Volora Hanzlicek and others who are listed on the attached sheet that becomes a part of these minutes.

A motion was made by Sandy Aberle and 2nd by Brent Lortscher to approve the agenda. Motion carried 7-0.

Mr. Stones opened the meeting by thanking the patrons for attending. He then apologized for inadvertently leaving the district information item off the last board meeting's agenda. Mr. Stones shared that he missed the item when transposing the items from paper to electronic agenda. He felt that continued discussion around this situation from previous meetings needed to be continued, therefore added the item that night. It was not an action item, just an information/discussion item. It was not determined to close Bern that evening as some rumors had stated. The intentions of adding the item were to begin a discussion. He stated that it was not the intention to disrespect the teachers, students or anyone in the community. Mr. Stones stated that he knows that Bern has good students and good teachers and the product is a great education.

Mr. Lortscher shared that this situation is difficult. He stated that he would like to apologize to the students, teachers, and patrons for the way the issue was addressed at the last meeting. This is not the case of Sabetha trying to take over Bern. If you have been at the board meetings you would know that this is not the case. The board is supportive of all students in the district and this is evident at each and every board meeting. Brent explained that the reason we are here discussing this issue has to do with FTE and state finances. He asked that patrons not direct their frustration toward the Board or Mr. Stones for the situation. It is not the board's fault; they are just trying to do what is best for the district students.

Mr. Bartkoski presented a review of information before consolidation from 488. In 2006 declining budgets and declining enrollment drove the discussion that began in 488's district. He commended the board for working to be proactive so the communities and children would have opportunities as the district prepared for the future. He began by reviewing the history of 488's consolidation. In January of 2007, he said that they began to have meetings during basketball games that were two fold. The first reason was to inform the patrons about the declining enrollment and state declining budgets. The second was to get patron input as the district gathered information and began to plan for the district's future. They asked patrons, students, and staff what cuts could be made in the future to survive. The information from the meetings was then used to help make the cuts that needed to be made. Mr. Bartkoski continued to ask patrons for suggestions throughout these meetings and in the community. In the winter of 2009 the basketball

meetings started again. Shortly after this the board began to have public meetings to discuss consolidation. In July of 2009, a meeting was held with KASB, Donna Whiteman to discuss consolidation. This was the first of 27 meetings in the '09-'10 school year that eventually led to consolidation.

He reminded the board that meetings were held with Nemaha Valley, Sabetha, and B & B. It was 488 that started the conversations with the other districts. It was 488 that sought 441 Sabetha in consolidation talks. The board continued to have meetings and meet with the public to gather information pertaining to consolidation as the talks with other districts continued. As 488 spoke with each district the more serious talks were with Sabetha 441. Consolidation was not the only topic that 488 discussed during this planning year. Other items discussed included a 4-day week, split the sites, dissolving the district, and even combining into one site. During the three on three meetings with Sabetha and it was determined that both districts were interested consolidation. Budget reductions and declining enrollment drove the discussions. Four areas were discussed as possible benchmarks; enrollment, state finances, curriculum, and community plans for sustainability.

Mr. Bartkoski ended the review of 488's journey by stating, "Had we not consolidated with 441, knowing what we know today, I seriously think we would be having a conversation about dissolving the district 488." He then thanked patrons for their presence and their continued support as the district continues to plan for the future as a new district.

Mr. Stones then reviewed the journey of 441 from past to present during consolidation meetings. Dennis shared that 488 approached 441 to discuss the possibility of consolidation. Three on three conversations occurred with 488 to determine how both districts could benefit from a merge of districts. Dennis stated that 441 would have had to make some cuts if they had not consolidated. District 441 administration had met and staff had been through surveys to present their ideas for cuts. Those cuts had been used to create a priority list that was in the stages of discussion. The consolidation allowed 441 to save jobs and curriculum that had been part of the district cuts.

Mr. Stones then presented the following information through a power point. The criteria that has been looked at all along during the talks and past board meetings are:

- Enrollment – should be around 150 to 160 for a K-12 facility (per KSDE recommendation).
- State Finances
- Curriculum
- Business plan to grow the community

The current general fund budget due to consolidation for #113 is \$8,710,517. This is the guaranteed budget until 2015. If we wouldn't have consolidated and you would have taken 441 and 488 and added their budgets the combined budget for both districts would

be \$7,892,808. This is a loss of \$817,645 if we were not locked in. But as a consolidated district we are guaranteed \$8,710,517.

Mr. Stones shared that the governor's office is currently talking about a \$75 cut per FTE this year. We will not take that cut, however, if we were not locked in, this would be a loss of \$965,257 instead of the \$817,645. With declining enrollment and the possibility of additional cuts in future years, the loss will probably be much greater than \$965,257 Stones explained.

Dennis explained that he is confident that we would not be having this discussion if Bern had held their enrollment or at least been close to the enrollment last year and the state was not cutting school budgets. He showed the trends for all four K-12 systems in the district.

Salary expenses were presented for '09-'10 per FTE. Salary expenses were presented for '10-'11 per FTE. Only building salaries were used to determine building expenses. Central office staff salaries were not used in the per FTE information to get building expenses. General Fund estimated expenditures were presented for '10-11'.

The second part of the presentation was questions with answers that Mr. Bartkoski read from slides that had been asked of the central office or board members. The final part of the meeting was then open to the public for questions.

Thad Lambrecht – Is the board going to set specific benchmarks for Bern or the USD #113 schools? Will community members be part of setting these benchmarks? Dennis shared that the declining enrollment, and declining budgets were driving these discussions. It was not the goal of the board to close a building(s). The criteria for benchmarks have been discussed throughout the meetings since consolidation. He stated that the board is open to input and would welcome the patron's suggestions for benchmarks.

Does the board have a timeline to set these benchmarks? Dennis said that the sooner the better, probably by the March board meeting.

Jay Fankhauser – Stated that 488 was led to believe that everything that was in place during the consolidation would be left in place for the first five years through the marriage of the two districts. He is positive that when Bern patrons made their vote it was understanding that changes would not be made for five years. Mr. Stones said that we are trying to be proactive. We need to be prepared for the cliff that the district may fall off of in July 2015.

Ed Reznicek shared that there were a lot of discussion around the 4 benchmarks during the 3 on 3 meetings. The one that was discussed the most was FTE (enrollment). If we had a facility dropped under the 150 we would not close it just for enrollment. There would be other things to look at such as state finances and enrollment trends. They did not want to look at one rigid factor. The drop in enrollment for Bern took the board by

surprise this year. They are now looking at the enrollment trends and enrollment projections for Bern. The board sees the decline in past years and the future does not show a change in the trend. The flexibility to plan for the future of the district becomes less if we wait until the end of the guaranteed budget. This is why we are discussing the situation now.

Cindy Myers – Read a statement that contained some of the following thoughts. She stated when Bern is faced with a challenge they work together to accomplish and achieve the challenge. She asked if there was an amount that the community could raise and provide to impact the financial issue. She wanted to know if Bern would be given the opportunity to come up with this money. They do not want to be the weak link and want to be a viable school. If they were gaining FTE next year would this make a difference? Would they be given time to grow further?

Roger Brockhoff shared that a donation can be made but monies cannot be used for general operating expenses from the community to support the Bern school. All donations that were made would have to be utilized through the USD 113 Foundation. If they are moving toward the benchmark, that is a good thing, whether it is in the enrollment, finances, curriculum or a community business plan.

Diana Platt – Moved from a much larger district, so their children could attend a smaller school. She shared the many opportunities her Bern High School students have had during their high school tenure thus far.

Ken Tubbesing – He feels this is an unjust situation seeing only that enrollment is the only problem. How many home-schooled students are in this Bern area? Mr. Stones stated that there was not way to collect that data.

Eldon Kaster – Actions create a reaction. A lot of students have left the district. This is the action. The reaction is the new families that have moved to Bern. He feels the community has now rallied to make something happen.

Laura Baumgartner (student) – presented information in paper copy to the board that she collected from Bern students. This document will become part of the minutes.

Lynette Strathman – Asked the board to please clarify the numbers from the General Fund Expenditure slide. Mr. Stones read the estimated expenses for each building off of the PowerPoint. She asked the board to double-check these figures and wanted to know why some of the expenses are so high compared to other buildings? Mr. Stones said that he would check the figures and provide further information. Can businesses opt out of the district? Dennis said if business's wanted to opt out of the district they would follow the same as an individual that wanted a land transfer?

Sherri Bredemeier – Did USD 113 freeze salaries this year? Stones - No, the first year in 113 salaries were not frozen, however, in 441 and 488 there were salary freezes in the

past few years. Bredemeier - How is someone outside the community looking to move to Bern going to understand the publicity that has shown a negative effect on Bern? Dennis explained that negativity is not a good thing and needs to be corrected. Bredemeier - Several years ago, Wetmore was facing the same issue. What is the same or different in the Bern situation? Stones - The issues Wetmore were facing were not low enrollment or declining budgets. The issue at Wetmore was handicapped accessibility and facilities that were failing. The first bond presented in 441 to remedy these issues failed severely. After the bond failure, discussion in the 441 district followed, which closing the facility was part of the discussion, and the district determined to through a vote of the board to leave the facility open and fix items through capital outlay funds. A Wetmore patron donated \$50,000 to the foundation for building improvements that the board matched through capital outlay dollars each year over a five year period. Facility upgrades were completed bringing the building up to code. In 2008 a bond was passed to do some additional building renovation on both ends of the district. The renovation at Wetmore brought the buildings together under one roof and brought the office downstairs from the third floor, thus making the building safer and more handicapped assessable for patrons.

Mr. Reznicek said that a number of things were upgraded in the old 441 district from capital outlay funds. Some of the facility improvements that were achieved through these funds included a roof on Sabetha Middle School, an addition to the elementary at Sabetha, and the purchase and remodel of the Dieck's building for a district office. He said it was a different challenge here at Bern. This issue is different from Wetmore; it is enrollment in Bern. He stated that Bern has nice facilities and the board is not looking for dramatic change but we need to see growth in enrollment.

Jerry Leuthold – Thanked the board and superintendents (current and past) for their hard work. He thanked Ed Reznicek for suggesting the board meeting so we (the community) could meet and discuss the current issue. He shared that the slide for plans is the best slide. He asked if there was a plan?

Mr. Brockhoff stated that our administration has been working hard at putting data together that will help the continued process of merging the district. Administration has been working to provide the board with this information on a sustainable plan. Leuthold - I appreciate the work. I want to let you know what we have been doing at Bern. A smaller group has been meeting for over a year. This group included our principal, member from city council, board member, and community leaders. The group was caught off guard with the information from last week's board meeting. This past week we have stepped up and formed a steering committee, which has appointed sub committees to build a business plan. One of things he would like to propose is that the Bern community is able to pull their own weight. We don't want to be a burden on the district yet we don't want our school closed. Mr. Leuthold said he had spoken with Brad Neuenswander, KSDE, and he advised him that the FTE recommendation shouldn't come from the state, but should be determined by the local district. He said that Bern is more valuable to USD 113 open than closed because of retaining all the students and they will make sure to pay their own way.

Stuart Schneider – Mr. Snyder had each board member, the superintendent and the asst. superintendent introduce themselves and thanked the board for their work. He promised to reverse the trends in enrollment and promises that the community will work hard to remedy the current enrollment situation. What do we do has a community and business family to keep the school open?

Roger Brockhoff - We can bury Dennis and Volora in work and to create a plan, but the bottom line is enrollment and state finances. The numbers are important, however, the key issue is enrollment.

Mrs. Dobbins – Recalled a meeting in Goff when Mr. Stones presented the information on consolidation. She said that she did not remember the benchmarks mention and asked Mr. Stones if he still had the PowerPoint presented that evening? Stones – reported that he did not have it with him however, could probably find it. He explained that the benchmarks were discussed during the consolidation presentations. Dobbins – Did the district have enrollment projections for Bern? Dennis provided number from the Kansas Association of School Boards, which are based on live births and retention rates. The following were the projections for Bern, '12 – 108, '13 – 108, '14 – 106, '15 – 105, '16 – 107. A patron asked if students moving back to the community after graduation were figured into these rates. Mr. Stones said that these enrollment projections take into account retention rates. The projections are as close as we can project.

Jeff Grossenbacher – Thanked the board. Stated he has been chosen for the Bern community steering committee. It is their goal to increase enrollment and meet set benchmarks established by the board. He read a statement that shared information about the Bern community and businesses. Grossenbacher shared that the school has great faculty and is evidenced by graduates and what they are doing currently in college and careers. The committees will be providing the board with information as part of their plan in future weeks. The committees requested an open line of communication with the board to establish this plan and said they would look forward to concrete benchmarks.

Dennis Meyer – Mr. Meyer stated that he had a suggestion to put the negative comments to rest - stop having meetings that talk about closing the school. He would like to see the board table this discussion for two to three years and allow the community to grow the enrollment. He asked that the board give them the time to bring the enrollment up and he reciprocated the commitment to make this happen.

Courtney Dalinghaus (student) – Came to Bern from Centralia. Need to look at the negative sides compared to the positive sides. She didn't feel she would have gotten to play basketball at Centralia but did at Bern. Students will miss out on some of these opportunities by attending Sabetha she stated.

Hanna Post - read her editorial that was published in the Sabetha Herald.

Carla Kramer – Have you considered the amount of money that would be lost due to students enrolling in other districts? Mr. Stones said that it would be considered and that he did not have a number only a guess at this point.

Brent Lortscher – He asked if we could hog tie the media to put a positive spin on the meeting? He stated that we want to keep the conversation positive as we work together.

Roger thanked the patrons for their attendance. He said he appreciated the patience patrons have had with the board. He said we are only seven people in a large community and want to hear the community's opinions and get their input. The board is willing to listen. He shared with Jeff Grossenbacher that the board would appreciate communication with the committee.

Ed Reznicek explained the board had a great deal of information to digest. He shared with the board that they needed to continue the conversation once they had the opportunity to review the information. It was agreed that talks would continue in the March meeting.

Bern Community Steer Committee members were asked to stand. Jeff Grossenbacher (Chairman), Stuart Schneider, Rod Edelman, Thad Lambrecht , Eldon Kaster , Garrett Stallbaumer , Sherri Bredemeier , Diana Platt , Heidi Baumgartner , and Lynette Strathman.

At 9:34 PM Brent Lortscher made a motion to adjourn the meeting and Cheryl Wenger 2nd the motion. Motion carried 7-0.

Board President

Board Clerk