

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, AUGUST 12, 2021

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

School Board General Counsel: Mrs. Ellen D. Odom

Superintendent of Schools: Dr. Timothy A. Smith

Advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on July 24, 2021 – Legal No. 4693648

I. CALL TO ORDER

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

“Diversity, Equity, and Closing the Achievement Gap” Training Video - The Superintendent made the following statement in response to public comments about the diversity training video that was recently shared with District employees: *“There has been a lot of communication and talk about the video that was shared with our employees. In response to the video shared at both our administrative conference and then later with District faculty and District staff – this video was not intended to offend, anger, or divide our employees, or anyone. I apologize. The idea of the video was mine, and I asked that it be shared with all District employees. Our goal as a district is to work to close the achievement gap between our white and black students in both English and math – gaps are 34% and 35%. This video has no impact or tie to curriculum. We are in full, 100% compliance with the State Board of Education's recent decision on critical race theory. We must begin to close the achievement gap. The question is how? Clear answers may not be readily available, but we can only do it together on one accord. So, as the superintendent of schools, a long-time educator of 33 years, and a believer in this great work, my hope is that we can move forward united and dedicated to reaching all students.”*

II. DISCUSSION:

- Calendar

- There were no changes to the remaining schedule of workshops/meetings for August.
- There were no changes to the current schedule of workshops/meetings for September.
- 2021 Open House Schedule - Mr. Steve Marcanio, Assistant Superintendent-Curriculum & Instruction, was to ensure that School Board Members received a copy of the 2021 Open House schedule.

- Public Forum Update

The Superintendent advised that staff had been in contact with Dr. James Harper, who addressed the School Board during the July 29, 2021 Special Meeting. Dr. Harper had expressed concerns regarding COVID-19 safety.

- Legislative Platform – Adams

School Board Members reviewed the proposed 2021-2022 Legislative Platform as prepared by Mr. Adams. (Edits suggested during this session are underlined.) This proposed Legislative Platform would be added under “Items from the Board” on the August 17, 2021 Regular Meeting agenda. (Deadline for submissions to the Florida School Boards Association is September 1, 2021.)

- I. **INCREASE FUNDING**
Sufficient and Sustainable Funds to Meet the Educational Needs of Florida’s Public-School Students
 - *Provide adequate Base Student Allocation (BSA) funding for districts to absorb any increased contributions to the Florida Retirement System (FRS), pay and offset other underfunded categoricals. Attention is needed for the increasing minimum wage requirements over the next 4 years.*
 - II. **HIRING EXPERIENCED EDUCATORS**
Provide school districts with options to ensure the availability of qualified and experienced school leaders, instructional staff, and support personnel by:
 - *Authorizing school districts to re-employ school-based administrators, teachers, substitute teachers, and other instructional support personnel after one month of retirement rather than the current requirements in law that can delay re-employment for twelve months.*
 - *Provide additional funding to increase the salaries for our experienced teachers as we increase our starting salaries in order as a step to increase our teacher retention rate.*
 - III. **MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES**
The mental health needs of both students and staff have increased significantly because of the pandemic and accompanying economic uncertainty.
 - *The need for intensive, daily services for some students is critical, and the Legislature should fund services that will help these students and their families.*
 - IV. **SCHOOL SAFETY**
The highest priority of the state and local government is the safety of our students, and sufficient funds to meet this priority.
 - *The Coach Aaron Feis Guardian Program is an important component to school safety. Sufficient funding for this program should be appropriated to ensure the availability of guardians in those school districts that depend on guardians for school safety.*
 - *Safe Routes to School plays an important role to ensure the safety and health of our students. The need for better transportation statutory language to identify hazardous pathways to schools. Increased infrastructure funding for sidewalks, crosswalks, and other pedestrian improvements.*
- School Resource Officer Daily Attendance – Slayton
 Chair Slayton initiated a discussion regarding the daily attendance of School Resource Officers (SROs). Mr. Kyle Kinser, Coordinator-Protection Services, responded to questions regarding this topic.
 - Minority Business Opportunities – Superintendent
 Ms. Allison Watson, Senior Purchasing Agent, provided a brief [update on the School District’s Minority Business Outreach Initiative](#) (developed/implemented in September 2019, presented to School Board in November 2019). The objectives of this initiative are:
 - To educate minority vendors on how to do business with the School District*
 - To provide best practices for quotes/bids/RFPs/construction*
 - To encourage registration and certification with the Florida Department of Management Services Office of Supplier Diversity (OSD) and the utilize OSD resources*
 - To increase School District partnerships with local minority organizations to promote vendor events*
 - To counter community perception that business opportunities are not available for minority vendors with the School District*
 - Appeal of Denial of Contractor Prequalification pursuant to Rule 6Gx3.16(3) – General Counsel
 Mrs. Odom advised that a company (Hellas Construction, Inc.) had filed a request for an appeal of the School District’s recent rejection of the company’s application for Pre-Qualified Contractor status. There was no objection to Mrs. Odom’s suggestion to have this matter placed on the agenda for the regularly scheduled meeting in September. Mrs. Odom was to provide School Board Members with all documentation pertinent to this matter.

III. **PUBLIC FORUM**

The following individuals registered to address the School Board and Superintendent during Public Forum:

<u>Name</u>	<u>Issue</u>
Bea Thomas, representing Minority Coalition	Diversity Training Video

Barbara Mayall, representing Minority Coalition	Diversity Training Video
Alice Downs	Diversity Training Video
Larry Downs, Sr.	<i>Yielded time to Alice Downs</i>
Diane Downs	<i>Yielded time to Alice Downs</i>
Dan Clark	<i>Yielded time to Alice Downs</i>
David Schneier	Diversity Training Video
Pueschel Schneier	Diversity Training Video
Mike Hill	Diversity Training Video
Jimmy Trotter, representing Minority Coalition	Diversity Training Video
Dr. James Harper	COVID-19 Safety
Christine Harper	<i>Yielded time to Dr. James Harper</i>
Larry Downs, Jr.	Diversity Training Video

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Prior to adjournment, several School Board Members responded to the public concerns regarding the diversity training video. Mr. Adams said he was “stunned” when he saw the video at a bus driver in-service training. Mr. Adams characterized the video as “divisive” and asked that it not be shown again. He also asked that such matters be presented to and discussed with the School Board during a workshop session, prior to distribution. Mr. Fetsko also asked that the video not be shown again, noting, “the video is definitely not the right tact for us to take.”

There being no further business, the Special Workshop adjourned at 4:43 p.m.