

SCHOOL BOARD PROCEEDINGS

The Avoyelles Parish School Board met in special session Tuesday, February 28, 2012, at 6:05 p.m. at the School Board Office with the following members present:

James Gauthier, President; Michael Lacombe, Vice-President; Freeman Ford, Darrell Wiley, Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., Shelia Blackman-Dupas, Lizzie Ned, Van Kojis, and Cynthia "Cindy" Hill.

Absent: None.

An Invocation was offered by Assistant Superintendent Craig Foster.

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the United States of America led by Board Member Freeman Ford.

1. On motion by Van Kojis, seconded by Michael Lacombe, the Board adopted the minutes of the regular Board meeting held Tuesday, February 7, 2012, as printed and mailed to Board members and published in The Weekly News, official journal of the Board. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

2. Superintendent Dwayne Lemoine presented personnel changes for the Board's consideration, as follows:

PERSONNEL CHANGES

COTTONPORT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Resignation of Rev. Charlie L. Jones, bus driver, effective May 25, 2012, for the purpose of retirement.

RIVERSIDE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: Appointment of John Austin, Jr., custodian, replacing Robert Hills who retired, effective March 7, 2012; and resignation of Robert J. Hills, custodian, effective February 29, 2012, for the purpose of retirement.

MARKSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL: Resignation of Tim Masling, band director, effective May 25, 2012, for the purpose of retirement; resignation of Sherman Williams, teacher, effective February 6, 2012, for the purpose of retirement; and correction in date of appointment: Appointment of Michael Welker, teacher, effective February 22, 2012 through May 25, 2012, replacing Ann Collins.

ADDENDUM(S) 2/28/2012

AVOYELLES HIGH SCHOOL: Appointment of Queen Alexander, special education teacher, effective February 24, 2012 through May 7, 2012, replacing Travis Armand while on sick leave.

MARKSVILLE HIGH SCHOOL: Resignation of Michael Ducote, custodian, effective at the end of the day February 23, 2012.

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On motion by Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., seconded by Cindy Hill, the Board adopted the personnel changes as presented by Superintendent Lemoine. MOTION CARRIED UNANIMOUSLY.

3. Superintendent Dwayne Lemoine advised the Board of a continuation of the grievance hearing for Mr. Melvin Jackson, teacher. Mr. Lemoine noted that at the February 7, 2012 School Board meeting the Board had asked for ample time to read the transcript of the grievance.

A motion was offered by Van Kojis, seconded by Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., that the Board accept the Superintendent's recommendation which is to dispose of the grievance submitted by Mr. Melvin Jackson.

Mr. Melvin Jackson addressed the Board regarding their hiring practices and procedures. He stated that he has been employed in the Avoyelles Parish school system for approximately 18 years as well as he is a product of the parish totaling 31 years. Mr. Jackson further stated that as an employee, mentor, and pastor, he is eager and willing to work as a teacher and coach, however, he has been denied this opportunity.

Furthermore, Mr. Jackson stated that he is a hard-worker and has done an excellent job as a teacher, athletic director (at the middle school level), and coach. He further stated that he enjoys a challenge and is willing to accept a coaching position at the high school level. In addition, Mr. Jackson stated that he has discussed this matter with various members of the community, and was told that he would be a welcome addition to a high school faculty. Mr. Jackson said that he has continuously requested a transfer from 1996 to the present, but has been unsuccessful in this endeavor. He advised the Board that during his tenure at Bunkie Middle School, he was a successful teacher and coach and a role model to his students.

Mr. Jackson appealed to the Board to practice forgiveness and reconsider their hiring procedures. He asked that the Board provide him an opportunity to coach at the high school level; and he pledged to work hard and have a successful athletic program.

President James Gauthier recognized individuals from the audience who spoke in support of Mr. Jackson. The citizens included Mr. Len Thomas, Rev. Chris Augustine, Rev. Allen Holmes, Mr. Howard Desselle, and Mrs. Christina Robinson.

Superintendent Dwayne Lemoine responded to statements offered by Mr. Len Thomas. Mr. Lemoine explained the Board's role or lack of their role in this matter. He said that the Board has hiring practices in place and that the hiring practices of the district, which are bound by state and ethical laws allow for a principal to make a recommendation for the hire and transfer for anyone they supervise on their school campus. Mr. Lemoine further stated that if a Board member coerces, compels, or ask a principal for a recommendation, they have violated the ethics laws and they are subject to a fine. In addition, Mr. Lemoine stated that as the agency head of this school district, he is required by law to report any ethics violations committed by this Board. Mr. Lemoine further stated that he is in a position, bound by the Board's policies and laws, that he cannot recommend a transfer to this Board without having received one from the principal of the school in

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view of the fact that the policies do not allow this practice and further that it cannot happen tonight. Mr. Lemoine also cautioned the Board not to be involved in a personnel matter because members would have to be reported to the Ethics Board for an ethics violation due to laws that govern a public Board which is the reason there are policies in place. Mr. Lemoine stated that he cannot make a recommendation to the Board unless he receives a recommendation from the principal and the Board members cannot, tonight, make a recommendation of a placement of Mr. Jackson without violating their own policy and the Board of Ethics.

Board Member Freeman Ford stated that the Superintendent was speaking of a situation whereby the Board was not convened. Mr. Ford said that the Board was here tonight to determine whether or not the policy was followed for all the years that Mr. Jackson was employed and even though the sending school should be approved by the receiving school, it would not be wrong for this Board to think that if the receiving person had made their decision prior to interviewing the applicant, this would not be proper procedure and that the policy was not followed in a consistent manner.

Mr. Melvin Jackson stated that he has requested approximately six transfers through the years of his employment and that the hiring policies has not remained consistent through the years. Mr. Jackson said that at one time, he was very near to being assigned to a high school, but the offer was withdrawn due to the fact that he was a coach at a middle school.

President James Gauthier stated that Mr. Jackson referred to past employment and speaking for himself, Mr. Gauthier stated that he was not serving on the Board during that period of time. Mr. Gauthier further stated that years ago, Board members were heavily involved in the hiring practices, but the hiring practices have changed through the years. Therefore, Mr. Gauthier stated that he is making his decision based on the facts presented this evening, not on past circumstances.

Board Member Shelia Blackman-Dupas stated that she is not in agreement due to a lack of consistency in the Board's hiring policy which she felt was one of the reasons Mr. Jackson was not able to transfer from one school to another. Furthermore, Mrs. Dupas stated that as a Board, individuals have been promoted with pending charges against them. Mrs. Dupas felt that due to the Board's inconsistencies, this is a major concern among employees, thus it gives employees the impression that the Board is not fair with its decisions. In conclusion, Mrs. Dupas said that it is a problem in the manner that the Board enforces their hiring practices.

Board Member Lizzie Ned encouraged Coach Jackson to move forward and not give up on his dream. Mrs. Ned stated that he is a dedicated teacher, coach, and a professional man. Also, she said that she is very hurt that over the years Coach Jackson was not able to move from one school to another school. Also, Mrs. Ned stated that in her 37 years of teaching, she taught in three different parishes and she was aware of her gifts and talents. Mrs. Ned said that she was given the opportunity to pursue these skills and opportunities and as a result, she became a very successful teacher. Mrs. Ned further stated that she believes in providing an opportunity to all individuals and it is her opinion that Coach Jackson was denied the opportunity to move to the level he desired.

President Gauthier called for a vote on the motion offered by Mr. Kojis.

The motion was adopted by the following vote:

Ayes: Darrell Wiley, Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., James Gauthier, Michael Lacombe, Van Kojis, and Cindy Hill.

Nays: Freeman Ford, Shelia Blackman-Dupas, and Lizzie Ned.

Mrs. Shelia Dupas stated that the reason she voted “nay” was because she felt the Board’s hiring practice was flawed and that the policy was not consistent.

Mr. Freeman Ford stated that due to Superintendent Lemoine’s previous comments, this is not a vote to influence or intimidate anybody in hiring anybody in a particular position.

4. On motion by Van Kojis, seconded by Freeman Ford, the Board agreed to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussing a personnel matter.

On motion by Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., seconded by Van Kojis, the Board reconvened in open public session at approximately 7:35 p.m.

A motion was offered by Freeman Ford, seconded by Shelia Blackman-Dupas, that the Board accept the resignation of the individual discussed in Executive Session, effective at the end of the day February 29, 2012.

The motion was adopted by the following vote:

Ayes: Freeman Ford, Carlos A. Mayeux, Jr., Shelia Blackman-Dupas, James Gauthier, Michael Lacombe, Lizzie Ned, Van Kojis, and Cindy Hill.

Nays: Darrell Wiley.

There being no further business, on motion by Van Kojis, seconded by Cindy Hill, the meeting was adjourned.

President

Secretary-Treasurer

