

REGULAR SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
MAX D. WALKER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
35 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.
QUINCY, FLORIDA

September 26, 2023

6:00 P.M.

The meeting was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman; Mrs. Karema D. Dudley, Ms. Cathy S. Johnson, Mr. Steve Scott, and Mr. Charlie D. Frost. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 6:03 p.m.

2. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Elder Ron Green of New Life Ministries, Gadsden County Commissioner District 5.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. RECOGNITIONS

Mr. McMillan recognized Elder Ron Green, County Commissioner District 5; and Commissioner Gary Russ with the City of Gretna.

Mr. Key recognized the entire staff for a job well done the first two months.

Mr. Frost recognized the district staff and teachers for returning to work. He also recognized the Superintendent, administrators, and teachers for their hard work.

Mrs. Dudley recognized Mr. Anthony Lucky for doing a phenomenal job as bus driver, teacher, and coach. She also recognized Ms. Miranda Cole at Gadsden Technical College for all her hard work, and Mr. Brandon Hill at George W. Munroe Elementary School for his hard work and dedication. She appreciated all teachers and staff.

ITEMS FOR CONSENT

Mr. McMillan added to the agenda item #9c – Student Expulsion – Case #12-2324-0231. He entertained a motion to approve the remaining consent agenda. The motion was made by Mrs. Karema D. Dudley, seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

5. REVIEW OF MINUTES

- a. August 22, 2023, 1:00 p.m. - School Board Workshop
- b. August 22, 2023, 4:30 p.m. – School Board Financial Workshop
- c. August 22, 2023, 6:00 p.m. - Regular School Board Meeting
- d. September 7, 2023, 6:00 p.m. – Tentative Budget Hearing

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

6. PERSONNEL MATTERS (resignations, retirements, recommendations, leaves of absence, terminations of services, volunteers, and job descriptions)

- a. Personnel 2023 – 2024

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

7. AGREEMENT/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATIONS

- a. 2023 – 2025 Academic Years Articulation Agreement School Board of Gadsden County, FL and Florida State University

Fund Source: FEFP

Amount: Standard State University Tuition Rate Per Credit Hour

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

9. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

- a. 2023 – 2024 Controlled Open Enrollment Plan

Fund Source: FEFP

Amount: Undetermined – Based Upon Enrollment

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- b. Gadsden Technical College Field Trip

Fund Source: N/A

Amount: N/A

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Items preceded by an (*) asterisk were removed from the consent agenda and moved to the discussion portion of the agenda.

*7. AGREEMENT/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATIONS

- b. Contractual Agreement between Gadsden County District Schools and Ethica, LLC

Fund Source: Title I

Amount: \$21,000.00

Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned the total compensation was not to exceed \$21,000 but on page #17 of the contract, it stated that the compensation would be \$21,000. She stated that she was concerned with the insurance statement on page 21 #11 stating that the district will hold Ethica harmless. She stated that she was concerned about not holding them liable. Mr. Scott stated that he was concerned about them not being liable. He stated that he has never seen a contract where the contractor is not held liable. Mrs. Minnis stated she was not sure that the district's insurance carrier would agree to this contract. She stated that the law covers all governmental organizations by statute and if the district stays within the law, there will be no issue, but if the agreement is not to seek liability then there could be trouble. She stated that the indemnification and insurance portion of the contract needed revisiting to get a clearer definition of the contract.

Mr. Steve Scott made a motion to defer action on agenda item #7b. The motion was seconded by Mrs. Karema D. Dudley and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

*8. SCHOOL FACILITY/PROPERTY

a. Purchase Order Request for United Refrigeration, Inc.

Fund Source: Capital Outlay
Amount: \$66,828.57

Mrs. Dudley asked if the district was being proactive by placing the portable air conditioners at the specific sites, or being proactive. Mr. Hudson stated that the portable air conditioners would be on hand as needed and to be able to return the current rented units.

Following discussion, Mrs. Karema D. Dudley made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve agenda item #8a. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Scott and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

b. Purchase Order Request for Pro Playgrounds

Fund Source: ESSER 3
Amount: Bold Step Infant Care - \$103,999.00
Chattahoochee Elementary School - \$179,999.00
Gadsden Elementary Magnet - \$169,999.00
George Munroe Elementary School - \$195,999.00
Greensboro Elementary School - \$193,999.00
Havana Magnet School - \$199,999.00
Stewart Street Elementary School - \$203,999.00

Mr. Frost requested the Board defer action on agenda item #8b. He stated that he wanted to schedule a workshop to further discuss funding.

Ms. Johnson stated that she wanted a workshop to further discuss funding. She stated that she was concerned about the amount of money being spent when some of the schools will be closed.

Following discussion, Mr. Charlie D. Frost made a motion to defer action on agenda item #8b and schedule a workshop. Mrs. Dudley stated that she shared the same concerns as other Board members. She stated that many of the playgrounds are a liability and need to be updated to follow guidelines and be up to code. She asked if the playground equipment purchased could be relocated. Mr. Key stated that the playground equipment was a part of the ESSER 3 funding. He stated that yes; the playground equipment purchased could be relocated to another campus. He stated that there is a liability issue with the current playground equipment. Ms. Johnson stated that when this information is placed on the agenda it is very important that every item have been discussed prior to voting. She stated that workshops needed to be held prior to every Board meeting. She stated that she had mentioned carpet a long time ago. Ms. Johnson seconded the motion to defer action and schedule a workshop. The motion carried with Mr. Scott, Mr. Frost and Ms. Johnson voted “aye”. Mrs. Dudley and Mr. McMillan voted “nay”.

Mr. McMillan stated that Master Board Training allow workshops to be held prior to Board meetings to discuss items. He stated that he wants to have a workshop to discuss agenda items prior to Board meetings.

Mr. Key reminded the Board that ESSER 2 funding covers playground equipment and it has already been discussed. He stated that Board members can talk to staff prior to the Board meeting and he is available to speak to the Board members. He stated that discussion was held in a previous workshop to replace carpet. Mr. Scott stated that the word was that they are not able to talk with individual employees and he has not talked with the Superintendent about anything because of that. He asked if he could schedule an appointment to talk with the Superintendent, and Mr. Key responded yes.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

c. Purchase Order Request for Shaw Integrated Solutions

Fund Source: ESSER 2 Lump Sum

Amount: Max Walker Administrative Building - \$96,557.03

Gadsden County High School - \$44,072.00

Building #7 at 655 South Stewart Street - \$25,941.16

Following discussion, Mr. Frost made a motion to defer action on agenda item #8c and schedule a workshop to further discuss. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson. Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned about the cost for the district office. She stated that she understands why tile is being put in some of the schools. Mr. Scott stated that the money could be put into the schools. Mr. Hudson was asked to explain the luxury tile to be installed at the district office. Mr. Hudson stated that this is not a luxury tile and the purpose of replacement is to cut down on infectious disease. Mr. McMillan asked if the plans are to remove the carpet at the Walker Building and put down tile. Mr. Hudson responded yes, it is a square carpet tile. The motion carried with everyone voting unanimously to defer action.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

9. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

c. Student Expulsion – Case #12-2324-0231

The Board rescinded its previous action on agenda item #9c because the mother arrived and wanted to request a hearing for student #12-2324-0231.

The mother of student #12-2324-0231 addressed the Board to request a hearing.

Following discussion, Mr. Charlie D. Frost made a motion to defer action on agenda item #9c until a hearing could be held on Tuesday, October 3rd at 5:00 p.m. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

10. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

None.

11. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Ms. Johnson stated that she was glad to be having the workshops.

Mr. McMillan asked DAG to share with the Board the advantage of having a project manager. Mr. Baker, DAG, stated that this is going to be a long and complicated process. He stated that there is going to be a lot of paperwork over the next 2 years. He stated that he was impressed with Mr. Hudson, but he has never handled a project of this size. He stated that the money need to be managed very careful. He stated that it would be an incredible amount of paperwork, and details that the person will be responsible for with Mr. Hudson. He stated that the person need to have experience.

Mr. Stewart, DAG, spoke about the process of previous jobs over 24 months, weekly meetings to head off any problems before it gets big. He stated that in the preconstruction period the Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP) will be created, there will be monthly payouts that have to be reviewed, the request for information is usually generated by the contractor when they run into issues with plans not providing enough information, architectural supplemental for clarification that is reviewed by the facility director, owner direct purchase for finance, have to make sure what is billed for is actually being provided, bombardment from community and radio that wants someone to speak for updates. Mr. McMillan asked if the Board hire a license contract for the project how would that effect the permits. Mr. Baker stated that he has asked that question to contractors and when Allstate was contracted, he asked them about the fees. Mr. Bill Hunter is a certified building official that can provide permits saving money to allow for hiring an accountant. He stated that Mr. Hunter is willing to provide the services working as a 1099 consultant. Mr. Baker asked the Board to consider what he said. Mr. McMillan stated he is only looking out for the Board and whether it is Mr. Hunter or someone else, we need someone in the position of project manager. Mr. McMillan asked if the pool has been acquired yet, Mr. Key stated it is on the City but his last conversation with the manager is that there is no problem. Mr. Baker stated that without the pool property it would be a significant cost to redesign the new school.

Mrs. Dudley asked if DAG could be added to the workshop.

In response to Mr. Frost's concern whether the school could be moved to another location, Mr. Baker stated yes it is a possibility with added expenses.

Mr. McMillan asked Mrs. Minnis if the Board could give direction to Mr. Key since this is not a day-to-day operation. He stated that DAG would be added to Tuesday's workshop.

Ms. Johnson asked Mrs. Minnis about a previous vote by the Board stating that they were not going to have a risk manager and transportation director as one person. She stated that the vote was that it was not and asked what the recourse would be. Mrs. Minnis stated that it would need to come back to the Board as a recommendation from the Superintendent.

Ms. Johnson stated that the bleachers at Gadsden County High School are slippery and need strips on them.

Mr. Key stated that the email Ms. Johnson referenced was that someone was asked to take those duties, and that person took leave and is now back on staff and doing those duties. He stated that he talked with FSBIT and they said it is the best it has been. He stated that a district staff person has been assigned those duties. He stated that he would hire someone for the position if the Board instructs him. Mrs. Dudley asked if those two positions were separate positions, Mr. Key stated yes. Mrs. Dudley stated that she thought that the risk manager position would be advertised since Mr. Bryant is the director of transportation. Mr. Key stated he could administratively place someone in lieu of sending him or her home and paying him or her to sit home. Mr. McMillan stated that he represents the insurance committee and in a small district like Gadsden, he voted against it because he felt the Board was not given all the information. He stated that it is common practice under FSBIT to have a risk manager that can have another job in the district. He stated that he has no issue with it and understands the money situation, but the Board and the Superintendent has to be respected. He stated that we are a team.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she had received phone calls from teachers that are not satisfied with the decision about how they receive their teacher supply money. She stated that the teachers should have been made aware in advance. She stated that the district has to start now to be strategic about next year and must find a way to get money to the teachers earlier. She stated that the district has to change the requirement for teachers to retain and upload receipts. She asked why it cannot be in their paycheck since they have already spent the money buying supplies the summer. Mr. McMillan stated he does not know why we pay like we do since it is only \$300, and the money should be given to them in their paycheck, and if we are audited the teachers can bring the receipts. Mr. Key stated it is the district's responsibility to have receipts when the auditor come. Mr. McMillan asked why it was like this, and burden should not be placed on the teachers. He stated that the Board should have heard about this from Mr. Key or Mr. Mays prior to setting up the Class Wallet system. He stated that we have to communicate and work with each other. Mr. Scott asked if Leon County is different because they gave a check to the teachers. Mrs. Dudley stated that the district is still doing things the same way, still creating problems, and giving the money after school start. She stated that teachers should be aware in advance of how payments are going to be made. She stated that the way we respect our employees goes back to our resume as an employer. She requested the issue be added to the workshop agenda for further discussion.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she wants to add to the workshop agenda personnel issues – Mr. Maples serving in two positions (Public Relations Coordinator and the Coordinator of Family and Community Engagement), and is it coming to the Board for approval. Mr. Key stated that there are some job descriptions that are the similar, and these two positions are similar. Mrs. Dudley stated that she just wants to know if it is the Board's responsibility. Mrs. Minnis stated that appointments to positions are made by recommendations to Board and these are two separate positions. She stated that the separation of powers gives the Board the right to ask about employment issues based on recommendation by the Superintendent. She stated that the Board could only reject the Superintendent's recommendation for good cause. Mrs. Dudley stated that since the concerns are known, she asked the Superintendent to bring to the Board information for Mr. Maples to do both jobs (Public Relations Coordinator and the Coordinator of Family and Community Engagement).

Mrs. Dudley stated that in response to Mr. Scott's questions: #1 agrees with the Superintendent, overpayment to Superintendent and Board members receiving check for June. Mr. Mays called Board members to inform them that their payment for the next several months would be reduced. Mr. Key stated it was not repayment but there was a remaining balance in April and the reduction of payment allowed them to be paid in June. Mr. McMillan stated that an employee told him that she received more than she was supposed to get and she had to pay the money back. Mr. Frost stated that vacant positions need to be filled, especially in the finance director. Mr. Key stated the Board voted in June for Mr. Mays to be finance director and the director of food service position will be advertised.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she had visited Gadsden Technical College and was impressed with the new program for 16-year old students who are not able to be successful in standard classrooms. She stated that they need an ESE Specialist to help these students. She stated that the nursing program is growing. She stated that the technology need updating.

Mr. Scott stated that he would address his concerns with the Superintendent.

Mr. McMillan stated that he had requests from a company (Winsail – First Baptist Church) to use the district bus for Gadsden Arms Apartments, they were told no. He stated that the Department of Corrections asked if they could transport correctional officers to Malone in August and they were told no. He stated that in his opinion, the district should have tried to accommodate them. He stated that he wants these issues to come to the Board to try to accommodate people. Mr. Key stated that he had not heard about the issue. Mr. McMillan asked if changes had been made to the Code of Student Conduct, Mrs. Buckhalt responded yes. Mr. McMillan asked if Mrs. Minnis could find an auditor to research information on the hurricane recovery money for the district. Mrs. Minnis stated that she will get with the Superintendent. Mr. McMillan stated that he has received several concerns about cameras in the district office. He stated that employees that they are being watched and cannot be trusted are making comments. Mr. Key stated that this was a delayed process, which was purchased years ago. He stated that if something happens law enforcement would need to know.

Ms. Johnson stated that Gadsden County High School was accepting donations to build a float for homecoming.

Ms. Chapman-Thomas addressed the Board to express her disappointment with the payment process of the \$300 supply allocation for teachers. She stated that teachers should have the responsibility to keep their receipts.

Mrs. Judith Mandela addressed the Board and the following concerns: if teachers do not keep receipts it has to be reported as income to IRS; what is the purpose of cameras in schools, security or for principal to document teacher activity. Mr. Key stated that the cameras are used for safety and to verify complaints. Mrs. Mandela stated that is not what the law states, okay for safety purposes but for overseeing it is a fine line. She asked if the district was going to post answers to questions that are given in the public forum. Mrs. Minnis stated that there is nothing in law about Board members speaking with the Superintendent. She stated that she would have to look into whether the questions are public. She stated that on the side of transparency she does not know of anything that would prevent the questions from being given out. Mrs. Minnis stated that if they were given out in the Board packet they are public. Mr. Key stated that they were not in the packet but were handed separately to Board members. Mr. Scott stated that the questions were public but his speaking with Mr. Key was private. He stated that the questions came out in the Board meeting, but the answers are not public. Mrs. Minnis stated that Mrs. Mandela has the right to request the answers to the questions. Mrs. Mandela requested a copy of the answers. Mrs. Mandela stated that she was concerned about the luxury vinyl tile and the money used. She asked if it has been since 2021 that the facilities committee of GCCTA asked about issues of cleanliness of schools and the carpet being replaced. She stated that ESSER 2 funds could be used to help eliminate infectious diseases. She stated that to know that school facilities are still dirty, there is rotted wood, pealed paint, and to spend money on luxury tile is almost criminal.

12. The meeting adjourned at 8:21 p.m.