

PRESENTATIONS FROM THE FLOOR

Central High School

Mr. Romulus Romani, Principal of Central High School, reported that Central High School has won the city championship in football. He stated his awareness of the Board's concern relative to student conduct at the games. He felt that, although conduct was not excellent in every instance, the students have shown that the Board need not worry about their conduct.

President Beaman stated that the Board is concerned about student conduct at athletic events, and at its last meeting action was taken to congratulate the young people on the wonderful job they have done.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion of Mr. VanBlooy, the Board adjourned at 10:05 p.m.

C. Robert Muth
Secretary to the Board

PROCEEDINGS

of

THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

of the

City of Grand Rapids, Michigan

OFFICIAL

SPECIAL MEETING, BOARD ROOM, 143 BOSTWICK AVENUE, N.E.

Wednesday, November 16, 1966

Meeting called to order at 11:17 a.m., President Beaman in the chair.

Present: DeGroot, Jonkhoff, Keeler, Oostema, Phillips, Post, Steenland,
VanBlooy, President Beaman -9.

Absent: 0.

COMMUNICATIONS

November 16, 1966

Mr. C. Robert Muth
Secretary to the Board

In accordance with the Rules of the Board, I hereby call a special meeting of the Board of Education, to be held on Wednesday, November 16, 1966, at 11:15 a.m., at the Board Room, 143 Bostwick Avenue, N.E., for the purpose of discussing the situation at South High School, and for transacting any other business that may properly come before the Board.

William H. Beaman, Jr., President

Received and printed.

President Beaman asked Mr. Anderson, Attorney, to explain the call of the meeting of the Board of Education without the regular 24 hours' notice.

Mr. Anderson explained that the Rules of the Board permit the calling of a special meeting of the Board on less than 24 hours notice, providing all Board Members are present. All Board Members are present.

SOUTH HIGH SCHOOL

President Beaman asked Dr. Pylman to introduce Mr. Davidson, Principal of South High School, and to explain to the Board the sequence of events relative to the problems resulting from the good grooming policy at South High School.

Dr. Pylman indicated that in providing background for the current situation at South High School the Board should be mindful of its action in August reaffirming its position relative to maintaining good conduct at its schools and in activities

related to schools. All secondary schools were advised of this policy and directed to implement it. The policy is a general one, and each school principal is directed to implement it through specific and detailed policies for his building. Individual school policies are not identical but are developed by the principal. Mr. Davidson and his administrative team developed and implemented the policy for this school. This policy, among other requirements, included a provision that all boys, once they begin to shave, would maintain a clean-shaven appearance, including the area of the upper lip. This policy was implemented and effective at South High School until recently. About three weeks ago he received a call expressing concern over the requirement that forbade mustaches. He suggested to the caller that this be discussed with Mr. Davidson, and such a meeting was held. At that meeting Mr. Davidson clarified the policy of South High School and affirmed his intention to continue with the policy through the current year.

Subsequent to that meeting the Superintendent received further contacts from members of the South High School Negro community, indicating further concern about this specific item in the good grooming policy and indicating they felt that the policy as it related to mustaches was discriminatory to the Negro student. The problem gained magnitude over the last two weeks through involvement of the Sheldon Complex, United Community Services, Human Relations Commission, and Director of Human Relations. The Superintendent and President of the Board met with citizens groups and others indicated above to discuss and attempt to mediate the problem. Those opposed to the policy requested that this aspect of the good grooming policy be rescinded immediately. Your Staff took the position of a willingness to review the procedure and reconsider the policy at the end of the first semester. Meetings were arranged with representatives opposing the policy. The first such meeting was held Monday, November 14, and we were scheduled to meet again tomorrow to continue attempts to resolve the problem.

However, last night a well organized demonstration took place outside of South High School in which students from the area and from Grand Valley State College carried signs as they marched around the building, displaying their opposition to this aspect of the policy. This morning at 9:20 a.m., approximately 400 students walked out of South High School, again in opposition to the policy. The demonstration last evening and the walkout this morning were arranged and directed by adults. This morning mothers were across the street from the school building waving to the youngsters and urging them to leave the school. In spite of attempts to resolve the problem by discussion, it was brought to a head last night and this morning by those opposed to the policy.

The Superintendent stated it was necessary for him as executive officer to know "where we stand as a school community, what we stand for, and where we are going." He expressed the concern that unless decisions are made clearcut, and unless issues are followed, "we will have no school system in the south end of the community, or what we will have will be a shambles in terms of the type of school climate we want." With this background, he presented Mr. Davidson and asked him to provide more details to the situation at South High School.

Mr. Charles Davidson, Principal of South High School, indicated that general deportment of students at South High School had deteriorated during recent years to the point where damage to teachers' cars has prevented some of

them from obtaining insurance coverage; where on occasion urinating in the vestibule and excreting in the auditorium had taken place; where student replies to teachers had gotten to the point of "go to hell," "make me," or even more vulgar language. Students who commit serious violations are suspended. At the same time, the staff has tried to adapt its rules to retain these youngsters in school, feeling that it is better to have them in school, even when attendance is extremely spasmodic. This type of report is depressing, but the Board should not be depressed, that these violations were confined to a small percentage of students; the vast majority of students are interested in school, interested in achieving, and interesting and invigorating to work with. The entire teaching staff had worked very hard to implement the good grooming policy, and the general climate at South High School had improved. However, in the last three to four weeks the situation has deteriorated because of opposition to the inclusion of the ban on mustaches in the good grooming policy. "We have watched our students in the hallways and in the classrooms go from an attitude of accepting instruction to rebelling against it. This was an abrupt change from the early part of the year when all teachers worked to supervise both their classroom and the hallways during the passing of classes. Attitudes toward the school and school property have deteriorated. This policy was part of our effort toward a goal of making South a better place for students to learn academically and also learn to be better citizens."

President Beaman questioned the discipline cases at South High. Mr. Davidson responded, "Last year we suspended a great many students for discipline. We had beatings, shakedowns in the hall for money, problems at football games, and students accosted as they left school and beaten to the extent of broken jaws and noses. My total time last year was spent on discipline. This year we have had only six serious discipline cases so that the principal and two assistant principals can spend their time on the school program, or could, up until three weeks ago."

Responding to a question relative to the events at the last football game, Mr. Davidson indicated that at the last football game of the season when South played Catholic Central on a Monday night South was complimented by Catholic Central officials on the fine behavior of the student body. During the second half of that same ball game every car along Cottage Grove Street was damaged, and his car received special treatment - the grill, hood, roof, and interior were all damaged.

Responding to several other questions, Mr. Davidson indicated that the majority of the students were still in school and following rules and regulations; the problems have been concerned with a minority of the students, out of a student enrollment of 1996. Only two students have been out because of the mustache issue, and this morning only one student was out of school because of it. There have been instances in which girls received undesired and immoral attention from boys, and on one occasion when he suspended a boy for particularly obscene references to a girl, he received obscene telephone calls. Because of some of these problems boys' and girls' lockers have been separated. Student behavior and citizenship had improved substantially this year. Hall monitors are used and respected by other students. Halls are controlled by passes, and all doors to the building are open, and all persons entering the building are greeted as guests.

Mr. Phillips stated he could attest to the improvement in discipline at South High School as he had visited the building many times. He had been very pleased

with the progress that had been made in discipline and was distressed that it had deteriorated to this point.

Mr. Davidson stated he was ready to spend the rest of his life at South working towards making it the finest high school in the city and one that would produce good citizens for Grand Rapids.

In response to further questions, Mr. Davidson indicated that the good grooming policy was presented to the student body on September 16, and it had been adhered to without substantial complaint from students until three weeks ago. The boy who is out of school today because of this situation had a mustache at the beginning of the school year and shaved it off to comply with the rules. He subsequently let it grow back; he became a symbol of resistance to the policy. The good grooming policies are applicable to all students, and many more Caucasian students initially objected to the cutting of hair than did Negro students to the shaving of the mustache; for every student sent home for a mustache, ten were sent out to get their hair cut.

Mr. Phillips stated, "Mr. Davidson, you made the rules for black and white alike. When did this take on a racial overtone?"

Mr. Davidson stated, "I don't see how it could take a racial overtone, but it has - I suppose because of the one boy who is out of school with a mustache. Some interested citizens got into the act against shaving on the basis that the Negro had an unusual skin problem when he began to shave which resulted in bumps and pimples. This was one of the points presented to the Superintendent by those opposing the policy."

Mr. Beaman indicated, "In other words, adults are involved in this, and it is not primarily students."

Dr. Pylman reiterated his earlier statements relative to the operation of the demonstration last night and the walkout of school this morning. "I personally observed the direction of students last night by adults and am also aware that two publications that had been previously written, one entitled, A Mistake, and the other, The Mustache - A Sequence of Events, were written by adults who were part of the Sheldon Complex organization. These publications were distributed previously, and one was again distributed last night. These publications were fallacious and directly misrepresented the situation." The Superintendent, however, indicated that the view of those in the Negro community opposing the policy was far from unanimous. He had met with a group of Negroes last evening as well as the Negro members of the PTSA, and these people were in support of the school's policies on good grooming and in support of the efforts to improve the educational environment of South High School. They wanted to be sure that no one else was speaking for them in this situation, and they wanted to be heard and represented on any discussion relative to this problem.

Mr. Fred Johnson, a resident of the South High School area who was in the audience, confirmed the statement of the Superintendent. He said they had given a statement to the Press on their support, which, in essence, said that authorities and laws had been disobeyed, and the Board should be able to decide this issue without the fear or threat of a walkout or other overt action. He wanted the Board to know that there was much concern among the Negroes, and a large segment feel that Mr. Davidson is doing a fine job at South High School.

Dr. Pylman further indicated that he had personally met with the faculty of South High School on Monday evening, and they indicated through confidential expressions that they were almost unanimous in support of the principal and the good grooming policy. A few indicated they didn't consider the mustache, per se, as a significant reason for school control, but all were in support of the principal and his efforts to improve the educational climate of South High School, and most of them commented relative to the improved situation at South High School during the past year.

Mr. Phillips thought that "the Board ought to know what adult organization is operating this and who is setting up all the orders because if we are going to get to the basic cause of the problem we have to know who is behind this activity."

Dr. Pylman indicated he knew that the piece of literature, The Mustache - A Sequence of Events, was written by the Director of the Sheldon Complex, Mr. Raymond Tardy, and the article, A Mistake, was written by a city public health nurse assigned to the Sheldon Complex. There is no doubt that either the car or sound system, or both, used during the demonstration are the property of the Sheldon Complex.

Mr. Beaman stated it would be very interesting to find out where these copies were run off, at whose expense, who supplied the paper, and what funds supported the cost of the demonstration and walkout. It is in the community interest to find the answers to these questions.

In answer to the question of the involvement of the Executive Director of the Complex as the author of one of the articles, Dr. Pylman indicated this was confirmed to him in the Mayor's Office last week by United Community Services officials who operate the Community Action Program. The article was written about ten days ago.

Mr. Beaman asked if the United Community Services was involved. Dr. Pylman responded that the UCS was involved because they are the operators of the Community Action Program, and the Sheldon Complex is an organization created by the Community Action office.

Mr. Oostema asked Dr. Pylman who was represented at the meeting in the Mayor's office which resulted in the statement in the paper. Dr. Pylman responded that the meeting had been arranged after he and the President of the Board had met with members of UCS, the Mayor, and the Human Relations Director of the City in the hope that a satisfactory solution could be reached. To this end, it was agreed to ask Dr. Donald Bouma, Professor at Western Michigan University, to serve as a moderator for a committee composed of the Superintendent of Schools, Principal and Assistant Principal of South High School, Mr. Raymond Tardy, Mr. Cassell Lawson, Director of Community Services for the Urban League, and Mrs. Ella Sims, a parent in the South area. This meeting was called because there was concern that this situation could cause riot conditions and any possibility of an eruption should be avoided, and that the individuals named above would be those who could hold the lid on the community; in fact, at Monday's meeting Mr. Tardy indicated that the students would not walk out until they had checked with him.

Dr. Pylman summarized by indicating that "the operation of schools and the authority to formulate necessary rules and regulations for their operation was delegated by the State Legislature to the local boards of education. The

Grand Rapids Board of Education had established a general policy relative to student behavior and grooming, and each principal was given authority to interpret and implement that policy in his school. This was done at South High School. The question now is not one of whether the mustache should be included in the good grooming policy of South High School, but is rather one of control of that building on the part of the Principal, the Superintendent, and the Board. We have attempted to operate the type of schools you want and the type of schools this community wants for its children. We do not believe we should be dissuaded in this effort by a small segment of the community which disagrees with a specific item in the policy. We are willing to discuss the South High School policy, or any policy, with any group of citizens, and I know this is also the policy of the Board of Education. I do not believe policy should be considered under pressure or duress."

Mr. Phillips stated, "This, as Dr. Pylman has said, has gone beyond mustaches and is in the realm now of obeying law and order and respecting authority. I certainly can attest that the majority of Negro students at South and the majority of Negro citizens in this community believe in and respect law and order. There are many laws that all of us perhaps do not agree with, but if each of us tried to decide whether or not we like a law, and if we don't like it we are going to break it, then we are living in a jungle. This community or any community can count on that. I think this Board ought to go on record as supporting law and order and respect for authority, and this applies to all of us. I am very sorry that this has descended into the realm of a race issue because it is not a race situation. That law was made for the entire school, black and white alike. A mustache, to me, has no basic or cultural bearing to one's background; it is an individual matter. Some people wear mustaches and some don't. Color has nothing to do with it. I would like this community to know - and I think I speak for the majority of Negro citizens - the majority of Negro students do respect law and order. If we don't like a law, we try to obey it but change it through due process and not through taking to the streets and trying to do it through force. I also think that once we get past this recommendation that we will explore in depth the problems that are at the bottom of the situation at South because we also want to make sure that we can find out the causes for the problems we are facing now and try to meet those causes. I believe the majority of Negro citizens as well as white citizens have a respect of law and order. I think they expect us to hold law and order."

Mr. Beaman stated, "I think everyone in this room agrees with you, Paul. I thought Mr. Davidson was very specific when he talked about the small number involved. We are not talking about the Negro community as such; we are talking about a group of people who have seen fit to take law and order into their own hands and to make a show of power of a kind, and it is unfortunate that this happened."

Dr. Pylman stated, "The parents of the students at South High School who walked out of school this morning ought to be publicly advised that they have a legal responsibility to see that their children attend school up to the age of 16. They can be prosecuted in their failure to do so. Those students over 16 years are not covered by the compulsory school attendance law. It is not the Staff's intention to be vindictive, however, and we should like to indicate that no disciplinary action will be taken against those youngsters out of school this morning if they report to school by tomorrow morning. The rules relative to

absence from school will be implemented against those who do not return by tomorrow morning."

Motion by Mr. VanBlooy, supported by Mr. Steenland, that the position taken by the Board last August relative to grooming procedures, discipline, etc., be reaffirmed at this time.

Carried: Yeas: DeGroot, Jonkhoff, Keeler, Oostema, Phillips, Post, Steenland, VanBlooy, President Beaman - 9.
Nays: 0.

Motion by Mr. Jonkhoff, supported by Mr. Post, that the Board reaffirm its policy of permitting the principal the autonomy to establish specific rules on discipline, grooming, decor, etc., within the general policy established by the Board of Education.

Carried: Yeas: DeGroot, Jonkhoff, Keeler, Oostema, Phillips, Post, Steenland, VanBlooy, President Beaman - 9.
Nays: 0.

Motion by Mr. VanBlooy, supported by Mr. Steenland, that the Board reaffirm its complete confidence in Mr. Davidson, Dr. Pylman, and the Administrative Staff of the school system.

Carried: Yeas: DeGroot, Jonkhoff, Keeler, Oostema, Phillips, Post, Steenland, VanBlooy, President Beaman - 9.
Nays: 0.

Motion by Mr. Steenland, supported by Mrs. Keeler, that the Board concur in the recommendation of the Superintendent on the handling of the students who walked out of school today.

Carried: Yeas: DeGroot, Jonkhoff, Keeler, Oostema, Phillips, Post, Steenland, VanBlooy, President Beaman - 9.
Nays: 0.

ADJOURNMENT

On motion of Mr. VanBlooy, the Board adjourned at 12:48 p.m.

C. Robert Muth
Secretary to the Board