

REGULAR SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

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

July 25, 2023

6:00 P.M.

This 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. Charlie D. Frost; and Mr. Steve Scott. 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 Reverend Matthew Bryant, Sr., Pastor of St. John A.M.E. Church.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. RECOGNITIONS

Mr. Key stated that school leaders were in training at the district's leadership team meeting two weeks ago in Tallahassee. He stated that the leadership team participated in the PAEC Leadership training last week. He stated that he was excited about the leadership team and that they have started pre-planning. He stated that some teachers have started working with the administration trying to move the school district forward. He recognized school principals, assistant principals, assistant superintendents, directors, coordinators, and supervisors for the 2023 – 2024 school year.

Mrs. Dudley recognized Ms. Kameela Weeks and the Office of Professional Learning staff for the last two days of work at the Build a Teacher workshop. She stated that professional development has been very engaging and exciting. She stated that she enjoyed working with the teachers. She stated that the district has some of the best and brightest teachers.

ITEMS FOR CONSENT

Mr. McMillan entertained a motion to approve the remaining consent agenda. The motion was made by Mrs. Karema D. Dudley, seconded by Mr. Steve Scott and carried unanimously.

5. REVIEW OF MINUTES

- a. June 27, 2023, 4:30 p.m. - School Board Financial Workshop
- b. June 27, 2023, 6:00 p.m. - Regular School Board Meeting
- c. July 6, 2023, 4:00 p.m. – Student Hearing
- d. July 6, 2023, 5:00 p.m. – Student Hearing
- e. July 11, 2023, 6:00 p.m. – Special School Board Meeting

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

6. PERSONNEL MATTERS (resignations, retirements, recommendations, leaves of absence, terminations of services, volunteers, and job descriptions)
 - a. Personnel 2022 – 2023

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
7. AGREEMENT/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATIONS
 - a. Cooperative Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Independent Contractor Leslie Peterson, MS CCC SLP

Fund Source: FEFP
Amount: \$60.00 per hour

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
 - b. Contractual Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Speech Language Pathologist Erika Raines

Fund Source: FEFP
Amount: \$59.00 per hour for services provided for one school
\$60.00 per hour for services provided for more than one school
\$39.00 per hour for services provided for one school
\$40.00 per hour for services provided for more than one school

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
 - c. Contractual Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Talk of the Town Speech Therapy, LLC

Fund Source: FEFP
Amount: SLP/PT/OT (\$60.00) per hour
SLPA (\$40.00) per hour

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
 - d. Contractual Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Inter-County (Leon County) Transfer of Exceptional Students

Fund Source: N/A
Amount: N/A

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
 - e. Cooperative Service Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and More Ability Therapy Services, LLC

Fund Source: FEFP
Amount: \$60.00 per hour (for actual hours worked) Occupational Therapy
\$45.00 per hour (for actual hours worked (Occupational Therapy Assistant)

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.
 - f. Contractual Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Aubrey’s Heart Therapy Services, PLLC

Fund Source: IDEA
Amount: SLP (\$60.00) per hour, SLPA (\$40.00) per hour

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- g. Contractual Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and The Stepping Stones Group

Fund Source: FEFP

Amount: \$61.00 for Psychologist per hour
\$58.00 for SLP per hour

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- h. Cooperative Service Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Florida State University Multidisciplinary Center

Fund Source: FSU Multidisciplinary Center for Florida Legislature

Amount: N/A

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- i. Agreement between the School Board of Gadsden County and Eric Rodriguez, DBA Lamier Technical Services

Fund Source: ESSER III

Amount: \$55,000.00

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- j. MOA between Gadsden County School Board and Florida Department of Health

Fund Source: General Revenue

Amount: \$100,100.00

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

8. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

- a. K12 Comprehensive Evidence-Based Reading Plan (CERP)

Fund Source: FEFP

Amount: \$350,280.00

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

- b. Approval of the 2023 – 2024 PAEC Course Catalog with Driver Education/Traffic Safety and Athletic Coaching Add-on Endorsement Plans

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.

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

- b. Personnel 2023 – 2024

Mrs. Dudley spoke highly of Ms. Valarie Jones, former principal of West Gadsden Middle School. She stated that Ms. Jones has built a culture and climate at West Gadsden Middle School. She stated that her parents and students may miss her at the school, but she still works for the district. She asked Ms. Jones to come forward and share how she will be serving the students in her new position as Director of Education Transformation Office.

Ms. Jones stated that she could not have created this culture and climate alone but with the help of Ms. Kimberly Cummings and Ms. Shannon Williams, Assistant Principals. She stated that one of her mentors told her that you couldn't move a school if there are cracks in the culture and climate. She stated that she started to peel back the layers of student achievement and noticed that many of the schools came very close to hitting the "C" mark. She stated that the district has a progress monitoring issue. She stated that some teachers are out-of-field, but people should be in place to help build those teachers' capacity with their content ology, paragon or their instructional delivery. She stated that the principals do not have individuals to help them support and monitor student achievement in their buildings. She stated that points are what get students to the next learning gain. She stated that the Education Transformation Office would provide support to schools in the form of instructional capacity for the teachers, provide side by side, push in and pull out support for the teachers. She stated that support would be provided to teachers to help them become highly effective teachers to move the district forward.

In response to Mr. McMillan's question to Mr. Key about who will be a part of the Education Transformation Department, Mr. Key stated that the department will consist of a secondary math coach, an elementary math coach, instructional coach, secondary ELA reading coach and elementary ELA reading coach. He stated that science would be added later.

Mr. Scott asked if all the appointees in the supervisory capacity were qualified for the positions they are being appointed. Mr. Key stated they all are. Mr. Scott stated that he was concerned about combining one principal to serve both schools (Gadsden Elementary Magnet School and West Gadsden Middle School); and asked if this is an attempt to bring both schools to a single school. Mr. Key stated no, and he does not have the authority to combine the schools; that is the School Board's authority. He stated that it is an estimate that there are not 450 students combined between the two schools. He stated that he spoke about reducing administrators in the workshop. He stated that this was an attempt to get the district where it needed to be with the FTE count per school. He stated that GEMS would be a school within a school at the new K-8 school. Mr. Scott asked for an explanation between a magnet school (GEMS) and a traditional school. Mr. Key stated that the lines are gray because in the past GEMS targeted the academically talented and gifted students, however, that is not the case now for GEMS. He stated that GEMS has become a regular school because of population FTE count. He stated that the district has to establish a very robust academic and gifted program in this county. Mr. Scott asked if there was any type of application process for students entering Havana Magnet School. Mr. Key stated no, Havana Magnet School was previously targeted for music and arts. He stated that Havana Magnet School serve students zoned for the area. Mr. Scott reminded everyone that GEMS is the highest performing school in the county and has been recognized by the State of Florida and continues year after year.

Mr. Frost stated that he received numerous calls and some feel that the Board is rubber-stamping items. He stated that he was concerned about voting on issues that have already taken place. He stated that he was concerned that Mr. Bryant was the district's risk manager and he would not want to burden him with trying to do risk management and operate the transportation department. He stated that he would like to see the two positions separated.

Mr. Key stated that as a cost saving measure he is reducing the number of administrators in the district. He stated that Mr. Bryant was asked about both positions and he stated "yes", he could handle both positions.

Ms. Johnson questioned whether the risk manager made sure there is not a potential accident waiting to happen. Mr. Key stated that the risk manager along with the school safety officer are doing that.

Mr. McMillan stated that he represents the district on the Florida School Boards Insurance Trust (FSBIT). He stated that a risk manager is a full-time position if it was done right. He stated that saving money could be done by reducing the risk. He stated that a good risk manager when not investigating an accident, provided training in the schools and maintenance department. He stated that Mr. Bryant was hired for the position of risk manager, and he should remain in that position. He stated that he is not sure if the right thing was done to hire Mr. Bryant as the director of transportation and risk manager.

Mr. Frost stated for the record that the two positions should be separated and have one individual serving each. He stated that money could be saved somewhere else.

Mrs. Dudley asked for a point of clarity if Mr. Frost was recommending the positions remain separate.

Mr. Key stated that his recommendation would remain the same to have Mr. Bryant to be the Director of Transportation. He stated that everyone should look at Florida Statute 286.011. He stated that he already knew what was going to be pulled before the Board Members came to the meeting. He stated that everyone needed to be careful.

Mr. McMillan stated to the Superintendent that he will ask him to leave the meeting and that he was going to respect the Board. Mr. Key stated that "you will respect me". Mr. McMillan asked for the safety officer, who was absent.

Mr. Frost stated to staff that; "before you go, remember you work for the Board and you may have to face some of the consequences."

Mr. Key asked Mrs. Minnis to talk to the Board. He stated that he was filing a formal complaint. He stated that the Board violated the sunshine law and he has recorded conversation amongst the Board members. Mr. Key and staff left the meeting.

Mrs. Dudley stated that this is what happens when there is continuous disrespect and disregard for the Board. She stated that the roles and responsibilities are when you try to work with the individual and have been holding hands singing Kum Ba Yah and now this is where we are. She stated at the last Board meeting that we are supposed to be a team.

Mr. Leroy McMillan made a motion to have the principal at West Gadsden Middle School and Gadsden Elementary School not be a combined position. He stated that it would give the assistant principals an opportunity to rise in the system. Mr. Charlie D. Frost seconded the motion. Secondly, Mr. McMillan made a motion to not hire Mr. Matthew Bryant as the transportation director. He stated that the job for the risk manager is an important job.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Board has to be concerned about health and safety for all students and staff.

Mrs. Minnis suggested the Board not talk about an individual but the jobs remaining separately.

Mrs. Dudley stated for a point of clarity to make sure she stays in her lane. She stated that it is disheartened to always hear "day-to-day operation". She stated that she wants to make sure she is doing her job. She stated that it is nothing personal; it is all about business at the end of the day. She stated that she does not care whose toes she steps on; that is just what it is. She asked who has the statutory power or duties and responsibilities to decide to combine positions or keep them separately. She wanted to know if the responsibility belonged to the superintendent or the board.

Mrs. Minnis stated that the Board establishes positions. She stated that technically the Superintendent has not combined the positions; he has assigned one person to both positions. She stated that the Board still has the two positions. She stated that the Board's concern is that one position deals with safety, financial and security for both positions, which could put the district at risk and could be the Board's assertion for good cause as to why one person should not do both jobs. She stated that ultimately if it goes any further, a court or an arbitrator would decide it.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she had a previous conversation with the Superintendent regarding his plans to have one person perform both jobs. She stated that after speaking with the Superintendent she researched the duties and responsibilities of both positions. She stated that she does not think that will be a sound decision to have one person perform two jobs. She stated that the district is already budget tight and it is the Board's job as the governing body to protect all. She stated that the Board has went along to get along on many things and not have exercised the duties and responsibilities as a Board. She stated that the students deserve better than this. She stated that the Board and the Superintendent has some accountability because things could have been done differently. She stated that she has always tried to support and work with the Superintendent.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Board's job is to protect all students, teachers, instructional staff, non-instructional staff, principals and even the Superintendent. She stated that health and safety all day long. She stated that she would not be jeopardized with something that does not make sense. She stated that the students would not be jeopardized with such nonsense.

Mr. McMillan stated that he takes part responsibility. He stated that since the Superintendent has been on board, he has bent over backwards to work with him. He stated that he could never get the Superintendent to work with him. He stated that when he goes into his office it is always "no". He stated that at this point and time he is no longer willing to accept that kind of behavior. He stated that it was an unfair act for the Superintendent to behave as he did. He stated that if the Superintendent was willing to sit and talk with Board members individually and tell them what he was thinking; the Board would not be in this position tonight. He stated that the Board is not here to make decisions for him. He stated that he is responsible for the day-to-day operation of the district. He stated that the Board and the Superintendent needed to work together.

Mr. McMillan entertained a motion to keep the Director of Transportation and Risk Manager Positions as two separate positions. Mr. Charlie D. Frost made a motion to keep the two positions separate with different individuals doing the jobs. The motion was seconded by Mr. Leroy McMillan and carried unanimously.

Following discussion, Mrs. Karema D. Dudley made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation on agenda item #6b with the exception of having a combined principal at West Gadsden Middle School and Gadsden Elementary Magnet School, and to have a single employee as Director of Transportation and Risk Manager. The motion was seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

c. Gadsden County School Board Proposed Salary Schedule 2023 - 2024

Following discussion, Mrs. Dudley requested the Board table agenda item #6c until a workshop was scheduled for further discussion. The motion was seconded by Ms. Cathy S. Johnson.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she wants the Board to be able to afford and sustain the pay raises. She stated that everyone deserves a pay raise.

Mrs. Mandela addressed the Board to request that information shared in the workshop be provided online for the public.

The Board unanimously voted to table agenda item #6c until a workshop was scheduled. Mr. McMillan stated that he agrees with Mrs. Dudley's statement that the Board is for pay raises, but has to know where the district stands financially and whether or not the district can sustain the pay raises. He stated that he wanted to make sure the lowest paid staff are taken care of as well as everyone else.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

9. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

None.

10. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Mr. Frost stated that the Board has a job to do. He stated that it is not about personal feeling but about business. He stated that the Board has to make a decision on the information presented to them. He stated that the Board is responsible when the State, Governor or Department of Education come and ask questions.

Ms. Johnson requested an update on the grievance policy. She stated that she wants to be fair and listen to the employees.

Mrs. Minnis stated that the Board does not get involved in the grievance process. She cautioned the Board getting into the grievance process.

Mrs. Dudley asked for understanding on the grievance process and filing in a timely manner after May 15. Mrs. Minnis stated that there is no role for the Board in the grievance process. She stated that there is a mechanism in place to shorten the timeframe and the different steps to go through. She stated that there are mechanisms in place that go up to arbitration. She stated that generally the Board members do not get involved in the process. Mrs. Dudley stated that the Board does not want the process drawn out. She stated that step one is to report to the site administrator and the site administrator if it takes more time to respond to grievances filed after May 15. Mrs. Minnis stated that if it gets to an arbitrator, the arbitrator could say that the site administrator failed to respond in a timely manner and make a decision.

Ms. Johnson stated that the Board need to make some changes to the policy if the evaluation process is not followed.

Mrs. Dudley asked what the consequences were for site administrators who do not respond to grievances in a timely manner. Mrs. Minnis stated that grievances are one thing, and whether the principals are doing their job and duties appropriately is not part of the grievance process. She stated that would be the superintendent, assistant superintendents or the directors to make sure principals are doing their jobs. Mrs. Dudley asked for a copy of the grievance process.

Mrs. Mandela addressed the Board and stated that Mrs. Minnis mentioned the appeals committee. She stated that there is no timeline in the collective bargaining contract and that is why it is the Board's decision to make the timeline shorter. She stated that there is not an abbreviated specific timeline. She stated that there is a timeline for the normal processes of grievances. She stated that in terms of expediting the process it was discussed that an appeals committee would be fair. She stated that the Instructional Personnel Evaluation Model was given to principals, but not shared with some of the teachers. She stated that the Instructional Personnel Evaluation Model specifically tells teachers when they are to be evaluated, how long they are to be evaluated, how many times a year to be evaluated, when the first one will start, when the second will start, and when to expect feedback. She stated that if teachers did not receive the document, it is a violation of statute. She asked if an investigation could be done to make sure the principals followed instructions.

Mrs. Minnis clarified that there is a process in the collective bargaining agreement for an evaluation committee but does not include the Board. She stated that the Board is not included in expediting the process.

Mrs. Dudley read Florida Statute 1012.22(1) (a) regarding the statutory duties, responsibilities and powers of the Board and Superintendent. She stated that to "proceed on its own motion if the Superintendent does not offer a qualified person under these circumstances: failure to submit a recommendation within the time prescribed by law, failure to nominate a person to fill a vacancy within a reasonable time, and if the first, second and third nominations are rejected for good cause". She stated

the Board has been asking about a finance director for a while. She stated that a finance director is crucial to the Board making good sound decisions. She stated that is one of the reasons the Board is not comfortable right now with giving raises that employees deserve. She stated that the Board has gone too long with the excuses and about what is not happening in finance. She stated that in September 2022, the Board approved a short contract for someone to bring support and help in finance. She stated that the Board has to be more responsible and more knowledgeable of what their responsibilities are. She stated that the term “day-to-day operation” is always tossed around and she wants to stay in her lane as a Board member. She stated that she wants to make sure that the Board is able to do their job and do their job well. She stated that she was concerned about student enrollment and teacher needs. She stated that she was concerned about Stewart Street Elementary School culture and morale being low, and the school grade moving from a “D” to an “F”. She stated that all the blame is not always on the teachers. She stated that at some point the district needed to start looking at the leadership. She stated that she is expecting better things at Stewart Street Elementary School. She stated that the blame needs to be stopped in saying that there need to be more teachers. She stated that Stewart Street once received accolades at the state level. She stated that she was tired of Carter Parramore Academy and the students being labeled “bad kids”. She stated that it starts and ends with school leadership. She stated that the Superintendent is not responsible for controlling every culture and morale at every school. She stated that is why he has school leaders. She stated that the narrative has to change at Carter Parramore Academy. She stated that she wants every school to have fully certified teachers like Greensboro Elementary School. She stated that she represents the district as a whole.

Mr. Scott stated for clarity that the Board has received information on the list of teachers who were not recommended back for this school year. He stated that he wished to schedule a workshop to discuss and review the evaluation instrument for school leaders.

Mr. McMillan stated that he was concerned about the school grades. He stated that the district still needed to acquire the pool property from the city to build the new K-8 school. He stated that the architect is concerned about the pool property because the new school design includes the pool property. He stated that he was concerned about the lawn maintenance at the district office and schools. He stated that he was concerned about Gadsden Technical College. He stated that he is not sure what is going on at Gadsden Technical College with very few students. He stated that he was concerned about whether the right director was in place for Gadsden Technical College. He requested the leader of Gadsden Technical College come and share with the Board his vision for increasing student enrollment.

11. The meeting adjourned at 7:45 p.m.