

Date: 9/3/98
To: Members, Board of Education
From: Chris Manaseri
Subject: Backup for first September Meeting

Surprisingly, it's Thursday and the teachers are here (most of them) and I still have time to get started on this memo, so I will.... The fact I can do so is testament to the cooperation of the excellent staff you have, and the preparation that went into planning our opening by Barb and Mike and others.

NON- AGENDA ITEMS:

1.0 EPC is back on the list. All approvals have been received from KeyCorp financing and we have two bidders so far on the installation of the motion sensors which will complete our expenditures. Then we have some paperwork to catch up on and these two phases of things will be put to bed and the EPC will be a done deal. Finally. All in all this has been a very positive project for us, and Ernie seems to have come through with all that we'd hoped for: we got away with doing several pieces of work that needed doing without a public vote and without a negative impact on taxes.

2.0 Docushare is up and running. As I write this, our teachers are all receiving training in its use, along with Web Based Learning for the new State Assessments. I will post this in your collection, for the adventurous among you, although we'll still do the mailings at least for now. As I learn more about docushare and get used to using it, I think you'll find us wanting to rely on it more and more for between meeting communication. The bulletin board alone, will be a valuable tool. The fact that our staff is the only whole staff training going on today in both of these cutting edge technology applications is once again testament to the fact that you ARE on the cutting edge of what our BOCES has to offer us. I have added you to the permission list for the K-12 Curriculum at a Glance, so you can see what our teachers have been up to. It is pretty impressive. Once we fill in some gaps and load some documents, we'll open this site up to others, including teachers from other Districts and our parents.

For your edification, I am including in your packet some spare copies of the training material our staff received on Docushare. If you're adventurous, you may want to play with this. Otherwise, learning how to sign on, find the Board of Ed Collection and read what's there will probably be all you'll need now and in the future.

3.0 CBO is now a three-school effort. Gerry Macaluso from Seneca Falls and I spoke about this on Tuesday (among other things as you will read). Their Board is still tentative about it but did officially vote to continue to participate as the plans are being drawn up. That's actually all any of us can do now, until we see what the cost of the service pans out to be and what we get done through it. I will continue to try to entice South Seneca to look into it as well. Larry Driscoll will now be calling the shots on how we proceed, as his office will be responsible for the operation if it flies.

4.0 Workers' Compensation safety meetings were held last Wednesday and yesterday, with drivers and cafeteria staff from South Seneca and Romulus participating well. Somebody in the two schools to the North did not appear to think sharing this service was worth it afterall, although they did participate in planning this with Gabe Lombardo's office. In any event, our insurance company did the training at no cost to us, and we have a better informed staff regarding safety on the job.

5.0 Also on **Workers' Comp**, our anticipated billing for this year is now in and it is \$5,000 UNDER what we budgeted (down \$15,000 from the surprise bill of two years ago). Some of this is cost containment, but most of it is pure luck. Anyway, a small piece of good news only, in that we had already anticipated some of this savings.

6.0 Computer upgrade appears to have gone well this summer, as all machines are humming during this very demanding two days of training. Ray has kept his part of the bargain well to date. You will see an action item relating to a budget transfer for his salary this year explained later.

7.0 Tax Collection has begun and Alice is doing well. She even had some very pleasant conversations with some of our STAR recipients checking to make sure they understood the drop in their bills correctly. Please remember that every home-owner who applies will see a reduction next year- that's worth getting and keeping the word out about. Lot's of people appear not to read the papers.

8.0 Related to **tax bills**, let me forewarn you about **Fayette**. I enclose a spreadsheet which details a comparison of last year's rates by township and this year's rates. Please note that while our levy went up less than double digits, and while our average tax rate also went up less than double digits, folks in Fayette saw larger than average tax increases. This is due to a sharp fall in their equalization rate - which is set by the State as a result of the reported assessed values in that area compared to actual annual real estate sales. We cannot control for that, only the assessor can, and then only to a certain degree. What people sell their homes for when they do is the real driving factor in establishing this rate. In any event, as Board members you are likely to hear complaints from Fayette taxpayers moreso and more justifiably so, than from others. This spreadsheet helps show you why. The rate in Fayette LAST year was below the average rate in the rest of the school district because the equalization rate was so far from 100. As this corrected itself this year, their rate JUMPED up to the average with Varick and Romulus. (From \$13.88 last year when the average was \$14.62 to \$15.57 this year when the average is \$15.62) Despite how reasonable that can sound to us, when people see a 12.24% increase in their taxes they get understandably edgy - especially when we told them to expect taxes to go up slightly less than the levy increase of 8.9%. The best we can do is blame the equalization rate and tell folks to apply for STAR to see a savings next year. All this just to try to keep you informed as a Board.

9.0 Correspondence from the Powell family and back to them to let you know that we have a crazy situation that requires some TLC on Mike's part and some firmness in our approach as well. There's only so much threatening I'm willing to have us take.

10.0 Auditors hope to wrap up tomorrow (Friday). Gloria and I plan to spend much of our days next week plugging numbers into the computer to complete the ST-3, the required State forms which were supposed to be filed electronically by September 1. Oops. It's not the first year we've been late, nor are we the only school in that situation. The State publishes a calendar of their dunning letters, and you as Board members don't get one until the last week of September. By then we should have everything in. Because Gloria has been working with Scott all of the last two weeks, we will not have a warrant for you in this packet, but will have something on the table Tuesday night.

11.0 Also on the table **Tuesday** night will be a cake and some refreshments as we welcome our new staff and give them a chance to meet you informally. **We are asking you to attend at 7 rather than 7:30** so we can meet ahead of time in the Home and Careers Room rather than just line them up in our visitors section like we've done recently. This way you can have a chance to visit with them and socialize before we get into our business section of the meeting.

12.0 Kidspace, the group that wants to take over the north end of the Depot was the topic of a phone call I received from Roland Smiley of State Ed earlier this week. Mr. Smiley was not enamored with the possibility of our small school potentially playing host to a residential facility for troubled youth sized almost equal to our own number. He indicated that no application to run a private residential school had yet been filed with SED, and that even if they did operate their own school on site, we might well have to be used as the least restrictive environment for some of their residents, especially as they are ready to transition out of the program there. He also did not like the fact that we were 8 hours out of the city, as opposed to Pennsylvania which

is only 3 hours away. He felt that the distance from home posed a factor for the likely clients of such a facility, whom he saw as rapists, drive-by shooters and sex offenders. Basically he was negative and thought we should be, too. I am scheduled to visit Kidspeace on September 24, and will have some of my own observations after that. Mr. Smiley suggested that there should be a meeting involving reps from SED, BOCES and RCS shortly after my trip, if there appears to be any continuing progress on this redevelopment effort. I have called Glenn Cook to give him a heads up on SED's initial reaction, out of courtesy.

13.0 Prison update. Glenn Cook tells me he expects to hear of a decision on that soon, but that no one is tipping their hand yet. I personally would not be surprised if we hear nothing on this issue until after election day.

14.0 Request to Use the School Building by Seneca Community Church for religious services. I took a call late Thursday from Len Robinson asking if it might be possible to use the school from the end of October until the new church next to Bev Steele's house is completed. I quickly answered that I was pretty sure it was illegal for schools to allow their buildings to be used for religious services by outside organizations. Sure enough Section 414 of Ed Law, which enumerates what school buildings can be used for does not say they can be used for church service. Ed Law is instructive in that it tells you what you can do, and anything it does not tell you is presumed to be a "no-no." That is, it is generally thought that unless it specifically says you may do something you may not. However, recent court decisions have backed both schools denying such use AND church groups requesting such use, depending on the policy and past practice of the District in question. Our policy does not specifically prohibit such use; however, our past practice has not allowed it - to my knowledge. Consequently, I have called Marc Reitz, our school attorney, for an opinion. I have also called Len Robinson to let him know we have a meeting on Tuesday in case he might want to come and ask. I should know more by tomorrow morning IF the answer is clear-cut. If not, Len may come to ask you and you may need to defer to the opinion of the school attorney, should you wish to do so. Basically - this one's up in the air for now... I have tended to be a conservative when it comes to separation of church and state, but I don't want to impose my conservatism on you any more than I want to impose my educational liberalism. It's your school. I'd just rather not get sued either way if we can help it. Rather than give you the ten pages of conflicting information I've found in house, I'll wait 'til Tuesday to tell you what Marc says.

15.0 The Myth of the Failure of Public Schools was an article I enjoyed reading and thought some of you might, too. I enclose it FYI. Anybody want to suggest the Finger Lakes Times reprint it on their School Zone Page? (Or better yet send a copy to Peter Pontius to help balance his reading)

AGENDA ITEMS:

1.0 Another BOCES Board resignation! (I think Joe Marinelli has now had more of these from his Board than we have had from ours) Now they want us to have a meeting on Wednesday October 14th to elect a new member. I will not be available that evening as I'm taking a Wednesday night grad class on Internet in Education. At the risk of losing my job in my absence, it's okay with me for you to meet that night anyway....

Other routine items should be fine. Remember the warrant will be on the table because of the audit.

2.0 Budget Transfer covers Ray Fox part-time from September 1 to June 30. This is a non-instructional salary code to both protect Ray's retirement status and to establish such a code for when we replace him down the road.

3.0 Cooperative Bidding is not something we do all the time, but we do get good rates for certain items like paper, etc., through it. It's one of the first things community members always seem to suggest as ways to save, and it's nice to know we already do it!

4.0 Sub Rates: We haven't changed them in a while and we are approaching the low end of the pack. Tina can't find sub drivers and recommended a \$10 figure. I can go with \$9.50 to parallel the outside trip rate. For teachers I suggest we move to \$60.00 per day for certified and \$50.00 non-certified, up ten and five respectively. For clerical and aides I suggest we move all to \$6.00. I spoke with Gary Alger about their rates, and he is going to suggest the same thing for drivers (and teachers). I conferred with Brent Cooley and have a list of daily teacher rates from the area. Seneca Falls and Waterloo were both \$60 per day last year. We're having a hard time with our lists, and we need to be competitive. It's time.

5.0 Tax Rate Impact of the Proposed Capital Project information is enclosed from Roy McMaster of Bernie Donnegan's office. I did not ask Roy to come down to explain this to you - instead I will try to do so. The bottom line is that by playing our cards right and investing our borrowing and drawing State Aid in the most timely of manners, we can do a \$1.5 Million project for less than \$4.00 per year to the average taxpayer, or six cents added to the tax rate for a ten year period. That's essentially peanuts. Roy also advises that our timing is not good for summer of 1999 work because State Ed is **SO** backed up nowadays. He thinks we'll be lucky to get their approvals in time for Spring bidding, and that we would most likely miss the summer construction season. The good side of this would be that we can borrow the money as soon as the State approves the plans, and if we don't expend it for more than a year, we can make arbitrage dollars on our investment of it, and minimize or even eliminate the tax impact altogether! (Another potential use of such funds is to replenish the capital reserve). SED's backlog is caused by two factors- the number of schools applying for projects with the additional 10% incentive after July 1 of 1998, and the fact that they have not been able to replace positions in State Ed Facilities Planning that have been vacated. Add to that the fact that my name will be on the documents we send in, and the delays could get even worse. I do have a tentative public presentation date planned for November 10 at which Roy and Allen Kosoff from the architect's office would be present to review plans with an audience from the public. Please check your calendars for that date. I would like to have volunteer members of the Board be actual presenters that evening to make the project seem more your idea and less mine. Maybe Mike on the gym, Ann on the auditorium and someone else on the Distance Learning piece (maybe even me).

6.0 Vote language straight from the bond counsel is suggested authorizing a public vote on Monday November 16, 1998 on the proposed capital improvements. Why this date? It's the same day as parent-teacher conferences, and we usually have a very good crowd of moms and dads coming into the building. Drawback? Voting machines will still be impounded from Election Day, and we will need to use paper ballots. I think the pros outweigh the cons.

7.0 Barb and Mike will update you on the opening of the 61st school year at RCS!

8.0 The resignation of Liz Larzelere was, unfortunately, not the last of the surprises we needed to face a week before school begins. On Tuesday we learned that Joan Barnard (Biology) had accepted a position in Seneca Falls, and on Wednesday that Michelle Cuva (School Psychologist) had accepted a position in the Syracuse area. Legally we have the right to require teachers to give 30 days notice and to force them to return to us for that amount of time before they can start these other jobs. Our take is that we'd rather not prolong the agony, and that we'd like to get the ball rolling on replacements ASAP. After an initial reaction of anger, hurt and frustration, we have been able to make plans which allow these people who have been good to Romulus over the years the chance to start the new jobs they want in a timely fashion. We have expressed our displeasure at having to do so so late in the summer, however, for whatever good that does (read none).

9.0 Appointments: With Joan's resignation, we would like to move Chris Conley to a probationary spot (we had hired her in July to replace Mike and work with Joan), and hire Marty Rotz as the long term sub for Mike until such time as he decides for sure that he likes the headaches we give him as principal and AD (like these last minute staff changes, schedule

changes and other surprises). Marty can be here on the 21st after giving the county two weeks notice. We would also like to appoint Karyn Sabara to Liz's job - she is already certified as a teaching assistant, we can get her for the salary range we advertised (and its a step up for her), we can have her here on Tuesday, and she comes to us with three years' experience as a computer lab teaching assistant at Watkins Glen. We do not yet have a plan in place for the school psychologist position. We have a couple of extracurricular changes as well (more of Mike's headaches), and some substitute appointments.

That should about do it for Tuesday. Please remember that we would like you to meet new staff (all 9 of them - 16% of the professional staff this year alone, with Mike and Nancy Munn's long term sub we approach 20%) at 7:00 pm in the Home Ec room so that is done by 7:30 and we're down to business. See you then!

CM/CM