

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF  
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, DECEMBER 13, 2012

The School Board of Escambia County, Florida, convened in Special Workshop at 3:00 p.m., in Room 160, at the J.E. Hall Educational Services Center, 30 East Texar Drive, Pensacola, Florida, with the following present:

Chair: Mr. Jeff Bergosh Vice Chair: Mrs. Linda Moultrie

Board Members: Mr. Gerald W. Boone  
Mrs. Patricia Hightower (*not present*)  
Mr. Bill Slayton

School Board General Counsel: Mrs. Donna Sessions Waters

Superintendent of Schools: Mr. Malcolm Thomas

Meeting was advertised in the *Pensacola News Journal* on December 1, 2012 - Legal No. 1583994

[General discussion among Board Members, the Superintendent, and staff occurred throughout this workshop.]

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Bergosh called the Special Workshop to order at 3:00 p.m.

II. OPEN DISCUSSION

- Controlled Open Enrollment Plan – Superintendent

The Superintendent said that staff would present a proposal that would go “hand in hand” with the proposed amendments to Chapter 3 policy that were on this month’s agenda. He said some of the changes that were being recommended were for the purpose of creating a “controlled open enrollment” which would essentially be the School District’s version of maintaining choice options for students now that AYP was no longer required. Mr. Chris McFarland, Coordinator of School Choice, provided a packet of information to School Board Members that outlined the proposed amendments to Chapter 3 policy, including the addition of Section 3.02(8), *Choice Enrollment Program*. He said the proposed “controlled open enrollment” plan would allow students to have more choices going forward due to changes with Florida receiving the waiver for AYP. Mr. McFarland said that it was decided that for magnet programs there would not be any changes; the magnet schools would still enter and have the transportation options that they had always had. For high school, he said there were no changes as high schools were never really involved in the AYP transfer piece; rather the way high school students traditionally transferred through choice was through the School District’s career academies and that process was still in place and would consist of an online application that would open on January 7<sup>th</sup> and close on February 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. McFarland said there would also be no changes made to the Pensacola High School International Baccalaureate (IB) and West Florida High School magnet programs. He said that the District had started incorporating middle schools into the career academy fair so middle schools were still in open choice through career academies. He noted that Workman Middle School International Baccalaureate (IB) program had been added as a choice and they would have an online application that would open on January 7<sup>th</sup> and close on February 15<sup>th</sup>. Mr. McFarland said that for the center-to-center transportation the District was still going to run a center-to-center bus from Warrington Middle to Bellview Middle and from Woodham Middle to Ferry Pass Middle. He noted that was the same as what the District did this year for a center-to-center option for

middle school. Mr. McFarland said that the “controlled open enrollment” plan would mostly affect elementary schools. He referred to Section 3.02(8), *Choice Enrollment Program* as the verbiage that covers the District’s “controlled open enrollment” plan going forward. Mr. McFarland said the packet he had provided included a sample of an elementary school choice transportation grid that spelled out the following options that each elementary student would have for choice: 1<sup>st</sup> option would be to attend their zone school based on residential attendance zones that were already established; 2<sup>nd</sup> option would be to attend a school within one of the eight (8) geographically-relevant school choice zones and get some sort of transportation which would be managed through bus stops that were already established; 3<sup>rd</sup> option will be their choice of school with center-to-center (C2C) transportation from their zone school to the approved choice school; 4<sup>th</sup> option is N.B. Cook Elementary as all students have the opportunity each year to apply and be selected by an established deadline; 5<sup>th</sup> option would be to attend any elementary school of their choice provided that the parent/guardian provides transportation. Mr. McFarland said the School District would have to consider other issues with regard to the “controlled open enrollment” such as program and school capacity. He said the District would not be able to approve any transfers to schools that had been deemed overcapacity. Mr. Slayton asked that Mr. McFarland send the School Board Members a list of the overcapacity schools. The Superintendent noted that what Mr. McFarland would send to the School Board now would be changing because of projected FTE in the spring. He said based on what the School District was projecting in enrollment for a school that is how staff would determine the capacity for the initial wave of choice. He noted that the School District would now count the portable stations where in the past it was only permanent stations and capacity could vary from school to school. He gave Beulah Elementary as an example noting that they may have a sufficient number of seats, but when you look at the cafeteria, the media center, the kitchen, they are not able to take any more students because they cannot accommodate that without running many lunches a day. He said that staff would look at those kinds of facilities as they were looking at capacity. He did not believe that the School District would declare any school open for this open choice that was above a 95% capacity because they would need to reserve space for those students that physically move into the zone. He said the intent was to fill the school with choice for parents as much as possible but there was a finite limit to some of these schools. He said that for those schools that were the real popular choices, whatever spots were available once staff ran the projections, they would run a lottery just like they do for N.B. Cook Elementary, West Florida High School, and Brown Barge Middle School and it would be a fair distribution. Mr. Slayton wanted to know when staff would be running a new list of overcapacity schools. Mr. McFarland said that staff typically puts the new list out in June for the roll-over on July 1<sup>st</sup>. He said the current list was on his department’s website and he could certainly provide the link to that information. He noted that the current overcapacity schools were based on 95% including portables so staff typically reevaluated overcapacity at the end of the school year because we have the numbers from all of these enrollment programs that happen in the spring. The Superintendent asked Board Members to recall that under AYP you could not use capacity as a reason to deny choice. He said that what the School District was structuring with its open enrollment was that capacity had to be a factor as you did not want to overcrowd a school to the point that you would have to start serving lunch as soon as students finished breakfast. Mr. Slayton asked that the list of overcapacity school be provided to the School Board Members as soon as it was available so that they could respond appropriate to parent phone calls. Mr. Bergosh asked if there would be a priority listing, for example if there was a family with two children about to enter school and even if it was one of the schools that was overcapacity, could they if they were not going to move but they would like their children to go to one of these choice schools, is there some sort of a priority list that we could do, similar to what is done for Beulah Academy of Science in that every year they are on a list because they have people “banging down the door” to get in there. He wanted to know if the District could do something similar within this choice program. The Superintendent said it would be similar like any lottery in that if the School District had to run a lottery you would still keep the students who had applied in that eligible list. He did not anticipate that the District was going to run multiple lotteries for these schools like was done for West Florida High School and N.B. Cook. Mr. Bergosh said he was more interested in the ones that were overcapacity just on the “off chance” that enough people would move out and it would “dip” under. Mr. McFarland said it would be a lottery situation like the one at Beulah. Mr. Bergosh referred to the following verbiage under Section 3.02(5)(C): *Final action on a student transfer request shall be made by the Board. The Board may approve, modify, deny or revoke any request for transfer recommended by the Superintendent. No*

~~principal shall enroll a student in a school to which the student is not properly assigned.~~ Mr. Bergosh wanted to know what the stricken verbiage was being removed. Mr. McFarland said it was because that particular statement was already in Section 3.02(3). Mr. Bergosh said he was supportive of the open enrollment plan as he thought it was “fantastic” to give parents choice but he wondered if staff had given some thought to a situation where there was a school that really struggles and it was surrounded by schools that were extremely successful and the parents of students at the struggling school, those who were really involved would be the ones who would take advantage of this type of program, and of course there is a correlation between those parents and their students and how well they do and there was potential for the highest performing students to be pulled out of the lower performing schools and moved to the higher performing schools. The Superintendent said he really believed that the worst of that was behind us because of the AYP choice. He said that were currently about 1,800 students that had been using AYP choice and many of those were ones that felt like they did not like the choice of their zone and they wanted to move to what they thought was a better, higher performing schools and so they exercised their choice so he believed that had already occurred. He said that what staff had tried to do with this was to provide opportunity that those parents who wanted to have a choice they could within some reason, relatively stay where they are and then you have the caveat that if there was an extreme outlier and you really wanted to go to the school you’re at and the School District is not transporting, we would still let you because you have that Option 5 where if you provide that transportation and there is room available, we will let you go to any school in the District. Mrs. Moultrie she had a similar question to Mr. Bergosh in that she wanted to know what would be the reverse effect of those schools that were already low in capacity, what exactly would this do for those schools. The Superintendent said he was hoping that it would be no worse than it had been with AYP. He said we had seen the result and there was no question that at a school like Lincoln Park Elementary, that was why Pine Meadow was overcrowded, was because a lot of Lincoln Park students had left and gone to Pine Meadow. He did not think you would lose more students from Lincoln Park but he did not know that you would recover those who had left except through attrition over time. He said he hoped it would be no worse than what the School District had experienced already under AYP and he had no reason to think that it would be worse. Mr. Bergosh noted that the School Board Members would have another opportunity to address this item during the December 14<sup>th</sup> Regular Workshop when the proposed revisions to Chapter 3 policy were reviewed.

- January 2013 Calendar - Bergosh

Mr. Bergosh noted that the January Regular Meeting had been moved from January 15<sup>th</sup> to January 22<sup>nd</sup> in order to allow staff returning from their Christmas vacation to prepare the agenda documents. Board Members expressed no concerns about the schedule for January.

- Escambia High School Graduation Rate Data - Bergosh

Mr. Bergosh said he had submitted this topic for discussion because of the recent media coverage of the School District’s graduation rate. He asked the Superintendent to explain the extenuating circumstances behind the reported rate. The Superintendent provided School Board Members with a handout that outlined the historical federal graduation rate for Escambia County. He noted that the federal rate was used this year for the first time in Florida to report graduation. He clarified that the federal rate would only count a graduate if the student had graduated in four years with a standard diploma. He said that becomes a particular “sticking point” in Florida because there were actually two types of diplomas issued in Florida: one for special education students (special diploma) and one for regular education students (standard diploma). The Superintendent noted that special diplomas did not count in the federal rate even though the students graduate in four years and they have met all the requirements that were expected in Florida. He gave the example of state of Texas where only one type of diploma was issued. He said that every student in Texas, including a special education student, would receive a standard diploma. He happened to believe that on the diploma options, Florida had it right in that it was fair that a special education student, who had worked on a separate set of standards and had received a waiver from the state for the FCAT, would receive a special diploma. He noted however, that the special diploma had hurt Florida in the federal rate so for Escambia County and for Florida overall, it had caused a loss of

somewhere between 15% and 18% of the graduation rate. He noted however, that the School District was actually at 82% on the old calculation (governor's rate) which was an increase of almost 4% over the previous year. He acknowledged that it was hard to digest the 4% increase when last year the District was at 79% and was now at about 82% yet the reported number was the 62.1% federal rate. He said he had provided the handout outlining the historical federal graduation rate because given all those caveats, when comparing "orange to orange" it was clear that the School District's graduation rate had increased over the years noting that in 2007-2008 the District's federal rate was 53.5% and it was now at 62.1%. He noted that the Florida was now required to report its graduation rate using the federal rate because that had been negotiated as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver. He said he was not sure what Florida would do on the special education issue, noting that national headlines had said Florida probably had the lowest graduation rate in the country, but he noted that was because 15% of those that were not counted were special education students. Mr. Bergosh said the School District had really been "beat up" in the media with regard to the graduation rate for African-American students which was very low at approximately 50%. He happened to believe that there were some societal issues to blame for that low rate; however, he questioned what more the School District could do or should be doing to increase the graduation rate for that particular population of students. The Superintendent believed that the School District should keep doing some of the same things it was already doing noting that obviously everyone wanted to do everything they could to see more students of all populations graduate. But he said the truth was that we are expecting a lot more out our graduates and that this year is the beginning of the year when high school students would have more hurdles to make it through than ever before. He noted that in the past, a student simply had to pass the FCAT reading test and get their twenty-four (24) credits in the appropriate areas, and they would graduate. Now however, he said everyone was required to take Algebra, Algebra II, Geometry, and Chemistry and they were required to pass their end-of course exams. He said that the FLDOE had approved the cut scores just yesterday for Geometry and Biology. He said all of those things just make it harder and more challenging for students. He believed that the School District's career academies were part of the answer for many of the at-risk students. He said that the School District had opened up Compass Learning this year which he believed had great potential for students who were at-risk. The Superintendent noted that the Director of High School Education and the high school principals were looking at the School District's data to confirm that it was accurate and to determine what could be done to continue to improve the graduation rate.

- Teacher Evaluation Data - *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh said this was another topic that had recently been covered by the local media. He said he had discussed with the Superintendent that there were concerns that the data from the new teacher evaluation process had indicated that the School District had many effective teachers but only two highly effective teachers. Mr. Bergosh wanted to know what School Board Members should tell the public when they ask why there were only a couple of highly effective teachers in Escambia County. The Superintendent said the first thing that he would say to the public and he wished that he had said this when he was initially interviewed by the local media outlets, was that it was just not right for anyone to think that the School District did not have highly effective teachers. He noted that the teacher evaluation process was very complicated. He provided several handouts to the School Board Members for their review. He explained the various components to the teacher evaluation process. He believed that the committee that worked on behalf of the School District was given a very challenging task of deciding where to draw the cut points for the various components of the evaluation; which he noted, they had done with absolutely no data and therefore, they had to try and make good judgments and try to be rigorous at the same time. He said the intent had always been to create an evaluation system that would distribute the scores of teachers adequately which would mean that there would be a number of teachers in highly effective, the largest number of teachers in effective, a smaller number of teachers in developing, and an even smaller number in unsatisfactory. The Superintendent said that no one was satisfied that the data had indicated that there were only two highly effective teachers in Escambia County. He believed that this problem was that the committee had set the cut points in a method that did not give the School District distribution but rather put everyone in the same category. He said the committee now had "data in hand" and would continue to review the evaluation process. The Superintendent said it was the School District's desire to have an

adequate distribution of teachers and that was the original intent of the teacher evaluation process that was created. He noted that under the old system, everyone essentially got the same rating. He said the committee that worked on the new process had put a lot of effort into creating a sophisticated system yet had ended up with everyone in the same silo. But in defense of that committee, he noted that they did not have much to work with in making the decisions on the cut points. Now that there was a year's worth of data available, he said that the cut points could be tweaked and hopefully the School District would then get an accurate distribution for its teachers.

- Alignment of Curriculum for Graduation with Bright Futures Scholarship Requirements (for college bound high school students) - *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh said he had spoken to the Superintendent about this issue a couple of times. He said the issue was the alignment of our high school graduation credit requirement did not line up directly with the requirements for Bright Futures with respect to math; in other words, a student could take Algebra IA, Algebra IB, Geometry, Algebra II and be eligible for a diploma from the School District but that would not count for Bright Futures. Mr. Bergosh said there were many parents who were not aware of that and asked if it would be possible to put that information on the website or mail something to parents and just let them know that if they were looking forward to Bright Futures that they would need to be aware that their child would need four (4) math credits and that Algebra IA and Algebra IB would not count. The Superintendent said that he had committee previously that staff would solve that problem. He said that as we get into the registration season it would be indicated on the registration card that Algebra IA was eligible for the Bright Futures; and when exams came out the School District would send the parent a written notice to that effect as well. He said that the level directors and school principals have been working through these solutions and those changes would be implemented in the spring.

- Survey Data from FSBA for Online School Board Member Networking/Idea Sharing Site – *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh provided handouts to the rest of the School Board Members and the Superintendent. He said that he had previous discussed his idea for a school board member networking/idea sharing site back in May and in August. Mr. Bergosh said that had discussed the website with Mr. Wayne Blanton and Ms. Andrea Messina from the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) and they liked the idea and were so kind as to send a survey out to over 300 of their membership. He said the handouts he had provided showed the questions that were asked about idea sharing on the web between school board members who are subject to open meeting laws. He noted that the vast majority of respondents had responded positively to the idea. He noted that there were 61 responses to the survey which occurred over the Thanksgiving holiday (November 15-November 30). He said it was a positive response for the most part. He noted for example, that over 90% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with Question 2, which was *“The ability to share my district’s best ideas with other district school board members statewide in real time via an internet website dedicated to networking best education practices would be welcomed.”* He said the handouts also included the short-answer responses to the following questions, *“If such a site existed in what ways do you feel it could be beneficial to districts and school board members?”* and *“What concerns would you have about participating in such a website as has been described in this questionnaire?”* Mr. Bergosh said the lion share of the answers to the latter question were that the majority of the respondents liked the idea but their overriding question was whether it would be legal or not. Mr. Bergosh believed that there was a very high likelihood that the FSBA would seek an opinion as to the question of legality. He said there was also a high likelihood that Mrs. Waters would send the same question to her e-loop of school board attorneys. Mr. Bergosh said he had provided this information because he thought that his fellow Board Members might have some interest in it. He said that at the beginning of next year, if it was found to be legal, there was a high likelihood that the website would be beta tested in the state of Florida. He said he would keep the School Board posted on this issue.

- Use of Travel Agency to Secure Airline Tickets for District Travel (postponed from November Workshop) - *Slayton* (5 minutes)

Mr. Slayton said his question came out of searching for the best possible price on an airline ticket for a trip that he had recently made. He said that he had purchased an airline ticket for about \$100 less than other employees in the School District who had made the same trip. He questioned why that option was not available to other employees in the District. Mrs. Gloria Johnson, Director of Accounting Operations, began by citing the various problems that the School District had experienced prior to contracting with a firm to provide travel services on behalf of the District. She said that the use of a travel agency was essentially a “control” mechanism for the District because “things had gotten out hand” with regard to employee travel. She said one of the primary problems was that the District had been cited by auditors because employees would make their own travel arrangements though they had not submitted the appropriate travel authorization forms for approval ahead of time. She said that by going through the travel agency, an employee would have to provide the approved travel forms and travel number before an the travel agency would secure the airline ticket. Mr. Slayton wanted to know what the incentive was for the travel agent to save the District money by pursuing the cheapest fare. Mrs. Johnson said that the travel agency was actually supposed to be doing that for the School District but noted that the fares were constantly fluctuating and that the travel agent would only be looking for the best rate at the time of booking. She clarified that the travel agency would not continue to watch for lower fares. Mrs. Johnson said that with of the problems that the School District had experienced in the past, it was a savings to the District to contract with a travel agency. Upon inquiry by Mr. Slayton, Mrs. Johnson clarified that the District contracted with only one travel agency; she said that the services were competitively bid in the past. Mr. Slayton suggested that perhaps the current firm needed some competition. Mrs. Johnson indicated that suggested that the travel agency services could rebid at some point. Mr. Slayton said he would support, if possible, splitting a contract between two different firms so that those firms might have some incentive to get the best travel rates for the School District. Mr. Bergosh said he had recently made travel arrangements through the School District’s contracted travel agent to attend a conference that was later canceled. He noted that the travel agent would not refund a fee that they had assessed even though the conference had been canceled. He suggested that the next time the travel agency services were bid, that the School District should consider negotiating the travel agent’s fees.

- Orange County School Board Website Video on "Introduction to Common Core Curriculum" - *Slayton*

Mr. Slayton said he had submitted this topic before he was aware that Escambia County School District already had a “common core” video on its website. The Superintendent confirmed that the School District did have a “common core” video on the District website under the Staff Development page and that the video had been used with school principals who were now using it with their teachers. Mr. Bergosh asked if Escambia County’s video had been designed so that the public could understand the information presented. Mr. Slayton pointed out that Orange County’s “common core” video was on the home page of their website. Mr. Bergosh believed that Escambia County’s video should also be posted to the home page of the District website so that the public would see it. Mr. Slayton commented that the video from Orange County was very well done. Mr. Bergosh questioned whether it would be possible to link Orange County’s video to Escambia County’s website. Mr. Slayton said that Orange County had said that would fine, but noted that it would be up to the Superintendent. The Superintendent said he would look into it and commented that the Orange County video was very well done. Mr. Slayton said it was designed so that anyone who viewed it would be able to understand the “common core” standards.

- State of Division Reports – *Superintendent*

The Superintendent said that every year, each division was required to present a State of Division report that outlined the division’s scope of operations, recent efficiency/cost reduction initiatives, successes, short and long term goals, and major challenges. Staff briefly reviewed “highlights” from the 2012-2013 State of Division Reports. It was noted that the State of Division reports could be accessed via the Superintendent’s page of the District website.

III. PUBLIC FORUM

Mr. Bergosh called for public forum; however, there were no speakers.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Special Workshop was adjourned at 5:04 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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Superintendent

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Chair

PENDING BOARD APPROVAL