

## SCHOOL BOARD WORKSHOP

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

November 10, 2025

4:00 P.M.

The workshop was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman; Ms. Cathy S. Johnson; Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon; and Mr. Steve Scott. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board (via zoom); Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others. Mr. Charlie D. Frost was absent.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The workshop was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 4:02 p.m.

2. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. DISCUSSION – INSURANCE PREMIUM RATES

- Pat Thomas Insurance
- Capital Health Plan

Mr. John Pat Thomas with Pat Thomas & Associates Insurance stated that in the year of 22 – 23, employee rates were \$721.88. He stated fast forwarding to 25 - 26, the rates increased from \$721 to \$874 dollars. He stated that shows how the market is trending. Mr. McMillan asked if the \$874 was the total cost of the insurance. Mr. Thomas stated that was correct and the total cost of the employee's benefit. He stated that the School Board contributes 78% of the \$874 cost. He stated that the School Board pays \$681.72, and the employee pays \$192.28. Ms. Johnson requested a copy of the insurance rate for employees, spouses and children. Mr. Thomas stated that the numbers for the employees, spouses and children were listed in the paperwork. He stated that the information could be obtained through the finance benefits department or the link <https://content.myconnectsuite.com/api/documents/83b1fd573c29409ab8414036ab9ea870.pdf>.

Mr. McMillan stated that the School Board is asking for other bids from other Health Insurance Carriers to allow other insurance companies to come in with different rates. Mr. Thomas shared with the Board a comparison of where the district stand with other school's counties, and governmental bodies. Ms. Hannigon that for Liberty and Wakulla the actual plan was mentioned? She asked how the plan compared to other entities. She stated that is it truly an apples-to-apples comparison? She stated that each of the entities have a different number of staff who are at CHP, but is it a true comparison just looking at the dollar figures? Mr. Thomas stated it was not a true comparison.

Ms. Deborah Siak with Capital Health Plan, stated that she had an idea of how the process for pool rates work at CHP? She stated that the rates are combined into a big pool and then from there they determine what it would take based on each plan. She stated that each of these plans are actually underneath the capital selection 153050 plan. She stated that Gadsden County has its demographics, you will have two plans that could be identical in every way, but their demographics are a little bit different and that is going to be the difference in the rates. She stated that the principal choice is between the capital selection and the quality choice plan. She

stated that the quality choice plan is probably the lowest plan that CHP offer, which has the highest copay. Mr. Thomas stated that he wanted to point out a few things that we do as your agent from Pat Thomas and Associates. He stated that they help facilitate insurance committee meetings. He stated that as the districts Designated Risk Manager, we coordinate the annual open enrollment and work closely with district staff. He stated that Mrs. Bruner has been a breath of fresh air to work with. He stated that she truly has not only been your hip pocket in the forefront, but she really wants to look out for the employees in the district. He stated that American Fidelity enrollment platform is the same platform we use. He stated that they come and actually enroll the individual employees. He stated that they work with new hires and current employees. He stated that they handle the retiree benefits for the school system. Ms. Siak stated that it has been found that we are losing money based upon the medical claims alone. She stated that this does not include administrative overhead or anything like that, this is strictly medical claims. She stated that when they say 122% average, which means for every dollar you pay in CHP they paid out \$1.22. She stated that CHP is also community rated. She stated that you have good years and bad years. She stated that the age of the group in Gadsden County are not getting any younger. She stated that this drives the cost up. She stated that the older the age, the more medical problems you may have. Ms. Hannigon stated that as for as the other entities that you all service here in Gadsden, are you doing the same? She stated that the City of Quincy does its own internal billing, but are there any of the other entities utilizing you all to manage the retirees. Mr. Thomas stated no. Ms. Johnson asked what was Pat Thomas and Associate's percentage received from Gadsden County Schools. Mr. Thomas stated that he would have to get back with the Board because he did not have the numbers in front of him. Ms. Hannigon stated market wise; is there a general percentage, say 3 to 5%? Whatever the premium is is there a general percentage that the broker would recoup from the premiums? Mr. Thomas stated that someone could charge this compensation or commission anywhere from 3 – 5%. Mr. McMillian stated that in an audit he believe it was the 20-21 year, the Board had a discrepancy of not having our insurance bid out often enough, and then they stated that we should do it every three years. He wanted to know if the district was doing that, and are we following the guidelines. Mrs. Bruner stated that she would check with the auditor to make sure.

Ms. Siak stated that CHP is pretty much in all the counties except-for one. She stated that CHP has been the only bidder. She stated that she has a report to share with the Board. She stated that right now we are showing that you have a lower concentration of people under 18 and a higher concentration of people over 50. She stated that is something that we all know, as we get older, we get more expensive. She stated that looks like 9.4% of the emergencies versus what is the rate would be based on the rest of our groups. She stated that the district has a higher emergency room rate. She was proud to announce that Capital Health Plan has been added to the Urgent Care location on Pat Thomas Parkway in Quincy. She stated that as of October 1st of this year, employees could go to the Pat Thomas Parkway location for services. She stated that the Quincy location or Patient First is better for pricing rather than going to an emergency room. She stated that there are online doctors that can see you 24/7 at a very low cost. She stated that we have to train ourselves that other services are out there and cheaper. Mr. Thomas stated that when open enrollment is held everything is made clear to all employees about the availability of everything for them. He stated that they are there for any questions and guidance for employees.

Ms. Judith Mandela addressed the Board and stated that one of the things that was discussed at the beginning of the 24-25 year insurance committee meeting is that we would meet regularly. He stated that we met one time and came up with some ideas. She stated that in terms of suggestions for how to get the information out, is that maybe we will begin to meet again with the committee so the committee can send more information to members regarding all the things that we have talked about. She stated that they discussed different ways of treating health conditions, and different places to go. She stated that if members are not aware they are not going to take advantage of it.

## 5. DISCUSSION – ELECTRIC FLEET

- Highland Electric Fleet
- Blue Bird

Mr. Dominic Ricotta and Mr. Matthew Scott with Highland Electric shared with the Board a presentation on the history and highlights using Electric Vehicles.

Ms. Hannigon wanted to know how long can an electric vehicle run until it needs to be charged and what is the going price of batteries for the vehicle, also what's the backup plan for keeping it charged? Mr. Ricotta stated that the best option in case of constant outage would be diesel or propane generators or even large battery storage systems on trailers. He stated that we have schools in the northeast that are subject to extreme freezes that do operate essentially large batteries on trailers to supplement their charging whenever there is severe weather and that those are the best options. Ms. Hannigon asked if that were something, you all would assist us with from a grant services standpoint, identifying funding for that type of backup power. Mr. Ricotta stated of course, there is actually one recently due to hurricane response preparedness actually, where we thought Florida would be eligible for some of these costs and especially for these exact systems. He stated that the company is always on the hunt for funding to supplement operations. Mr. Scott wanted to know if we could get the grant by just swapping it over although Gadsden has not yet been approved for the grant. Mr. Ricotta stated yes, before the government shutdown, Gadsden was picked as a district for our federal work plan. He stated that to ensure that it actually goes through, the government need to come back and then we have to draw down the funding for these vehicles. He stated that the company has the funds because there were no issues with our work plan. He stated that they are just waiting for everything to get the green light. He stated that as part of the contract and part of the condition there will be no cost to you or the district until the site is operational and functional. He stated that everything is subjected to receiving and keeping that full cost of \$395,000. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know when the deadline was. Mr. Ricotta stated that they would aim to be done with the site before July of next year. He stated that there are tax credits expiring in November, so we would like to work towards a potential decision or discussion at the next Board meeting on November 18<sup>th</sup>. Board members wanted to know if Highland Electric was the only company that provide the electric bus service, are there other electric bus companies. Mr. Bryant (Transportation Director) stated that there are other companies. Mr. McMillian asked if it was possible to investigate the other companies to see their cost as well. Mr. Ricotta stated that there was no other company that can bring in the funding like Highland Electric. He stated that it was because we have it and it is secure in terms of providing electric buses. He stated that it is the major manufacturer. He stated that Bluebird / Thomas built international buses, they all have their own and we are diagnostic to which ones we utilize. He stated that they have already bought Bluebird buses with FTS and they are a great partner for us in Florida, and they were bought before the tariffs. He stated that the most affordable way of doing it now is, we do have the funding, and we do have the buses at the highest level of funding and at the most affordable bus price that we have seen before because we get to work directly with FTS. He stated that there are other companies that do things similar to the way we do it, but we have the \$3,000,000 at the table and that is why we are able to bring this to you for review. Mr. McMillian asked what the meaning was when you make the statement that no one else has the \$3,000,000. Mr. Ricotta stated that this was part of a group application awarded to Highland Electric and so we are able to shift it to priority districts within the State. Mr. McMillian stated that the Board talked about the fuel cost on diesel buses, and as he can remember, we are piggybacking off Gulf County to purchase diesel fuel. Mr. Bryant stated that was because of the rate that they are getting. Mr. McMillian stated that was exactly why. He wanted to know if the district was trying to find better prices on diesel fuel so that we could possibly stay with diesel. Mr. Bryant stated that was something that we can look into and get some updated information for the Board. Mr. McMillian stated that the Superintendent did tell the Board that he was going to get other companies in here so that we can make a better decision and now he hear that there is a deadline. Mr. Ricotta stated that it is financially and an even more advantageous deadline because there is a tax credit that expires that we cannot take advantage of if we continue to stretch the decision. He stated that in reference to the other company point, it is just if you do get quotes on one with available funding that is an option, but we have the funding available. He stated that there are restrictions on the vehicle. He stated that if you wanted to run it for more miles or take it on field trips, the contract gives you the right to do so. He stated that the company is not interested in making any money based on limitations. He stated that the restrictions are in place so we can handle the appropriate energy and actually give you the service promised. He stated that we guarantee our chargers are working and you are actually being ready for the route in the morning. Mr. McMillan stated that it was in the contract if we exceed more than the 10 or 20,000 miles within the period. Mr. Ricotta stated that we do offer an extension of miles on the flexibility period. He stated that every year the Board would get the opportunity to review the mileage. He stated that if the bus exceeds the mileage, you could move it to the next level. Mr. McMillian asked how many buses are needed for the Gadsden County School Board to operate. Mr. Bryant stated that the district has 49 – 50 bus routes. He stated that we currently have 55 buses. He stated that 53 of the buses

would need to be in operation. He stated that based on DOE compliance and regulations we need to have at less 10% for spares. Mr. Gerard Moore (Transportation) stated that he wanted the Chairman to be aware that the diesel industry has changed. He stated that some of the parts are no longer available. He stated that the vehicles are changing. He stated that if the district does not go with electric buses, 15 diesel buses need to be replaced as soon as possible. Ms. Johnson wanted to know if the district had the money to go with Highland Electric. Mrs. Bruner stated that we have budgeted \$4.3 million for pupil transportation services. She stated that was the amount spent on buses last year. She stated that there would be no change to the budget. Mr. McMillian stated that in the packet there is \$360, 000 per year, so we will be paying over \$17, 000 per bus for 8 buses. He stated that after 12 years the Board must renew the contract or get new buses. Mr. Moore stated that we went with 12 years because of the body of the bus; it is not worth anything after that. He stated that the oldest bus in the district is a 2009. Ms. Hannigon asked Mr. Ricotta to elaborate on Gadsden being a priority district. Mr. Ricotta stated that based on the EPA's criteria, he could not give the exact breakdown of what falls but it is typically socioeconomic and or size of the district. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know what Highland Electric's communications with the City of Quincy has been like. She wanted to know what it means for the City of Quincy for us to go in this direction as far as their electric grid. Mr. Ricotta stated that there has been no impact. He stated that they have reviewed the sight and spoke with Mr. Bryant. He stated that the City of Quincy is ready to go when we are. Ms. Hannigon asked what will the energy cost be like and the impact to the utility cost with this new infrastructure. Mr. Ricotta stated that it would be independently metered to Highland Electric. He stated that there would be no additional charge to the district. He stated that the energy is under their contract. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know if the Board had looked at a lease for diesel buses. Mr. Ricotta shared information with the Board on financing and leasing buses.

#### 6. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

None.

#### 7. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Mr. McMillan stated that the Board need to be careful about spending our dollars. He stated that salaries needed to be increased in Gadsden County. He stated that he has to make some decisions by this time next week or Tuesday of the next week. He stated that he wanted the Board to remember that we are talking about spending \$136,000 per year over a 12-year period for 8 buses. He stated that his only drawback was that the Board does not own the buses.

Ms. Hannigon asked Attorney Minnis how the process was looking for the Ward's Lot property as an agenda item for next week's Board meeting. Attorney Minnis stated that as she indicated, she did get a copy of the five-year facilities plan that does contain that property on it. She stated that she was trying to get a date to see if it has been submitted to DOE and once, she gets that information she can send it over to Mr. Baptiste. She stated that he will add the information to the resolution to include the statutory language for the five-year facilities work plan, and then the item will be brought back to the Board.

#### 8. The workshop adjourned at 6:28 p.m.