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EYES ON THE BOARD

a publication of the McAllen AFT

A Union of Professionals

February, 2012

Volume 20, Issue 6

FIRST BUDGET MEETING

McAllen ISD Special Budget Meeting, February 20, 2012 at 3 p.m.

Mr. Saldivar and Mr. Vela were absent. Mrs. Hilda Garza-DeShazo chaired the meeting.

We sent a letter to all McAllen ISD Board Members requesting that the time of the Budget Meeting be changed to February 21, 2012 at 6 p.m. None of the Board members responded except Mr. Saldivar—representing the Board. We are citizens and taxpayers and should be able to attend district Budget meetings outside of working hours.

In case you don't know, we cannot speak during the Budget Meeting.

The item first discussed was Staffing Guidelines. The meeting was discussed in very low voices—was very difficult to hear. Out of the blue a raise was discussed for teachers and others. Percentages were mentioned like a 1% or 2% raise. Board members mentioned other staff—paras—but little was said. We were not given the budget pages—administration says they are a draft—thus, they don't have to give them to AFT. Of course, we will request the draft through Open Records. A 2% increase in pay for all employees will cost approximately $4 million.

There will be two (2) assistant principals at each middle school this next year. There was no oral discussion of cutting Librarians and clerks—very unclear. Each school has an RN and there is one (1) LVN to substitute—no change in this.

There was no discussion regarding custodians and cutting their days.

Stipends were discussed. If a teacher has a Master's degree, Dr. Ponce wants to give a stipend if it is in their subject area. Ponce wants to increase the number of teachers who can teach dual enrollment classes. Other stipends were touched on but little said. Stipends for Math and Science teachers were discussed, but no decision was made--$1,000-$3,000.

PUBLIC COMMENT

This Math and Science discussion has gone on for 15 years.

There was no discussion of the school calendar at this meeting.

McAllen ISD Regular Board Meeting—February 20, 2012 at 6 p.m.

Mr. Saldivar and Mr. Vela were absent. Mrs. De-Shazo chaired the meeting.

The Board discussed in great detail approving classroom instructional supplies, furnishings, equipment, materials and miscellaneous. It seems that expenses this year were $600,000+ and now there is a change to $800,000+. In the discussion it was revealed that there was a need for IPad2 covers and that brought up the costs. This item will be brought back.

The pending litigation for Anna M. Rubio in the County Court at Law No. 1 of Hidalgo County was on the agenda. The Board instructed Attorney Crain to settle the suit.

The vote was 4-1 (Farias voting no).

Texas Teacher Retirement Fund

As we move towards the 2013 Texas Legislative session, we must recognize that the educational employees in Texas will have a direct impact on the economy of Texas/McAllen. In McAllen there will be reduced church collections, fewer new cars purchased, less spent on doctor's visits, less spent on prescription drugs, fewer home repairs, less on car washes, less on gasoline, and less on eating out.

A national study has found that guaranteed-benefit plans like the TRS system get more bang for the buck, costing only 46% as much as limited-contribution plans for each dollar of benefits delivered. That's partly because large, pooled, professionally managed funds like TRS get better average returns than individual accounts that are partly eaten up by fees.

The TRS rate of return for decades has exceeded the 8% rate targeted by TRS actuaries. As a result, state taxpayers' share of benefits paid is only about 20%. Earnings on investments cover some 60% of benefit payouts; the other 20 percent comes from employee pension contributions.

Making a switch to individual retirement accounts for new hires while still paying pension obligations to those already retired would blow a huge hole in the state budget. The Legislative Budget Board estimated HB2506 would have added $1.5 billion to the state's costs for teacher and state-employee retirement for many years to come, because retirement dollars for new employees would no longer contribute to the common investment pool that currently generates benefits very cost-effectively for all current and future retirees. So the proposed switch from so-called defined benefits to a so-called defined-contribution plan truly would qualify for a dubious-achievement award—it would cost the state more yet would deliver less.