

SCHOOL BOARD WORKSHOP

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

July 14, 2025

5:00 P.M.

The workshop was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Ms. Cathy S. Johnson, Vice Chair; 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. Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman, was absent.

1. Call To Order

The workshop was called to order by the Vice Chair, Ms. Cathy S. Johnson, at 5:00 p.m.

2. Opening Prayer

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

3. Pledge of Allegiance

Recited in unison.

Items for Discussion

4. Code of Student Conduct 2025 – 2026

Mr. Scott asked if the progressive discipline would apply to repeated infractions. He stated that he was concerned about employees or agents not being held liable for wireless communication devices lost, stolen or confiscated and brought to district property. He wanted to know if this was something the district could hold to. Mr. Key responded yes. Mr. Scott stated that on page 11, under section 1.02 illegal organization and teen court. He stated that from his understanding there is no teen court in Gadsden County. Mr. Key stated that the Department of Juvenile Justice is trying to get teen court reinstituted. He stated that civil citation is currently in place. He stated that the document will read civil citation / teen court. Mr. Scott stated that civil citation has to be authorized by a law enforcement officer. Lieutenant Buckhalt stated yes. Ms. Johnson stated that in other words, before the Board can approve the Code of Student Conduct handbook, all of the other information has to be approved. Mr. Key stated that civil citations are currently going on in Gadsden County; it is the teen court that is waiting to be re-established. He stated that he met with representatives from the Florida Department of Juvenile Justice regarding teen court. He stated that conversations with the State Attorney are going on regarding re-establishing teen court. Mr. Scott asked what was restorative practice when it comes to the offense on page 11 at the bottom – inappropriate public display of affection, restorative practice. Mr. Key stated that it still means the same. He stated that training will be provided. He stated that kids would still be taught the right thing to do in any situation or the appropriate means of doing things. Mr. Scott that he was questioning the strategy and the details. He stated that it means giving a child another chance and that it flows through the document several times. Mr. Key stated that he is trying to correct misbehavior. Mr. Scott stated that he did not understand extra-curricular activities and mandatory 10 days on page 12 of the document. Mr. Key apologized to Mr. Scott, he stated that he did not have the updated document. He stated that mandatory mean ISS (In School Suspension). He stated that the student will get 5 days of ISS if they decline. He stated that if they decline something that is mandatory they are going to get five days ISS along with whatever consequences that go along with

it. Mr. Scott stated that he was reluctant to say anything else based upon the old packet and him just receiving the updated version today. Mr. Key stated that the pages are still the same and questions can be based upon from the old packet. Mr. Scott stated that on page 14, fighting mutual combat, report to law enforcement, every time there's a fight, a mutual agreed upon fight that law enforcement must be involved. Mr. Key stated that there are certain things that students do must be referred to law enforcement, but law enforcement does not have to take any action. Mr. Scott stated that the district is reporting discipline to the Department of Education. He questioned whether the law enforcement recommendation was a part of the report to DOE. Mr. Key stated that it only becomes something major when students have been expelled. He stated that whatever the consequences for the student must match whatever is being sent to DOE. He stated that for example, if it got to the point that they had a fight, it ended up somebody getting hurt, then law enforcement will file charges. He stated that however, if it's just a fight it might get upgraded or it may not even be in the system as a fight. It may end up being battery if law enforcement files any charges. But if it's just a mutual fight you just talking to law enforcement. In case you want to, you still may want to do civil citation. For that student, it's still being referred to law enforcement just for their opinion, but the system is going to pull everything that is in focus. Mr. Scott asked for clarity on whether disruption on school activity can be labeled as any type of discipline problem or is it only for fights or something like that. Mr. Key stated that would be disruption of school functions. He stated that disruption is when the administrator has to shut the campus down and move the kids to different areas until they get things under control. He stated that is a major offense that can be expulsion as well. Mr. Scott stated that he was concerned about district employees being assaulted by students. He stated that it is mentioned a couple of times in the document. He stated that it need to be more detailed to not apply to elementary or kindergarten students. He stated that whether an employee gets hit trying to stop a fight intentional or unintentional, he is concerned about protecting employees in every possible way. Mr. Key stated that page 32 – 33 deals with the consequences of striking a school district employee or non-student resulting in bodily harm.

Ms. Hannigon asked Mr. Key how does the district adhere to and enforce the policy, and make sure there are consistent practices across the board, whether it is a Level 1 or Level 3 infraction, just considering the fact that everything won't necessarily make it to your desk or one of your assistant superintendent's desk. So, then what is that mechanism to ensure consistency? Mr. Key stated that there are words throughout the document such as "may" or "will" that gives the principal the discretion to handle at the school level or refer to the district office. He stated that there are some things that must be referred to the district office such as drug offenses and guns. Ms. Hannigon stated that she was having trouble aligning things between the old and the new document. Mr. Key stated that most of the language did not change. Ms. Hannigon stated to Mr. Key that you requested feedback from the Board regarding recording fights. She stated that he wanted to know if the current policy was written to weak. She wanted to know how the policies discussed at the retreat regarding cellular devices align with the policies that took place in the legislature? Mr. Key stated that statute says that wireless communication devices, including cell phones, are prohibited throughout the entire school day for elementary and middle school students. He stated that for high school students cell phone use is prohibited during instructional time unless expressly directed by a teacher for educational purposes in a designated area. He stated that high school students might be permitted to use phones during non-instructional time such as before and after school, lunch breaks, and passing periods, depending on the individual school district policies. He stated that when it comes to recording fights or anything of that nature, the students are going to be in violation of the code of conduct and board policy at that point in time. He stated that moving back to one of Mr. Scott's questions earlier. He stated that in years past if I collected a phone as the principal and I lost that phone, we would be responsible for paying for another phone or, getting that student another phone. He stated that is not the case anymore. He stated that you do not have to; we do not have to be responsible if a phone gets lost and if a student says, somebody stole my phone. He stated that students could have their phones during lunchtime because it is not a protected time. He stated that when it comes to recording fights or anything of that nature, they're going to be in violation of the student code of conduct. Mrs. Minnis stated that what the Superintendent is saying is correct. She stated that drawing the line on when wireless devices can be used and how they can be used. She stated to make it clear and understood that recording is not acceptable. She stated that there's a problem with recording voices and faces in Florida when you do not have permission to do so. She stated that it is a problem to post other students' identity on the internet. She stated that this is a step in the right direction

to have a clear policy to still allow students to use their phones, but to have directions. She stated that if any student were to record another student without permission, it's a violation of policy and code. Ms. Hannigon asked what was the district's approach in dealing with this day today? Mr. Key stated that the principal (Mr. Ball) of Gadsden County High School was at the meeting. He stated that Mr. Ball has already instituted and put things in place. He stated that the student's phones will have to be powered off or placed inside of their book bags during school time. He stated that if they're walking in the classroom with their cell phones in hand, there are pouches that are ready for the students to place inside locked up. He stated that the biggest challenge is really at the high school than the rest of our schools. He stated that the cell phone issue was already established at the alternative school, where the students are not allowed to bring cell phones at all and that actually worked out. He stated that in some cases, the students turned in their cell phones every morning, and when it was time to leave, they received their cell phones back. He stated that one thing that he has learned when talking to other superintendents is that children know their phone, and mom has another phone that doesn't work that's sitting at the house. He stated that what the students will do is bring that old phone and that's what they put inside of the basket. He stated that it is still having access to their own phone. Ms. Hannigon asked for clarity on the amount of time a student has when placed in ISS or OSS. Mr. Key stated that he will have to go back and check his notes. Ms. Hannigon stated that that at the retreat it was mentioned that the code of student conduct was on the secondary level, and that the Board was going to look at doing an elementary level. She stated that as the Board attempt to approve the code of conduct, she's taking it as those adjustments will be made as being a secondary level and adding an elementary level. Mr. Key stated that with the Code of Student Conduct many of the infractions did not change. He stated that one that has been added is input from teachers. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know how student's absences are handled. Mr. Key stated that one thing that we found out is that our students are very smart. They would get their parents phone and block the district number or the school number. Therefore, many of the parents did not receive any of the phone calls that were made to the number. Then the teacher or the administrator would try calling the parent on their own personal cell phone and they would get the parent to find that again, they were blocked. He stated that certified letters are sent out to parents to let them know the number of days the students have missed. He stated that parents are going to have to assist us with this situation. Ms. Hannigon stated that parents are saying that now that we are looking into addressing our student code of conduct that we need to address and look into our staff regarding conduct. She stated that this is a valid point and wanted to mention this. She stated that she was perusing through board policy and the union contracts. She stated that she was on board 100% with wherever documents we need to put more teeth in. She wanted to know when another meeting would be held to discuss the changes from this meeting. Mr. Key stated that notes are taken of everything mentioned at this meeting. He stated that the district would follow the code of ethics for educators in Gadsden County.

Ms. Johnson stated that she was concerned about reporting bullying and harassment. Mr. Key stated that there are some things in place for students to let staff know if there is a bullying or harassment situation. He stated that the student would have to write a statement of what happened and let someone know. He stated that the Fortify FL Link: <https://getfortifyfl.com/> can be used for reporting. Ms. Johnson stated that there will a different student of conduct for the elementary students. Mr. Key stated yes, the principals have been made aware of the difference. Ms. Johnson questioned if the parent letters go out certified. Mr. Russ-Sills stated that parent letters are sent via regular mail, but when the parents receive letters that cover statute regarding absentee and truancy those letters are sent via certified. He stated that the information is also documented in focus. Ms. Hannigon asked what the call to action in those letters was. Mr. Russ-Sills stated that would be at the discretion of the schools. Mr. Frost stated that it would be good to establish a good rapport with our parents and our guardians so that when students come to school with phones, they can be taken up as they walk into the building even the hoodies. He stated that the district has to have to have a good rapport with the community. He stated that the district need volunteers.

5. Enterprise Fleet Management

Mr. Bryant stated that the district's vehicles needed to be up-dated and repaired. He stated that the vehicles are outdated and many parts that were needed for the vehicles are expensive. He stated that Enterprise Fleet Management has come up with a plan so that the district will be able to rotate vehicles throughout the years and to have a leasing agreement with them to have better vehicles. He stated that the numbers for the

leasing plan is included in the presentation. Ms. Johnson asked if the Board could have a copy of the paperwork referencing the vehicles and everything that has needed to have them brought up to date. She asked if there was an estimated amount of monies, the district spend each year for maintenance on vehicles.

Mr. Jean Bordes and Mr. Simon Ortega addressed the Board regarding Enterprise Fleet Management. Mr. Ortega stated that for the past year and a half the Enterprise team has been working with your team, Gadsden County Schools, to come up with a plan for how we can rotate out your older vehicles and replace them with newer up-to-date vehicles. He stated that the packet that you are looking at is an analysis on how everything would be worked through. He stated that if we are trying to make sure that we rotate the vehicles out within years and by age and mileage, it is a proactive approach. He stated that to answer the question in reference to maintenance on the vehicles, based on the information that was given, its \$56,000.

Following further discussion and review of the Enterprise Fleet Management Agreement, the Board agreed to start the process of rotating out the district vehicles. Ms. Johnson stated that she wanted to make sure everything adds up correctly and the district stays above 3%. Mr. Key stated that the funding is coming out of capital outlay, not general funds.

6. Items by the Superintendent

Mr. Key stated that we are aiming for a “B” letter grade in the District. He stated that we need our parents and everyone to get involved with helping our schools and students. He stated that we could not do it by ourselves. He stated that this would get us where we need to be. He stated that the bar is going to keep getting higher.

7. School Board Requests and Concerns

Mr. Scott inquired about the suspension of federal funds. Mr. Key stated that the district is shifting things around to help meet the needs of staff and students.

Ms. Johnson announced that the One Gadsden Foundation would be having its annual back to school drive on August 10th beginning 2:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m. at the Eugene Lamb Recreation Center in Midway, Florida.

8. The workshop adjourned at 6:55 p.m.