

SCHOOL BOARD WORKSHOP

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

October 3, 2023

3:30 P.M.

The workshop 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. 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 workshop was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 3:30 p.m.

2. Purchase Order Request for Pro Playgrounds

Mr. Frost stated that he was concerned with where the playground equipment would be placed, if it can be moved, and if so would it be damaged. He asked why it was just happening now because all playground equipment is a hazard. He asked where Bold Step was located; Mr. Key stated Bold Step is located at Carter Parramore Academy. Mr. Frost asked if Bold Step had any playground equipment. Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated about the purchase of playground equipment in the spring of 2023, the district had a safety inspection by the Department of Education and it was recommended to not allow the children to play on the current playground equipment because the equipment was not up to code. She stated that after an investigation from other districts, the district decided to go with this company (Pro Playgrounds) as a piggyback on a district in the region. She stated that the district is replacing the playground equipment with safe equipment to meet code requirements. Mr. Frost asked why the district waited since March. Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that it takes time for the risk manager and others to review the findings and make a decision to ensure equipment is up to code. She stated that it was written into the grant and funding secured. She stated that since the district could piggyback the equipment did not have to be bid. She stated that between May and September it has taken time for due diligence. Mr. Key stated that this is late conversation concerning playground equipment and in the past, there has been no movement for equipment. He stated that the district did not just start talking about this. He stated that the ESSER 3 grant can fund the replacement of playground equipment across the district, but there has been no movement. He stated that FSBIT also has discussed the risk of our playground equipment and Mr. Hudson has been moving the process. Mr. Frost asked if the playground equipment could be moved, Mr. Hudson stated that moving the equipment was one of the things that was discussed and it can be relocated without damage. Mr. Scott stated that this includes everything except the ground preparation. Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that the key is to move the equipment safely and this company has done this before. Mr. Frost stated that Gadsden Elementary Magnet School playground equipment is old. Mr. Key stated that Gadsden Elementary Magnet School playground equipment is newer than other schools. Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that the schools listed are the ones involved.

Ms. Johnson stated that the district need to be diligent to make sure the children are safe while playing.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that the district staff would be attending a meeting on playground safety. She stated that the district partner with FSBIT to do regular safety visits. Mr. Hudson and Mr. Riley are acting on concerns expeditiously. Mrs. Dudley asked if we had already planned to replace playground equipment prior to this, Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated yes.

Mr. McMillan stated that the P. O's could have been handled differently. He stated that since there were inspections the Board should have been notified. He asked that when serious issues come up such as playground equipment, the Board should be notified. He stated that if he had known earlier this would have already been handled, and there would be no need for a workshop.

Mr. Key stated that he would not get into any details, but this is not the first time this has been discussed, but it is the first time an agenda item has been presented. Mr. McMillan stated that this is the first time he has been told the playground equipment failed inspection. He stated that he was upset that the Board was not notified that an inspection took place and failed. Mr. Key stated that Mr. Hunter did not replace the playground equipment as he was instructed.

Mr. Frost asked for an explanation on the difference in the amount given to each school. Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that the company visited each site and based on their observations and the administrator's ideas the proposals were created. She stated that the new playground equipment will be age appropriate and will pass inspection. Mr. McMillan stated that the cost is not a concern it is that the equipment need replacing. He stated that he would have liked to of known about the inspection and the Board could have taken action immediately.

Mr. McMillan stated that the playground equipment be brought to the next Board meeting for approval. Mr. Key asked for a Special Board meeting. The Special Board meeting was scheduled for Tuesday, October 10, 2023 at 5:00 p.m.

3. Purchase Order Request for Shaw Integrated Solutions

Mr. McMillan stated that he was concerned with the cost to replace carpet in the Walker Building when the schools need updates. Mr. Key stated that this is not the first time carpet has been discussed; it is that the previous director did not do anything with it. Mr. Hudson has been given instructions to go throughout the district to replace carpet.

Ms. Johnson stated that her concern was with the students. She stated that that she is more concerned about the field house and students not having lockers. She stated that when she looked at the ESSER funding and what it can be used for the district has the funds.

Mr. Key stated that some carpet has already been replaced. Mr. Frost stated that he wants to make sure schools are in place before the district office. Mr. Key stated that he has no issue with not doing the district office and that is the reason it has not been brought to the Board earlier. He stated that staff at the district office (four key persons) have been impacted by COVID. He stated that it is not just the school impacted with no AC, it happens at the district office. He stated that we are trying to fix things so they do not continue to happen.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she was not questioning the carpet but wants to take care of the schools first, then the Max Walker Building.

4. Ethica Contractual Agreement

Mr. Scott stated that the Ethica contract seem to favor the company in not being liable if something happened. He asked if the district would be accountable for a mistake the contractor made. He stated that he was opposed to the liability language.

Mrs. Minnis stated that she was concerned that the contract states the district will indemnify the company. She stated that if the company is inadequate, the district could not go back against the company. She stated that if the intent is only for things the district did or did not do, she suggested changing the language in the contract. Mrs. Farlin stated that the contract language has been amended. Mr. McMillan stated that the contract would come back to the Board on October 10th.

5. Student Code of Conduct

Mr. McMillan asked about the Code of Student Conduct format – line thru is removed, and additions in red. Mr. Frost stated that he is always questioned about what we allow students to when fighting, jumping on other students and only receive a 3 - day suspension, then come back to school and do the same thing again. He stated that nothing must be in place if it is still happening. He stated that he does not know if the Code is strong enough and if more need to be done to deter students from fighting.

Mr. Key stated that some changes on page #36 need to be made with the number of days. Mrs. Buckhalt stated that there were several meetings with administrators. She stated that she is not an expert in behavior and is not an educator. She stated that she took the suggestions of administrators and the changes were recommended. Mr. Key stated that he did not know about some of the changes and that the number of days 5-10 need to be put back into the Code. He stated that ESE students are different. He stated that if the school does not send information for an expulsion he could not act on it. He stated that he has met with principals and stated to them that they must follow the Code.

Mr. Frost asked for an explanation of how many days a student can get for an incident. Mr. Key stated that a group fight is an expellable offense. He stated that the principals should assign 5 days and then have a hearing and then the school decides the action and send to the Superintendent. Mr. Frost stated that he wants a uniformed decision that is consistent throughout the district. Mr. Key stated that everything in that section need to remain as it previously was (page 36).

Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned about the different classes – (class 1 page 33 and 34). She asked why four offenses and then in school suspension. She stated that is too lenient for the students. Mr. Key stated that this is to allow teachers to have communication with the parent. He stated that there is an intervention process. Mrs. Dudley stated that administrators need to be involved early on before too many offenses.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned about corporal punishment. Mr. Key stated that parent permission was needed before the use of corporal punishment. Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned about the climate change with the middle and high school students and the use of corporal punishment. She stated that the safety of the staff need to be taken in consideration. Mrs. Minnis stated that the Board's time limit to review corporal punishment is every two years and that time has expired. Mr. McMillan suggested that corporal punishment be removed from the Code of Student Conduct.

6. Positions

- Risk Manager
- Budget Director
- Food Service Director

Mr. Key stated that the district is trying to find ways to combine or eliminate positions in order to save money. He stated that the budget director position was never advertised. He stated that the assistant superintendent for finance was filled by Mr. Jalen Jackson. He stated that the food service director position would be advertised. He stated that he does not think the director of transportation should be the person to handle risk management. Mr. Frost stated that Mr. Bryant received training and the insurance company (FSBIT) recommended the position. He stated that the risk manager position should be filled.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she was concerned that she has not been given enough information about combining positions. She stated that she wants the position information to come to the Board if the positions are combined and want to know the salary.

Mr. McMillan stated that agenda items would be discussed in a workshop prior to Board meetings.

Mr. Key stated that Mrs. Buckhalt is in charge of safe schools. He stated that with the requirements for safe schools she would not have time to do both positions. He stated that in some districts the director of transportation and the director of facilities are doing the duties of risk manager. He stated that we must have better communication. He stated that he is in the process of trying to find out what positions the district can do without in order to put money into the employee's pocket.

Mr. McMillan asked about the budget director position. Mr. Mays stated that the budget director position has not been used since Mr. Milton was superintendent. Mr. Frost stated that Mrs. Wood left and her position was vacant. He stated that Mr. Mays is director of finance. Mr. McMillan asked if the district has the position assistant director of finance. Mr. Key stated that Dr. Sonya Jackson watches closely to make sure we follow rules.

Mrs. Dudley asked for the employees in the finance department. Mr. Mays gave a breakdown and stated that staff has been reduced from 12 employees to eight employees. Mr. Mays stated that the finance department was at full staff when Mr. Key was elected, but prior to his administration in 2015 there were 12 employees. Mr. Mays stated that he would provide Mr. Frost with a list of staff in his department.

Mr. McMillan stated that benefits are not being taken out correctly. He stated that when the district makes a mistake, insurance coverage could be denied. Mr. Key stated that these are issues that we are working to correct. He stated that some of the issues are with the vendor and not on finance. Mr. Mays stated that some deductions are not showing because benefits start in October. He stated that direct statements are being sent to the vendors, which is now requiring vendors to go back and reinstate.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she wants to workshop the open enrollment process and vendors. She stated that she thinks all vendors should be under American Fidelity.

Mr. McMillan stated that he wanted to know how much money is being offered for the school food director position. Mr. Key stated that it is a coordinator salary and the correct title is school food service operations manager that oversees the warehouse and menus. Dr. Sonya Jackson stated that the job description changed in the area of qualifications and background.

7. Teacher Supply Allocation

Mr. Frost stated that teachers must have receipts. Mr. McMillan stated that he was concerned about the time the teachers would receive the pay. He stated that he wanted to give the teachers their supply allocation earlier. He stated that he wanted this to be the last time the district to use Class Wallet. Mr. Key stated that that the teacher supply allocation was declared as income for staff. He stated that he was concerned about the receipts for auditing purposes. Mr. McMillan stated that teachers are saying they want their money. Mrs. Minnis stated that there are all kind of consequences if the proper distribution and documentation are not kept and handled correctly. Mrs. Minnis stated that she would research the information and provide an update to the Board.

8. New K-8 School (Project Manager)

Mr. Frost stated that he wants to make sure that the district gets the best of the best. He stated that he does not want anyone to think the Board has already selected a project manager. Mr. Key stated that he believes Mr. Hudson is capable of doing the job. He stated that Mr. Hudson is a certified contractor. He stated that there might need to be additional staff in finance to assist with the new school project. Mr. Frost stated that he wants to make sure that this is the only thing this person would be responsible for in finance. Mrs. Dudley stated that she wanted to make it clear that the Board was not recommending Mr. Hunter to be the project manager for the new school. She stated that the project manager position needed to be bid. Ms. Johnson stated that she wants to advertise the project manager position.

Ms. Johnson stated that she wants the Board to complete the Master Board Training.

Mr. Baker stated that he has heard the Board agree with the project manager's qualification and advertising for the position. He stated that there would be a lot of extra work. He stated that he guarantees the new school project will be a success. He stated that he does not want to be the fox. He stated that this was just an idea brought to the Board to make the project go smoother.

9. The workshop adjourned at 6:00 p.m.