

SPECIAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING

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

August 4, 2020

10:00 A.M.

This special meeting was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present via telephone conference: Mrs. Audrey D. Lewis, Chairwoman; Mr. Leroy McMillan, Mr. Charlie D. Frost, Mr. Steve Scott, and Mr. Tyrone D. Smith. Also present were Mr. Roger P. Milton, 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 Chairwoman, Mrs. Audrey D. Lewis, at 10:00 a.m.

2. AGREEMENT/CONTRACT/PROJECT APPLICATION

- a. Rostan Task Order for Grant Management of the Office of Head Start's "Hurricane Michael Disaster Recovery & Mitigation" Grant

Fund Source: N/A

Amount: Not to exceed 4% of the project budget, approximately \$443,740

Mrs. Lewis introduced Mrs. LaKeysha Perkins and requested her to share with the Board a brief overview of the Rostan Task Order for Grant Management of the Office of Head Start's "Hurricane Michael Disaster Recovery & Mitigation" Grant.

Mrs. Perkins stated that documents and paperwork are being finalized to file an application for Head Start Disaster Recovery Funding from Hurricane Michael to apply for a grant. She stated that Head Start has not received any monies yet, but are in the grant application process.

Mr. Milton thanked Mrs. Perkins for her efforts to find funding to replace some of the facilities damaged by Hurricane Michael.

In response to Mr. Frost's concern regarding whether Head Start had received any funding or applying for the grant, Mr. Milton stated that Head Start was applying for the grant and once the documents are complete, they will be submitted.

Mrs. Lewis thanked Mrs. Perkins, Mr. Hunter and team members for applying for this funding opportunity.

Following discussion, Mr. Steve Scott made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve agenda item #2a. The motion was seconded by Mr. Leroy McMillan and carried with Mrs. Lewis, Mr. McMillan, Mr. Frost and Mr. Scott voting "aye".

Mr. Tyrone Smith joined the meeting following the vote on agenda item #2a.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

3. EDUCATIONAL ISSUES

a. 2020-21 Florida's Optional Innovative Reopening Plan - Gadsden County Schools

Mr. Milton stated that weeks ago the Board approved the district reopen schools on August 31st with the parents having a choice of brick and mortar or distance learning. He stated that other than brick and mortar the district has to submit a plan to the Department of Education by July 31st for approval. He stated that the Board has to approve the school reopening plan also. He stated that each Board member has been given a copy of the school reopening plan and it was posted on the district's website. He stated that there is still a lot of work to do before reopening schools. He stated that about 55% of the parents have opted for distance learning with the deadline being extended to August 7th for requests.

Mrs. Lewis stated that the district had to have assurances in the plan to take care of the most vulnerable students (ESE/ELL/lost learning).

Mrs. Farlin shared with the Board a review of the following assurances: Reopen in August with brick and mortar for five days a week; Full array of services will be offered including special services for ELL/ESE; Robust and frequent program monitoring with flexibility for parents to transition back; ESE IEP teams and support services will be done remotely unless parent requests face-to-face; ELL team meetings will continue services remotely unless requested face-to-face; Report how students are doing frequently to DOE for all students; Be flexible for Charter School to do what they need to do; and other questions in plan detailed how the district will meet these assurances.

Mrs. Lewis thanked Mrs. Farlin for the review of the assurances in the school reopening plan. She stated that everyone needed to be reminded of the difference between "virtual" and "remote or distance learning".

Mrs. Farlin stated that remote learning is where students get the same information and instruction as the brick and mortar students in their own environment as they access GCPS services. She stated that virtual is if they go outside the district instructional services (FLVS or other programs) and the FTE follows the student out of the district.

In response to Mrs. Lewis' concern regarding food service and transportation, Mr. Milton stated that he would address food service and transportation under the Superintendent's items but needed Board approval on the School Instructional Reopening Plan first.

Following discussion, Mr. Leroy McMillan made a motion to accept the Superintendent's recommendation to approve agenda item #3a. The motion was seconded by Mr. Steve Scott and carried unanimously.

ACTION REQUESTED: The Superintendent recommended approval.

4. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

Mr. Milton stated that he was communicating daily with FADSS and all other districts. He stated that Gadsden is in the top 10 of the hot spots for COVID-19 cases. He stated that there are concerns about reopening schools with the rise of positive cases. He stated that there are protests across the state. He stated that staff have submitted concerns about returning to school. He stated that the GCCTA President Mrs. Judith Mandela was present on the conference call on behalf of the teachers. He stated that the district is very concerned and encouraged parents to opt for remote learning if they can. He stated that

the district is not convinced about what the impact will be on the schools when they reopen but are still preparing for them to be open. He stated that he has great concerns about student FTE and transportation FTE. He stated that there will be a great impact on transportation FTE and funding with parents transporting students. He stated that the district will not know how to consolidate routes until after the first few weeks of school. He stated that spacing on the bus was still an issue. He stated that transportation usually costs the district more than they receive and this situation will make things even more costly. He stated that all students eat free but the district still is concerned about funding on the actual number of students eating free if there is a large number of remote students. He stated that the district was approved by the Department of Agriculture (DOA) to feed remote students but it may require adding additional staff to provide to services. He stated that the district is unsure if they will receive a waiver to let parents pick up the food instead of students. He stated that he hoped that transportation and food service funding will be held harmless. He stated that with student enrollment, the district is held harmless for the first 9 weeks but the district still has to be accountable for student learning and attendance daily to protect funding. He stated that there is still parent confusion between virtual versus remote learning. He stated that with virtual the district would lose all or a majority of its FTE. He stated that safety first will require lots of expenditures and in the face of falling revenues for enrollment the district is a concern. He stated that all Superintendents are concerned about students and staff safety. He stated that he is on daily conference calls with Superintendents and the Department of Education in this planning process. He stated that IT has provided principals with the number of requests for remote learning but those numbers do not include those requests made to the school in person. He stated that the IT requests as of Friday for remote learning were 55% of the total student body. He stated that fewer students in the building will help with social distancing but will impact funding. He stated that the district has received huge supplies of PPE and they are being shared equitably. He stated that the district is working closely to acquire more through the CARES Act. He stated that we are all vulnerable and all the experts have different views about who is safe and who should be quarantined. He stated that the district will work with the community to do our best to keep everyone safe and bring students back to school.

5. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Mrs. Lewis stated that the district is exploring other options for employees who may have some underlying conditions and who need to work remotely. She stated that she is worried about students who may not have access to the internet. She stated that the Board of County Commission is looking for ways to expand its broadband width to help with internet access.

Mr. Frost questioned why schools in South Florida are allowed to go totally remote and North Florida schools have to open with both face to face and remote options. He stated that he was concerned about the options for staff with underlying conditions returning to work.

Mr. Milton stated that the health and safety of students and staff are of great concern. He stated that no single answer is in place for each case. He stated that consideration for everyone will be taken into account if they need to work remotely, or if the district has to explore other options for employees who cannot work remotely, including exploration of leave options. He stated that the district need staff at schools and will try to work with those who cannot come on a case-by-case basis. He stated that the district will also try to be consistent with their decisions across all staff. He stated that South Florida has returned to Phase I and relies on the Health Department to determine its reopening status but some Health Departments are still hesitant to make those calls. He stated that the district is monitoring the instructional plans that have been approved and the circumstances of the plan when it was approved. He stated that the district is working to determine options for changing plans based on what other districts are being allowed to do.

In response to Mr. Frost's concern regarding the first step for an employee with an underlying condition returning to work. Mr. Milton stated that the employee should be directed to their immediate supervisor and the supervisor will work with HR to determine what protocols the employee will need to follow.

In response to Mr. Smith's concern regarding whether the Board or FADSS has drafted a resolution or referendum to oppose reopening to the Governor and the Department of Education, whether or not schools are opening too soon, and should the district consider reopening in January, Mrs. Lewis stated that yes, the Florida School Boards Association and the GCCTA have both submitted resolutions.

Mr. Smith stated that with Gadsden being in the top 10 hot spots for COVID 19, it is wise for Gadsden to draft their own resolution including asking to take Gadsden back to Phase 1, and citing legal issues and economic strain on employees while requesting district funding be held harmless. He stated that it is a hazardous work environment and Gadsden should do their own resolution.

Mr. Milton stated he would speak with Attorney Minnis regarding a resolution for Gadsden. He stated that the phases that each county is in are discussed by county as a whole and include schools. He stated that he will ask the county to work with the district on a resolution that covers the entire county. He stated that GCCTA is working with FEA on a resolution.

Mrs. Lewis stated that everyone should speak with a united voice across the district.

Mr. Milton stated that the district will continue to advocate as a county and include schools in all issues on this virus. He stated that he was not aware of a resolution being sent by the county at this time. He stated that he would share the schedule for the County Commission meetings with Mrs. Lewis so she could join those discussions at her availability.

Mrs. Lewis stated that she was concerned about the district doing everything to the best of their ability to be creative, accountable and safe.

Mrs. Judith Mandela, GCCTA President, thanked the Board for listening to the teachers and advocating for them to their peers and the Department of Education. She stated that the Department of Education has tied the teacher's hands and this advocacy is moving in the right direction for teachers. She stated that the district has to keep all 800+ employees safe. She stated that all employees needed to be encouraged to freely report without repercussions if they are not safe returning to work. She thanked the Superintendent and Board for listening to their concerns.

Mr. Milton stated that he will continue to advocate for sharing and open communication between everyone. He stated that if someone has concerns, they should share them with administration first before going to the media. He stated that the district is not trying to hide anything.

Mrs. Lewis thanked Mrs. Mandela for sharing concerns on behalf of the teachers. She stated that the Board takes safety seriously. She stated that Mrs. Vicki Muse Johnson, Mrs. Tammy Farlin, and Dr. Sylvia Jackson are developing things to share with parents when school reopens. She stated that every situation will have to be dealt with as they come up. She stated that everyone need to work as a TEAM.

6. The meeting adjourned at 11:10 a.m.