

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, JULY 20, 2020

The School Board of Escambia County, Florida, convened in Regular Workshop at 9:00 a.m., in Room 160, at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center, 30 East Texar Drive, Pensacola, Florida, with the following present:

Chair: Mrs. Patricia Hightower (District IV)
Vice Chair: Mr. Bill Slayton (District V)
Board Members: Mr. Kevin L. Adams (District I)
Mr. Paul Fetsko (District II) – *present via speakerphone*
Dr. Laura Dortch Edler (District III)

Superintendent of Schools: Mr. Malcolm Thomas

Also present: Mr. Joseph L. Hammons, Esquire - Hammons Law Firm

Not present: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters, School Board General Counsel

Meeting advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on July 1, 2020 – Legal No. 4258833

Minutes prepared according to *Roberts Rules of Order, Newly Revised*

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

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Hightower called the Regular Workshop to order at 9:00 a.m.

Superintendent Hiring Survey – Mrs. Hightower clarified that although a recent online survey circulating on social media appeared to be an initiative of the School District, it was not created by or created at the request of the School Board, nor was it sent by or sent at the request of the School Board.

II. DISCUSSION

-Calendar

Reviewed calendar (dates July 20, 2020 through September 15, 2020); no changes.

-Student Absenteeism in this COVID World - Hightower

The Superintendent responded to inquiries by Mrs. Hightower regarding how the School District would handle student absenteeism during the upcoming school year when absence(s) were associated with ‘suspected’ exposure to COVID-19. In short, the Superintendent said that in such circumstances, the School District would consult with health professionals concerning appropriate actions, in terms of student attendance.

-Legal Contract for School Board - Hightower

Mrs. Hightower initiated a discussion regarding the possibility of retaining separate counsel to represent the School Board while Mrs. Waters remained on leave of absence. Currently, the Superintendent’s counsel, Mr. Joseph L. Hammons, was also providing counsel for the School Board; however, should a conflict arise between the School Board and Superintendent, the School Board would need to obtain separate counsel for the School Board for that matter. Mrs. Hightower was to provide an update on legal services at the August Special Workshop.

-Strategic Plan Discussion – Superintendent

Mr. Denny Wilson, Director-Continuous Improvement & School Choice, outlined the proposed process for review, preparation and submission of the School District’s strategic plan for 2020-2021. In short, the proposal was essentially to move forward the 2019-2020 Strategic Plan for 2020-2021. The School Board

would be asked to consider approval of the 2020-2021 Strategic Plan at the September 15, 2020 Regular Meeting.

-2020-2021 School Re-opening Plan – Superintendent

Addressed under Section III, *Comments from the Superintendent*

III. COMMENTS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Permission to Advertise the Proposed 2020-2021 Tentative Millage and Tentative Budget (Item V.b.2.C.7)

Mr. Terry St. Cyr, Assistant Superintendent-Finance & Business Services, prefaced this presentation with a brief overview of the latest budget information. Ms. Theresa McCants, Director-Budgeting, reviewed the three-part advertisement that the School Board was being asked to approve concerning the proposed 2020-2021 tentative millage and tentative budget. Ms. McCants reviewed each part of the advertisement, which if approved by the School Board, would be published in the *Pensacola News Journal*:

- Notice of Proposed Tax Increase
- Budget Summary
- Notice of Tax for School Capital Outlay

There was much discussion concerning the Superintendent's recommendation that the School Board levy 1.3510 mills for Local Capital Improvement (Capital Outlay). Given the School Board would have to advertise a tax increase anyway, Mrs. Hightower initiated discussion regarding the possibility of levying the full 1.5 mills for Local Capital Improvement (Capital Outlay).

DISCUSSION ON APPOINTED SUPERINTENDENT (moved forward as time certain)

School Board Members discussed the following topics with Florida School Board's Association (FSBA) Superintendent Search Team [John Reichert and Dr. Bill Vogel (both present via speakerphone)]:

- Discussion/acceptance of the candidates that come forward from the Citizens Advisory Committee
- Discussion regarding the identification of semi-finalists
- Discussion regarding questions & format for semi-finalists response to questions and date that responses are due from the semi-finalists.
- Finalize school/community tour routes
- Discuss options for a community meet and greet
- Finalist Question Protocol

COMMENTS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT (Continued from Section III)

-2020-2021 School Re-opening Plan – Superintendent

See also: Item V.b.1.D.1., Escambia County School District 2020-2021 Innovative Reopening Plan

Dr. John Lanza, Director of the Florida Department of Health in Escambia County, was invited to address the School District's plan to reopen schools*. The Superintendent asked Dr. Lanza to speak to the most contentious aspect of that plan: delay school and mandatory masks. The school district has previously announced that social distancing and mandating the wearing of masks, two key safety measures, would be logistically impractical. Additionally, some people in the community would like to see the start of school to be delayed in order to better assess COVID trends in the state. Dr. Lanza addressed the matter of when to resume schools, telling the School Board that any delay would not "make any difference" as he did not believe much would change between now and the time that a vaccine came out. Regarding masks, Dr. Lanza said that the wearing of the face coverings would help prevent the spread of the coronavirus. He noted that the state surgeon general advised that people wear mask, calling them "useful" and "effective."

**In addition to offering two remote-based options, the School District is offering a full week, on-campus return to school. This is in line with an order from the Florida Department of Education.*

The Regular Workshop recessed at 11:37 a.m. and reconvened at 11:46 a.m., with all School Board Members (Mr. Fetsko present via speakerphone) and the Superintendent present. Also present: Mr. Joseph L. Hammons, Esquire – Hammons Law Firm. At this time, the School Board continued discussions with the Superintendent and his staff regarding Item V.b.2.C.7, Permission to Advertise the Proposed 2020-2021 Tentative Millage and Tentative

Budget and also the 2020-2021 School Re-opening Plan (outlined in Item V.b.1.L.1., Escambia County School District 2020-2021 Innovative Reopening Plan).

IV. MINUTES

-No items discussed

V. COMMITTEE/DEPARTMENTAL REPORTS

2. Anti Racism Resolution

Item submitted by Mrs. Hightower; template provided by Florida School Boards Association
Dr. Edler said she appreciated the intent of the resolution; however, given she saw no 'plan' for change outlined in the resolution, she could not support the adoption of the resolution in its current format.

VI. UNFINISHED BUSINESS

-No item submitted

VII. NEW BUSINESS

a. PROPOSED ADDITIONS OR REVISIONS TO SCHOOL DISTRICT RULES

1. Rule(s) Adoption
-No items submitted
2. Permission to Advertise
-No items submitted

b. CONSENT AGENDA

The Superintendent listed any changes made to the July 21, 2020 Regular Meeting agenda since initial publication and prior to this session.

1. Curriculum

K. Workforce Education

There were no questions/concerns specific to items submitted under Section K, *Workforce Education*; however, Mr. Steve Harrell, Director-Workforce Education, responded to a general inquiry regarding remote certification offerings.

L. Other

1. Escambia County School District 2020-2021 Innovative Reopening Plan

Addressed earlier in the session under Section III, *Comments from the Superintendent*

2. Finance and Business Services

A. Finance

7. Permission to Advertise the Proposed 2020-2021 Tentative Millage and Tentative Budget

Addressed earlier in the session under Section III, *Comments from the Superintendent*

E. Purchasing

21. Change Notice #2 to Purchase Order #5422000107 – Pleasant Grove Elementary Replacement School

Upon inquiry by Mr. Slayton, Mr. Keith Wasdin, Director-Facilities Planning, gave a brief update on the status of the Pleasant Grove Elementary School replacement project.

3. Human Resource Services

-No items discussed

4. Operations

A. Facilities Planning

2. Miscellaneous

c. Educational Plant Five Year Survey

Mr. Keith Wasdin, Director-Facilities Planning, confirmed no major changes to the Educational Plant Five Year Survey.

c. ITEMS FROM THE BOARD

3. Selection of Appointed Superintendent Semi-Finalist Candidates

General discussion on this item occurred earlier in session under *Discussion on Appointed Superintendent*.

d. ITEMS FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

-No items discussed

e. INTERNAL AUDITING

-No items discussed

f. ITEMS FROM GENERAL COUNSEL

-No items submitted

VIII. PUBLIC FORUM

The following individuals requested to address the School Board during Public Forum:

-Darzell Warren, representing Escambia Education Association – Issue: 2020-2021 School Reopening

-James A. Harper, speaking as an individual – Issue: Infection Control of COVID-19 in School

IX. DISCUSSION ON APPOINTED SUPERINTENDENT – *Addressed earlier in this session*

1. Discussion/acceptance of the candidates that come forward from the Citizens Advisory Committee
2. Discussion regarding the identification of semi-finalists
3. Discussion regarding questions & format for semi-finalists response to questions and date that responses are due from the semi-finalists.
4. Finalize school/community tour routes
5. Discuss options for a community meet and greet
6. Finalist Question Protocol

ADD

X. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Regular Workshop adjourned at 3:08 p.m.