

Remarks to Board of Education, Community Unit School District 200, November 11, 2009

Public Hearing – Driver’s Education Waiver

Today is Veteran’s Day, but it seems like Groundhog Day, because this Board keeps repeating the same process and getting nowhere. This year you laid off teachers and cut arts programs. District taxpayers are hurting as unemployment tops 10%. Yet for the third time in two years, you’re seeking a waiver to tinker at the margins with a program that pays huge salaries to driving instructors – one gets over \$104,000, the other \$94,000¹ – while refusing to take the easy steps I’ve been urging for the last 2 years² to improve it and save over a hundred thousand dollars a year. At July’s meeting we were told that Dr. Baker would report on this issue, but to my knowledge he hasn’t. I know he’s busy, so I’ve prepared a report for you.

In 2008, the District spent over \$800 per student to provide drivers’ education.³ The drivers’ ed teachers got raises since then, so we can assume costs have increased. Meanwhile, private instruction that meets all state requirements is available for only \$420,⁴ about half the District’s cost. This presents a very simple solution.

State law only requires the District to offer one section of drivers’ ed. Do that for students with demonstrated financial need, but give any student who shows proof of completing a private course a \$170 credit toward student fees. Parents’ out of pocket costs would be the same \$250 they pay now. The District would not be “outsourcing,” so it wouldn’t have to comply with school code requirements. Students would love to get their licenses sooner. And in tough economic times, the District would save \$100,000 a year.⁵

While we’re on the subject of holidays, November 15 is “School Board Members Day,” created, ironically, by an association of school boards to honor themselves. If you want to pat yourselves on the back, fixing drivers’ ed is an opportunity to earn it.

¹ See <http://www.championnews.net/teacher.php?tid=86821&year=2008> (salary of \$104,376) and <http://www.championnews.net/teacher.php?tid=87147&year=2008> (salary of \$94,206).

² Remarks at public hearings on January 9, 2008 and June 10, 2009.

³ See report attached to Board materials for January 9, 2008 meeting, available at www.cusd200.org, which indicated that the District spent \$392,853.09 for 487 students.

⁴ See <http://www.exceldrivingschool.com/Default.aspx?tabid=2151>. I have no relationship of any kind with any driving school.

⁵ The District’s (taxpayers’) 2008 out-of-pocket cost to run the program, net of state reimbursement and fees, was \$193,427.52 per District figures. Assuming the only cost increase since then was the \$10,170 staff raises, and subtracting a parent credit of \$170 per student x 487 students, the gross cost savings would be \$120,807. The District would still have to run one section of drivers’ ed, but it is reasonable to assume that the net cost savings would still be at least \$100,000.