

SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

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

March 20, 2023

5:00 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; Mr. Steve Scott; Ms. Cathy S. Johnson; 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 5:03 p.m.

2. Opening Prayer

The opening prayer was led by Mr. Charlie D. Frost.

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Recited in unison.

4. ESSER Funding

Mr. McMillan stated that Mrs. Tammy McGriff was not in attendance because of the death of her mother. He stated that Superintendent Key and Dr. Sylvia Jackson would present information on ESSER I and II funding. He stated that a workshop would be scheduled to discuss ESSER III funding when Mrs. McGriff return to the office.

Mr. Key stated that ESSER II was handled by Mrs. McGriff and Dr. Sylvia Jackson.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that ESSER II funding was awarded a lump sum of \$10,517,947 and of that specific criteria had to be met per grant. She stated that the bulk of the award focused on improvement of student learning activities and improving air quality within the district. She stated that the majority of those fund have been expended or encumbered. She stated that the district is applying for an amendment of slightly over \$1,000,000 to purchase 7 regular school buses, 2 handicap buses and vehicles to transport students. She stated that the reason is that over 75% of the buses are 10 years or older, out of commission and having to transport students in crowded conditions. She stated that she believes the grant allows qualification for the health and safety of students. She stated that some of the funding was used for after school and summer school transportation.

Mrs. Dudley asked for specifics on improving student learning.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson provided information on ESSER II. She stated that ESSER III would be discussed in a workshop when Mrs. McGriff returns. She provided the following information:

- ESSER II went to Career and Technical Education (will provide in writing) \$250,000
- K-12 paid for some after school and summer school
- \$2,300,000 replacement of wireless needs
- \$800,000 computer replacement
- \$500,000 software (general and also safe access)
- Redirected mental health to another funding source so can use on buses
- Summer learning \$250,000
- Transportation fuel and drivers summer school
- \$3,866,000 to improve indoor air quality to upgrade HVAC. Mrs. Dudley asked if Stewart Street Elementary School was one of the schools to upgrade their HVAC; Dr. Jackson stated yes because that facility will be refurbished, Havana Magnet School and Greensboro Elementary School was also a part of that. Bid was placed and only one proposal so it is being resubmitted. The State department was very supportive
- Expenditures/allocated early for COVID for masks, sterilization, most has been used up
- ESSER II is public knowledge and she will provide copies if requested. For the most part ESSER II has been expended or earmarked for specific needs as required under the grant. Mrs. Dudley asked if the purchase of buses was one of those earmarked items. Dr. Jackson stated yes and also to transport athletes.
- Ms. Johnson asked what is being done for James A. Shanks Middle School. Dr. Jackson stated that issues with individual units or classrooms are reported to the principal and then the principal works with maintenance. The issues are handled immediately unless the vendor has the item on backorder.
- Ms. Johnson stated if the facility is working well we need to keep it up. She asked how the magnet school was being handled. Dr. Jackson stated that we are holding on trying to make older schools as comfortable as possible without spending a lot of money / after new school then the funding will be redirected to Havana Magnet School, Gadsden County High School, West Gadsden Middle School and Greensboro Elementary School. It is costing the district to try to “plug holes” in older schools. The state advised not to put a lot of money into the older buildings. Ms. Johnson stated we do not want the older schools to get in worse condition. As a district we must continue to upgrade as we go. As a Board we need to be proactive in taking care of our buildings. Dr. Jackson stated that half of the \$60+M is at the Governor’s office so hopefully we can begin work on the new school soon. The Superintendent has a plan to begin work on a half-cent sales tax so that funding could be directed to maintaining our schools.
- Mr. Key stated renovating schools cannot be paid out of ESSER funds, but must be paid from general funds. However, funding for AC units can be used with ESSER funds. The only way to get funding is to raise the mileage or property tax. He stated that he has met with custodians about the condition of our buildings. We must find additional funding in order to keep our schools where they need to be and going to Leon County to purchase things takes away from our funding. Putting money into buildings also takes away from raises. People must do a better job of cleaning and maintaining our buildings.
- Mrs. Dudley stated that with ESSER funding, the Board need to be mindful of the critical needs of staff, addressing learning loss, mental health, school safety, school cleanliness, and need to be good stewards of this funding. She stated that the district need more teachers and support staff.

- Mr. Key stated that about 80 positions are open and they are tied into ESSER 3 funding and no one has applied. He stated that this is the problem we are running into. Most of ESSER III is tied into staff because virtual learning does not work for our students. Principals are having a hard time staffing after school programs. In order to change the dynamics in Gadsden it is going to take the right personnel. He stated that there are 4 schools with 4 additional grants tied to after school because they are D and F schools. He stated that there is more flexibility with lump sum than there is with ESSER III. He stated that that some districts have spent millions of dollars on athletics. Mrs. Dudley stated we have to come up with ideas of how to recruit and possibly use ideas from other counties.
- Dr. Jackson stated that good effort need to be made to recruit qualified teachers. Mr. Key stated that the district is #45 with the beginning teacher salary.
- Ms. Johnson stated that other districts have found unique ways to spend ESSER money. She stated that there need to be a workshop to further discuss ESSER funding to become more knowledgeable of what can and cannot be done.
- Dr. Jackson stated other districts word differently from Gadsden.
- Ms. Johnson asked if there is anything that can be done at James A. Shanks Middle School with ESSER funding. Dr. Jackson stated everything that has been requested by the principal has been handled.
- Mr. Frost stated that he was here tonight to make sure the district is using the money correctly.
- Mr. Scott stated he has asked for an accounting of ESSER I, II, and III funds. He stated that he totaled the ESSER II funds and the spending mentioned by Dr. Jackson earlier was very accurate. He asked what has been done at James A. Shanks Middle School to improve air quality. Dr. Jackson stated that doors and carpet have been replaced. She stated that she did not know about AC units but will research.
- Mr. Frost stated every district is suffering from employee shortage.

5. Educational Items by the Superintendent

Mr. Key stated that each classroom at James A. Shanks Middle School have individual units. He stated that the principal at Shanks has addressed facilities more than any other principal has in the last 2 years. He stated that all the principals have been asked to bring needs to the district's attention. He stated that everything that we can do with ESSER funds will be done, and other issues will be handled through general funds.

6. School Board Requests and Concerns

Ms. Johnson stated that she wants Havana Magnet School's scoreboard painted or repaired. She thanked Mr. Mays for all his hard work and the information he provided. She requested a breakdown of spending and the remaining balance of ESSER funds.

Mr. Scott requested an executive session following the meeting.

In response to Mr. McMillan's quest to offer custodians 12 month positions, Mr. Key stated that the issue would have to be bargained.

Ms. Judith Mandela, GCCTA President, addressed the Board with the following concerns:

- \$10M for ESSER II but according to DOE it says a little more than \$14M. Dr. Jackson stated \$10M is a lump sum and another portion for technical. Mr. Mays sated that a portion of the funding is for technology. He stated that the Governor is re-appropriating some of the funds for learning loss and truancy that revert back to the state as of 6/30. He stated that when the Governor finalizes his budget the district will have to reapply for the funding.

- Over \$800,000 was earmarked for facilities. Mr. Mays stated that it was a combination between FEMA and insurance money. Ms. Mandela asked how much money was left from FEMA and insurance. Mr. Mays stated that he will get that information.
- Ideas for the conditions of James A. Shanks Middle School and other schools would be to have a community walk through to have the community determine if the facilities are clean. She stated that and we keep calling this a waste of money to clean the facilities, when the new school will not be built until 2025. She stated that there should have been a discussion earlier when she sent memorandum to the Board. She stated that she never received a reply to the email she sent on 12/6/2021. She stated that the current conversation that we are having should have been held back then.

Mrs. Dudley stated the Board has never said it is a waste of money to clean the facilities but there may be things that are desired. She stated that DOE has said not to do it because the new school is being built. She stated that whatever we need to do to clean the schools we are going to do that, but we have never said it was a waste of money.

Mr. Devonta Knight stated that his question had been answered.

Mrs. Shaia Simmons, former teacher, thanked the Board for the special meeting and providing transparency. She requested a copy of the ESSER documents from Dr. Sylvia Jackson. She stated that it is a good idea to have custodians work 12 months with more pay. She asked if the \$800,000 would go back into the district's budget. She stated that money for more bonuses should include certified teachers. She stated that she made a public records request on February 9th and as of now she has not received any information. She stated that she did not want to seek legal help.

Mrs. Karema D. Dudley made a motion to schedule a workshop to discuss ESSER III funding upon Mrs. McGriff's return. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson, and carried unanimously.

7. The meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

The Board convened in executive session at 6:20 p.m.; and adjourned at 7:35 p.m.