

SCHOOL BOARD FINANCIAL WORKSHOP

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

September 22, 2026

4:30 P.M.

The workshop was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman; Ms. Cathy S. Johnson; Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon; Mr. Steve Scott; and Mr. Charlie D. Frost. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others.

1. Call To Order

The workshop was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 4:34 P.M.

2. Financial Information

- 2026 – 08 Board Revenue Summary Report

- 2026 – 08 Board Expenditure Summary Report

Mrs. Bruner stated to the Board, included in your meeting packets is the revenue and expenditure report for the previous month. She stated that we are still entering the budget information, and she checked on the progress today. She stated that we have not quite finished, but we hope to have it completed by Friday. She stated that beginning with next month's report, you should be able to see more of the original budget information for comparison. She stated that we will also begin providing graphs and charts to help illustrate revenue and expenditure activity. She stated that on the second page, the fiscal year-to-date activity column reflects approximately \$10.1 million in revenue received. She stated that please keep in mind that most of our local revenue begin coming in when property taxes are paid in October. She stated that we have reminded our departments to consider this timing when managing their expenditures. She stated additionally, the State has restricted certain grant funds to quarterly releases. She stated that some grants are typically front-loaded, meaning most of the expenses occur at the beginning of the year, while the remaining expenses are spread throughout the year. She stated that we must carefully manage these drawdowns to ensure that funds are requested as expenditures occur. She stated that we cannot continually use other available funds to cover these expenses while waiting for the appropriate revenue to arrive.

Mr. McMillan stated to Mrs. Bruner, are you saying that the total revenue received through fiscal year-to-date activity is \$10,180,213.16? Mrs. Bruner responded yes. She stated that if you look at the last page of the expenditure report, page 19 of 19, the fiscal year-to-date activity column shows that we have spent approximately \$14.3 million. She stated that this means our expenditures are already exceeding the amount of revenue received. Mr. McMillan asked Mrs. Bruner to please explain how we are able to do that. He stated that he would really like to know because he would like to be able to do the same thing with my household accounts. Mrs. Bruner stated that we still have budget authority, even though all the anticipated revenue has not yet been received. She stated that is why we are emphasizing to our departments the importance of slowing down their spending. She stated that the departments cannot simply look at the amount remaining in their budget lines or purchase orders and spend the entire balance. She stated that they must exercise restraint and regulate their spending based on the revenue available. She stated that we need to remain conservative through October and November while we monitor receipts and await the next calculation. Mr. McMillan stated that he believe we need to use stronger language. He stated that instead of telling departments that they need to slow down their spending, we need to tell them that they are going to slow down. We must exercise better control over expenditures.

Ms. Johnson wanted to know what are we comparing this information against. She stated that the original budget is not included in the report. She stated that she also heard you mention budget revisions, but the revised budget information is not available in the columns provided. She stated that we do not have a baseline against which to compare the figures. Mrs. Bruner stated that the general fund is listed multiple times because the report organizes information by fund and

function. She stated that you will see categories such as Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP), workforce development, and voluntary prekindergarten. She stated that some entries show zero because those activities are recorded at the district level. Ms. Johnson wanted to know if there was a way to consolidate this information into one report. Mrs. Bruner stated that is not how the Skyward system operates. She stated that consolidating those functions would prevent you from seeing the individual details. She stated that we are still entering the approved budget information. She stated that once that process is complete, you should be able to see the original budget figures. She stated that the budget revisions column should generally remain blank unless a budget revision is presented for processing and approval. She stated that the revised budget should ordinarily equal the original budget unless an approved revision has been made. She stated for now, the most useful columns to review are the monthly activity and fiscal year-to-date activity because they show the transactions that have occurred.

Ms. Hannigon stated that she had a question, and please forgive her because she was not familiar with all the internal processes involved in paying our bills. She stated that when we look at total expenditures, does that amount include encumbrances, or does it represent actual expenditures for which payment has been made? Mr. Bruner stated that the fiscal year-to-date activity column reflects actual expenditures. She stated for example, on page 4 of 19, approximately halfway down the page, you will see an instructional-related rental expense with an activity amount of \$23,317.85. She stated that the associated purchase order, or encumbrance, is \$58,799.35. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know about the approximately \$14 million in expenditures? Mrs. Bruner stated that the amount represents actual expenditures recorded in the fiscal year-to-date activity column. Ms. Hannigon stated that in a situation like this, where do we get the money to cover the difference? Mrs. Bruner stated that we have money in the bank to carry us until the anticipated revenues are received and the State funds are drawn down. She stated for example, we have drawn down Head Start funds because, as with many of our grants, we must spend the money first and then request reimbursement. She stated that we are working to bring the timing of expenditures and revenue receipts closer together. She stated that it is also important to remember that this report reflects activity through the end of August. She stated that we have had an additional month of activity during September. She stated that when next month's report is prepared, we may see additional revenue receipts and corrections to recognize funds that are owed to the district. She stated that as the accounting process progresses, the figures should become clearer. She stated that this situation commonly occurs at the beginning of the fiscal year because most local revenue does not arrive until property taxes begin to be paid. Ms. Hannigon stated that as we entered the fiscal year, the fund balance was negative. Is that correct? Mrs. Bruner stated yes, we are still working to ensure that we have properly recognized all funds owed to us through grants and other funding sources. Ms. Hannigon stated that when we talk about fund balance, she generally think of our reserves. She stated that if our reserves were negative, where did we obtain the money to cover the approximately \$4 million difference between revenue and expenditures? Mrs. Bruner stated that the fund balance can be confusing because of the way funds are allocated and recognized in the accounting system. She stated that we have money available, and we can reimburse those accounts as appropriate. She stated that for example, we have funds associated with the State Board of Administration (SBA) account, as well as funds held by Gadsden Technical College for its Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. She stated that these accounts contain money that may be available for their designated purposes. She stated therefore, when we report a negative fund balance, it does not necessarily mean that the bank account itself has a negative balance. It reflects how the funds are recognized in the accounting ledger.

Mr. Frost stated that he was concerned that if we do not have sufficient money available, we will overspend. He stated that if we do not have the money, we need to pull back on our spending. Ms. Hannigon stated that toward the end of the fiscal year, we generally have discussions about spending and the need to establish a hard stop or slow down expenditures. She wanted to know do we have a similar internal approach at the beginning of a new fiscal year. She stated that the fiscal year begins in July, but much of our revenue does not arrive until October. She stated that means we may go approximately three months into the fiscal year before receiving a substantial portion of our local revenue. She wanted to know are we taking similar steps to manage departmental spending during this period. Mrs. Bruner stated yes, we can deactivate purchase orders or turn them off so that departments cannot spend against the remaining balances. She stated however, the greater challenge is communicating with departments and ensuring they do not initiate unnecessary expenditures. She stated that the departments may proceed with activities before Finance receives the invoices. She stated that by the time those invoices reach our office, we may be obligated to pay them. She stated that we must distinguish between essential expenditures and those that can be delayed. She stated that we have to pay for fuel, employee salaries, and employee benefits. She stated that we must also ensure that resources are available for necessary maintenance, including air-conditioning and heating expenses. She stated however, matching expenditures to incoming revenue is difficult during this period because the revenue has not yet arrived. She stated that as we saw last year, the budget initially approved is not necessarily the budget we will have available by the end of the fiscal year. Therefore, we must carefully monitor our spending and adjust as necessary.

Ms. Hannigon wanted to know when we refer to our fund balance or reserves, where are those dollars physically held, and how are those funds maintained? Mrs. Bruner stated that we maintain funds at Centennial Bank, Capital City Bank, and the State Board of Administration. We have two SBA accounts: one for hurricane funds and another for operating funds. Mr. Key stated that most of our reserves are held at Centennial Bank. Mrs. Bruner stated that most of the funds are held at Centennial Bank. She stated that when she researched the history, we learned that many school districts previously used the SBA as their primary backup for funds. She stated that after a market crash left some entities unable to access their money, the state advised districts not to keep all their funds in one place. She stated that the recommendation was to diversify where the money is held.

Mr. Key stated that since we are discussing expenditures dating back to July 1, he wanted to revisit the issue involving Allstate Construction and the new school. He stated that we previously had a situation in which Allstate did not communicate properly with us, yet we received invoices for the project. He wanted to know how much of the money reflected in this report relates to the new school construction and is still awaiting reimbursement. Mrs. Bruner stated that in the middle of the report, you will see the SunTrust loan associated with HMS, followed by the PECO funds. She stated that the relevant entries include the 3400 PECO fund, the 7400 facilities fund, and the 3100 professional and technical services category. The 6300 buildings category includes expenditures for construction of the new school. She stated that these figures reflect activity through the end of August.

Ms. Hannigon stated that considering our current revenue and expenditure figures, your projections for incoming revenue, and the drawdowns we have requested, do you have any concerns about our financial position as we move forward through the first quarter? She stated that we are now at the end of September and moving into the next phase of the fiscal year. Ms. Bruner stated that one of our primary concerns is ensuring that students attend school, particularly during testing periods and student-count periods. She stated that any reduction in our full-time equivalent (FTE) student count can negatively affect our funding. She stated that we must do everything possible to encourage students to remain in Gadsden County and attend our schools. She stated that we have seen an increase in the portion of our Florida Education Finance Program (FEFP) funding going toward scholarships. Last year, the amount increased from approximately \$7 million to nearly \$9 million. She stated that represents a significant loss of funding, and it is difficult to overcome a deficit of that size. Ms. Hannigon stated that she would like to revisit the different funding sources we discussed. She stated that there may be other school districts facing similar challenges, but we must recognize that, although we are in the business of education, we also have to manage the district as an organization that depends on revenue. She stated that she believes it could be beneficial for the Board to identify funding that would allow us to hire a consultant to help us evaluate the business side of our operations. She stated that she was not necessarily referring to financial management. She stated that she was specifically referring to student retention, recruitment, and marketing. She stated that as Mrs. Bruner explained, our students are a major factor in determining the funding we receive. She stated that if we continue losing students, we will continue losing revenue. She stated that at some point, we must take a serious look at why this is happening and determine what we can do differently. She stated that every business must market itself and demonstrate its value. She stated that in today's environment of school choice, we must make Gadsden County schools the best choice for families. She stated that we cannot accomplish that simply by continuing our regular day-to-day operations without evaluating our approach. She stated that she remembers making this point during a candidate forum in 2024. She stated that we must identify why students are leaving and determine what changes would encourage families to remain in our district. She stated that we have discussed the reasons students leave, but each student and family may have a different explanation. She stated that a consultant could help us conduct surveys, identify the root causes, and develop strategies to address those concerns before additional students leave. She stated that she recently spoke with the Superintendent and had a conversation with a parent yesterday afternoon. She stated that at the end of that conversation, the parent stated that she was looking for another school to send her child. I would not have expected that particular conversation to end that way, but it demonstrates how quickly a parent may lose confidence in the district and decide to leave. She stated that we must find ways to rebuild trust and confidence among our parents. She stated that we need families to give us an opportunity to address their concerns and improve their experiences rather than immediately deciding to go elsewhere. She stated that no school district is perfect. She stated that every district has challenges. She stated that we must encourage parents to work with us so that we can resolve problems together. She stated that for these reasons, she believes the Board should consider identifying funding for a consultant who could help us evaluate our performance, understand why students are leaving, and develop a stronger strategy for marketing and retaining students.

Mr. Frost stated that he does not have a problem with losing students to other public schools. He stated that his concern is losing students to private schools and charter schools because they have more opportunities and can do things that traditional public schools cannot do.

3. Facilities Update

Mr. Hudson stated that he would like to provide a few updates on the status of our facilities. He stated that Mr. Chris Marshall, the project manager from Allstate Construction, typically attends Board meetings to provide updates on the new K-8 school project. He stated that unfortunately, Mr. Marshall was unable to attend today's meeting, so he would provide the construction updates. He stated that regarding our facilities operations, we have made significant progress in getting the HVAC systems under control. He stated that we are doing the best we can with the resources available. He stated that the extreme heat made this year particularly challenging, but we have been able to manage the situation more effectively. He stated that one remaining concern is grounds maintenance. He stated that normally, grass growth begins to slow down around this time of year, and we typically finish most of our mowing activities by late October or early November. He stated however, because of the continued heat, the grass is still growing. He stated that we are waiting to see when growth will slow down so that we can redirect our resources and provide logistical support to other departments. He stated that once that happens, we will be able to focus on the significant amount of work ahead of us, including moving activities and providing support to other departments throughout the district. He stated that our department is also conducting interviews to address staffing shortages. He stated that we have several promising candidates and hope to make progress toward having adequate staffing levels. Mr. McMillan stated that he wanted to know what positions are you currently interviewing for. Mr. Hudson stated that we are interviewing candidates for HVAC technicians, an electrician, general maintenance positions, and groundskeepers. He stated that regarding construction of the new K-8 school, the photographs presented to the Board show progress throughout several areas of the project. He stated that the cafeteria and other buildings are progressing, with brickwork underway and structural components being installed. He stated that the structural steel joists are being positioned to support the roof decking. He stated that the exterior facade is also shown to illustrate the building's anticipated appearance once construction is complete. He shared photos of the central utility plant showing that crews have begun installing interior and exterior brickwork. He stated that this portion of the work is expected to be completed by next week. He stated that the Innovation Center is also featured in the presentation. He stated that this facility will be an important addition to the school and will have a significant impact on the overall learning environment. He stated that the photographs also show the foundations where brick masonry work will take place. He stated that areas identified as C1 and C2 contain classrooms. He stated that in the rear portion of the property, crews are completing plumbing and other construction work while making every effort to keep the project on schedule and ensure that the school is ready for occupancy by the anticipated date. He stated that in the parking area, the drainage system and piping have been installed, allowing work in that area to move forward. He stated that piping for the gutters and downspouts has also been installed.

Ms. Hannigon stated that she had a question regarding the utilities. She stated that at the previous meeting, she believes the representative indicated that we would receive an update concerning coordination with the City of Quincy. What is the current status? Mr. Hudson stated that we have an upcoming Owner-Architect-Contractor (OAC) meeting, during which we will request an update on the utility arrangements. He stated that we hope to have that information available for the Board soon.

Mr. Frost stated that he was excited that our students will no longer have to attend school in the same building that we attended 50 years ago. He stated that they will have the opportunity to learn in a brand-new school and a completely new environment. He stated that he was very excited about this project, and he commended Mr. Hudson for his work. He stated that this year was particularly difficult for those responsible for maintaining air-conditioning systems. He stated that his own air conditioner went out at home, and he experienced firsthand how uncomfortable the heat could be. He stated that the extreme temperatures made this a challenging year, and he wanted to commend Mr. Hudson again for his efforts.

Mr. McMillan wanted to know if Mr. Hudson, could provide an update on Chattahoochee Elementary School. Mr. Hudson stated that we are waiting for an installation date. He stated that the equipment has already been ordered, and the necessary measurements have been taken. He stated that we are waiting to learn when the materials will arrive so that the installation can be scheduled. He stated that we hope to have an update by the middle of next week. He stated that we have communicated the urgency of this situation to the vendor and are working to ensure that installation takes place as soon as the materials arrive.

Ms. Johnson wanted to know how is the HVAC system at Havana Magnet School performing. Mr. Hudson stated that the HVAC system at Havana Magnet School is performing much better. He stated that we occasionally receive calls about a particular area experiencing an issue, but these problems are generally resolved quickly when our maintenance staff responds. He stated that recently, we have not encountered problems requiring expensive replacement parts, such as compressors that can cost thousands of dollars. He stated that most of the issues have been minor repairs that Mr. Isaac and Mr. Bell have been able to address promptly, allowing the affected areas to return to normal operation.

4. Educational Items by the Superintendent

Mr. Key stated that as a reminder, we are still working through the budget process. He stated that there are things he would like to say, but he recognizes that his comments must be carefully considered and communicated appropriately. He stated that we need to be mindful of how our statements may be perceived by the public, particularly when discussing the district's financial challenges. He stated that we do not want to give the impression that individuals do not care about our students or the condition of our facilities when we are operating under significant budget constraints. He stated that if we had \$100,000 available to repair the air-conditioning system at Chattahoochee Elementary School, the work would have already been completed. He stated likewise, if we had the millions of dollars necessary to replace the entire HVAC unit at Havana Magnet School, that replacement would have been completed. He stated that we were quoted approximately \$100,000 for the work at George W. Munroe Elementary School, and we are finally moving forward with addressing that issue. He stated that as Mr. Hudson explained, we worked with another vendor who provided an alternative approach to getting the air-conditioning system in the cafeteria at George W. Munroe Elementary School operational. He stated that system has been down since last year. He stated that the temperature in the cafeteria became so high that, beginning this school year, we could no longer allow students to eat there.

Mr. Key stated that regarding the carpet project, he understands that the vendor arrived to begin the work because it had already been scheduled. He stated that he was informed that someone had failed to contact the vendor to stop the project. He stated that since the work had previously been approved and the vendor had already arrived, he allowed it to proceed. He stated however, when he went into the office and saw the work beginning, he recognized that it could have been stopped before the vendor started. He stated that if we had stopped the work at that point, we might have avoided having to pay for it. He stated that he wanted to make it clear that we are not prioritizing beautification projects over the needs of our students. He stated that our students' safety, comfort, and educational environment remain our priorities. He stated that the challenge is that we do not have the financial resources necessary to address every facility need immediately. He stated that until we establish a reliable funding source in Gadsden County to support renovations, repairs, and long-term maintenance of our school buildings, we will continue facing these same challenges 10, 20, or even 30 years from now. He stated that these are issues that should have been addressed decades ago, and we must find a sustainable way to move forward. He stated that he understands that people have concerns about the age of our buildings. He stated however, we do not always apply the same criticism when discussing other counties. He stated that we send our tax dollars to support schools in Leon County, where facilities may be 15 years old, and to Franklin County, including Apalachicola, where some facilities may be 20 years old. He stated that yet, when we discuss the needs of our own district, the conversation often becomes critical. He stated that he was not directing these comments at any particular individual. He stated that he was speaking about our county as a whole. He stated that he has seen comments on Facebook expressing a desire for better schools while also criticizing efforts to make improvements. He stated that we cannot continue asking for progress while opposing the measures that could help us achieve it. He stated that there are also inaccurate statements circulating about the district, including allegations of corruption and wrongdoing. He stated that these claims are not always corrected, and he sometimes feel compelled to respond. He stated that he wanted to be clear that we are not going to tolerate corruption or conceal wrongdoing to protect anyone's position. He stated that we must remain accountable and transparent in how we conduct the district's business. He stated that until the citizens of Gadsden County support the district and work together to move our schools forward, we will continue to face significant challenges.

Mr. Key stated that student enrollment is another important concern. He has heard parents express the belief that their children are too good for Gadsden County schools. He stated that attitude is part of the challenge we face. He stated that we are part of this county, and we must work together to strengthen it rather than simply looking elsewhere for solutions. He stated that he believes that approximately 62 of Florida's 67 school districts are experiencing declining student enrollment. He stated that if that figure is correct, it demonstrates that this is not a challenge unique to Gadsden County. Other districts are also working to retain students and bring families back into their schools. He stated that our neighboring district has launched a campaign to encourage families to return to its schools, and its efforts have been criticized, with some arguing that the money could have been spent elsewhere. He stated that this illustrates that, regardless of what we do or how we approach the problem, we may face criticism from members of the public. He stated for that reason, we must be careful about how we communicate our decisions and financial circumstances. He stated that people listening to our discussions may interpret our statements differently, and important context can sometimes be overlooked. He stated that there are many aspects of the district's financial situation that the public may not fully understand. He stated that those who have served on school boards or worked closely with school districts may better understand the financial challenges we are discussing. He stated that as Mrs. Bruner explained, school districts often experience a particularly tight financial period at the beginning of the fiscal year. He stated that during this time, some districts borrow money or take out loans to cover expenses while waiting for revenue to arrive. He stated unfortunately, Gadsden County has money in the bank to help us manage this period until additional revenues begin

coming in. He stated that is a positive circumstance, not a negative one. He stated that we must recognize the importance of managing those available funds responsibly while ensuring that essential expenses are covered. He stated that we are committed to doing everything possible to take care of the children of Gadsden County. He stated however, achieving our goals will require the cooperation and support of the entire community. He stated that we must also identify a sustainable funding source for facility improvements. He stated that there are limited options available to the district. He stated that one possibility is increasing the millage rate, which we are not pursuing at this time. He stated that another is pursuing a sales tax initiative to generate additional revenue. He stated ultimately, the citizens will have to decide whether they are willing to support that effort and invest in our schools. He stated that at the same time, we are receiving requests from the City of Quincy regarding the demolition of a building. He stated that we must ask an important question: Where will the money come from to complete that work? He stated that we cannot commit to projects without identifying the resources necessary to pay for them. He stated that until the community supports the improvements it says it wants, it will be difficult for the district to make the progress necessary to provide the facilities our students deserve. He stated that when we look at Leon County, we see a district with a budget that he believes is approximately \$500 million to \$600 million. He stated that a significant portion of that funding comes from sales tax revenue, including revenue generated through the sales tax that Gadsden County residents contribute when they make purchases in Leon County. He stated that we must carefully consider these circumstances and determine how we can move Gadsden County forward. He stated that we cannot continue operating under the same financial constraints while expecting substantially different results. He stated that our students deserve safe, comfortable, well-maintained schools. Meeting those needs will require responsible financial management, a sustainable funding strategy, transparency, and the support of our entire community.

5. School Board Requests and Concerns

Mr. Scott stated that he had questions about the proposed optional sales tax and the language included in the proposal. He stated that based on that language, if the measure passes, will the revenue be designated exclusively for the Gadsden County public school system? He stated that citizens have asked whether the district would be required to share the revenue with Crossroad Academy. Mr. Key responded yes. Mr. Scott wanted to know about Robert F. Munroe Day School, Tallavana School, or the New Franklin Academy. Mr. Key responded no, because those are private schools. Mr. Scott wanted to know the familiarity with the New Franklin Academy. Mr. Key stated yes, however to his knowledge, it is a private school. Mrs. Franklin has been operating for some time, although the school was previously located in Leon County rather than Gadsden County.

Ms. Johnson wanted to know if the Board could obtain copies of the football game schedules. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know if we and why the districtwide Google Calendar had been discontinued. She stated that she wanted to follow up on some of the Superintendent's earlier comments regarding statements being made publicly about the proposed half-cent sales tax, our school district, and local government. She stated that there have been accusations that individuals throughout Gadsden County are corrupt or misappropriating funds. She stated that she did a quick google search because she believes many residents are either uninformed or misinformed about these issues. She stated that for example, when residents shop in Leon County, a portion of the sales tax they pay helps support that county, including its schools. She stated that many people may not realize this when they make purchases using cash, checks, or credit cards. She stated that she did not fully understand the extent of this issue herself until recently. She stated according to the information she found online, Leon County's sales tax initiative dates back to 2002. She stated that compared with our neighboring county, Gadsden County is approximately 24 years behind in having a similar funding mechanism. She stated that as a result, we are trying to catch up while addressing aging facilities that are deteriorating and require significant repairs. She stated that she also believes we need to examine what we can do better as a school district. We need to tell our own story. She stated that we have a public information officer, so we should consider how we can strengthen our communication efforts and ensure the public understands the positive work taking place in our schools. She stated that we cannot respond to every negative comment on social media. She stated that she also read the comments that have been circulating, and she was surprised by some of what she saw. She stated for example, she read a WCTV social media post about a vehicle accident in which an individual was transported to Tallahassee Memorial HealthCare (TMH). She stated that although the report concerned the accident, the discussion somehow shifted to the school district, the proposed sales tax, and criticism of our local hospital. She stated that this illustrates how quickly conversations can move away from the original subject and become focused on the school district, even when the district has no direct connection to the issue being discussed. She stated that because we are currently asking residents to consider a half-cent sales tax, we are facing criticism that is not necessarily related to our own actions. She stated that some of the criticism reflects broader frustrations and issues that have made headlines throughout the county. She stated that our challenge is to communicate more effectively. She stated that she was not suggesting that we try to answer every negative statement. She stated that instead, we should make a greater effort to share positive information, highlight our accomplishments, and help residents understand what the district is doing to improve educational opportunities for our

students. She stated that sometimes she removes items from the consent agenda so that we can discuss them publicly. She stated although Board members may already understand what is happening within the district, members of the public who watch our meetings may not have that information. She stated that these discussions provide an opportunity to explain the positive work being done and ensure that residents are aware of our progress. She stated that we should consider how we can invest in better communication and use the media outlets available to us to present a more complete picture of the district.

Ms. Hannigon stated that returning to the issue of school choice, we must determine how to make the Gadsden County School District the best choice for families. She stated that we need to communicate our strengths while also acknowledging the areas in which improvement is necessary. She stated that as she mentioned earlier, declining enrollment is not a problem unique to Gadsden County. School districts throughout Florida are dealing with similar challenges. She stated however, we still have a responsibility to operate our schools effectively, manage our finances, and find ways to remain financially stable. She stated that the situation becomes more challenging as additional schools open and provide families with more educational choices. She stated that we must determine how to respond to these changes and develop strategies that will help us retain students. She stated that perhaps we can schedule time to discuss these concerns collectively and identify approaches that may help us address them. This is a significant problem, and it will not disappear without deliberate action. She stated that our staff members are already managing their daily responsibilities and may not have sufficient time to step back and develop comprehensive solutions. She stated that she hopes we can work together to identify strategies that will benefit the district. She stated that as a starting point, she recommends strengthening our marketing efforts, promoting the positive work taking place in our schools, and communicating more effectively with the public.

Mr. Frost stated that has found that one of the best ways to get information to our residents is to go directly into the community and engage with them. He stated that he does not always ask someone to send me a schedule. He stated that he goes out and obtain the information himself. He stated that when you visit our gymnasium, look to the right, and you will see the people working in their designated areas. He stated that we have to get out into the community and be involved. He stated that when we attend games in Leon County, we see the new athletic fields, gymnasiums, and other facilities. He stated that our spending in that county contributes to its economy and supports the services and facilities available there. He stated that a house divided against itself cannot stand. He stated that we are trying to hold our own district together, and it often feels as though we are relying on prayer to get us through.

Ms. Hannigon stated that she would like to make one additional comment. She stated that she appreciates the points that have been made, she was confident that if this room were filled with teachers and staff members from throughout the district, many would express concerns about the challenges they face every day. She stated that they may love Gadsden County and remain here because they care about the community, but that does not mean there are no problems. She stated that there are real issues that need to be addressed. She stated that discussing these challenges does not mean that we believe our students are bad or that the entire school district is failing. She stated that it means that we recognize there are areas in which improvements are necessary. She stated that our teachers deal with these challenges daily. She stated that based on some of the phone calls she receive, there are staff members who feel as though they are facing these issues without adequate support. She stated that while attending athletic events and engaging with the community are valuable activities, we must also recognize what is happening inside our classrooms. She stated that teachers and staff members are on the front lines of education, and they need support in addressing the difficulties they encounter. She stated that as the Superintendent noted earlier, these challenges are not unique to Gadsden County. Other school districts may be experiencing even more serious problems. She stated that however, that does not eliminate our responsibility to address the issues within our own district. She stated that there are situations involving teachers and staff that we can help resolve through appropriate support, communication, and mediation. She stated that she wanted to emphasize that her intention in raising these concerns is not to portray our students or our school district negatively. She stated that no school district is perfect. She stated that every district has challenges that require attention. She stated that we must be willing to acknowledge those concerns, listen to our employees, and work together to find practical solutions that improve the educational environment for both students and staff.

6. The workshop adjourned at 5:48 P.M.