



WINNEFOX LIBRARY SYSTEM

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MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 19, 2009
TO: Winnefox Library System Board of Trustees
FROM: Jeff Gilderson-Duwe
RE: Member Libraries' Evaluation of Winnefox Library System Effectiveness

Every year, when completing the state's annual report, each member library board indicates whether the Winnefox Library System did or did not "provide effective leadership and adequately meet the needs of the library" during the past year. Twenty-eight member library boards indicated that Winnefox did meet their needs and provide effective leadership during 2008. Two member library boards – those in Fond du Lac and Menasha – indicated that it did not.

Enclosed you will find the letters that the boards of the Fond du Lac and Menasha Public Libraries included with their 2008 annual reports to the state, explaining their reasons for believing that Winnefox's leadership and performance were inadequate. Both letters trace the source of inadequate leadership and performance to the fact that Winnefox and the Oshkosh Public Library share a Director.

The Winnefox Board examined the issue of sharing a Director with Oshkosh Public Library in 2005, as both organizations were preparing to recruit to fill the vacancy that would be created with the retirement of John. Nichols. Two of the most vocal advocates for separating the Directorships were Ken Hall, of the Fond du Lac Public Library, and Tasha Saecker, then of the Caestecker Public Library in Green Lake. Continuance of a joint Directorship was discussed in a special meeting on May 10, 2005 and again in the regular meeting of May 25, 2005. At the second meeting, the Winnefox Board voted (14-7) to retain the shared Directorship structure with Oshkosh Public Library. The issue was raised again during the 2007 strategic planning process. An outside facilitator conducted focus groups on system issues in each county and reported that "for a majority of participants, the shared Winnefox/Oshkosh Public Library structure is not a significant issue for the local library."

According to Wisconsin Statutes 43.05 (14) (b), the state will "conduct a review of a public library system if at least 30% of the libraries in participating municipalities that include at least 30% of the population of all participating municipalities state in the [annual report] that the public library system did not adequately meet the needs of the library." Two libraries of thirty falls short of this threshold.



Ken Hall
Director

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To: Richard Grobschmidt, Assistant State Superintendent DLTCL
Members of the Winnefox Library System Board of Trustees
From: Fond du Lac Public Library Board of Trustees
RE: Statement of System Effectiveness
Date: March 18, 2009

Fond du Lac Public Library reluctantly answered "no" to the final question on our *2008 Annual Report* "did your library system provide effective leadership" in the past year. This answer deserves an explanation. We would like to stress at the outset that we have absolutely no dissatisfaction with the current Winnefox Library System (WLS) director, Jeff Gilderson-Duwe, personally. Jeff has proven himself to be a talented, creative, fair minded administrator. Jeff is an exemplary Director to the extent to which his situation allows.

Our concern is that the Director of the Oshkosh Public Library (OPL) is also the Director of the Winnefox Library System. This relationship puts the interests of WLS in a permanent subsidiary relationship to OPL when those interests are in conflict with one another.

For example, each year WLS must negotiate a new Resource Library Agreement with OPL. Contracts are normally negotiated between parties that are independent and more or less equal, able to advocate for their own self interests. Having one person advocate for both automatically puts one party at a disadvantage. WLS is always the junior partner in these negotiations since OPL can be considered the majority shareholder of the directorship. The Director owes 80% of their time – and allegiance – to OPL and 20% to WLS by contract. This means that as fair minded as one individual may be, there is no way they can evaluate the equability of a contract without bias to their primary employer.

Having fiduciary decisions made between two organizations represented by the same person is counter intuitive at best and unethical at worst. Neither the financial interests of the member libraries nor the interests of the taxpayers of the State of Wisconsin are best served by such an arrangement.

Beyond the conflict of interest in financial matters, issues of policy and practice regularly arise where individual members have competing interests. Issues range in importance from the trivial to those with broad ranging service implications for the public. With a dual directorship, the interests of the resource library will always take precedence over the interests of other member libraries. By extension, the interests and needs of users of member libraries will be subservient to the needs of OPL users. Many of these decisions will have financial implications for members even if no money is changing hands between organizations. The argument of a dual directorship

saving money for the taxpayers – an argument most often heard in support of a dual directorship – is a monumental fallacy.

The inherent flaws in this present arrangement are exacerbated by the current financial climate all publicly funded institutions find themselves in. It is no secret that virtually all WLS member libraries are serving an ever growing number of customers while funding is necessarily threatened by our current economy. The WLS Director cannot effectively advocate for the interests of all member libraries under the best of conditions. All member libraries need and deserve an unbiased advocate now more than ever. Until the directorship of OPL and WLS are divorced from one another, WLS will never have the effective leadership it deserves.

Explanation of Library Board's Response about Public Library System Effectiveness

The Menasha Public Library Board of Trustees has stated that the Winnefox Library System DID NOT provide effective leadership and adequately meet the needs of the library on the 2008 Annual Report. The library board also checked this box on the 2007 Annual Report.

Let me first state that Jeff Gilderson-Duwe has done the best he can managing a library system with such limited time available to him. Jeff has done an admirable job in restructuring the Winnefox Technology Executive Committee to include more small libraries. He is a qualified, talented person caught in a situation that has an inherent problem.

It is the inherent conflict of interest in managing a library system and the resource library within it that concerns the board. It is hard to have a contract between the resource library and the library system where the person negotiating for both sides is the same individual. How can member libraries be certain that their needs are being weighed equally?

This is exacerbated by the fact that the director works for the library system 20% of the time and Oshkosh Public Library 80% of the time. Because the time and payment is not equally, he is necessarily biased in his approach.

The library board is also concerned with issues where our library may have a differing approach than the Oshkosh Public Library. Because many of these issues are decided at the system level, the conflict of interest becomes even more pronounced. Some of the issues are smaller than others, but they primarily revolve around innovation and the support that the system gives for it. There is also the matter of processes being slowed down to a near crawl if they are not of interest to Oshkosh Public Library.

The board has asked that I provide some concrete examples in the statement.

One example occurred during our recent Annual Meeting. The system was facing possible large budget cuts in the state budget and did a survey of the libraries as to what programs to cut/curtail. When I saw the survey, I was alarmed that innovation in individual libraries was being mentioned as something to be curtailed. I expressed this to the system director and assistant director. What resulted was that that portion of the survey was expanded to even more effectively target innovation in individual libraries. It was unfortunate and regrettable but one of the concrete examples of how the system lacks support for innovation even in the individual library.

Innovation in the system has come to a near standstill unless led discretely by a member library. It is no longer being led by the system itself, creating a situation where member libraries have to move ahead on their own despite the ramifications of their decisions later to the larger group. Other issues must necessarily go through the system like taking online fines. The member libraries have waited years for a solution to be purchased and implemented, and the system has yet to even get bids from vendors and investigate solutions. We are in a similar situation for print management and wireless statistics.

We are looking for leadership from our system and advocacy for all of the member libraries. The director attends the system annual meeting and the technology committee meetings. Unfortunately, for many member libraries the only time they see the system director is at the single annual meeting. He has yet to visit all of the libraries in the system even one time. This lack of connection and lack of advocacy is evidence of the disconnect that is the result of the joint directorship.

It has been frustrating to watch Winnefox, which was once a leader among library systems, slip. We as members continue to push for new approaches and new technologies with little to no results on a system level. The Menasha Public Library Board of Trustees asks that these issues be investigated and a tangible solution proposed.