

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, AUGUST 27, 2020

The School Board of Escambia County, Florida, convened at 8:30 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)
Dr. Laura Dortch Edler (District III)

Not present: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters, School Board General Counsel
Mr. Malcolm Thomas, Superintendent of Schools

Session advertised in the Pensacola News Journal on August 3, 2020 – Legal No. [4305947](#)

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mrs. Hightower called the Regular Meeting to order at 8:30 a.m. Mr. Fetsko led the Pledge of Allegiance to the United States of America.

II. SUPERINTENDENT FINALIST INTERVIEWS

8:30 AM: Interview – Dr. Earl Johnson

10:30 AM: Interview – Keith Rittel

1:15 PM: Interview – Dr. Timothy Smith

3:15 PM: Interview – Keith Leonard

For each interview, Mrs. Hightower began by welcoming the finalist and introducing each School Board Member. She then outlined the 90-minute interview process: 5-minutes allocated to finalist for opening statement, 15-minutes allocated to each School Board Member for questions, and 5-minutes allocated to finalist for closing remarks.

Questions posed by School Board Members:

-What would be your plan for retention and recruitment to increase the number of qualified teachers in our classrooms? (Adams)

-To what degree do you believe responsibilities can and should be delegated to principals? How would you hold them accountable for accomplishing those responsibilities? (Adams)

-What experience do you have managing capital and operating expenditures? How familiar you are with different fund types? What would be your priorities for capital project resources currently available to our district? (Adams)

-From a district perspective, explain how student performance standards affect planning and prioritizing a facility's fiscal, technological, and human resource projects. (Adams)

-Describe your ability to cultivate a disciplined, safe, and orderly school environment. (Adams)

-The district, in my opinion, has many areas that need fixing. It is usually customary for candidates to research facts and figures about a potential job. Assuming that you as well followed this practice, discuss the greatest barrier to a quality education for all children, regardless of their life situations or circumstances that you identified. What are your plans to be the fixer of that barrier? (Edler)

-Explain why you believe or do not believe that there is a strong correlation between neighborhood schools, parental involvement and academic success or failure of poor children and children of color. (Edler)

-There have been many debates over the causes of the difference in educational achievement between the various ethnic subgroups. At the forefront of those debates is the common practice of favoritism, cronyism, nepotism, and/or institutional biases. What is your philosophy on whether such practices prevent qualified

educators of color from being hired, offered lateral promotions or being placed in upper level administrative positions? And what are your plans to correcting this problem? (Edler)

-It seems that in this district, most, if not all ESOL centers are placed in low performance schools. Share with us your experience and improving ESOL students achievement by place incentives in low performance schools, rather than high performing schools. (Edler)

-In this district, our pandemic is the good old boys club. Convince me that you will reject membership in the good old boys club and that you will lead this school district objectively, with the major focus of academic success for all children and a balance of diversity and inclusion in every aspect. (Edler)

-When a new superintendent is hired, we want to make the transition as smooth as possible for everyone. How would you help both the educational community and the community at large adjust to the new style of leadership that would come with you being our new superintendent? (Slayton)

-Like the superintendent, school board members do not like surprises. How would you ensure the school board is informed on important matters? (Slayton)

-What methods of communicating with parents have you found most effective and how would you encourage and leverage parental involvement? (Slayton)

-Everyone will want to get to know the new superintendent. How do you approach and build cooperative partnerships among businesses, civic groups, and ethnic groups? (Slayton)

-How have you engaged the community of your district and how have you increased visibility of the school system and its needs? (Slayton)

-How would you evaluate the instructional program and how would you make changes to the instructional program based on that evaluation? (Fetsko)

-How do you balance the needs of special populations, such as ESE, ESOL, and students traditionally referred to as gifted and talented? What have you done to address the diverse needs of student populations in your district? (Fetsko)

-What do you think the role of extra curricular activities should be in the school system? (Fetsko)

-What is the role of career and technical education? How have you expanded this role in any of your previous positions? (Fetsko)

-What types of programs have you found to be the most effective in improving student learning? What makes them effective? How do you evaluate that effectiveness and how do you communicate the effectiveness to stakeholders? (Fetsko)

-Marketing has been the thing. How do you communicate that effectiveness to the stakeholders? How do they know that this is working? Or this is good? How do people get the good results given to them? (Fetsko)

-Give us a thumbnail sketch of your professional experiences, your pivotal belief in public education, and which of these experiences prepared you to be our next superintendent? (Hightower)

-Based on your knowledge of our school district and community, what do you believe should be the top two top priorities for our school system? (Hightower)

-We are a choice district. Year after year, many of our schools receive many more requests for enrollment than they have capacity to accommodate. How would you address the issue that desired schools are not available? (Hightower)

-You will be hired after the school year has begun. Employees are in place. COVID protocols are in place. The strategic plan has been approved. What steps would you take to create a hundred day plan for our district? (Hightower)

-We are a military community. What suggestions do you have to strengthen our relationship with Naval Air Station Pensacola as the superintendent? How would you work to win back the military families who are currently making other educational choices for their families? (Hightower)

III. PUBLIC FORUM

-No registration forms submitted

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the interviews concluded at 4:36 p.m.