

## REGULAR SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

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

January 27, 2026

6:00 P.M.

This meeting 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; 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 6:00 p.m.

2. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Reverend Dr. Bernard Hudson, Pastor of Arnett Chapel A.M.E. Church.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. RECOGNITIONS

Ms. Janet Hartman with the Florida Public Safety Institute at Tallahassee State College addressed the Board to talk about returning the correctional officer program to the high school as a dual enrollment opportunity by Tallahassee State College. She stated that the dual enrollment program would be offered in the afternoon hours. She recognized the following individuals: Vice President Shelly Bell of Workforce Development at Tallahassee State College; Mrs. Carla Chukes who manages Recruitment Programs. She stated that we offer firefighting, law enforcement as well as corrections; Ms. Chinita Robinson, Coordinator of Corrections at the Academy, a 2012 graduate of the East Gadsden High Schools Correctional Officer Program; and Ms. Asia Grant, an Officer at the Guest and Re-entry Center, and a graduate of the 2010 High School Correctional Officer Program. She shared with the Board information about the correctional officer program. She stated that there was a sheet in the back for the public to have more information about the correctional officer dual enrollment program. Ms. Carla Chukes addressed the Board and shared a brief overview of her experience as a correctional officer and teacher. Ms. Chinita Robinson and Ms. Asia Grant both shared with the Board their experience with the correctional officer program and how glad they are for being in the program.

Mr. McMillan stated that without a doubt, the district will call on Ms. Robinson and Ms. Grant to help encourage our students to enter the correctional officer program. Ms. Hartman stated that the minimum student requirements are in statute. She stated that the student must have at least a 2.0 grade point average to enter the program. She stated that the program is only offered to seniors for a very specific reason. She stated that one could only be certified as a corrections officer if they are 18 years old. She stated that the student could not qualify with a firearm until they are 18. She stated that the program is positioned to be successful, to have them not only complete the program, but to become certified and go right to work. She stated that they have the commitment and support of Sheriff Young and the Florida Department of Corrections to bring this program back to the high school. Mr. McMillan thanked Ms. Hartman and her staff for sharing information with the Board on the correctional officer program. He stated that it is an opportunity for our young adults.

Mr. Steve Winn addressed the Board to report that there is some scholarships funding in the Biletnikoff Foundation. He stated that there would be about \$200,000 given in scholarships this legislative session. He stated that this year the applications are for those who have overcome obstacles in their lifetime and have still been able to maintain their grades, and their community involvement. He stated that with the Superintendent and Dr. Sylvia Jackson's involvement, we have applied again for \$26 million for the final phase of the new K-8 school. Mr. McMillan stated that the Biletnikoff Scholarship money is given out every year for students.

Mr. Key thanked Mr. Winn for addressing the Board and made the correction of a K-8 school and not a K-12 school. He thanked everyone for the support, prayers, calls, and texts during the passing of his dad, and the support shown during the funeral service on Saturday (January 24). He stated that he greatly appreciated everyone. He thanked the district staff for a marvelous job at the repast. He stated that the construction has started on the K-8 school. He stated that work has begun to ensure that the school is ready to be occupied in August of 2027. He stated that parent meetings have begun to let parents of Shanks students know some of the thoughts that we have to move those kids off that campus to get the school built by August of 2027. He stated that Ms. Moody has been doing a wonderful job of scheduling those events and making sure that things are on point. He stated that the district is looking forward to just engaging with our community about the K-8 school along with other things that we must do to bring back to the Board for approval. He stated that there is a steady increase in the graduation rate. He stated that a few years ago the district was at 83% without testing. He stated that currently the district is at 81%. He stated that the high school has done a wonderful job of maintaining a "C", starting under the leadership of Mrs. Chelsea Franklin. He stated a great job to the administration and staff of Gadsden County High School. He thanked Ms. Kimberly Cummings for her help and all she does for the district. He stated that a new head football coach has been named, Mr. Daniel Fish. He stated that a community meeting would be scheduled to formally introduce Mr. Fish. He stated that Mr. Fish has already hit the ground running and has gotten a couple of student's scholarship offers. He stated that Mr. Fish is looking at films and making calls to schools to get student offers. He stated that the district appreciates the job that Mr. Fish is already doing and has not officially started. He stated that over the Christmas break there was just a lot of misinformation of people accusing me of violating policy, violating state laws with transfers and things of that nature. He stated that Florida Statute 1012.27 specifically gives the Superintendent the authority to transfer staff. He stated that Florida Statute 1012.22, the School Board should act upon the recommendation of the Superintendent. He stated that he would bring the transfer recommendation to the Board at the next scheduled Board meeting. He stated that the transfers were made under his authority and not initiated by the School Board, though Board approval is required under State law.

Ms. Hannigon stated that the December and January Excellence in Education awardees were being recognized at the meeting. Principal Kirkland from George W. Monroe Elementary School shared with the Board names of the three recipients from her school: Student of the Month – Gene Akins, Support Staff of the Month – Ms. Shakelia Richardson, and Teacher of the Month – Ms. Bridget Kenon-Franklin. Each of the recipients were presented with a plaque. Principal Pamela Anderson from West Gadsden Middle School and Gadsden Elementary Magnet School shared with the Board names of the three recipients from her school: Student of the Month – Lakeyda Graddy, Support Staff of the Month – Ms. Shalonda Starks, and Teacher of the Month – Ms. Lyric Humphrey. Each of the recipients were presented with a plaque. Ms. Hannigon stated that each of the recipients were previously presented with \$250 and their flowers. The Board and Superintendent congratulated each of the recipients.

Ms. Hannigon presented the SWAT students Ayden Burke and Cameron Claridy. She stated that SWAT stands for Students Working against Tobacco. She stated it is a program that is sponsored through the Florida Department of Health, and our local department here in Gadsden has been offered this program in our schools for some years as a part of their program. She stated that they do have benchmark schools that must present the program to the School Board each quarter. She stated that the student's presentation was about adopting comprehensive tobacco free schools. She stated that there are some updates that the district need to incorporate into its policy based on tobacco free Florida standards. She recognized our health administrator Dr. Adrian Cooksey, Ms. Tanya Footman Supervisor for Health Education Promotion, Ms. Ellen Henderson, Ms. Leslie Tahana, and Ms. Kyshandra Hyman who is also with our students.

Ayden Burke addressed the Board and thanked Ms. Hannigon for taking on this vision, believing in us and seeing that we were serious about what we are going to do. He stated that we are passionate and 10 toes down

with this mission. He stated that he has been with SWAT for two years. He stated that he is the president of the SWAT club. He stated that a simple after school lunch activity turned him into going on regional trips. He stated that he was passionate about what he is doing. He stated that we have included some differences to our activities that have taken place in Gadsden County. He stated that our main mission is to learn and inspire our peers to stand up against tobacco, not only stand up against tobacco but also be aware of the dangers and harmful effects of tobacco.

Cameron Claridy addressed the Board and stated that SWAT started as a club activity at school and then into meetings, the retreats, the regional meetings, it is just all been green light. He stated that the SWAT Squad has empowered and equipped him to help his friends and classmates about tobacco usage at school, in the community and at home. He stated that we are here to talk about the urgent need for schools to adopt comprehensive tobacco free school policies. He stated that schools are essential parts for our growth and development into adulthood. He stated that SWAT helps to shape the environments where we learn, interact, and make decisions that affect our daily lives. He stated that a good portion of our students' waking hours are in school about 1/3 that day and it's typically where peer pressure hits the most, especially peer pressure to experiment with tobacco products. He stated that SWAT reduces the likelihood of youth engaging in tobacco use, particularly vaping. He stated that it has been established that young people are especially vulnerable to nicotine addiction. He stated that research shows that nearly 90% of all adult smokers started smoking before the age of 18, showing how early experimentation with tobacco products can lead from early to later on in life. He stated that tobacco free school policies were the most effective ways to protect young people from these long-term consequences. He stated that a study was done in 2024 that showed 37.7% of high school youth reported using nicotine. He stated that in 2024 a high number of youth used electronic vapor products. He stated that youth ages 11 to 17 reported that their parents were not aware that they were using tobacco products. He stated that the final study that we have used in 2024 in Gadsden County, 43.3% of students reported seeing each other use electronic vapor products on school property. He stated that last year we have seen firsthand how tobacco products disrupt learning. He stated that it is more than statistic; it is a daily reality in our schools. He stated that students skip class, students use the bathroom for tobacco use. He stated that he has seen how this have hurt the students and hurt the community. He stated that comprehensive tobacco free school policies play a crucial role in reducing youth's tobacco use throughout the county.

Ayden Burke stated that the main reason why the SWAT students are here is to request that the Board consider a comprehensive tobacco free policy. He stated that within this policy, the schools would have everything they need to protect students and staff from secondhand smoke. He stated that the policy would prepare young adults from starting the use of tobacco and ensure that students at all appropriate age levels receive tobacco prevention education, and keep out deceptive industry materials. He stated that it would also increase access to resources for students and staff who need help quitting tobacco. He stated that currently, Gadsden County is missing the purpose statement and rationale opportunities for tobacco sensation actions, policy evaluation, and supportive approach to student enforcement, and policies that address students, staff, and visitor enforcement. He stated that the Gadsden County Squad and the Department of Health urge the Board to implement comprehensive tobacco free policies across all Gadsden County Schools. He stated that establishing a uniform system would create a constant supportive environment that helps protect students from the harmful effects of tobacco. He stated that the Department of Health staff is eager to collaborate to develop and implement these policies. He stated that the youth in our county needs your support to combat the ongoing vaping and tobacco epidemic. He welcomed the Board's thoughts, comments and insights. Ms. Hannigon thanked Cameron and Ayden for their presentation and bravery. She stated that she is working with them and staff to identify all the deficiencies, current deficiencies in our policy that do not align with Tobacco Free Florida standards, and as we move forward in the coming months, whether that be piece by piece. She stated that collectively we would be bringing those proposed policy changes so that they can check the box and let the State know that they have done their due diligence. She thanked the Florida Department of Health, Gadsden, and our SWAT students.

## 5. CITIZEN COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

Attorney Mark Levine (Law Office of Levine & Strivers) addressed the Board to follow-up on a memorandum and letter that was sent to each of the Board members back in December. He stated that the exact date was December 13, or 11. He stated that he presumed that each Board member received it, it was sent to them

directly, and members have had the opportunity to read it. He stated that we believe that the consequences of those statutory rule violations were directed specifically at Mr. Holt, who is going to come to follow me. He stated that he represents Mr. Holt and the Gadsden County Teachers Association. He stated that we are here to ask that on behalf of Mr. Holt and others that the actions by your administration and your Superintendent have resulted in a severe adverse effect on your students. He stated that he sat in for a few minutes during the facilities workshop and all I heard is what I hear from every School Board that I address on a regular basis, that we are short of money, and you are, and you do the best you can with what you have. He stated that if a program that is addressed in the letter to the Board had been effectively handled, you would have much more money in your coffers than you do. He stated that you would also have equipment. He stated that we are here to ask for an independent investigation and a review of the situation over the past seven years. He stated that our office would be the direct contact for anyone at the district or whomever you decide to put in place to begin this review. He stated that what we want you to understand is that we are asking you to investigate it. He stated that we do not want this going outside, but we cannot continue to hold on to this program, the programs that are addressed in the letter to be continued as is so to speak. He stated that he thinks that the district can do an internal investigation, independent investigation. He stated that there are plenty of folks who do that for different districts. He stated that if we cannot get something moving quickly, then I have been directed to go to the Department of Education's Auditor General, potentially the Florida Department of Law Enforcement and others. He stated that he was not making a threat, just suggesting that it is time. He stated that he wanted the Board to know about the decision to have this concern investigated and have a report issued. He stated that the memo is very, very specific and easy to understand and that is why we spent so much time and effort on it. He stated that we wanted to just ask the Board politely, please pay attention to that because it can enrich your pocketbooks to assist your students greatly. He thanked the Chair.

Following discussion regarding Mr. Levin's statement and emailing information to the Board, the Board noted that the information was not sent through the proper channels. Mr. McMillan stated that the request needed to be sent to the district's Attorney (Mrs. Deborah Minnis), once Mrs. Minnis reviews it; she will give the guidance on how to respond to the request. Attorney Levine stated that he would make sure that Attorney Minnis receives the information for review.

Mr. Jamal Holt addressed the Board to state that his rights were violated regarding the CTE program. He stated that Superintendent Key, Dr. Sonya Jackson and Dr. Sylvia Jackson violated his rights. He stated that for over the last seven years he has spent years building a CTE program. He stated that \$500,000 was generated from his classroom year after year after year. He stated that his program has never had a funding problem, but what he has had is that his union work has caused these three individuals to continuously target him and his program. He stated that everything that Mr. Levine talked about, the Board got the emails. He stated that he could go with 80 emails that he has sent to several including text messages. He stated that his program generated hundreds of thousands of dollars. He stated that his kids were allowed to sit in their classroom for the last five years without working on computers in order for us to test to raise money. He stated that what he has had to do was stop the teacher across the hall stop teaching his class so he could use his computers for student testing to generated funding.

Ms. Judith Mandela, President of GCCTA, addressed the Board with questions regarding the financial workshop that was held earlier today. She stated that in a couple of the School Board meetings, she thinks that it may have been in November when it was brought up that there was FEMA funding that you were not sure on whether it was still available. She stated that in the last School Board meeting, she asked about whether the FEMA money will be processed, and the Chairman stated that he would get back to me. She stated that as of today, she has not received any information regarding FEMA funding and the availability of the funding. She stated that in the financial workshop held today, there was an item that was funded through FEMA and over half million dollars through the insurance funding. She questioned whether the Board knows yet whether there is money available. She stated that maybe in the November or October meeting the conversation was we do not know if the money was still available, but based on that there was an item that was being paid through FEMA and paid through the insurance funding. She stated that she wanted to know whether that money is available which would offset some of the cost that you may have to pay for facilities through general funds. She stated that the other question that she had was about the insurance funding. She stated that at one point she heard \$6.2 million dollars, correct or not? She stated that the finance director mentioned that it was in the SBA account, and the questions are what are the limitations on the spending of the funds that are in the

insurance account that are available to schools, and what schools are available and the limitations on what it can be spent on. Mr. Key stated that the answer was actually given in the workshop, facilities. Ms. Mandela stated that was not made clear to me. She stated that if you wanted to you could use some of that funding to pay for some of the needs of the facilities. She stated that she noticed the calendars for the 26-27 year the 27-28 school calendars were on the agenda. She stated that a few years ago, the union and other members of the instructional personnel were a part of those meetings. She stated that she was not sure who makes the decisions regarding the calendar, but I think just out of pure respect and I'm not sure maybe there were teachers that are a part of the calendar committee. She stated that just out of respect that you have instructional personnel a part of the meeting. She stated that it would, in her opinion, be a good idea that at least teachers are involved in the development of the calendar just for the purpose of planning, and the purpose of making sure that there's adequate planning.

Following a lengthy discussion regarding the calendars, the Superintendent stated that School Board Policy 3.18 states that annually the Superintendent shall establish a School Year Calendar committee. He stated that the committee should prepare a proposed school year calendar for the school year following the next occurring fiscal year and present to the Superintendent for approval and recommendation to the Board. He stated that all departments and the necessary staff are represented on the calendar committee. He stated that staff invited 16 individuals to the calendar meeting but only 13 attended. Mr. McMillan stated that a policy review was needed on school calendars. He stated that he wants to make some corrections concerning the calendar in the future. However, the Superintendent is the one that oversees, and select individuals for the calendar committee.

## 6. REVIEW OF MINUTES

- a. December 16, 2025, 4:30 p.m. – School Board Financial Workshop
- b. December 16, 2025, 6:00 p.m. - Regular School Board Meeting

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve agenda item #'s 6a & 6b. The motions was seconded by Mr. Steve Scott and carried unanimously.

## ITEMS FOR CONSENT

Mr. McMillan entertained a motion to approve the remaining consent agenda. The motion was made by Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon, seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson and carried unanimously.

Mr. McMillan stated that there were amendments to agenda item #9b and 9c. He stated that the Director of Finance stated that she could not find records for one of the buses (item #9c) where it had been approved by the Board to be put on as an auction item, and this was added to the Board packet that was previously received by the Board. He stated that regarding the request to finance the resurfacing of the existing track at Gadsden County High School in the Board packet, there is only one option. He stated that Mr. Hudson has given the Board a second option, which is a little bit more \$75,000, more than the first option. He stated that the first option was to finance it for seven years and we would pay over \$141,000 in interest. He stated that he thinks that item #2 is better for resurfacing the track. He requested that the Board amend the Board packet on agenda item #9b to add option one and option two to the agenda. He stated that hurricane funding could be used to pay for resurfacing the track because this is a facility issue.

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

- a. Personnel 2025 – 2026

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- b. 2026 – 2027 School Year Calendars

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- c. 2027 – 2028 School Year Calendars

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

## 8. AGREEMENTS/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATIONS

- a. Memorandum of Understanding Between Florida State Stoops Center for Communities, Families and Children, and the School Board of Gadsden County

Fund Source: N/A

Amount: N/A

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- b. Nursing Skills Lab Update

Fund Source: Pipeline

Amount: \$108,347.50

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

## 9. SCHOOL FACILITY/PROPERTY

- a. Purchase Order Request for Generator

Fund Source: FEMA

Amount: \$62,079.00

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- c. Surplus Auction

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 at the beginning of the meeting and acted upon during the discussion portion of the agenda.

## \*9. SCHOOL FACILITY/PROPERTY

- b. Request to Finance Resurfacing Existing Track at Gadsden County High School

Fund Source: Insurance Dollars

Amount: \$564,274.00 Total (Finance by NCL at \$100,829.17 Annually)

Ms. Hannigon stated that she was uncomfortable with spending insurance dollars at this time. She stated that she wanted to set priorities for budgetary reasons, and to have a workshop with other departments to express the needs in their schools before money is spent.

Following discussion, Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon made a motion to not approve option #1 or option #2 for resurfacing the track at Gadsden County High School. The motion died for lack of a second.

Mr. Steve Scott made a motion to approve option #2 to pay in full to resurface the track at Gadsden County High School. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson and carried with Mr. McMillan, Mr. Frost, Ms. Johnson and Mr. Scott voting "aye". Ms. Hannigon voted "nay"

Mrs. Karema Dudley addressed the Board to get an understanding of option #1 and option #2. She asked if option #1 was for financing and option #2 to pay in full and from what funding. Mr. McMillan responded that was correct. Mrs. Dudley stated to clarify what she was hearing there is going to be a cost saving factor without choosing option #1. She stated that she understands that this is a pressing matter because it has come up before. She stated that she wanted to make sure that the Board is transparent because additional information (option #2) was added to the agenda. She stated that transparency is very important.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

## 10. SCHOOL PROPERTIES

### a. Chattahoochee High School Property (Faith Apostolic Christian Tabernacle Services, Inc.)

Mrs. Bruner stated that the reconciliation was done based on the best information she could gather. She stated that there were some cells that have been highlighted because there were some discrepancies between what was recorded in the written documentations. She stated that she was able to find what was entered in Skyward and what was entered as a cash receipt. She stated that it seems like multiple payments were or a payment was broken up into smaller payments. She stated that they might have paid more than the stated amount, which must be added principal, which changes the calculation. She stated that she was able to pull cash receipts through October of 2025, but she knows that they made a payment last week. She stated that payment needed to be added to the calculations. She stated that brings them, depending on how much that payment is, to owing in the ballpark of a little over \$300,000. She stated that she would like the opportunity to send this information to them for review to make sure the records are the same for each of us. She stated that Faith Apostolic Christian Tabernacle Services, Inc. have paid a total of \$227,868.15. Mr. McMillan stated that at one point they were 37 payments behind. He stated that he will have to study this information, and he need time to make sure that things are correct. He stated that all Board members need to take the opportunity to review the information and discuss what we would like to do with the property.

### b. Greensboro Future Farmers of America (FFA) Property

Mr. McMillan stated that the Greensboro FFA started in December of 1961. He stated that the chapter was donated 20 acres of property on Telogia Creek Road in Greensboro. He stated that the property is all grown up and a portion of it is wet. He stated that the 4-H of Gadsden County was given the same amount of property by the same company and they want to sell their property, but they do not have the right away established at that time. He stated that for them to access their property we are going to have to give them right away. He stated that his viewpoint is that the Board has no use for this property. He stated that he had an attorney contact the Future Farmers of America Association for the State of Florida. He stated that the attorney recommended that the property be sold and the money from the sale of that property go directly to the Future Farmers of America at Gadsden County High School. Mr. Frost stated that he wanted to make sure that we are doing things the correct way when selling the property

### c. Quincy High School (GEMS) Property

Mr. Key stated that we are currently looking at moving all staff out of the Quincy High School (GEMS) building because of some safety issues. He stated that the district's risk manager, along with maintenance, has been looking at vacancies in other building locations. Mr. McMillan asked if there was a deadline for Ms. Denson and the Head Start Office staff to begin relocation, Mr. Key stated no, we are working on the issue.

## 11. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Key stated that the Board was given updates by academic services as well as support services. He stated that Dr. Jackson previously was talking about how the district actually wrote an application or wrote for a grant to FEMA for the generator. He stated that the district is working with Rostan to get the funding that has been allocated for the repairs made so we can recoup some of the money that FEMA had for us.

## 12. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Ms. Hannigon stated that she wanted to publicly make a request. She stated she touched on this during the recognitions from West Gadsden and GEMS. She stated that she understands that at certain junctures there is a need to make changes in personnel. She stated that she wanted to reiterate publicly that we provide as much support as possible for the campuses that have been impacted by leadership changes at Stewart Street, West Gadsden/GEMS as well as the high school. She requested google calendar to notate what is happening in the district. She stated from a housekeeping standpoint, if we could, I know that it has happened in other districts where there is a bit of contention regarding the time that individuals must address the Board, what they can and cannot say. She stated that maybe the statement could be made by the attorney or by the chair, before we go into citizens' comments. She stated that it happened this evening where one of our speakers thought they

should have had more time to finish their comments; however, they were restricted to 3 minutes. She stated that the Board could make the statement from the onset what the rules of engagement are regarding citizens' comments. She stated that this would help the process. She stated that she hopes that discussion regarding the relocation of Shanks students, and the impact it will have while the new K-8 school is being built. She stated that even though we are looking at August of 2027 to move into the new school, we are combining several schools. She stated that there would be some staffing changes. She stated that she thinks the sooner the Board could address reduction in staffing; the better it will be for those impacted to have an opportunity to seek employment elsewhere or even within the district.

Mr. Frost stated that Faith Apostolic Christian Tabernacle Services have put \$207,000 in this building. He stated that he does not feel right to have to go take it from them because they missed a couple of payments. He stated that he would not fight against the church. He stated that he recently spoke with the Band Director at West Gadsden Middle School, who stated that they would like to get the band back up and running.

13. The meeting adjourned at 8:13 p.m.