

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF
ESCAMBIA COUNTY, FLORIDA

MINUTES, NOVEMBER 14, 2013

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 (*arrived at 3:04 p.m.*)
Mrs. Patricia Hightower
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 November 1, 2013 - Legal No. 1612086

I. CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Bergosh called the Special Workshop to order at 3:00 p.m. He welcomed everyone in attendance to the monthly special discussion workshop.

II. OPEN DISCUSSION

- Legislative Priorities – *Superintendent*

Mr. Jim Hamilton, Mixon & Associates, gave a brief update on recent legislative matters. He said the Senate had been focused primarily on implementation issues in regard to legislation that had already been passed; while the House had taken the initiative in clarifying cohort transitions to new graduation requirements that was ambiguous in the original Senate Bill 1076 from the prior year. Mr. Hamilton briefly addressed the status of budget developments.

- The School Board's Legislative Agenda as it Relates to the FSBA Legislative Platform – *Hightower*

Mrs. Hightower noted that School Board Members should have received a packet of information that included the [Florida School Boards Association's \(FSBA\) 2014 Legislative Platform](#) which outlined the FSBA's priorities for the 2014 legislative session. She noted that School Board Members would have an opportunity to address any concerns with the document at the FSBA conference in December prior to finalization. Also included in the packet, was the *Recommended Duval County Public Schools 2013-14 Legislative Agenda*; Mrs. Hightower thought that perhaps the School Board in Escambia County could

format their legislative agenda similar to that of Duval County's by outlining both the existing language of Statute/Board Rule and also their recommended changes. Mr. John Hamilton, Mixon & Associates, suggested that the School Board had "a better shot at making something happen" if they put forth their legislative agenda by January at the latest.

- Class Size Compliance Going Forward – *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh initiated a discussion regarding class size compliance. He noted that recently that several Florida school districts had willfully violated state law by not complying with the class size mandate. He said it infuriated him that those school districts had essentially "thumbed their nose" at the mandate. He cited the school district in Palm Beach County as an example. He noted that two years ago, Palm Beach County had essentially said they did not have the money to comply with the class size mandate because it would have cost them \$59 million; instead they just "thumbed their nose" at the mandate and they were fined \$4 million which essentially saved their taxpayers \$55 million. What was particularly infuriating to Mr. Bergosh, was that same year, the Escambia County School District had spent approximately \$3 million in excess of its class size allocation in order to comply with the class size mandate. He also cited Brevard County as an example of a school district that had willfully decided simply to pay the "paltry" penalty rather than to spend the millions of dollars necessary to comply with class size. Mr. Bergosh said his suggestion for solving this problem was to penalize the offending school district's "arrogant" superintendents and school board members perhaps 5% to 10% of their salary until they complied. Mr. Slayton said he was not going to speak against any of the school districts that had not complied; as he trusted that those school districts that had made such a decision had done so because they believed it to be in the best interest of their students. Mrs. Hightower suggested that the conversation ought to be about whether or not there was a "flaw" in class size compliance mandate. She noted that the Florida School Boards Association (FSBA) had been working on convincing the legislature to go back to a school-wide class size count rather than a room-by-room count, similar to that which was done for charter schools. She believed that most school districts would be able to meet the class size mandate if it determined on a school-wide basis. With regard to the class size penalty, she questioned whether money was an appropriate or logical consequence for the matter of educating students. Mrs. Hightower, like Mr. Slayton, said she trusted that the school districts/school boards were doing what they felt to be in the best interest of their students.

- November and December Calendar - *Bergosh*

There were no changes to the School Board's schedule of meetings/workshops for November.

Mrs. Linda West, Coordinator of Board Affairs, noted that following the typical schedule of meetings/workshops, the dates for December would most likely be as follows:

Special Workshop, December 12th, beginning at 3:00 p.m., Room 160, Hall Center

Regular Workshop, December 13th, beginning at 9:00 a.m., Room 160, Hall Center

Regular Meeting, December 17th, beginning at 5:30 p.m., Room 160, Hall Center

It was noted that the schedule for December would be determined at the November 19, 2013 Organizational Meeting.

- Community Town Hall Meeting held October 12, 2013 Regarding “Making Escambia County Public Schools Work for Our Children” – Moultrie

Mrs. Moultrie provided School Board Members and the Superintendent a copy of a [handout](#) that was supposedly presented by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) at the October 12, 2013 Community Town Hall Meeting. Mrs. Moultrie said she did not believe that any of the School Board Members, including herself, had the opportunity to attend that meeting. She wanted to share the handout with her fellow School Board Members as it contained information regarding the School District. It was her belief that any information being distributed about the School District should be discussed by the School Board if possible. She also noted that she had discussed with the Superintendent some of the data that was included in this handout. The Superintendent commented that most of the data outlined in the handout was correct; however, there was some information that was omitted or incomplete. NOTE: *The handout included statistics on total in-school suspensions, total out-of-school suspensions, non-promotions, graduation rates, etc. Those statistics were broken-down by race (i.e., white, African-American, Hispanic, other).* Mr. Bergosh was concerned that as was typically the case, information such as that outlined in the handout did not include any statistics for the significant Asian population in Escambia County. After much discussion on issues related to the information outlined in the handout, the Superintendent advised that he in conjunction with Mrs. Moultrie would be putting together a community task force to discuss these types of issues but specifically the achievement gap among the various races. He asked School Board Members to let him know if they had any recommendations for individuals who should serve on that task force. Mrs. Moultrie commented that it was “time for a frank conversation with the right people” about the type of data outlined in the handout as it was reflective of what was occurring in Escambia County. She said she appreciated the Superintendent for moving forward with the establishment of a community task force to assist the School District in identifying solutions to these types of issues. Mr. Bergosh requested that the Superintendent have the task force look at the achievement gap between the Asian and white populations.

- Audit Committee’s July 2, 2013 Recommendation to Establish Committee – Hightower

NOTE: At the July 2, 2013 Special Workshop, the School Board agreed (by consensus) to the following recommendation from the Audit Committee: *Option 2 - In addition to all the actions included in Option 1*, we recommend the Internal Audit staff independently verify the status of all the concerns, and provide an opinion of the perceived effectiveness of proposed corrective actions. The IA staff should monitor the outcomes of said actions and provide to the Board with updates as individual concerns are alleviated. The IA staff should conduct exit interview with all employees who have exited and/or transferred internally within the Finance area within the last 18 months. Further, the Board should work in cooperation with the Superintendent to form a committee to review the organizational structure and personnel of the Finance area, with the goal of increasing productivity and determining efficiencies and best practices. [*Option 1 – We recommend the Board request from the Superintendent, or his staff, a status of the concerns included in the memo, along with the status of reconciliations of the District’s bank accounts, and the status of Accounting Operations’ ongoing audits/reviews of purchasing card transactions. In addition, we recommend the Board be updated on the status of the current financial audit by the independent CPA firm, including but not limited to, any anticipated audit adjustments and/or anticipated findings related to internal controls over financial reporting. The Board should require corrective actions and additional updates by staff as required. Furthermore, a strict timeline should be developed, by which all concerns would be addressed.]*

Mrs. Hightower recalled a follow-up discussion that had occurred at the October 11, 2013 Regular Workshop regarding an audit committee recommendation that was accepted by the School Board at the July

2, 2013 Special Workshop. Her concern was that there had been a miscommunication among the School Board and the Superintendent with regard the specifics of that recommendation, particularly the part that said the School Board would “work in cooperation with the Superintendent to form a committee to review the organizational structure and personnel of the Finance area, with the goal of increasing productivity and determining efficiencies and best practices.” Mrs. Hightower recalled that when she had inquired about the matter at the October 11, 2013 Regular Workshop, the Superintendent had indicated that a team from FADSS would be on location during the last week of October to take a close look at the human resource and finance operations. She noted however, that the gentleman who had met with her only wanted to discuss issues related to the Skyward program. The Superintendent recalled that at the October 11, 2013 Regular Meeting, he had mentioned that he would be using the Florida Association of District School Superintendents (FADSS) to bring in finance and human resource experts from school districts across the state, who would take a close look at the organization, staffing, and the efficiencies of the Human Resources and Finance departments. He noted that FADSS had sent six (6) experts in the areas of human resources, finance, and information technology (due to issues in the areas of human resources and finances resulting from the recent Skyward software implementation). He advised that the FADSS team’s scope of work was to “review organizational structures of the Escambia County School District’s finance and human resources operations, make a recommendation regarding staffing and alignment of work responsibilities, as well as operational efficiencies and best practices.” The Superintendent advised that the FADSS team had interviewed most everyone in the Human Resource Services and Finance departments. Had not yet received a report from the FADSS team but believed they would be providing some pragmatic suggestions many of which would not cost any money. Mr. Bergosh said he shared Mrs. Hightower’s concerns in that he thought the Superintendent would have worked in conjunction with the School Board to develop the oversight committee and that School Board Members would have had an opportunity to nominate individuals to serve on that committee. Mr. Bergosh said he was “caught off-guard” when the gentleman from the FADSS team only wanted to discuss issues related to the Skyward program. Mrs. Moultrie also noted that her discussion with the gentleman from the FADSS team was limited to only issues with the Skyward program. The Superintendent noted that he had not chosen the team; rather he had asked FADSS to send experts in the areas of finance and human resources. Upon inquiry by Mr. Bergosh, the Superintendent advised that he had never committed to having School Board Members nominate individuals to serve of that team. After further discussion, the Superintendent said he would accept the responsibility for the apparent miscommunication. He also said that if School Board Members felt they needed an additional opportunity to “weigh in” on the matter, he would be happy to setup telephone interviews for them with the FADSS team. Upon inquiry by Mr. Bergosh, the Superintendent said that he would share the team’s entire report with the School Board as soon as it was received.

- Selection of Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Board for 2013-2014 – *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh said it was his intent to nominate Mrs. Moultrie to serve as Chairman for 2013-2014. Mrs. Moultrie said she would appreciate the opportunity to serve in that capacity. Mr. Slayton said it was his intent to nominate Mrs. Hightower to serve as Vice Chairman for 2013-2014. It was noted that nominations for Chairman and Vice Chairman would be decided by formal vote during the November 19, 2013 Organizational Meeting.

- Handicapped Accessibility at District Facilities – *Bergosh*

Mr. Bergosh said he was contacted about an athletic coach who was wheelchair-bound and the facilities at her school, particularly in the athletic areas, were not wheelchair accessible. Upon inquiry by Mr.

Bergosh, the Superintendent advised that the School District was required to conduct an assessment of handicap accessibilities every five (5) years; he noted that the next survey would occur in a little over a year. He noted that there would probably always be needs that had been identified but that were not totally met; however, if an issue arose that involved a student or an employee, the School District would typically address the issue immediately and make the necessary accommodations. Mr. Bergosh said he would inform the Superintendent “offline” as to the specifics of the situation.

- “What’s Right in Education” Studer Conference – Hightower

Mrs. Hightower said she had attended the recent “What’s Right in Education” Studer Conference.” She said she had been reminded of how the School District had started out with the Studer program. Mrs. Hightower was aware that the Superintendent was still implementing the Studer model, but wanted to know if the rest of the School District was; her concern was that there had been many changes in school leadership and she was not sure those leaders were staying true to the original model. The Superintendent confirmed that the Studer model was being implemented district-wide; however, since the initial implementation the School District tried to make the model more specific to Escambia County. In response to requests by Mrs. Hightower and Mr. Bergosh, the Superintendent said he would provide School Board Members with the results of the recent employee engagement survey and department score cards and would also post those results on the District website.

- Automation and Technology Academy – Superintendent

Mr. Steve Harrell, Specialist-Workforce Education and Jennifer Grove, Workforce Development Coordinator at Gulf Power and Executive Director of the Northwest Florida Manufacturers Council, gave a brief presentation to the School Board regarding the new Automation and Production Technology Academy at Northview High School that would meet regional demands for a skilled manufacturing workforce. (NOTE: *The Automation and Production Technology Academy was approved by the School Board at the July 16, 2013 Regular Meeting.*)

- Campus Security Task Force – Superintendent

It was noted that this would be a generalized presentation suitable for public record; a detailed report would be provided to School Board Members later that day via their Secure Documents portal. Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, began by recognizing the members of the Campus Security Task Force that were present in the audience. He noted that that the task force had been comprised of school district staff, law enforcement, community, homeland security and building and facilities experts. Mr. Dennis then narrated a brief Power Point® [presentation](#) that provided an overview of the task force’s final work product and recommendations. Upon inquiry by Mrs. Hightower, Mrs. Waters advised that the detailed report that Mr. Dennis referenced at the beginning of his presentation would be exempt from public record, as it contained security plans for the School District. She also advised that any meeting where the specific security plans would be discussed with the School Board would also be exempt. Mr. Bergosh recalled a previous discussion where it had been suggested that a special meeting would be held for the purpose of discussing security matters. The Superintendent suggested that such a meeting might be more productive if held after such time as the School District had implemented several ACAMS were deployed at various schools so that issues from those implementations could be addressed prior to any additional implementations.

- Real Estate Broker RFP – *Superintendent*

The Superintendent wanted to have an opportunity to discuss the matter of real estate services with the School Board prior to bringing forth a renewal or issuing an RFP. The Superintendent believed that having two firms had worked well for the School District, but he wanted to hear from School Board Members on the matter. He noted that representatives of Scoggins III, Inc. and Beck Property Company, LLC were present in the audience in case School Board Members had any questions or concerns with their performance. At the request of the Superintendent, Mr. Shawn Dennis, Assistant Superintendent for Operations, gave a brief review of the various real estate services that had been provided by each firm over the past year. He noted that the current contracts with both firms included renewal provisions; he said the Superintendent and his staff would be inclined to recommend renewal rather than the issuance of a new RFP. Mr. Bergosh said he wanted to commend the two real estate firms as there had been more School District property sales over the past year than there had been in the previous seven (7) years he had been on the School Board. He restated for the record: “My issue last year was not with any specific real estate company or agent, just that I had been contacted by others in the community who wanted to have the opportunity to compete. They had called numerous times, over and over – they had proposals that they wanted to give and they felt that not telling the Board when the RFP was going out when a couple of Board Members had asked because we were working on an RFP that had expired and then putting the advertisement for the RFP out over the Thanksgiving weekend was tantamount to limiting competition.” He noted that he had no issues with the services that had been provided by the current two firms. Mr. Boone commented that “if it’s not broken, don’t try to fix it.” Hearing no objections from the School Board, the Superintendent advised that he would continue to move forward on a contract renewal with Scoggins III, Inc. and Beck Property Company, LLC.

III. PUBLIC FORUM

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

IV. ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business, the Special Workshop adjourned at 5:33 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Superintendent

Chair