

January 15, 2003

I. CALL TO ORDER

Ed. Programs and Instruction Chairperson, Roberta Bauer, called an Ed. Programs and Instruction Committee of the Whole Meeting of the School Committee to order in the Auditorium at the East Somerville Community School, at 7:15 p.m., for a meeting with Unidos Program and Bilingual PAC.

II. ROLL CALL

Present were Ms. Cardoso, Ms. Harris, Ms. Bauer, Mr. Sullivan, Ms. Taylor, Ms. Murray and Ms. Rossetti.

Mayor Gay and Alderman O'Donovan were absent.

Also present were Dr. Albert F. Argenziano, Superintendent of Schools, Mr. Robert A. Snow, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment, Dr. Steven F. Jenkins, District Administrator for Student Services and 316 members of the audience.

III. Unidos Program/Bilingual PAC

Members of the community gathered at the East Somerville Community School auditorium this evening to address the school committee members regarding the Unidos/Two Way and Bilingual Education Programs.

Chairperson Bauer welcomed the community and introduced the school committee members, Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Albert F. Argenziano and Mr. Robert A. Snow, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. Ms. Bauer informed the audience that the Somerville School Committee was the first school committee to come out publicly against the Unz Referendum and a formal vote was taken on this issue. She stated how we are all aware that Somerville voted against curtailing Bilingual education, as we know it, the referendum did pass and we are all concerned about what that means for us now. She then invited Dr. Argenziano to address the audience. Superintendent Argenziano briefly spoke on the following three issues:

- 1) The Two-Way Program: The Superintendent explained that Grades 3 and up is where the Massachusetts Department of Education is focusing on where English language learners would have basically one year to learn the language of English. He commented that he has an extreme comfort level that the students presently in the Unidos Program going into Grade 3 are bilingual and he feels at ease that on Saturday, January 25, 2003 parents can register their child for Kindergarten whether they are English speakers or Spanish speakers. The program will continue under the title of Unidos as of January 15th.
- 2) Bilingual Education: Dr. Argenziano advised that after this morning's meeting with the Mayor, the school department will need to make reductions for April 1st, approximately 10%, for July 1, 2003. What that means is the Somerville Public Schools has to cut a minimum of five million dollars. Eighty three percent of our budget is staff, and as the Superintendent explained before at a previous meeting with the Bilingual Education staff, there would be a minimum of fifteen less bilingual teachers, a minimum of fifteen to twenty less regular

III. Unidos Program/Bilingual PAC (cont.)

education teachers, a minimum of fifteen less special education teachers, and a complete elimination of paraprofessionals. Dr. Argenziano explained this is not definite, but it is what 10% means to him and this is what would be presented to the school committee who makes the final fiscal decision. He informed the bilingual staff present here this evening and the parents that the department is trying to get together a severance package that possibly fifty to sixty teachers could take advantage of to retire two to three years earlier, this way the younger generation would be able to stay.

- 3) Implementation of Question #2: The Superintendent advised that we have seven months to implement question #2 which is the law. The Urban Superintendents of Schools, of which there are twenty two, have put together a letter to send to the legislators, governor, lieutenant governor, and school committee members. What the Superintendents are requesting is a three year grace period (through 2005-2006) to implement the law in order to do professional development with their staff in training them as English immersion teachers, and added to that, which is extremely difficult with the budget cuts, is to be able to purchase the materials necessary to do this in 180 days. Dr. Argenziano explained that if nothing changes, we have seven months beginning in September to get all of our children immersed in English.

Mr. Robert A. Snow, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment informed the audience about two major initiatives that have been put in place. The school system has already planned an introduction to a brand new reading and a brand new math plan. These two initiatives along with the introduction of longer blocks of time for reading and for math next year, coupled with retaining class size, leaves us hopeful that this transition will get us through the next few years.

When Dr. Argenziano and Mr. Snow finished talking to the audience, Ms. Bauer invited community members to come forward to address the school committee. Thirty-one members of the audience, both adults and children, spoke to the committee regarding their concerns about the future of the bilingual education programs.

Ms. Bauer thank everyone who attended tonight's meeting. She emphasized a few things that community members could do: if you need waivers, or know of people who could benefit from waivers, ask for them; if you are not registered to vote, please do so; lobby your state representatives, Patricia Jehlen and Vincent Ciampa. Let them know that you support what they are doing. Eventually there will be hearings at the state house on the Larkin Bill that we heard about tonight. Attend these hearings.

Discussion took place among members of the school committee.

MOTION: Ms. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Mr. Sullivan that the school committee writes to the state house in support of the Larkin Bill. The motion was approved by voice vote.

MOTION: Ms. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Ms. Harris that the committee writes a letter to Representative Larkin asking for changes in the Unz Law, to remove the provision for suing teachers and to omit the thirty day trial period before requesting a waiver and to eliminate the age requirement for the waiver. The motion was approved by voice vote.

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Ms. Harris commented she feels the committee needs to do further research on this subject before voting on the motion this evening.

MOTION: Ms. Harris made a motion, seconded by Ms. Rossetti, to table discussion of the Unz law until the regularly scheduled school committee meeting of January 27, 2003. The motion was approved by voice vote.

MOTION: Ms. Taylor made a motion, seconded by Mr. Sullivan, to be proactive in notifying parents of their waiver rights under the new Bilingual Law.

FRIENDLY AMENDMENT: Ms. Cardoso offered a friendly amendment to the above motion to also include teachers so the motion reads *to be proactive in notifying parents and teachers* of their waiver rights under the new Bilingual Law. Ms. Taylor accepted the friendly amendment.

Ms. Bauer informed the public the school committee members will do all they can to preserve their bilingual education programs. She thanked the members of the audience for attending this evening's meeting and for their comments, questions, and concerns.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:40 p.m. by voice vote.

Dr. Albert F. Argenziano
Secretary