

MINUTES
BLEDSOE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
REGULAR MEETING
February 5, 2024

The Bledsoe County Board of Education met in Regular Session on February 5, 2024, at 6:00 p.m. at Bledsoe County Middle School.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Vincent Boring, with seven members present.

Roll Call:

Mr. Andy Billingsley	-	Present
Mr. Vincent Boring	-	Present
Mr. Ben Farmer	-	Present
Mr. Jacob Frady	-	Present
Mrs. Carolyn Oakes	-	Present
Mr. Bron Reece	-	Present
Mr. Don Snow	-	Present

1. Discussion and possible action on extending the Director of Schools contract.

Chairman Boring stated that he asked Mr. Upchurch to speak for just a few minutes to explain a couple of things on why this has to be the first item on the agenda and also speaking at the Board meeting.

Mr. Upchurch explained how we arrived at the point we are at this evening. This issue was first discussed during the December board meeting and at that time the Board was under the impression, and it wasn't and item on the agenda, so it was brought up basically toward the end of the meeting. The Board was under the impression that Director Sparkman's contract expired in June 30, 2024. After some brief research within the days following that, we determined that it did not. It actually expires June 30, 2025. Because there was a request made to examine the contract to possibly extend the contract. I forged ahead to present to the rules and regulations that the Board adopted for the amendment and the negotiations, receiving Mrs. Sparkman's position and then I prepared the amendment to the contract for presentation to the Board. The reason we adopted the June of 2025 as the expiration date there are several reason. The first reason of course it is not during an election year. You can say what you want about elections in Bledsoe County, elections both directly and indirectly influence or impact how an individual may vote. This removes the politics from it by doing it in 2025. Of course that is now the whole point of why we appoint the Director of Schools by the Board rather than by general election. Secondly, it would allow any new members who may be elected during this election cycle to consider the contract and whether or not the contract should be amended or the terms of the contract. Finally, the statute and I will discuss the statute in just a minute. There are restrictions in the statute which prohibit a board from considering a renewal or, extension or termination during a 75 day period during an election year and that begins 45 days prior to the August election and expires 30 days after the election. So we wanted to eliminate that, to avoid the dead period.

I went ahead and drafted the first amendment as I was directed to do. We initially had it on the January docket, but because the development, statue requires at least 15 days' notice on action on the Director's contract to be the first item on the agenda we set it on tonight Board meeting, and we gave the 15 days' notice and it is the number one on the agenda.

There is an issue that has been raised about whether or not individuals who want to speak tonight have complied with Board policy. Board policy is 1.404 and that policy requires anyone who wishes to speak provide the Director 48 hours' notice or the Chairman of their intent to speak, what subject they wish to address, limit the comments to 3 minutes and there is some other minor provision to that, tonight we've looked and I don't think this 48-hour period has been followed or recognized, but if you look at the statute which established the 75-day window, the 15-day notice provision and the provision requiring it to be the first item on the agenda. That statute makes reference to the convenience of the public and the statute reflects that the reason we give 15 days' notice and the reason we put it first on the agenda is for the convenience of the public. So reading that with our policy, it is by opinion that the convenience of the public would allow us to allow the public that are here today who wish to address this issue to speak to the Board, speak to the Director, speak to the Chairman. I think the limits that are in place, the 3 minutes. Those are appropriate limits and those should be followed. The requirement that you should address your comments to the Chairman that should be followed. If the Board believes that my interpretation of the statute is not a correct interpretation and does not authorize the Board to suspend the rules and allow the public to speak tonight, the other thing the Board can do under Roberts Rules of Order and that is the procedures we follow, the Board can suspend the rules. There are rules of procedures. The rules speak to admission to the meeting. It is not a substantive rule or regulation that we are suspending, it is a procedural rule the Board can do that unanimously or by a two thirds majority, I don't think that it is necessary for the Board to take that step if the Board agrees that based upon the language of the statute which discusses Directors' contracts. The Board agrees with me that the language that it requires notice to the public and the convenience of the public, if the Board agrees that allows participation and discussion by the public then that would be sufficient.

Chairman Boring: I think we have met all of the requirement. This was added to the agenda at the December meeting, there was a request for it to be added, so it was added. The thought was that Mrs. Sparkman's contract ended this year. I and some of the other Board members as well even though that was not the case, thought it would be a great idea to go ahead and pursue this. As I said before that if you have a coach who has made outstanding achievement, you would take every action that you could to keep that person by extending their contract and that is why I was interested in moving forward with this. The Board, to do that in the next meeting and we are here tonight discussing that. Mr. Upchurch did move forward with a contract; Ms. Sparkman did send him information that she wanted to be in her contract. We have all seen that and discussed that and agreed to go into negotiations with that contract which would be for a four-year period that would begin July 1, 2024 and end June 30, 2028. That is what is up to discuss and we are going to do that.

Unless there are any objections from the Board we will follow Mr. Upchurch's suggestions, 3 minutes for anyone who is signed up to speak on this topic. We will stick to this topic. If you have some reason you're in support or not in support of us renewing this contract. Please say that. Do not attack Board members or Director in doing so. We are all grownups here. At the end of the night we will speak to each other when we leave and appreciate and understand each other's positions, even if it does not agree. That is my hope and wish and I have talked to a couple of other board members over the last couple of months and it is our desire, Board members, do you agree with that with that proposition moving forward with the speaking.

Mr. Billingsley: May I ask a question Mr. Chairman. I want to move forward with whoever wants to speak to speak, but does that set a precedence that we need to change our policy Mr. Upchurch or is this just onetime, do we need to suspend to make it a onetime event for tonight?

Mr. Upchurch: No, I really don't think we need to suspend our policy, tonight because of the language in the statute. In my mind the statute contemplates the members of the public speaking to this issue.

Mr. Billingsley: And going forward is that the way the Board always thinks is what I am saying. By us doing this tonight? In three meetings from now we have people who want to speak. I don't mind it, but today are they allowed to speak without 48 hours' notice.

Mr. Upchurch: No, not if we are not considering the Directors contract.

Mr. Upchurch: So only the Director's contract and the language of the Director's contract which I believe gives us the opportunity to allow members of the public to speak.

Mr. Billingsley: I understand. I have no issues with that.

Mr. Reece: I am fine with that. Thank you Mr. Upchurch for that.

Mr. Snow made a motion for the convenience of the public they be allowed to speak, and the ones that have already signed up should be given preference.

Motion: Mr. Snow Second: Mr. Reece

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: AYE Mr. Boring: AYE Mr. Farmer: AYE Mr. Frady: AYE
Mrs. Oakes: AYE Mr. Reece: AYE Mr. Snow: AYE

Audience members who had signed up were Ms. Theresa Jackson and Susan Olinger both addressed the Board and expressed their concerns.

Chairman Boring: I'm going to turn to the discussion on the contract as Mr. Upchurch said he did send the contract out to the Board members there are two things on the contract that are up for negotiation and one of them is salary obviously first thing that we talked about on the contract. Mrs. Sparkman has sent that to Mr. Upchurch and he has put that in the contract for \$149,900.00 yearly salary and the other thing is the incentive package the same as everyone in the system is getting with the \$6,000.00 cap on that.

Mr. Reece stated that not everyone in the system was getting an incentive package. Chairman Boring stated that everyone in the system has a package similar to this. Mr. Reece questioned what the Board staff's incentive package was. It was clarified that the Board staff did not have an incentive package.

Mr. Farmer asked what the base pay was in the current contract. Ms. Kara Walling, Finance Director stated that is at \$129,792.00. Mr. Farmer asked what total compensation paid to her was and Ms. Walling stated it was \$151,514.67, which was comprised of the base salary and the 15% administrative supplement that is based on the state base which is \$6,300.00, travel of \$5,000.00, insurance \$7,620.14, bonus \$1,959.53 and equity \$843.00.

Ms. Walling stated that the compensation for the 2024-25 school year would be \$178,374.28 assuming the state base increase to \$45,000.00, health insurance rates stay the same and she receives the \$6,000.00 incentive bonus. This does not include employer's share of social security, medicare, retirement and insurance.

Chairman Boring pointed out that the employer's contributions are part of all employee's compensation.

BEP funded in 2023 around \$125,200.00 which is around 96% for the Director. Ms. Walling, Finance Director, explained that we no longer have BEP funding, we now have TISA and it is funded from students not positions. It is student ADM plus services and we get funding amounts. If you wanted to say 100% of the salary is funded from TISA, you can or if you wanted to say 50% of the salary is funded by TISA and 50% local you can say that. TISA allows the Board to make the decision on how it is used. This year we got a little bit more than last year. Enrollment numbers are down some, by about 15.1 students. TISA is based on an average daily membership. We are funded at a rate of \$6,860.00 per student 15 students equates to around \$100,000.00 dollars.

More members of the audience were allowed to voice their concerns. Mrs. Michelle Collier, Mrs. Candace Lovitt, Ms. Janet Eikel, Mrs. Christy Rains, Mr. Alfred Terry, Mr. Will Angel, Ms. Amber Smith, Ms. Chrissy Walker, Keonia Payne and Ms. Lara Degenaro.

Concerns that were expressed by the public were as follows: Director getting a raise and credit for score when it was the teachers and students who did the work. Morale in schools are low, favoritism, retaliation, renewing the contract early, felt that the Board should wait. That it would be unethical to renew it now with new Board members to be on the Board in September. Incentive bonus having attendance criteria, IEP's, retention, testing and tutoring, data driven causing students to just be numbers, Board members should visit schools and talk to teachers and staff, and student's not receiving service were some of the major concerns.

Recess

Chairman Boring stated that he had been asked to give board member a few minutes and mentioned maybe 5 minutes to speak if you want.

Mr. Reece: I said at the last meeting I didn't think this is the time for a contract in light of it being 2025 before it is going to end and I still do not think it's time for a contract. There are some definite problems I've got with the contract itself and just to be clear, it's put on the agenda as discussion and possible action of extending the contract. This is not an extension of the contract this is a brand new contract that's going to start. So we've already got the director locked in at \$129,000.00 until 2025 this contract if approved the way it is, it's going to start her salary starting July the first. Is that correct Mr. Upchurch? Mr. Upchurch: That is correct. Mr. Reece: at \$149,900.00 after we already got it locked in for a year at \$129,000.00 which is what we got it at now. After the overwhelming amount of people that spoke here and things they said I couldn't in good conscience see this going any further. You know when people speak in my district and I've said this over and over time and stuff and I know Mr. Terry spoke and I don't get a chance to go to schools Mr. Terry I work out of town all the time so I don't get a chance to go, but if people call me I always try to respond or reply or talk to them and if they're tell me want something confidential I try to always keep it that way, matter of fact I don't think if I've ever broken that and sometimes that's hard because whenever they tell me something and I go to try to investigate and they say don't say I said anything. It kind of handcuffs me to where I really can't do a whole lot without it revealing who they were that said something to me. So, but with that I represent district 1 okay I'm not here for my opinion and I want everybody to understand that. My sole purpose of being on this board is to be the mouthpiece for District 1. I have not talked to one person in my district besides a Board member that was for this contract and there is no way that I can be for that. If 54% of the people in my district want something it does not matter my personal opinion, I am going with that 54%. That is what I was elected to do. I feel like that's the reason we got voted in up here, that is what we're supposed to do and that's my thought on that, on the process. I can't see this continuing. I have never seen such an overwhelming amount of anything since I've been on the Board. I've been here for 6 years. I mean this is this is pretty overwhelming.

Mrs. Oakes: I do not have anything to say.

Mr. Frady: I appreciate everybody coming tonight. I'd like to say I appreciate everybody's comments and questions and concerns. You have made a statement. You come to express your opinion and express your concerns and that is admirable and I appreciate that very much. I also appreciate something that Mr. Terry said and he said something that was very, very good and somewhat convicting to me. I spend a lot of time at Wheeler. I walk into the middle school and high school on occasion. I haven't been to Rigsby much, but as far as my district, my ear has been on the ground listening to as much as I can. Here's my thoughts on this. I not unapproachable, before today. I can't speak for today. I can't say this for today but for past. I can count on one hand the people that have contacted me and call me about the situation. What I have heard predominantly is, wow look what's happening in our schools system, this has never happened like this in Bledsoe County before and so when I hear that you say I've heard this I've tried to write it down as many notes as I can and I said like this I don't have time to address them all, but they all

need to be addressed every one of them, every concern you have, but in turn being that said, can I say this, I would like to see you here at every board meeting. You can know all there is to know as far as I personally am concerned and I think I can speak for the Board. I don't mean to put words in their mouth. As transparent and unthreatening as possible, if you got a concern you can go to your teacher, you can go, I see shaking heads, but try it, if you have a problem come talk to me if it gets to that issue. Come talk to me, I'm happy to talk to you. Secondly and I don't mean to take up everybody's time, I may take up a little bit of Mrs. Carolyn's time, but in turn talking about Miss Sparkman. I'll agree with you on this we do need to dial in this we need to dial in the contract. Let's talk about Mrs. Sparkman for a minute this is a lady who has moved from home to come work in our school system. That has put in countless hours and a lot of the grief that I've heard from the community. It really comes down to a few things, one is that salary, we need to work on that, secondly is the time that we're doing it in. We are trying to just to keep the momentum going, but how I can speak more to that here and you are welcome to talk to me anytime, but that is by approach to this. Thirdly they say that we are testing 10 of our best kids and others fall in the cracks. We can speak to that, but I'm happy to at a better time to go into detail and we can dig that out, but can I say that's not true. As far as I know, it is basically, that is not true in no way. The grade that we have comes from the state is compiled all together, so therefore if you have that issue you got some false information. Also, the fact that you say that Mrs. Sparkman drives back to Memphis and then every morning comes back to Pikeville to work even 3 times a week that makes no sense. You can look at Tennessee and if that is a big deal to you can look and see at Tennessee landowners so she has spent time here and by the way I would assume that if you live that far away you would take up all your vacation days, but for what I understand she still has hers. Multiple occasions she has been the first one there and last one to leave. So those issues don't ring in my ears to be heavy. If you feel like your kid has been neglected my goodness, if I feel like my kids were being left behind I will tear down the rafters. Get somebody to listen and do something different. Listen you can talk to me. You need my number I can give to you. Get out a pen and paper I will give it to you. Then there's another thing I want to mention. It was mentioned about a Board member's wife. Can I say this, at least in my family I got several family and I have a wife that works in the school system? I guess you will have to take my word for this for whatever it is worth, but I can promise you that I have never nor do I think it's right, asked for any favors for my family and friends at all. What I wanted from the day I started on this board is that my family and yours to have the opportunity that they otherwise would not had to have the positions they have and the work that they have. Now, so I've said all this, I'm going to say I love you if I can help you I want to, but there's elements of truth. I like the truth I got to do everything I can to say what's right. I answer to someone much bigger. Lastly, all this stuff. I've heard your opinion. Can I tell you this and this may sound mean and ugly and don't mean it to be, but this is just where I am at. It is not about me, to be honest it's about our kids and when our are kids are doing well, when our kids have opportunity, I mean I'm going to do my best to vote that way

Mr. Billingsley: I want to start out by saying I think I was the one that made the motion two years ago it was now to put this contract out in 2025. To put it in between election cycles, but it wasn't done, Mr. Upchurch may have a different opinion, but it wasn't due to politics it was due to time frames. I wanted to make sure that we had plenty of time to find a new superintendent if we needed one. So the times are totally different now than we were then, in my opinion, we were changing director of schools pretty regularly and I wasn't a big fan of that. I don't want to go through that again. This Board pushed together a strategic plan. We put together a policy, that is what we do. Our strategic plan that we put together for Mrs. Sparkman, for the whole school system, most of them we have had a five-year plan. Many of those have been completed in two years. Now that's not on this Sparkman, the Board asked her to do these things. She came to us and asked us to put this bonus in place for teacher based on grades, based on levels, you have to base it on something. The Board is the one that put the absentee rule in there. We want our teachers here. I understand hardships a lot of people work, but we are not punishing you for not being here, it's just not the reward if you're not here, but we did that not Mrs. Sparkman. That is my big point on that. I do believe testing is important, relationships and teachers and students I know are important. Some of my favorite people on earth have been my teachers. So I do understand relationships. So maybe that is something we need to work on, but we also have to fund the school system. We also have to be able to educate the kids and we have to make sure that what we want to be taught is being taught. We have to grade that somehow and testing is the way right now that we do that so you know. I think consistency is key for us, we do have a lot of momentum I feel like going in the right direction. Yes

we do really have in my opinion; we have 11 or 12 months because if we don't do this now we have to start negotiating this thing in January. If we have to replace the Director, I mean we've been in that, that takes a long time that's what we're trying to stave off. We have a director that is following policies that we set. Is meeting the goals and strategic plan that we set, and educating our children I think better than it's been in a long time. If she's willing to sign up now for four more years, I don't think we should take a chance on who the next Director might be next year. That is where I come from on that and everyone is not perfect, never going to be perfect, but we all got to do the best we can do right now. I think Mrs. Sparkman is doing everything that the Board ask her to do.

Mr. Farmer: I would like to thank everyone for being here tonight. I know everyone's done that, but clearly you recognize that this is probably by statute the number one thing that we do is hiring our soul employee as a Board. The second most important thing we do is dealing with capital improvements and infrastructure across our campuses. Unfortunately, we have hijacked that with a contract that probably could have been tabled for a period of time in my opinion. I think we are a little bit premature on it. I think we got time to deal with this particular issue. We have a relationship with our county commission we need to be building. We've got to talk about several million dollars in capital improvements that are well known and continue to advance our systems and fundamental capabilities to provide for our students let alone the faculty and staff; we have those expenses as well. I think when you talk about the director's position there are multiple ways to come out what the cost and value is to that and at some point we have to put a price tag on it, but I do not believe it is today. I would like to see us take on, when that time comes for that position that we look at a lower contract amount and higher bonuses tied to specific areas everything from results in special education to specific testing. Whether it be stem science or math or agriculture those things that matter in our community whether it come up with three or five of those categories we tie those to bonuses. In my business we would call those sick bonuses, it would be a lot of money, but they will be worthwhile and very tangible and identified. I think that's the approach that we're headed to in a lot of ways I'm hoping before we open up with the full agenda and we can get a chance to add the item to relook in the next couple of weeks at the bonus system that we put in place for employees. I think we've got a good thing going. We just need to look at it, tweak it a little we have some people getting left behind unintentionally and at least evaluate and have that discussion again. So I currently am a no vote in going forward. I don't think that's a shocker for anyone. I've shared this publicly. I do think there's a system in place to begin to look at this in a timely fashion, but also have one that has incentives to deal with these specific areas that everyone tends to fall into. We won't get them all. We are not going to get the Chess Club unfortunately. I like the Chess Club, but you will have certain areas that we can start to look at and gauge off of those that are tangible numbers and whatever form or fashion you want to put that thank you Mr. Chairman

Mr. Snow. I think some of you have been here and heard me say in many other meetings we appreciate you coming. I wish we had more at our meeting. Like Mr. Billingsley said we have the Strategic plan and Mr. Ridley's presentation early on is an example. We identified something as goal and Mrs. Sparkman fleshes out how we are going to accomplish that. I think we have many good things going and I think if we don't extend the contract, Mrs. Sparkman is going to be a lame duck. I am afraid the things we have accomplished we will regress. We will go back to the old way. It is hard to make progress. It is hard to make a decision that you don't want me to make. I spent 49 years here trying to build a good reputation. Many of you will probably leave here tonight with less of an opinion of me than you had when you came. I promise you when I first ran for this position I said one thing I'll do, I'll listen to everything I can. I'll get all the information I can and I will do what I think is right. I'm not in opposition of extending the contract that will be with the negotiating that we do increase the bonus or leave the bonus as pretty generous, reduce the upfront dollar amount. Like I said Mr. Ridley just gave us one example of the things that Mrs. Sparkman has put in place. When I first came on the board, well actually before I was elected before the election when I was out electioneering I mentioned that I would like to see a merit system so teachers could get bonuses based on merit. That was shot down really quick. The people I was talking to I found out were union people from out of state. Unions, I don't think that they want to see merit, they want control. Mrs. Sparkman took that and ran with it and we have this incentive bonus that the people are getting now. Some of you teachers that have been here 25 plus years, you all know that for years you ask for more Mrs. Sparkman, I think has been a big part in the raising from 25 years. What I'm saying that to say is a lot you've heard a lot of things that she's not doing that we don't like, but I've seen a lot of things

that she's has done that I do like. We have got a great Board we disagree, but we trust each other that it's sincere. We are going to have some new members; they're going to be good people. We can move forward and address some of these things that you have brought to us tonight. A lot of things that we've heard over the last 3 weeks or so concern me, but I don't want to see a lame duck. I want somebody that can work with us to go ahead and accomplish some of those goals that we set.

Chairman Boring: I'm one of those people that will not be sitting here September 1st, I think everyone knows that, as a federal employee I will not be able to participate in a partisan election, so I will not be sitting here September 1, because I will not be running for this seat again. When I was elected for this position, I was not elected for three and a half years I was elected a four-year term. My term will end in August of this year. Everything that comes up during that time frame, I believe it's my responsibility to vote yes or vote no. During this time I will have idea's to keep the momentum going or to change direction and we all have that opportunity to put our part in on that. I agree with everything. I appreciate everyone that has spoken and I think that every person that has spoken has brought a good idea that we need to work with. There's so many opportunities that we brought up some of them were repeated and I appreciate that. I appreciate every phone call I've had, every text I've had, every email. Mr. Payne said I appreciate everyone who responded to his email. I have not responded to every email. I can't, I can't respond to each email and I don't know if it's me, if it's the Board or unless it's directed so I don't know how many people are on that list, but if you get a hold of me I will respond. I appreciate the comments that were made tonight and that I have been getting. I appreciate the positive comments that I have gotten. I apologize for saying this, but I did not hear many of those tonight. There are so many things that some of us have spoken about. So many things that are going on, talking about the strategic plan, I know that people don't either like to talk about those things, but because there are goals and objectives that we need to achieve and we have done that. We have challenged Mrs. Sparkman with a five-year strategic plan. We set the goals and she and her staff set the objectives and we approve them as we will look at tonight there will be a change to the strategic plan that we approved at the last meeting. That is how we are grading our Director that is how we do that even in meetings. We are going to ask about the strategic plan to see where we're going. To see if we are on track same as on the budget. We want to know we are going or where we are at any given time. The scores are a big deal everyone agrees. Everyone who is an educator agrees that is how you view progress to see where everyone is and see what changes you need to make in the teaching to be sure your next score is higher. That's what ever one wants. I appreciate that Mr. Ridley is putting those things together in an effort to increase those scores. We have to do it every day, we do that every day as an educator. If you're an educator here and we support that. We support the idea to improve things and we've done over the past, this is my 8th year on the Board. The incentive plan, I've heard comments about the incentive plan. I think it's a great thing Miss Sparkman brought that to us. Ms. Farrah, Ms. Kristy, Ms. Kara, and Ms. Sharlene worked on that. I thought it was a great idea, but what I heard was some negativity because about the case of attendance we added as Mr. Billingsley said we said. We added that attendance piece because it is important for teachers to be here every day. It's going to be important in my job every day the same as it is everyone else so we added that attendance piece and I apologize to those who were not able to get that, but whatever the plan that you put in place has to have standards that you meet if you will or qualifications that you meet. So looking into next year, I'm hopeful that we have a lot of more happy folks because everything is in place and you know what it takes to reach that. You have the possibility of getting the full amount. I hear a lot of IEPs and that is certainly something that we have talked about a lot and we're taking a look at those. Those things are important I understand I've had children and grandchildren who have had IEPs and make sure those are followed and if there's something not going on as Mr. Frady mentioned talk to your teacher and I know this the way that goes and some of you may have tried to do that, talk to your teachers, talk to your principal, get a hold of Mrs. Sparkman, get a hold of us after that point. We have one employee I believe it was Mr. Farmer who pointed out one employee and that is Mrs. Sparkman. We hire the Director or fire the Director or set a contract or increase that contract and that is what we're looking at doing. A lot of people have encouraged attendance to meetings, I encourage that so you know what is going on or you can watch the live stream. Does everyone know or remember that just a few months ago we were

reimbursed by the state in the amount of \$4 million dollars on ESSER Funds. I did not know that could happen we did not know there was a possibility of that so Mrs. Sparkman was speaking with some of the other directors she wanted to plan to make it happen so she challenged Mr. Oxner to work on that. He is taking care of our ESSER budget. I appreciate that. Four million dollars is a lot of money, that come back into the system, that will sustain the system at the current rate for the next five years. One point four million is what we had discussed two meetings go for future facilities upgrades. I mean we have done a lot of facility upgrades. I know everyone has seen that we do that. The support groups for each sport, those clubs they put in time they put in effort they put in money and have built some facilities on site and we are thankful for all those things. We have a lot of good things going on we do have some opportunities we need to address and that is what I'm going to do, that's where I am at, all those things we can address. Address those opportunities as I call them to make it better. Bledsoe County can be the best in the state and this Board has worked on that. We don't agree with status quo that's not us. Everything that we have, we have done to elevate Bledsoe County and I want to continue that. I think talking about this as I explained in the beginning, I will not go into it again that is the reason I will be in favor of extending the contract. Believe me I have heard from people, I have heard from family member, some for, some against, so where do I go. With what I think is right.

Mr. Reece: Mr. Upchurch when does this contract begin if it is signed into effect?

Mr. Upchurch: July 1 or this year.

Mr. Reece: So essentially if it's signed in the way it is we are literally giving \$20,000 away that we don't have to if it signed at \$149,900.00. Correct me if I am wrong Ms. Kara, \$129,792.00. okay so we're giving away \$20,000 in the grand scheme of things whenever you get a 14-million-dollar fund balance that don't sound like a whole lot. That is some of our employee's yearly salary right. Yes, that's a lot of money. We have got employees that are full-time employees that almost live on poverty level. I mean and you know without getting too much into it because I feel like this is going to go into negotiation I would rather bring out some good points out a little bit later. I hope all of you stay for all of this and its entirety, even if it gets put off until another meeting I hope you come back, because this is where the meat is and this is where things are. You have heard members sit here and say, and I hate to go against them, you heard member say contact your teacher, contact your principal and if that don't work contact me, but you came here tonight and you contacted us, it's not working. I mean the only thing you can do from here is wait until election time and I hope things don't die down, and if I am the cause of something going through that you don't support, I hope to goodness you vote me out, that is how I feel about it, I am that strong about it. I mean whether I wasn't strong enough to stop it, whatever the case may be, that's how strong I feel about it. I know I don't make a lot of friends, but I am not here to make friends, I am here to do what is right and do what the people want and what the people are looking for. You are the ones that pay this. A lot of this comes out of state tax dollar, but guess what you pay state tax dollars, lot of it comes out of federal tax dollars, guess what you pay federal tax dollars, this is your money, this is everything you are looking for, this is the education of your kids, your grandkids, your nieces your nephews whatever the case may be. Take care of this. It does not matter if I am up here on this Board or not, make sure you take care of this and hold people accountable for what they do up here. I am not up here for me, I am up here for you, and I try to help you anyway I can and I hope you all know that. Some of you may disagree, but there would be very few that would disagree with that over times I have tried to help people.

Mrs. Christy Rains asked from the audience about tutoring funds to bring up bubble kids and about it only being offered to one group of children and not all of them. Ms. Sparkman explained that the grant is coming from the state and that the high school had tutoring during Warrior Time. Mrs. Rains, continued her statement and stated she was not just asking about high school, but system wide. Mrs. Sparkman explained that tutoring funds put into place where all students can be tutored. After more audience interaction Chairman Boring, stated that we had to keep order and that everyone had been given an opportunity to speak.

Mr. Reece stated that he wanted Mrs. Rains question to be answered. He stated that he thought they were all legitimate questions. He asked the Board if they did not think that they were legitimate questions.

Mr. Billingsley stated that he thought it was a legitimate question that needs to be asked at a different situation.

Mr. Farmer stated that he also wanted the question answered, but also understands that the Chairman need to regain control of the room.

Chairman Boring asked if there was any objection from the Board for the question to be answered. None was made.

Mrs. Sparkman stated that we have a grant from the state for all tutoring, it breaks down for intervention pieces to where our principals have pushed in that time, children are pulled out based on the needs they have whether they are high, medium or low. The question was aimed at the high school to begin with and I know that Mr. Ridley has that time set in, "Warrior Time" so they can be pushed in for whatever tutoring they may need. If your child needs more support in algebra, then there is an intervention time to help support them and you should not have to be paying for that to take place. If you still feel you need to do that, I guess as a parent that is up to you. That is a time that we have specifically put into the schedule for your child to get that need met. There is not a certain group of kids that get tutoring, all kids should get tutoring.

Chairman Boring stated the question had been answered and that we needed to move on.

Mr. Reece made a motion in light of everything that went on here today that we dismiss all contract negotiations and we look at possibly begin contract negotiations again in December of 2024 or later.

MOTION: Mr. Reece SECOND: Mr. Farmer
VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: NO Mr. Boring: NO Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: NO
 Mrs. Oakes: NO Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: NO
Motion Failed

Mr. Billingsley made a motion that we accept the contract as presented, and reduce the salary request down to \$139,900.00 and leave everything else as it is.

MOTION: Mr. Billingsley SECOND: Mr. Boring
Discussion:

Mr. Farmer requested to make an amendment to the motion. Mr. Reece asks where this money would come from. Mrs. Walling stated the budget has not been set yet for next year, but the \$10,000.00 would have to be pulled from another line item or fund balance. Mr. Reece added that it would possibly be \$16,000.00 in compensation plus additional for retirement and stuff. I have spoken with three county commissioners; they are not for this. We have three county commissioners sitting right here, I am assuming they did not come here in sheer support. Mr. Reece asked Mr. Upchurch what happens if the county commission doesn't approve the school boards budget. Mr. Upchurch stated that at some point if the county commission does not approve the budget the state would come in and set the budget for us.

Mr. Farmer stated that one of things that he mentioned earlier, that I want everyone to be aware, the we have openly discussed as a Board, is again the infrastructure across the Board for all of our facilities. This is going to require substantial investment over the years. We are not talking about getting fancy, we are talking about replacing fundamental basic things and it will take commission action and it's

approximately 3 million plus after we are no longer in discussion with the lease for City Hall, probably around 5 million. We could look at those things and we may have to make cuts, one of the things that Mrs. Sparkman did do, we took about 3 million dollars over five years and spreading that apart to keep some of these in class programs going that are some of the positive things. In order to do that and maintain those funds we are going to have to look to the commission, ultimately to our community to find those funds. It has got to come from somewhere. Approximately 85% of our budget is from state and federal funds currently and about 15% local. We have got to slow down and look at what we are doing and collectively listen to our friends, our family, our district about how we are going to get through the next couple of months and year. I don't know if tonight we are doing that very well.

Chairman Boring questioned Ms. Walling about the budget since it has not been set for next year. So if this change starts July 1, then there would be no budget amendment needed. Ms. Walling responded that was correct, but she stated that if expenditures stay the same and no more revenue came in then she assumed she would have to pull it from another line item. Chairman Boring stated that you could use fund balance. Ms. Walling stated that we are in a health spot.

Chairman Boring stated that we would be looking at the budget next month and raises across the board. He stated when we talk about facilities that we have a plan for that has all of those things spelled out and where the cost will be. He further stated that we are in a good place on that and will be for several years because of all the things that have been done. We take blame for things that go wrong and we take credit for things that go right. I will take the blame for anything that happens that is not good. I would also like to think that I had a part in the good things. I agree we have to take a look at things and I don't take this thing lightly, because I have spoken to a lot of folks, and sure negativity breeds and I appreciate the folks that come up and have a positive word to say, I appreciate that as much as the negative, but what happens with the negative, that is opportunities for us to work on and I am certainly willing to work on those.

Mr. Billingsley stated that our total budget is about 16 million dollars a year.

Mr. Farmer asked Mr. Billingsley if he would be willing to entertain in your motion to reduce the contract amount and setting up a bonus structure of somewhere around, reduce the contract amount to \$110,000.00 and a bonus structure of \$39,000.00 and break that apart into four or five varies tracks if you will.

Mr. Billingsley stated not at this point, but thanks for the idea.

Mr. Frady stated that he thought they need a little time to dial this in, just a little, he stated he was not for waiting too late, he stated he was not for waiting till December, and maybe we could come up with a more agreeable and understandable contract. I wish we could dial it in and have the opportunity to look at it a little bit better.

Mr. Reece stated with this contract the percentage raise we give to staff member, the director will get as well, correct.

Chairman Boring stated yes.

Mr. Reece stated if we give our staff members a 4% raise, this is kind of what that looks like if you're driving a school bus you're going to get around \$30.00 per month, right in that frame. A teacher is not going to get that much, on \$139,900.00 that will be \$5,596.00 that is tacked on to this already. So we are right back. The question was asked if the original contract started at \$129,000.00. Mr. Reece stated it was \$125,000.00, there was a raise given on that and that is what got it to \$129,000.00. There is always that fight that the gap gets wider and wider between the bottom and the top. Every time you give a percentage raise across the Board it gets wider to the point that you can't even see each other anymore and that is where we are.

Mr. Frady stated that the Board had addressed a lot of that gap, not saying it perfect, but have addressed a lot of it.

Mr. Reece stated that we have address some, we have a budget we have not seen, we are having to bring teachers up to per the Governor to meet a base salary by year 2026. We have school vouchers that the Governor is pushing through, and whenever he does, when people decide to take the school vouchers and put their kids in a private school or have them schooled somewhere else, they will take that money and we are losing funding for that as well, that gets back into if you have got 20 or 30 kids or 40 that leaves you are talking thousands upon thousands of dollars. The reason our fund balance looks so healthy, and I don't blame anybody here for not keeping up with all of this stuff before. It is a lot to keep up with and it overwhelms by brain sometimes, I have insomnia and I lay in bed at 3:00 in the morning reading this stuff and it just wears me out. The reason our fund balance is so health is ESSER money we have been getting. Things that we normally would pay for has been coming out of ESSER funds. It is sort of like putting it on a credit card, that is good no interest, but all the sudden that bill comes due we are going to run out of money and we are going to run out of money fast.

Mr. Billingsley stated that we do not have to pay that money back, it is not like a credit card.

Mr. Reece stated that ESSER was not, but our fund balance will be cause these new buildings, that great ESSER money is paying for the majority of them, is that correct?

Mr. Farmer stated that we are taking about 3 million dollars of ESSER funds, and put into in class room academic things over five, which is an awesome thing to do, but my biggest fear is that we have to dig into those funds to do these other improvement, or those improvements go incomplete. That is a direct communication with our commission.

Mr. Billingsley stated he thought Mrs. Sparkman is the one to lead us through those problems.

Chairman Boring called for a vote on the following motion.

Mr. Billingsley made a motion that we accept the contract as presented, and reduce the salary request down to \$139,900.00 and leave everything else as it is.

MOTION: Mr. Billingsley SECOND: Mr. Boring

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: NO Mr. Frady: YES

Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: NO Mr. Snow: YES

Chairman Boring stated as part of the negotiation we will offer Mrs. Sparkman that amount. What kind of timeframe do we give her to respond to that? The time frame to respond to the offer was set by the next meeting. Chairman Boring asked if there were any objections to that, none were expressed.

2. Approval of the Agenda. Mr. Farmer requested to add an item to the agenda. 14a. Discussion of evaluating the employee incentive bonus terms and conditions.

MOTION: Mr. Snow SECOND: Mr. Farmer

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: AYE Mr. Boring: AYE Mr. Farmer: AYE Mr. Frady: AYE

Mrs. Oakes: AYE Mr. Reece: AYE Mr. Snow: AYE

Recessed for 10 minutes.

3. Approval of the minutes from the January 8, 2024 regular meeting of the Bledsoe County Board of Education.

MOTION: Mr. Billingsley SECOND: Mrs. Oakes

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: AYE Mr. Boring: AYE Mr. Farmer: AYE Mr. Frady: AYE
Mrs. Oakes: AYE Mr. Reece: AYE Mr. Snow: AYE

4. Request by Mrs. Kara Walling, Finance Director, to approve monthly financial reports for the month ending December 31, 2023

MOTION: Mr. Boring SECOND: Mr. Reece

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: YES
Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: YES

5. Request by Mrs. Kara Walling, Finance Director, to approve quarterly financial reports for the month ending December 31, 2023.

MOTION: Mr. Billingsley SECOND: Mr. Farmer

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: YES
Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: YES

6. Request by Dr. Becky Ridley, Aware Director, to approve the MOU for Health Connect of America. Mr. Upchurch reviewed the MOU and recommended it to be approved

MOTION: Mr. Farmer SECOND: Mr. Boring

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: YES
Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: YES

7. Request by Mr. Steve Reel for approval of the following overnight trips and competitions:

Event	Place	Date
Skills USA Regional Event	Huntsville, TN TCAT	February 6-7, 2024
DECA State	Chattanooga, TN	February 29- March 2, 2024
Skills USA State in Chattanooga	Chattanooga, TN	April 14-17, 2024

MOTION: Mr. Billingsley SECOND: Mr. Reece

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: AYE Mr. Boring: AYE Mr. Farmer: AYE Mr. Frady: AYE
Mrs. Oakes: AYE Mr. Reece: AYE Mr. Snow: AYE

8. Request by Mr. Ronny Collier, FFA Advisor, for the approval to attend the Legislative Breakfast and Flowers on the Hill on February 22, 2024. We have visits scheduled with our legislators; we plan to spend the night on February 21, 2024 in Nashville since the breakfast starts at 7:00 a.m. Six students with Ronny Collier and Michelle Collier as chaperones. We have requested visits with our legislators during the day and will assist in seeing that every legislator in our state is contacted and thanked for their service and flower arrangement prepared by TN FFA members. Use of school suburban.

MOTION: Mr. Boring SECOND: Mr. Reece

VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: YES
Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: YES

9. Request by Mr. Ronny Collier, FFA Advisor, for the approval to attend the 96th TN FFA State Convention in Gatlinburg, TN March 24-27, 2024. Plan to have up to 30 members participate and at least 5 chaperones. Travel will be by bus. We invite all Board members to attend a day this year. Lillie Cagle will be delivering her retiring address as TN FFA State Sentinel on Monday and will be serving as the chair of secession later that evening.
 MOTION: Mr. Snow SECOND: Mrs. Oakes
 VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: YES Mr. Boring: YES Mr. Farmer: YES Mr. Frady: YES
 Mrs. Oakes: YES Mr. Reece: YES Mr. Snow: YES
10. Presentation by Mr. Matt Ridley, Principal Bledsoe County High School, on ACT. Was presented during the planning session.
11. Review of Bledsoe County Schools Strategic Plan with changes. Mrs. Sparkman explained that we changed goal 4 back to facilities and made a goal 5, which is climate which you asked us to do and pushed those objective and strategies underneath that. You previously approved it with that correction being made.
12. Discussion and/or approval of resolution on 4th grade retention. Mr. Upchurch is to do a resolution regarding the 4th grade retention stating that the district is not in favor of this law. Will be prepared for the March meeting.
13. Old Business. None
14. New Business.
 - 14a. Discussion of evaluating the employee incentive bonus terms and conditions. To be discussed at March meeting.
15. Director's update. The Quarterback Club had the football banquet for players. BCHS boys' basketball is doing well and the girls are working hard

Date	Meeting	Place	Time
March 4, 2024	Planning Session	Bledsoe County Middle School	5:30 p.m.
March 4, 2024	Regular Meeting	Bledsoe County Middle School	6:00 p.m.

16. Adjourn.
 MOTION: Mr. Reece SECOND: Mrs. Oakes
 VOTE: Mr. Billingsley: AYE Mr. Boring: AYE Mr. Farmer: AYE Mr. Frady: AYE
 Mrs. Oakes: AYE Mr. Reece: AYE Mr. Snow: AYE


 Board Chairman


 Director of Schools

Sign Up Sheet for Board Meeting February 5, 2023

Name	Address and Phone	Agenda Item
Theresa Jackson	635W Hale Rd	The real reason why the kids are testing
Susan Olinga	189 Harwood Lane	Superintendent contract
Michelle Collier		50 high FFA
Cambake Lovett		
Janet Eikel		
Kirsty Rains		
Alfred Terry		
Will Angel		
Amber Smith		
Krossie Walker		
Keony Payne		
Lara DeGenaro		