

REGULAR SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

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

November 18, 2025

6:00 P.M.

The meeting 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 meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 6:00 p.m.

2. OPENING PRAYER

The opening prayer was led by Pastor Willie Fagg of Second Elizabeth Missionary Baptist Church.

3. PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Recited in unison.

4. RECOGNITIONS

Ms. Hannigon stated that in sponsorship as a School Board member, owner of the Ivy Shop and in partnership with Direct Auto Exchange, the student of the month, support staff and teacher of the month for November were recognized from Gadsden County High School. She invited Principal Marlon Ball to address the Board to share how each of the individuals were selected for recognition. She stated that the teacher of the month (Ms. Angelina Horton) was presented \$250 as well as flowers from the Ivy Shop. She stated that the support staff (Ms. Jennifer Tsigbey) also received \$250 and flowers from the Ivy Shop, and the student of the month (Chasity Redding) received \$200 and some paraphernalia from Direct Auto Exchange. Each individual was presented with a plaque. The Board and Superintendent thanked each individual for their recognition and hard work.

5. CITIZEN COMMENTS AND CONCERNS

Mr. Gary Russ-Sills addressed the Board and explained how the system they are using is helping to work through some key progress highlights in the implementation of the new attendance manual. He stated that as of November 17th, the Gadsden County School District's Chronic Absenteeism Rate is 37.75%, with 1,509 of the district's 3,997 enrolled students missing at least 10% of school days. He stated that this represents a significant improvement from the 2024 – 2026 school year, when chronic absenteeism was approximately 50% (2,123 of 4,256 students). He stated that this downward trend reflects meaningful progress in strengthening attendance support systems and intervention practices across the district. He stated that the implementation of the Attendance Intervention Manual has been a key factor in this improvement, helping schools enhance progress-monitoring processes, track attendance trends more comprehensively, and ensure staff take more timely steps to address student attendance concerns. He stated that notably, social workers, teachers, and administrators have played an increasingly active role in attendance interventions and student engagement efforts. He stated that despite these gains, additional work remains. He stated that specific areas for improvement include the consistent distribution and collection of attendance policy acknowledgement forms, more effective use of the FOCUS system by classroom teachers for documentation and monitoring, and the continued need for consistent implementation of interventions and corrective actions across all schools. He shared with the Board the following school level attendance actions: George Munroe Elementary School – approximately 50 teacher consultations (emails or discussions) regarding attendance updates; approximately 50 family phone calls about attendance expectations; 50 nudge letters sent

home; 15 students participating in social skills groups; 10 students receiving individual support; 12 student check-ins focused on motivation and attendance improvement; and 1 home visit conducted. James A Shanks Middle School – Nudge letters mailed to families; attendance-focused phone calls to parents and guardians; attempts made to schedule parent conferences; home visits conducted; student check-ins three times per week; and habitual truancy letter drafted for one student following exhaustive intervention and engagement attempts. Chattahoochee Elementary School – 17 attendance non-compliance letters issued; and one home visit conducted. Greensboro Elementary School – 95 attendance non-compliance letters issued; 2 home visits completed; 2 attendance contracts initiated with families; and 2 Navigate 360 attendance interventions implemented. He stated that to further reduce chronic absenteeism district-wide, the following actions are recommended: 1) Strengthen enforcement of attendance policies – increase accountability for parents and guardians is necessary. Because many families do not receive government assistance, withholding such benefits would not serve as an impactful motivator. Therefore, stronger policy-based consequences are needed; 2) Update Student Attendance Policy 5.40 – incorporate clear and actionable consequences for non-compliance; and ensure corrective actions support consistent, district-wide implementation; 3) Enhance staff usage of FOCUS – provide additional training to classroom teachers to ensure consistent documentation and monitoring of attendance data; and 4) Improve distribution and documentation of attendance acknowledgement forms – Ensure all families receive and return required documentation to reinforce expectations. He stated that by strengthening these areas, the Gadsden County School District could continue making meaningful progress in reducing chronic absenteeism and promoting student success. He stated that the FACE Office is actively working to offer services and support to our families: Attendance & Student Support – Update/train staff on policy and procedures; provide on-site support for staff and students; actively engage with families and communities regarding the importance of attendance. McKinney Vento Program – Refresh/train staff on identifiers and steps to support students and families connect with partners for continuous support; actively work with families to offer resources to promote school attendance and well-being. Home Ed & Virtual Instruction – Ensure compliance for families and students: conduct on-site home evaluations; provide overview of services and options for students and families; offer cost-success analysis for informed-decisions; maintain accountability and support for students. K-8 School – Facilitate meaningful and courageous conversations for internal plan development; provide feedback and follow-up to stakeholders & project management; maintain and update K-8 website to ensure transparency. School Climate Change – Engage schools, families and communities with incentives and resources for success; offer meaningful and sustainable solutions to macro-level issues. He explained to the Board that he was moving on to another position at Florida State University. The Board thanked Mr. Russ-Sills for his hard work in the district and noted that he will be missed.

Ms. Curlie Wilson, grandparent of a student at Gadsden County High School addressed the Board with her concerns about a transportation incident that happened involving her grandson. After the Board heard Ms. Wilson's concern, she was informed of the information she wanted to know about the incident. The student's father addressed the Board and stated that he met with school administration and the matter was resolved.

Attorney Baptiste (Gadsden County Commissioners) addressed the Board to say thank you to the Board and Superintendent for allowing him to come back on behalf of the Gadsden County Board of County Commissioners. He shared with the Board an amended resolution to an agreement and the Ward's Lot property. He stated that this resolution does satisfy that extra piece information regarding the facilities work plan. He stated that the plan refers to the designated property is no longer a school and is no longer needed for educational purposes. He stated that he has done all the research to ensure that the county is able to build on this lot. Attorney Minnis stated the item has been added to the agenda as item #8b and needed the Board's approval.

Following discussion, Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon made a motion to add agenda item #8b – Resolution No. 2025-05 and the Interlocal Agreement. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Scott and carried unanimously.

ITEMS FOR CONSENT

Mr. McMillan entertained a motion to approve the remaining consent agenda. The motion was made by Mrs. Stacey S. Hannigon, seconded by Mr. Charlie D. Frost and carried unanimously.

6. REVIEW OF MINUTES

- a. October 7, 2025, 3:00 p.m. – Special School Board Meeting
- b. October 15, 2025, 3:00 p.m. – School Board Workshop
- c. October 28, 2025, 4:30 p.m. – School Board Financial Workshop

d. October 28, 2025, 6:00 p.m. - Regular School Board Meeting

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

7. PERSONNEL MATTERS (resignations, retirements, recommendations, leaves of absence, terminations of services, volunteers, and job descriptions)

a. Personnel 2025 – 2026

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

Items preceded by an asterisk (*) were removed from the consent agenda at the beginning of the meeting and acted upon during the discussion portion of the agenda.

*8. AGREEMENTS/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATIONS

a. Highland Electric Fleet, Inc.

Fund Source: Capital Outlay

Amount: \$136,000.00 Annually

Mr. Scott expressed his concern regarding the idea of electric vehicles. He stated that considering the status of our bus system and the fact that we have to do something over the next 12 years, he sees this a win, win situation. He stated that he was concerned about #7 Vehicle and System Operations and its Roman number IX page 36 referencing not to operate a vehicle on a route that extends more than 60 miles away from the premises in any direction. Mr. Dominic Ricotta (Highland Electric) stated that the mileage need to be increased. He stated that the district could always request a planned excursion or let us know of that excursion and take it further than 60 miles, especially if we know that it will be stopping at one of the other Highland depot sites. Ms. Johnson wanted to know the district's long-term plan. Mr. Matthew Bryant – (Transportation Director) stated that we are looking to purchase diesel buses as well. We looked at this as an idea to be able to get as an option to get some additional buses based on the grant that was provided through Highland. Ms. Johnson asked if there was an exit plan. Mr. Ricotta stated that Highland Electric is always available to help capture more grants or step in where we could be beneficial. He stated that they want to recommend something that is going to be cost effective to the district. He stated that does not say we cannot continue to supplement the fleet with diesel buses, whichever way you may see. He stated that in reference to the exit clause, Highland would provide all the upfront capital, so essentially there is a termination schedule at any point during the 12 years. He stated that if the Board wants to take over ownership and terminate the contract with us outside in the event of a default, you have the option. Mr. McMillian stated that he was concerned about the \$55 an hour not being enough to pay the district's mechanics to work on Highland buses. He stated that is not enough and needs to be addressed, along with excess mileage fee. Mr. Ricotta stated that the mileage in the contract is based very distinctly on the routes the vehicles will run with some wiggle room. He stated that if one bus goes over in year 1 within the contract you could cycle it on a different route in year 2. He stated that there is also the ability to review mileage each year to make sure you have the right mileage for the routes you want to run. He stated that in reference to the mechanic fee, the district's existing mechanics that work on buses under this contract, the \$55 is a reimbursement to the team. He stated that they are going to be working on the same number of buses, and providing training on electric buses, but we are giving that credit back to the district as an incentive to keep up with some of the work that is required such as rotating tires and changing windshield wipers. He stated that anything-high voltage is for the dealer. Mr. McMillian wanted to know if Highland was comfortable in the early stage of the electric vehicles and parts being available to keep the buses running. Mr. Bryant stated that yes and asked Mr. Ross with Blue Bird to give the Board and explanation. Mr. Ross Rayner (Blue Bird Transportation) thanked the Board and was grateful for doing business with Gadsden County. He stated that he would do his best to be up to speed on anything we need to do to assure your success with the buses. He stated that the parts availability on the electric buses is of great concern to Bluebird because they are electric interest. He stated that one of the Department of Education contract specification says that we must provide parts for 15 years. Mr. McMillian stated that the connection on page 9, the interconnection limit you want is \$55,000, which covers the interconnection cost to connect the system to an on-premises connection point and to interconnect from that point to the local electric utility system. Mr. Ricotta stated yes, the money would come from your local utility. Ms. Johnson wanted to know how extreme weather affects the electric bus battery and the climate control. Mr. Ricotta stated that the battery is kept regulated. Mr. Hannigon wanted to know if the attorney prior to them coming to the board reviews the district's contracts. Attorney Minnis stated that she

reviews the contracts prior to being put on the agenda when asked to review. Mrs. Hannigon wanted to know what was budgeted for transportation. Mrs. Bruner stated that the transportation department's budget was based on the 24-25 expenditures, which was \$4,265,480.45. She stated that an additional amount of \$133,613.65 spent last year for buses. She stated that the total amount budgeted was \$4,399,094.10. She stated that several buses were purchased last year. She stated that the current amount is less than what we have in the current budget for buses. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know what the remainder of funds were budgeted for the buses when an additional \$133,000 for buses will cost the district. Mrs. Bruner stated that it would be up to Mr. Bryant to give us a plan. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know about the five-year plan. Mr. Bryant stated that based on the five-year plan we are looking at replacing a total of 23 or 24 buses altogether, which fall under the 10 to 12-year lifespan for those buses. He stated that with the eight we are looking at roughly 15 additional buses that will be replaced. He stated that we are communicating with all the vendors and possible grant information. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know if the district will be able to utilize another grant opportunity to get additional buses or is it a one-time deal? Mr. Ricotta stated that we would always assist the district in going after grants you seem applicable and we will always bring them to your attention. He stated that you are not limited to expansion; we like to make sure there is room for expansion. He stated that we want to operate in the best interest of the district. Ms. Hannigon wanted to know if school districts could pursue grant dollars directly from EPA. Mr. Ricotta responded yes. He stated that the application is simple. Mr. McMillan stated that he was concern about having something you cannot use when you get ready to use it.

Following discussion on agenda item #8a – Highland Electric Fleet, Inc., Mr. Steve Scott made a motion to approve the contract with Highland Electric Fleet. The motion was seconded by Ms. Stacey S. Hannigon and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

b. Resolution To Transfer Ward's Lot to the Board of County Commission

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

9. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Key stated that the attendance policy that Mr. Russ Sills talked about would be coming before the Board shortly, because that statute was actually changed this year. He stated that quite a few policies would be brought before the Board with the request to advertise at the December meeting.

Mr. James Mills, Principal at Greensboro Elementary School and Assistant Principal Ms. Rena Nelson shared with the Board the School Improvement Plan. Mr. Mills stated that the staff came together as a leadership team this summer. He stated that the leadership team was comprised of community members, teachers, food service workers, custodial workers and other staff. He stated that everyone felt like they had a voice and came up with the theme: Embrace Elevator and Excel. He stated that we recognized that everybody is in a different place when it comes to implementation and we wanted to make sure that everyone felt comfortable knowing that we're going to go through some changes and it's okay to embrace it, and the better we get when we elevate and of course, we excel. He stated that he wanted to share with the Board the school's five-year trend data. He stated that Greensboro Elementary School is Pre-K through 3rd with an enrollment of 258 students. He stated that the school grade, despite having 258 students, is only based this year on 51 students. He stated that it is only proficiency is when we get learning gains. He stated that we began PM1 this year with 0% proficient in PreK ELA; kindergarten was at 0% in ELA. He stated that these are proficiency numbers - 7% proficiency in math. He stated that in October we went up 6% in proficiency in kindergarten, stayed at 7%, unchanged for kindergarten, ELA and 1st grade at 7%, went up to 11%; 2% in math. He stated that the 1st grade went up to 25% proficiency. He stated that the numbers reflect the alignment study that was done and released in late August. He stated that 2nd grade ELA started off the year with 7% proficiency, 15% from October with 2nd grade math 4% with improvement to 15% so far; 3rd grade started the year off with 5% proficiency, we are now at 16%, we began the year with no students efficient in math and have moved up to 4%. He stated that the way the school is structured 3rd grade reading counts twice plus 100 more points for math. He stated that for every student we get a percent in terms of proficient in reading that is really four points for our school grade. He stated that in attendance compared to last year in August, September and October is based on a 7-day flu outbreak that we had. He stated that the guidance counselor, teachers and I would make the necessary phone calls that are needed to make sure that our parents know how excellent it will be to have our children in school and on time. He stated that attendance is necessary. He stated that we are up on discipline referrals because we

are identifying more students for early intervention services. He stated that this does not mean that we have an increase in behavior issues; it just means that we want to make sure that we are documenting our students so that we can provide the services that they need. He stated that a student support services team has been put in place. He stated that an ESE Pre-K unit has been added. He stated that everyone knows that we are going to work together. We consistently have meetings to say what is working, what is not working, and have that effective communication. He stated that we are really making a focus on effective communication so that everybody in the building knows what is going on at all times.

Board members thanked Mr. Mills and Ms. Nelson for their presentation on the state of Greensboro Elementary School.

Ms. Thelma Hickman, Principal at Havana Magnet School, and Assistant Principals Ms. Deborah Dickey and Ms. Shannon Williams shared with the Board the state of Havana Magnet School. Ms. Hickman stated that she was the proud principal of Havana Magnet School where our mission is to provide a rigorous learning environment where students feel safe to achieve academic and personal success. She stated that the schools' vision for our students is for them to become self-driven learners who think critically and take ownership of their own learning in a positively engaged environment. She stated that we are moving onward and upward, ready, set, to go blasting off into excellence. She stated that our comparison data from PM3 to PM1 shows that there have been drastic changes. She stated that PM3 to PM1 across all grade levels, PM1 is lower than PM3. She stated that PM3 testing tells what a student should know at the end of the school year, and PM1 testing usually test information that has not previously been taught. She stated that STAR and the PM3 measure the same things. She stated that STAR was designed to show growth. She stated that student attendance is ADA our average daily attendance. She stated that the attendance rate is up, all except for 7th grade. She stated that they are kind of lagging behind a little bit, but we are on the right track of moving our students, getting them present every day. She stated that we work closely with our school social workers to make sure the students report to them and to check in with their parents. She stated that we have created a new display that went up today with attendance that says we are soaring to 98% of attendance. We have a plan to encourage the students. She stated that if they show up on the day of their PM2 testing, they get an out of uniform pass. If they score a level 3-4 or 5 on their PM testing, they get a 3 week of outer uniform pass and that has been one way to get them to school. She stated that we are doing very well with discipline because of the new and improved student Code of Conduct. She stated that we work hard each day with our administrative staff along with our social workers to provide interventions for student to keep them in school. She stated that we have added athletics as our 40% club. She stated that the goal for November was 40%, so we have created a display in the front office and every student who met the 40% club earned a certificate with their name displayed in the front office. She stated that we are shooting for 98%. She stated that we have data chats with the students and teachers. She stated that the administrative staff have data chats with the students after PM2 testing. She stated that the prediction for this year is know that there is going to be a new scale this year that says an A. She stated that she was hoping to increase our learning gains. She stated that we are sitting right at 647 points, which would be a B. She stated that we definitely want to get an A. She stated that we are going to continue to keep working, but we wanted to make sure that we set realistic goals based on what we saw in the 24-25 year. She invited the Board to come out to experience all of the wonderful things that are happening at Havana Magnet School.

Mr. McMillan apologized for holding the principals so late to address the Board. He stated that he had all the intentions of having them come earlier.

Mr. Key thanked Ms. Hickman and the staff at Havana Magnet School for everything. He stated that he often visit, was able to stop one of the students, and asked them about their data. He stated that the students know their data every single time. He stated that he believe they have everything that they need in order to make Havana Magnet School and A. Ms. Johnson thanked them for doing an awesome job.

10. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

None.

11. The meeting adjourned at 8:05 p.m.