

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, JULY 12, 2012

The School Board of Escambia County, Florida, convened in Regular Workshop at 8:00 a.m., in Room 160, at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center, 30 East Texar Drive, Pensacola, Florida, with the following present:

Chair: Mr. Bill Slayton Vice Chair: Mr. Jeff Bergosh

Board Members: Mr. Gerald W. Boone
Mrs. Linda Moultrie
Mrs. Patricia Hightower (*not present*)

School Board General Counsel: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters

Superintendent of Schools: Mr. Malcolm Thomas

Meeting was advertised in the Pensacola News Journal on June 29, 2012 - Legal No. 1569066

[General discussion among Board Members, the Superintendent, and staff occurred throughout this meeting.]

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Slayton called the Regular Workshop to order at 8:00 a.m.

The following item was moved forward on the agenda:

V.B.5., Legal Services:

Risk Management Fund

b) Steven Baker, P.A. \$ 72,748.52

As he had done numerous times before during School Board workshops, Mr. Bergosh again expressed his concern about the large amount of legal fees each month. Mr. Bergosh said that after a while of “renting a tool,” he had to ask whether it was “better to buy the tool” when the School Board was spending large amounts each month for legal services. He believed that it was time the School Board considered hiring another full-time in-house attorney with an annual salary of perhaps around \$100,000 in order to eliminate the large monthly bills from outsourced attorneys such as Mr. Baker. Mr. Steven Baker, P.A., clarified that the \$72,748.52 was not just for one month of legal services, but rather six months during which time there had been two jury trials; he reminded the School Board that the bill included costs. Mr. Baker was of the opinion, that if the School Board did choose to hire a full-time in-house attorney as suggested by Mr. Bergosh, they would still wind up paying costs and for the salary suggested by Mr. Bergosh, the School Board would not get someone with 35 years of experience like himself. He believed that the School Board needed to look primarily, at the outstanding results over the past 30 years that he had been representing the School Board. Mr. Bergosh said that the timeliness of receiving bills from Mr. Baker was also a problem. He noted that the bill on this month’s agenda included hours from as far back as November 2011. He commented once again, that the bills from Mr. Baker should come to the School Board in a timelier manner. Mr. Bergosh wanted to make sure that Mr. Baker knew that this was not a personal issue as he believed that Mr. Baker did an excellent job for the School District. Mrs. Moultrie agreed with Mr. Bergosh that in being a good steward of the School District’s finances, she could not help but look at the cost of legal fees every month and ask whether it was cost efficient to “buy the tool or just continue to rent it.” She said she would continue to monitor the legal fees each month.

II. OPEN DISCUSSION

- July and August Calendar - *Slayton*

School Board Members reviewed their schedules for July and August; no changes were made.

Mrs. Laura Shaud, Director of Budgeting, addressed the Board regarding the need to schedule a Special Meeting for the purpose of considering approval of the Annual Financial Report and final budget amendments. School Board Members decided that the Special Meeting would be held September 11, 2012, beginning at 5:00 p.m., in Room 160, at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center. Mrs. Shaud also mentioned that the final budget hearing would need to be tentatively scheduled. School Board Members agreed to tentatively schedule the final budget hearing for September 18, 2012, beginning at 5:01 p.m., in Room 160, at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center. Mrs. Shaud noted that the final budget hearing would be officially set during the July 31, 2012 Special Meeting to approve the budget.

- Synopsis of New Laws Pertaining to Education, Especially Graduation Requirement - *Slayton* (15 minutes) [Handout(s) provided to School Board Members]

As requested by Mr. Slayton, Mrs. Carolyn Spooner, Director of High School Education, gave a brief synopsis of the new laws pertaining to education, including a new law that provides a student the option of early graduation if the student has completed a minimum of 24 credits. It was noted that the option for early high school graduation would be addressed in the Student Progression Plan that would be submitted to the School Board on the August 21, 2012 Regular Meeting agenda.

- First Grade Retention Policy – *Superintendent* [Informational packets provided to School Board Members]

The Superintendent said he would be proposing a retention policy for first-graders who were not reading at grade level. He noted that one of the School District's biggest problems was that students begin elementary school significantly behind with typically 17-20% of students starting kindergarten more than one year behind. The challenge for the School District, he said, was to make sure that those students before progressing to second grade were actually knew how to read proficiently (reading at or above grade level). (First-graders who are not reading at or above grade level by the end of the year could be held back.) The Superintendent noted the importance of students learning how to read in the early elementary grades (Kindergarten, first grade, second grade) because after second grade, students must use their reading to learn all other subject matter.

Ms. Kelli Aepli-Campbell, Reading Specialist, narrated a brief PowerPoint presentation that outlined information pertaining to the proposed first grade retention policy including: committee make-up, topics the committee discussed, documents, purchases, key ideas, and next steps. Ms. Campbell reviewed a "draft" version of the letter that would be used to inform parents of the retention policy and a "draft" version of the first grade report card insert that would be used to communicate a student's progress throughout the school year.

It was noted that the first grade retention policy would be addressed in the Student Progression Plan that would be submitted for the School Board's consideration on the August 21, 2012 Regular Meeting agenda.

At this time, the following item was moved forward on the agenda:

Update from A.A. Dixon Charter School

[Handouts provided to School Board Members by the presenter]

NOTE: This update was provided as part of the Dixon Charter School Corrective Action Plan (CAP) that was approved by the School Board at the September 20, 2011 Regular Meeting. In accordance with the CAP, Dixon was to present an update to the School Board at each monthly workshop for the remainder of the 2011-2012 school year.

There was no formal report from A.A. Dixon Charter School. Mr. LuTimothy May, Board Chair of A.A. Dixon Charter School, simply thanked the School Board for the action that they had taken at the June 26, 2012 Regular Meeting concerning Dixon Charter School and then introduced the school's new administrative team comprised of three veteran school principals with tenures in Escambia County School District: Dr. Wendy Bennett, Ms. Linda Scott, and Ms. Modeste McCorvey. Upon inquiry by Mr. Bergosh, Mr. May confirmed that the overall financial picture for Dixon was looking much better than it had in the past, noting that the school had ended the 2011-2012 fiscal year around \$50,000 in the black.

The Regular Workshop recessed at 9:30 a.m. and reconvened at 9:41 a.m. with Mr. Slayton, Mr. Bergosh, Mr. Boone, Mrs. Moultrie, the Superintendent, and General Counsel present. Mrs. Hightower was not present.

- Low Performing Schools - *Superintendent*

The Superintendent noted that this discussion topic was directly related to Item V.A.17, *Extended School Day for Selected Elementary Schools*. The purpose of Item V.A.17 was to extend the school day for selected elementary schools in order to provide an additional hour of intensive reading instruction for all students in grades K-5. As he had mentioned before, the Superintendent said that one of the School District's biggest problems was that students begin elementary school significantly behind with typically 17-20% of students starting kindergarten more than one year behind. The challenge for the School District, he said, was to make sure that those students before progressing to second grade actually knew how to read proficiently. He said that research was clear that the only way to "catch up a student who comes to school one or two years behind" is to insert an intervention of time; therefore, he was proposing an extra hour of reading instruction for several elementary schools whose students were struggling with reading performance.

The following principals shared some of the highlights from their individual school's extended day plan: Christine Nixon, principal of Lincoln Park Elementary; Jennifer Sewell, principal of Montclair Elementary; and Connie Farish, Principal of C.A. Weis Elementary. Ms. Farish also presented the plan for West Pensacola Elementary in absence of the school's principal, Ms. Sabrena Cunningham. (*Plans were outlined on the summaries provided in the backup documentation for Item V.A.17.*)

Mr. Bergosh prefaced his questions by noting that he intended to support the approval of Item V.A. 17. However, he noted that this would be a very expensive (approximately \$2.4 million) endeavor and questioned whether the School District was "going to get our bang for our buck with the extra hour" with regard to a major impact on reading, especially when considering that there already after-school programs in some of these schools. The Superintendent said that the difference in the proposed extra hour and the current after-school programs was that during the extra hour, the students would remain with their regular teacher who would be working creatively with the students on reading instruction. With regard to the cost, the Superintendent said that the bulk of the cost was paying the salaries of the teachers who would be staying an extra hour every day for the 180- day school year. The Superintendent said that staff was hopeful that the extended hour would prove to be beneficial. He said it was important to "do something different" during the regular school day to try and help students who were multiple years behind. Mr. Bergosh referred to some of the charter schools, Byrneville in particular, that did not have the benefit of an extended school day. He also noted that charter schools only received 95% of every dollar that the School District received and yet they were able to do it. The Superintendent pointed out that a charter school like Byrneville did not have the same type of student demographics as these selected traditional elementary schools and not as much poverty either. He said the "wild card" was special education in that Byrneville did not accept special education students whereas the traditional schools did and that had impacted the letter grade for those schools significantly. Mrs. Moultrie commented that poverty was not an excuse, but rather an "artificial barrier" that should be "thrown out the window." Mr. Bergosh agreed and so did the Superintendent. The remainder of the discussion on this item centered on the transportation aspect in terms of the logistics of providing student transportation for these selected elementary schools. The Superintendent said that each selected elementary school's detailed plan for the extended school day would be forwarded to School Board Members once available.

III. COMMENTS FROM SUPERINTENDENT

-None

IV. PROPOSED ADDITIONS OR REVISIONS TO SCHOOL DISTRICT RULES

-No items submitted

V. CONSENT AGENDA

A. Curriculum and Instruction

6. Amendment to the Charter Contract between the School Board of Escambia County, Florida and 21st Century Academy of Pensacola, Inc. dba Newpoint Academy

Mr. Bergosh said he had concerns about Newpoint Academy given that the school grade had received an "F" school grade. Ms. Carla Lovett, Executive Director of Newpoint Schools, addressed the School Board concerning Newpoint Academy's school grade for the 2011-2012 school year. Ms. Lovett said that the school was already working on an improvement strategy and she assured the School Board that the school would not have multiple occurrences of such low performance. The Superintendent advised the School Board that should Newpoint Academy make a second consecutive "F" in the 2012-2013 school year, they would then be in a position to have to go before the State Board of Education to request a waiver based on the options in the law. The Superintendent said there would need to be some discussion with Newpoint about making regular updates to the School Board on the school's academic progress. Mr. Bergosh and Mrs. Moultrie believed that Newpoint Academy should be treated similar to Dixon Charter School in that they should provide monthly academic status updates to the School Board at the School Board's regular monthly workshops, starting with an update at the August Regular Workshop.

17. Extended School Day for Selected Elementary Schools

This item was discussed as part of the "Low Performing Schools" topic under the *Open Discussion* segment of this meeting.

B. Finance

5. Legal Services:

Risk Management Fund

b) Steven Baker, P.A. \$ 72,748.52

This item was addressed earlier in the meeting.

6. Scrap List I for July 2012

Upon inquiry by Mr. Bergosh, Mr. Tom Ingram, Director of Information Technology, and Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, confirmed that staff was still exploring the possibility of modifying the current disposal process so that computers could be made available to individuals and organizations in need of computer equipment rather than being scrapped. The Superintendent said that once the process was finalized, it would be communicated to the School Board.

9. Financial Status Report: Employee Benefit Trust Fund

Mr. Bergosh asked for a recap of the Employee Benefit Trust Fund. Mr. Terry St. Cyr, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Business Services, said that in May 2012 there was a \$3.5 million fund balance which was significantly better from the \$600,000 range that was

experienced back in December 2011; however, claims expenses in June 2012 were significantly higher than they had been earlier in the year.

11. Results of Annual Physical Inventory of Warehouse for 2011-12

Mr. Bergosh said the results of the warehouse annual physical inventory looked “very good” although he was curious about the approximate 5% “spike” that he had noticed in the Gas, Oil, and Antifreeze area. Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, said that he would refer this matter to Mr. Randy Porto in Accounting Operations for an explanation that would be provided to all School Board Members.

C. Human Resource Services
-No item discussed

D. Purchasing

22. Hellen Caro Elementary – Declaration of Emergency

Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, advised the School Board that earlier in the month, the chiller system cooling tower had failed at Hellen Caro Elementary School. As an emergency measure, the District had rented and installed a temporary cooling tower. Mr. Dennis explained that the Superintendent’s declaration of emergency was necessary so that the materials and services required to facilitate the permanent replacement of the cooling tower could be procured as expeditiously as possible in order to avoid future disruption of classes and restore full operational status. It was noted that early estimates placed the replacement cost in excess of \$55,000.00.

E. Operations

1. School Food Services

5. Universal Breakfast & Provision 2 Schools

It was noted that this item would be deleted from the July 17, 2012 Regular Meeting as it had been determined that it would be better to handle this matter as an informational item instead.

F. Student Transfers
-No items discussed

G. Internal Auditing

1. Dependent Eligibility Audit

At the request of Mr. Bergosh, Ms. Michèle Kiker, Senior Internal Auditor, gave a brief review of the results and recommendations of the Dependent Eligibility Audit report (*as outlined in the backup documentation for this item*). Ms. Kiker said that she was pleased to report that the audit had confirmed that only dependents who were eligible for coverage were receiving health insurance benefits through the School District.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS
-None

VII. NEW BUSINESS

A. Items from the Board
-No items discussed

- B. Items from the Superintendent
 - 3. Declaration of Emergency – Escambia High School

Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, reminded the School Board of the July 3, 2012 fire at Escambia High School that had damaged classrooms in the 100 Wing of Building 1. It was noted that those classrooms would need to be renovated prior to fall classes that were scheduled to begin August 20, 2012. *Professional Services Industries was coordinating clean-up efforts with NCM Demolition & Remediation, Inc. and reconstruction would be addressed by one of the School District's continuing contract architects and general contractors.* Mr. Dennis explained that the Superintendent's declaration of emergency was necessary so that the materials and services required to respond to that damage could be procured as expeditiously as possible in order to avoid further damage and restore full operational status.

- C. Items from the General Counsel
 - No items submitted

VIII. COMMITTEE/DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

- 1. Update from A.A. Dixon Charter School

This item was handled earlier in the meeting.

IX. PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Slayton called for public hearing; however, there were no speakers.

X. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Regular Workshop adjourned at 11:23 a.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Superintendent

Chair

ADD

PENDING BOARD APPROVAL