

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, FEBRUARY 16, 2012

The School Board of Escambia County, Florida, convened in Special Workshop at 3:00 p.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 (*not present*)
Mrs. Linda Moultrie
Mrs. Patricia Hightower

School Board General Counsel: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters

Superintendent of Schools: Mr. Malcolm Thomas

Meeting was advertised in the Pensacola News Journal on February 1, 2012 – Legal No. 1552286

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Slayton called the Special Workshop to order at 3:00 p.m.

II. OPEN DISCUSSION

- Middle School Pupil Progression - Jeff Bergosh

[*Handouts provided to School Board Members*]

Mr. Bergosh expressed his belief that the current requirements for students to progress from middle to high school were “set too low” (see: Student Progression Plan, current edition). He noted that under the current requirements, an 8th grade student with poor performance in middle school would still be advanced to 9th grade. He was concerned that with the current requirements “set so low” that many rising 9th graders were being set up for failure in high school. Mr. Bergosh suggested that the School Board consider increasing the requirements in an effort to ensure that middle school students would be ready for promotion to high school. He believed, at a minimum, that a level 2 scoring on the FCAT and “C” averages in all required core courses should be the required benchmark for promotion to high school. (NOTE: *Current promotion requirements did not include FCAT scoring and only required “D” averages in all required core courses.*) Mr. Slayton expressed some concern with Mr. Bergosh’s proposal, noting that by increasing the requirements, the School Board would, in a sense, be “punishing the middle schools in that those students would be retained in middle school and will then impact their scores, their grades the following year.” Mr. Slayton questioned whether the School Board was “starting early enough” because he did not believe that the problem with poor student performance had just begun in middle school. The Superintendent suggested looking at this issue earlier than 8th grade. He believed that allowing a “marginal” 8th grade student the opportunity to enter high school, where

there was more opportunity for them to engage in “student life” (i.e., athletics, clubs, other activities), might actually help motivate that student to perform better academically. The Superintendent said “if you put a rule in place that if you’re level 1 you can’t go to high school, you’re stuck - you just suck all the hope away from some of the kids.” He believed the “key” was early grades and said he would be very supportive if Mr. Bergosh wanted to talk about a “1st grade trigger” instead as he believed that 8th grade was too late. The Superintendent also believed that Florida had it “set too late” with a “3rd grade trigger” noting that students learn to read in kindergarten, 1st, and 2nd grades and then in 3rd grade, Florida expects those students to use the reading to learn. “So we wait until students get to a place where we’re using reading to learn and we’re not teaching reading and then we fail them” he said. “If we’re going to hold somebody back, maybe you’d want to think about it in 1st grade because it’s (retention) coming in 3rd grade anyway.”

While the discussion centered on middle school students being prepared to enter high school, several School Board Members agreed with the Superintendent on the importance of “starting earlier” with preparing students, preferably before they entered kindergarten.

Mr. Bergosh indicated that he would pursue additional discussion on this issue in the future as he believed that the School Board must ensure that middle school students are ready to progress to high school before they get there.

- Waste, Fraud, Abuse Tip Line - Jeff Bergosh

[Handouts provided to School Board Members]

Mr. Bergosh suggested the establishment of a tip-line for anonymous reporting of possible incidents of waste, fraud, and abuse. He noted that the establishment of such a tip-line was originally suggested by the Internal Auditing department in a report dated April 27, 2007 (see: Audit 2007-004, Ethics Review): *We recommend that the District re-establish a hotline for reporting violations. Ideally, the number should be independent of any District operating department, such as an outside service provider. With an independent resource for reporting violations, employees may feel empowered to report concerns without fear of retaliation or lack of action.* The Superintendent suggested an on-line reporting system as opposed to a call-in tip-line, explaining that he would not want the reporting individual “to get into a dialogue and get an impression that someone on the other end was for or against what they were saying.” The Superintendent indicated that it would be very simple to establish an on-line system via the School District’s website for the anonymous reporting of waste, fraud, and abuse (similar to the on-line system that had been established for the anonymous reporting of bullying, teen dating violence, harassment, and other incidents). The Superintendent suggested however, that the reporting system also include a “positive side” for anonymously submitting ideas for eliminating waste and other cost-saving suggestions.

- Exit Interview Policy - Jeff Bergosh

Mr. Bergosh expressed his belief that the School District should establish a more formalized exit interview process for all classes of employees, including administrative and professional personnel. Mr. Bergosh believed that valuable information could be garnered from an employee, especially a District-level administrator or a school principal, who was exiting the system. The Superintendent indicated that he would look into the matter but was more included to creating an “exit survey” that could be conducted electronically.

- Dual Enrollment - *Patty Hightower*

Mrs. Hightower said she was recently made aware of a situation where an 11th grade student was told that she was not eligible for dual enrollment because she had not been enrolled in an Escambia County high school for at least one full semester. Mrs. Hightower said the student had previously attended a local private high school and while attending that school was dual enrolled at Pensacola State College (PSC); when the student enrolled second semester in Escambia County she was told that she was not eligible for dual enrollment and was therefore, forced to drop her dual enrollment courses at PSC. Mrs. Hightower said she would forward all the information she had received about this situation to the Superintendent and she asked that his staff look into this situation, specifically with regard the School District's dual enrollment "articulation agreement" with PSC.

- February and March Calendar/Events - *Bill Slayton*

None of the Board Members in attendance expressed any concern with the School Board's schedule of events for February or March.

- Budget Priorities - *Superintendent*

Mr. Terry St. Cyr, Assistant Superintendent for Finance and Business Services, narrated a brief PowerPoint® that provided an overview of the House and Senate proposals for public school funding for the 2012-2013 fiscal year.

- Health Insurance Update - *Superintendent*

Mr. Kevin Windham, Director of Risk Management, introduced Mr. Jim Filmont, Vice President of Willis of Florida, Inc., Inc., the School District's new employee benefits consultant. Mr. Filmont addressed the board regarding the following topics:

Medical Claims: Mr. Filmont reported that he had positive information that January 2012 claims were about a million dollars below those of December 2011. Of course, he noted that the majority of those claims that were paid in January 2012 were incurred in November and December 2011. He said it was very likely that the School District would continue to see positive claim experience through February, March, and possibly April 2012 based on the recently implemented contribution strategy and plan design changes.

Pharmacy Claims: Mr. Filmont said that January 2012 claims were about half of those in a "normal" month. He noted that the reduction in pharmacy claims was based on two factors: (1) the recently implemented plan design changes; and (2) fewer employees on the plan.

Mr. Filmont said that Willis of Florida, Inc. would continue to monitor the School District claims and plan performance and would be meeting quarterly with the School District's employee benefits committee.

Health Clinic: Mr. Filmont said that the next step in the process would be the vendor criteria selection. He said that Willis of Florida, Inc. would build several models for the School District's employee benefits committee and the School Board to review, then a Request for Information (RFI) would be issued, followed the issuance of a Request for Proposal (RFP), then a final presentation from the top two or three vendors, a final recommendation to the School Board, and the opening of the School District's health clinic around September 1st. Mr. Bergosh expressed some concern that the health clinic was now scheduled to open later than what had been previously estimated as a first quarter 2012 opening.

III. PUBLIC FORUM

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

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Special Workshop adjourned at 4:56 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Superintendent

Chair

PENDING BOARD APPROVAL