

JOINT MEETING  
BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSISONERS, SCHOOL BOARD, AND CITY COMMISSIONERS

NORTH FLORIDA RESEARCH AND EDUCATION CENTER  
155 RESEARCH ROAD  
QUINCY, FLORIDA 32351

February 9, 2023

4:00 P.M.

Present: Kimblin NeSmith, Chair, District 3; Eric Hinson, Vice-Chair, District 1; Brenda Holt, District 4 Alonzetta Simpkins, District 2 Ronterious “Ron” Green, District 5; Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator; Clayton Knowles, County Attorney; Crystal Jimenez, Deputy Clerk; Charlie D. Frost, Sr., District 4; Karema D. Dudley, Vice Chair, District 5; Freida Bass-Prieto, District 4; Steve Scott, District 2; Ronte R. Harris, District 3; Cathy Johnson, District 1; Deborah Minnis, Attorney; Keith A. Dowdell, District 1; Elijah Key, Superintendent; Rob Nixon, City Manager; Leroy McMillan, District 3; Angela Sapp, District 2; Gary Roberts, Attorney; and Anessa Candidate, District 5

**Invocation, Pledge of Allegiance**

Chair Nesmith welcomed everyone to the workshop at 4:10 p.m. He thanked the chairman of the school board, Mr. McMillan. He also thanked Vice Chair Commissioner Hinson and Board Member Scott. Chair Nesmith said he asked Mr. Scott about the last meeting with the school board and the county, Mr. Scott mentioned to him that whatever was discussed, there was no follow up. Commissioner Nesmith said they are here for a purpose and that is to find whatever their goals are and to develop a common theme.

Mr. McMillan proceeded with the invocation. Then, everyone proceeded with the Pledge of Allegiance of the U.S. Flag.

**Amendments and Approval of Agenda**

Chair Nesmith asked for any amendments. There were none.

**UPON MOTION BY COMMISSIONER HINSON AND SECOND BY COMMISSIONER HOLT, THE BOARD VOTED BY VOICE VOTE TO APPROVE THE AGENDA AS PRESENTED.**

**Citizens Requesting to be Heard on Non-Agenda Items (3-minute limit)**

The Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners welcomes and encourages public participation at all meetings of the Board. Citizens are free to speak for up to three (3) minutes on non-agenda items. Public comments and participation is also encouraged for items on the agenda.

Additionally, if you are unable to attend a meeting in person, comments from the Public can also be submitted via email to [CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov](mailto:CitizensToBeHeard@gadsdencountyfl.gov) until noon on the date of the meeting. Citizens are further encouraged to participate via Zoom using the credentials on the County’s website. The meetings are also broadcast live on the Board’s Facebook page. Comments submitted after the deadline, but prior to the meeting, will be added to the official record, but the County cannot guarantee that Commissioners and staff will have adequate time to review comments prior to the meeting.

Commissioner Hinson read the above statement aloud.

## General Business

### 1. **Welcome**

(Kimblin E. NeSmith, Chairman, Board of County Commissioners) (Keith Dowdell, Chairman, City of Quincy) (Leroy McMillan, Chairman, Gadsden County School Board) Chair Nesmith asked everyone to introduce themselves. They went around the room to introduce themselves.

Chair Nesmith said they may not have made enough progress, but now they are going into the bicentennial this year. They are here to come up with a plan to assist the school district and the City of Quincy. They have the commitment of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners to assist in any way.

Commissioner Dowdell said when he first thought about this meeting, he thought about the constitution saying that “we the people coming together as one”. They tried this before in the past, and now they are coming back together. It is a perfect time to do things for the citizens of the county. He thanked who came up with the idea. He wants them to work together and put bitterness out the door and take care of business.

Chair Nesmith said Mr. McMillan initiated the conversation with the County in the middle of last year. He said unity is a powerful tool.

*Commissioner Simpkins entered at 4:24 p.m.*

Mr. McMillan said he was born and raised in Gadsden County. He wanted to come back home to do what he can to help the young kids in Gadsden County. He said they have to understand that without them having a school system that is representative of a system that is educating kids, they have to come together and ensure that the children have the very best. He said our kids are our future.

Mr. Dixon introduced the manager and the superintendent. They have a relationship established behind the scenes. He said at the basis of everything they attempt to do, begins and ends at the school district. It is a self-perpetuating system. He said that Lizzo said “everybody wants to be great, ‘til they got to be great”. Every community doing great has a great school district. East Gadsden was built someplace else, and they didn’t think they were losing anything, but the first thing they lost was football. They have to see what is happening together.

Commissioner Harris, Commissioner Simpkins and Commissioner Candidate introduced themselves. Superintendent Key said they need to work together to improve the county as a whole.

He said from the economic stand point, they need to make the schools the model schools what they need to be in order to move Gadsden County forward. He said he always says that “we did not just get here; we have been having these issues a long time”. It is going to take everyone working together. It is going to take getting the educators back in Gadsden County that have fled to other places.

Mr. Key said the county is working on affordable housing; they need to have a place where teachers can stay and they are not living in Leon County. They will continue to move the salary scale to keep good teachers here. Without good educators, it is going to be hard to move the needle. Graduation rates start in elementary school. They cannot continue to retain. Kids are sometimes 2 years behind before they get to middle school. They have already created dropouts; they have to change that narrative. He went over the Vision from the PowerPoint and the mission.

He said enrollment has been decreasing. The Gadsden County School district budget shows that close to \$3 million that went to private schools for students that are getting vouchers. The legislatures are currently planning to expand that even more. If they do that, hold the private schools accountable the same way. They County population has also decreased. They must come together to make it work and to get

economic growth. They do not want Gadsden County at the bottom for the wrong reasons, in order to change that, they must come together. They need to improve the learning environment.

They do not have a lot of money in the Gadsden County school systems to put into renovations. What will work is a half-set sales tax. Leon County is improving their schools by the half-set sales tax and making renovations. Many schools in Gadsden County were built more than 60 years ago. He said they have the support from the City of Quincy and the County Commission to build a new school in Quincy. They were pushed with time and they decided where is the best place to put a school. There was a need because of how old the schools were. He said the state said if it is going to cost more to renovate a school, they will tell you to build one. It will be a K-8 school. There a lot of issues at the schools that they cannot deny but they cannot keep patching. They cannot keep schools open just because they graduated from there. They pay a nice bill to the City of Quincy for electricity. The schools are not efficient. They do not want to leave a carbon footprint. The committee agreed to construct one new school. He said how they are going to pay for it, they asked the state for money. George W. Monroe, James A. Shanks, GEMS and Stewart Street are all going to the new school. It is going to cost \$68 million. They want to make sure they don't fall short. They have had conversations about the King St. pool to make sure it happens. They will build on Shanks location to keep the school in the city of Quincy not the outskirts. Programs will ensure about 1,600 kids will be housed with technology, CTE programs. They want to ensure kids will follow a pathway up to high school. The state did approve money to renovate the gym. It will be a two-story building with grade levels separated, so that safety is of utmost importance. He asked if there were any questions?

Commissioner Holt asked what will happen with the front of the school. Superintendent Key said it will be razed and made into a parking lot.

Commissioner Prieto asked what will happen with the students who currently attend Shanks when they raise it. Mr. Key said students have to be moved from building 16. They are working with a company that have built buildings that are on site to keep the students safe. They may have to move some students to other schools to ensure that they have no issues. Commissioner Prieto said with the noise factor, it is impossible to learn anything. Mr. Key said the gym, the chorus room, the band room, and building 16 all have to become empty. They will be moving kids to the front and east side of the campus. Commissioner Prieto asked what is the estimated construction time? Mr. Key said about 2 years. If they get funding this year, it may be 2025-2026, to be completed. Mr. Key said the start would be in the summer.

Commissioner Nesmith asked where are they on funding? Mr. Key said the state has budgeted \$68 million for this project; however, the cost of materials may be more so it may be more money to cover the inflation and other things. Commissioner Nesmith asked what does he need from the Board of County Commissioners? Mr. Key said they are ranked #2, normally, they always rank #1 person. The governor has funded all districts in the past. Due to the abundance of money, they are looking to fund all the districts. He said he needs them to encourage Senator Simon and Representative Franklin to bring in additional money to fund the school. He said they may have to cut costs and the County may have to clear an area. They are trying to look at some soft costs as well. Commissioner Nesmith does not want him to cut costs. They want a state-of-the-art school. Mr. Key said then it is calling the legislatures. Mr. Key said they did not want to put anything else on the table that would jeopardize the school. This is their priority.

Commissioner Holt asked if they do not have active open CDBG grants open, then they can show a 15 job increase, and it is a funding mechanism they can apply for CDBG. The first paycheck pays \$750,000 dollars. She said they can usually apply for sewer money. They do have to document those jobs. She asked if they have asked for any money from the federal government? Mr. Key said they have not. Commissioner Holt said that is a good possibility because they have a new congressman. They are already on their committees. They need to present the project as if may not get funding from the state. She put down \$100 million because of cost increases. There are other funding mechanisms.

Commissioner Prieto asked who are the other schools competing with? Mr. Key said Putnam and Glades County. Commissioner Prieto asked if there is any research that new schools help make scores better. Mr. Key said any environment is going to help, but going back to what he said, it is going to be teachers. They have good teachers in some of the schools but they need more. Commissioner Prieto said there is existing sewer and water, how much would have to be modified? Mr. McMillan said he asked for this meeting to collaborate. So that they can see how can they help. They are going to build this state-of-the-art school. No study has been done that shows putting a child in a new school is going to make them be smarter. With the schools that we have now, our kids deserve better. They will have to totally revamp King Street. The present conditions cannot handle the traffic. They will probably use the same amount of water, but all of that will have to be moved. They will move the electrical stuff according to code. They need to start thinking about the infrastructure as far as providing utilities to the new school.

Commissioner Green presented himself and said he is glad to see this collaboration. He has been out working but he knows they can get this accomplished together.

Commissioner Grant Sapp said there is a need for new schools. She sees the need for new schools. They have not done a study about how schools affect children. However, if a child sees mold and mildew, that child will not come compared to Havana Magnet School. She said good teachers matter. They will bring a good viable school. Quincy is the seed in Gadsden County.

Board Member Dudley gave a personnel account on how students need good air conditioning in their classrooms. They need to get students out of these old schools. She said behavior is an issue and what do they have in the community they can get involved in?

Mr. Dixon said they need to see it not as an indictment but an opportunity. They can change what happens tomorrow. They have to do it big and fast. Mr. Key said they asked for an additional \$50 million. This is a 5-year program. Stability becomes important. No matter who is at the table, the mission remains the same. They have to improve the district in the meantime. They need money for programming and personnel. They need to expand the budget, not only at the state level but on the federal level. They have good contacts that can be used. They need to make their asks bigger.

Commissioner Prieto said she heard 2025 now she heard 2028. Mr. Key said there is a 2–3-year building process. He said it is not a 5-year project. She asked if they are asking for money other than for the new school to help them address the low reading scores and other issues. She said she does not believe it is about the building, it is about the teachers. She is not discounting a new school, but she wants to know how they are addressing the issues in her opinion. They are losing students.

Mr. Key said the scores have not come out. Mr. Key agreed that it comes to teachers. There was a \$5,000 bonus for teachers and \$2,500 for other schools. If they had high VAM scores, they could have earned an additional \$1,500. They have teachers this year that are leaving with \$12,500 and \$15,000. This year they are doing the same thing again. They are getting ready to put more money into recruitment and retention. They are looking at the possibilities. Commissioner Prieto asked if there is a multiyear funding source? She asked what are they doing to encourage parents to be more involved? Mr. Key said they asked the federal government but when it comes to more funding, they have asked for over \$100,000,000 for the new school. Commissioner Prieto asked about the increase in salaries and if they are effective in retention or if they need another cycle? Mr. Key said most teachers left when the salary was \$38,000. Gadsden County is at \$45,000, Leon County was at \$43 and changed to \$47,000. They need to come up again.

Mr. McMillan said the architects have told them if they break ground in July, there is a strong possibility that in August of 2025, our kids will go to school at the new school. They need to be on the move.

Mr. Key said they had 3 students from Gadsden County is a part of the Future Builders of America that went to Las Vegas to compete in the national building association conference and placed #2 in the entire country. They need to be celebrating those kids.

Mr. Dixon reminded the BOCC that they worked in the summer program.

Commissioner Simpkins agrees that we need a school. She knows it is a legislative priority. Her goal was for them to collaborate as a county. They need to discuss what happens with the students when they leave the school. As a community, what can we do as a county in order to change the trajectory of the kids? She takes it personal when talking about the teachers. Teachers work with what they are given. They do not choose the students. They have to come together and assist the school board to make sure they look at the CDBG grant. They have to look beyond that and at what they can do to provide to the students after 3:00 p.m. and what programs they can put in place. She said we have the highest crime rates in state of Florida. They need to have a plan for those students.

Mr. Key said they have one of the highest percentage of teachers that are out of field. Some are temporary certified. Students are coming to the schools disadvantaged and have teachers disadvantaged. In order to move the county, they have to get in field certified teachers to close the gap early.

Commissioner Green said they need to work together on all levels. There are other ways they can start their own boys and girls club without utilizing the Boys and Girls Club. It is not about the boards; it is about the children. The collaboration needs to happen on a more consistent basis. It does not take a mega county to see a positive transformation. People are watching the negative energy; they will not come to us if they are not working together. It has to stop if they want to move forward.

Mr. Nixon is 100 percent behind this project. What do they need to do? They need to ask for that money to maintain it. They need a sense of urgency in the implementation plan. They need to follow the motto and have half percent sales tax. The citizens will have to bite the bullet and invest in ourselves.

Commissioner Holt asked how they can model themselves after someone who has already done it. They need to get the appropriations list and get their lobbying skills up. They have a disadvantaged population. If they do not get to Tallahassee, they will miss the money.

Commissioner Candidate thanked everyone. She said a 21<sup>st</sup> century school is their end goal but they need to start exposing kids to the program spaces. 3-5 years will be here fast. There are a lot of foundation grants available. Mr. Key said students are already being exposed, they are trying to move it down to the elementary level.

Commissioner Harris supports the new school. He said the pool is not an issue. He wants to talk to everyone. He shared his interest for what they do with the citizen money. If houses and jobs are here, the City of Quincy is examining every contract they do business with. They will support them. They need to look at banking services. People cannot go to a bank to secure a mortgage. If they do not have a banking institution in this community that is willing to pour back into the community, then they are just turning wheels. It will not happen if the opportunity is not made available. They need to have institutions that are going to pour back into the community. He is on a mission in 2023 that the people's money will not sit in a bank that will not provide them equitable opportunity. They have to play hard ball.

Commissioner Dowdell said by any means necessary they will help. The City of Quincy is with them. They are waiting on him to say what they need to do. He said in Tallahassee, the game is republican. They have to play the republican game. They have to mingle with them. The republican ideology is public and charter schools. They need to come up with their own charter school district. If they just add the name "charter", it will help. It is now or never.

Commissioner Prieto wants to see the plan out of this meeting. She asked about a traffic study and it has not been done. She wants them to put the plan in writing. Commissioner Nesmith will ask if they need to start meeting. They will start now. They can form a committee where they can start meeting on regular basis.

Mr. Dixon said they will create a plan. They will make sure all the trains are moving at the same time.

Mr. Harris said if there is a workshop setting, if already discussed so that they know what to expect. They need a step-by-step plan. Chair Nesmith said her point is received.

Mr. Dixon said it is not about red or blue it is about green.

2. **Discussion of Legislative Priorities**  
(Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)
3. **Discussion of Future Partnerships**  
(Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)
4. **Discussion of General Government Business**  
(Edward J. Dixon, County Administrator)

**Motion to Adjourn**

WITH NO FURTHER DISCUSSION TO COME BEFORE THE BOARD, COMMISSIONER NESMITH ADJOURNED THE WORKSHOP AT 6:11 P.M.