

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, FEBRUARY 12, 2015

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: Mrs. Patricia Hightower

Vice Chair: Mr. Bill Slayton

Board Members: Mr. Jeff Bergosh
Mr. Gerald Boone
Mrs. Linda Moultrie

School Board General Counsel: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters

Superintendent of Schools: Mr. Malcolm Thomas

Meeting was advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on February 2, 2015 - Legal No. 1636722

NOTE: The minutes from this session have been prepared according to *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*. The video from this session is available at <http://escambiacountysdfl.swagit.com/play/02122015-662>

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Hightower called the Special Workshop to order at 3:00 p.m.

II. OPEN DISCUSSION

- February, March and April 2015 Calendar – Hightower

There were no changes to the remaining schedule of School Board workshops/meetings for February:

- Regular Workshop, February 13th, beginning at 9:00 a.m.*
- Regular Meeting, February 17th, beginning at 5:30 p.m.*
- Special Workshop, February 18th, beginning at 3:00 p.m.**
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There were no changes to the schedule of School Board workshops/meetings for March:

- Regular Workshop, March 16th, beginning at 10:00 a.m.*
(The agenda would include an “open discussion and presentations” segment.)
- Regular Meeting, March 17th, beginning at 5:30 p.m.*
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There were no changes to the schedule of School Board workshops/meetings for April:

- Special Workshop, April 16th, beginning at 3:00 p.m.*
- Regular Workshop, April 17th, beginning at 9:00 a.m.*
- Regular Meeting, April 21st, beginning at 5:30 p.m.*

*To be held in Room 160 at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center

**To be held in the Superintendent’s Conference Room at the Dr. Vernon McDaniel Building

- Alternative School Schedule - Hightower

Mrs. Hightower initiated a discussion on this topic as a follow-up to comments made by Regina Hyman during the Public Forum segment of the January 20, 2015 Regular Meeting. Ms. Hyman had asked the School Board to consider the possibility of a year-round schedule for the 2016-2017 school year. Mrs. Hightower wanted to know if her fellow School Board Members had any thoughts on the matter and/or if they were interested in exploring the possibility of an alternative school schedule as a pilot program at one of the area schools. It was noted that the School District had implemented a year-round schedule at several elementary schools in the past (beginning with Ferry Pass Elementary, 1999-2000 school year) but returned to the traditional schedule primarily due to the challenges that it presented for some families with children who were on different schedules (i.e., an elementary student on year-round calendar and an middle or high student on traditional calendar); and because the year-round schedule interfered with family summer vacations and various community sports programs. Mrs. Moultrie noted that Ms. Hyman's primary reason for asking the School Board to consider a year-round schedule was her concern with the lack of activities available for students while they were out-of-school for the summer. In light of that concern, Mrs. Moultrie asked the Superintendent to explore the possibility of creating a partnership with various community organizations to provide formalized activities incorporated with educational training during the summer months.

- Update on Florida High School Activities Association Meeting - Moultrie

Mrs. Moultrie provided a brief update from a recent Florida High School Activities Association (FHSAA) meeting. She advised that the FHSAA continued to hear appeals regarding its "19 and 9" age limitation for student-athletes and Tate High School won their appeal to move from District 1-Class 7A to District 1--Class 6A.

- Review by General Counsel of Department of Education Exam Opt Out Letter - Slayton

Upon inquiry by Mr. Slayton, Mrs. Waters advised that a recent letter from Florida Education Commissioner Pam Stewart to several Florida senators made it clear that there were no provision in Florida law allowing students to "opt out" of standardized testing. It was unclear as to what consequences, if any, students may face for refusing to take the test as no such guidelines currently exist. Mrs. Waters noted however, that school districts could be penalized with a loss of funding for failing to report test refusals.

- Half Cent Sales Tax - Slayton

Mr. Slayton commented that the School Board owed a great deal of thanks to the One-Half Cent Sales Tax Watchdog Committee, the School District's Operations department and everyone else involved in the construction of the new school facilities at A.K. Suter Elementary and Ernest Ward Middle School. Upon inquiry by Mrs. Hightower, the Superintendent advised that the ribbon-cutting ceremonies for both A.K. Suter Elementary School and Ernest Ward Middle School would be postponed until such time as additional site-work on those two projects was completed. Mr. Slayton also noted that the School Board also owed a great deal of thanks to voters of Escambia County for their recent approval (November 2014) of the one-half cent sales tax extension. The Superintendent advised that the Escambia County Public Schools Foundation would host a reception on March 10, 2015 for those citizens who contributed to and/or helped with the one-half cent sales tax extension campaign. The reception would begin at 3:00 p.m. in the new cafeteria at A.K. Suter Elementary School.

- EHS Internet Marketing Academy – Superintendent

Students enrolled in Escambia High School's Internet Marketing Academy commented on the knowledge and experience they had gained through this program.

By combining web site design with web programming, the Internet Marketing Academy provides an instructional program where students will develop academic, technical, and workplace skills that will serve

them as workers and members of the community. Students will design websites for a variety of uses including commerce and non-profit purposes. The mission of the Internet Marketing Academy is to prepare students for the employment in or related to web development positions through instruction that focuses on website planning and design, product and services promotion, and scripting languages. The academy is in partnership with Future Business Leaders of America, the targets business student organization in the world. FBLA gives students the opportunity to develop leadership skills, establish occupational goals, and compete against other students at local, state, and national levels.

- Gifted Services Update – Superintendent

At the request of the Superintendent, Ms. Pam Cebula, Subject Area Specialist/Gifted, narrated a brief PowerPoint® presentation that outlined proposed changes to the District’s gifted education program. Ms. Cebula explained that the purpose of the proposed changes was to expand gifted services to individual schools throughout the county thereby offering gifted students the opportunity to receive PATS-like instruction one period a day at their home school rather than one day a week at the PATS Center. It was noted that visiting the PATS Center once a week was still an option for both elementary and middle school gifted students; however, it was the belief of the Superintendent and his staff that students who chose to receive gifted services at their home school deserved an opportunity to receive that same high quality enrichment. The remaining discussion centered on clarifying the reasons for the changes, addressing concerns about how these changes would be communicated to students and parents, and the Superintendent’s preliminary plans and timeline for moving forward with these changes. Mr. Bergosh was disappointed that the Superintendent and his staff had not mentioned anything to the School Board about these proposed changes prior to this session. He had actually learned about the changes via a social media post on *Pensacola Today*. The Superintendent’s response was that this was the first opportunity that staff had to present this update to the School Board. He noted that specific conversations about the proposed changes to the PATS Center and the gifted program had only occurred within the last 4-5 weeks. He commented that it was unfortunate that “social media got ahead of this and put out incomplete information” before staff had a chance to update the School Board, students and parents. Mr. Bergosh wanted to know if the Superintendent could legally make these changes without input from the School Board. Mrs. Waters was to research the matter and respond at a later time. The following individuals registered to address the School Board regarding the proposed changes to the gifted program: Kathy Holsworth, Angela Johnson, Fredi Prettyman, Debi Dunkerley, and Melissa Venezia.

- Invocation and Board Decorum - Boone

- Maintaining Decorum During School Board Meetings - Bergosh

Because the topics submitted by Mr. Boone and Mr. Bergosh were very similar, they agreed to combine their discussions. Mr. Boone said he wished to address the difficulties that the School Board had experienced with a certain individual who had chosen to be disruptive during the invocation portion of several regular monthly meetings. It was noted that this individual had been particularly disruptive during the January 20, 2015 Regular Meeting by chanting aloud during the time that Mr. Bergosh’s guest was delivering the invocation and by insulting that guest with an anti-Semitic slur. Mr. Boone was hopeful that the School Board could come to some agreement as how to handle such situations should they occur in the future. Mr. Bergosh was extremely disappointed that the disruption and the insult on his invited guest was allowed to occur, stating “I understand people have a freedom of speech and expression, but when they cross the line and they’re disrupting a meeting and insulting invited guests, it must be shut down.” Mrs. Waters clarified that any member of the public had the right to address the School Board during Public Forum regarding any matter relating to public education; however, the School Board Chair had the right to request that an individual cease any disruptive behavior. After further discussion on this matter, Mrs. Hightower took an opportunity to apologize to her fellow School Board Members for not handling that situation appropriately; she then shared her thoughts for how she intended to handle such situations should they occur in the future.

Due to time constraints, it was decided that the remaining topics from this agenda would be discussed at the beginning of the February 13, 2015 Regular Workshop:

- District Communications - *Bergosh*
- Accommodating Military Dependent Enrollment in Magnet Schools - *Bergosh*
- Policy Proposal: Discipline Matrix Intervention Overlay – *Bergosh*
- High School Attendance Policies During Testing - *Bergosh*
- Discussion Regarding Pell Grant Administration Audit Findings - *Bergosh*
- Pre-Kindergarten Program Update – *Superintendent*
- Teacher Recruiting – *Superintendent*

III. PUBLIC FORUM

This section was handled earlier in the session during the Superintendent’s *Gifted Services Update*.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Special Workshop adjourned at 5:20 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Superintendent

Chair

PENDING BOARD APPROVAL