

MUSCOGEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA
MARCH 19, 2001, 6:30 P.M., BRADLEY LIBRARY

MINUTES

The regular meeting of the Board of Education of the Muscogee County School District was held on Monday, March 19, 2001, 6:30 p.m. in the conference room at the Bradley Library.

The following members were present: Mary Sue Polleys, Chairman, James Walker, Vice Chairman, David E. Ebron, Linda Parker, Fife M. Whiteside, Philip T. Schley, John Wells, Brenda P. Storey, and Owen Ditchfield.

Others present: James E. Humes, II, Legal Counsel, Fred M. Jones, Treasurer, Billy Kendall, Assistant to the Superintendent, Brenda Dozier, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Gordon Stallings, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, Myles B. Caggins, Jr., Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs, Bill Hortman, Associate Superintendent, Tom Walters, Assistant Superintendent for Personnel and representatives from the media.

Dr. Polleys called the meeting to order with an invocation and pledge of allegiance to the flag led by students from Cusseta Road Elementary. Dr. Polleys also recognized Leadership Columbus participants, Mr. & Mrs. Halouska representing Friends of the Libraries and Ms. Annie Askew representing PTA's. Mr. Sims recognized Ms. Deborah Rhodes, a teacher at Richards Middle School on being selected for the Presidential Award of Excellence in Math and Science. Mrs. Dozier recognized the organization Safe Kids of Columbus for winning the 2000 Georgia Coalition of the Year Award. Dr. Budge presented a check from the Friends of the Libraries. Mr. Sims recognized Mr. Gibson and two of his students from Martin Luther King, Jr. Elementary School (Jordan Austin and Deshaun Brown) who reported a gun on campus. Dr. Polleys called on Paul Olson who spoke to the Board regarding the Premier Academy charter school petition.

Upon motion of Mr. Ebron, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved official actions taken at the regular Board of Education meeting on February 20, 2001.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Mr. Alfred Parham to the position of Assistant Principal at Spencer High School.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Ms. Agnes Evans to the position of Program Coordinator at the Woodall Center.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board unanimously approved the minor revisions to the Student Behavior Code and Discipline Policy booklet for the 2001-2002 school year.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Wells, the Board approved the broadcast of regular meetings of the Board on a six-month trial basis at a cost not to exceed \$500.00 per month and recommend approval of a budget adjustment in the total amount of \$3,000.00 from the Budgeted Reserve Fund to cover this expenditure. The vote was (8) affirming and (1) opposing, Walker.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved a new policy regarding Student Assignments.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board unanimously approved the proposed football schedule for the 2001-2002 school year.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved an increase in the cost of high school football tickets during the 2001-2002 season, a charge for parking to out-of-town opponents at Kinnett Stadium and an increase in the cost of athletic tickets for middle schools.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Wells, the Board unanimously approved the use of Kinnett Stadium by Special Olympics on May 3, 2001 with a reserve rain date of May 10, 2001.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved the use of Kinnett Stadium by the Columbus Police Department on June 20, 2001 for the Georgia Police and Fire Games.

Upon motion of Mrs. Parker, seconded by Mrs. Storey, the Board unanimously approved students from Columbus High to travel to Spain April 12, 2001 through April 21, 2001.

Upon motion of Mr. Ebon, seconded by Dr. Schley, the Board unanimously approved the revision of the target dates for the new library.

Upon motion of Dr. Schley, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board unanimously approved the implementation of the FutureForce Program that targets at-risk students.

Upon motion of Mrs. Storey, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved the mathematics textbook adoption for grades 6 through 12.

Mrs. Storey commented that the Board needs to take action on a charter school petition from Premier Academy based upon no dollar amount, two sight locations and cost per student. Mrs. Storey said that Mr. Sims has an estimate of the dollar amount. Mr. Sims commented that he has a range based on the funding for this year from a low of \$2,300.00 per student to \$3,009.00 per student of FTE. Mrs. Storey asked for a motion. Mr. Ditchfield made the motion seconded by Mr. Wells to approve the charter school petition as submitted from Premier Academy. Dr. Polleys asked if the Board had any comments. Mr. Whiteside asked Mr. Sims about the portion of local money involved. Mr. Sims said that local money would be \$1,328.00 per student. Mrs. Storey commented that she is “a proponent of choice but would not be voting for the application for several reasons, the first being that of the finances.” She said that “the budget that has been submitted is not detailed enough and based upon the percentage of the budget that is known and the number of students estimated to be attending some of the salaries that are being proposed appears to be for financial gain.” Dr. Schley said that he would like to “commend Mr. McEachern for his efforts in getting a charter school started.” Dr. Schley commented that as he understands “the concept of charter schools will be an integral part of the Muscogee County School District and as such I feel I need to know the specifics of the budget, the location of the proposed school which is unknown at this time, and those serving on the governing board is unknown.” Dr. Schley commented that “in the future when the location, budget and governance are clearer, I can then make a decision.” Mr. Ditchfield commented that he would like to modify his motion since Mr. McEachern has changed the petition to one location. Dr. Polleys verified from Mr. Humes that Mr. Ditchfield could change his motion to read, “based on one location.” Mr. Ditchfield commented, “change is always uncomfortable, some people feel threatened by it, I think that some people might fear that if Mr. McEachern’s project succeeds, it might make other schools appear bad. I take the opposite approach, I feel that as most of the Board feels, the idea for a charter school is a time that has come. Most of the questions we’ve raised to my thinking are Mr. McEachern’s problem. Where he puts it is his problem. How he pays the teachers is his problem. I don’t think he can afford to hire inferior teachers at a lower rate because his project would fail and I think he has made an honest effort to resolve the various points of clarification that have been brought up and I feel that he is the one taking the chance and we should give him the chance to make this project work. I just would hope he would go with either a neutral location or a southern location where the potential for improving test scores is much greater.” Mr. Wells commented, “the legislature voted to provide for charter schools in the State of Georgia. It’s very clear that the legislature has said that when a proper petition is presented, the local board must act on it. If a proper petition is presented, I see no other thing that I can do except to vote in favor of it. The alternative would be that the petitioner would have the right to go directly to the State Board of Education and if they determine that the petition is ok they’ll give him a charter. He’ll operate the charter outside the auspice of the local board. Now if we give the charter here we’ll at least have oversight of it and can make sure that everything is going the way we want it to. The legislature passed charter legislation to improve the schools in Columbus and when it was originally brought up in the legislature, they wanted to improve low performing schools and by that it would mean to me that a school should be located where the greatest need is and we can look at the test scores and determine where that will be.

I don't think it would be appropriate for the charter school to be located in a far north position. I think it should be located primarily in the middle of Columbus or where the greatest need is." Mr. Whiteside commented, "on the very back of the petition it's written on the assumption that the school district would be paying \$5,800 per pupil. As John knows that number never was right. I am comfortable that the number the Superintendent has reported here tonight based on the program in which the child will be served between \$3,600 approximately and \$4,400. I think that's right. When you do that and you plug those numbers into the preliminary budget that is at the back of the charter, frankly that preliminary budget won't work. If I wanted to be critical of it otherwise, I would also note that it was discussed thoroughly at the committees that there would be likely some borrowing by the charter and there is no direct provision in here for debt service repayment of interest on debt and I could criticize the budget for that reason. If the charter proponent comes forth and says I will run a charter school with "X" number of programs and I will figure out how to make it work out and if he doesn't make it work out then it just fails. If it fails and you know failure really is in a sense the American way, we take risks, we do things that are improbable sometimes they work, sometimes they don't work. If on the other hand he has to cut his programs back in order to make the school work, he may find that he can't find parents who will entrust their children to him in which case it would fail but then again, that's fine to because the children belong to the parents, they don't belong to us. So to me any concern about the viability of the school is really satisfied by the free market. We do well with many things in Muscogee County but what we don't do well with is providing choice to parents and that's a problem we need to work on. Under the circumstances in which we operate now, I think I'm going to vote to support just about every charter that comes through here unless it is something illegal or immoral, I think I'm just about going to vote for every charter that comes through here and I will vote for this one and if it passes, John I wish you a great deal of luck." Dr. Polleys asked for the vote on the motion to approve the charter school petition based on one school location. The vote was (6) opposing and (3) affirming, Mr. Wells, Mr. Whiteside, Mr. Ditchfield.

At Mr. McEachern's request, Dr. Polleys allowed Mr. McEachern to speak after the vote was taken. Dr. Polleys said this procedure is highly unusual, but Mr. McEachern may speak to the Board. Mr. McEachern said, "I want to thank the Board for the action you've taken tonight. My brother Dr. Robert McEachern and I met with Guy last summer and we prefaced all of our conversations by saying...excuse me let me back up a minute if I may. This is the only statement I'm going to make to the press, TV or any media is what I am saying now. So there will be no other comments except what you hear from me today, tonight right now. We told Mr. Sims last summer that we want to be a part of the solution and not part of the problem. It's kids that we're all about, it's taking failing schools and making successful schools. I think every comment that this Board has made tonight and throughout this process we are taking constructively, we're taking it under our wings, we're taking it in a positive vein, we're not going to be confrontational with you people, we're not going to be adversarial, we're not going to do anything but take the highest road that we possibly know how to do and whether you voted us up or down tonight, I trust your judgment, the people behind this petition trust you and trust your motivation for the Muscogee County School System. Thank you very much." Dr. Polleys thanked Mr. McEachern "for that spirit."

Dr. Polleys called on Mr. Wells for the finance agenda items.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mrs. Storey, the Board unanimously approved financial statements for seven months ending January 31, 2001.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mrs. Storey, the Board unanimously approved the budget preparation calendar for FY02.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved a confirmation purchase order to McMath-Turner Construction Company in the amount of \$23,126.00 for paving the parking lot at M.L. Terry Library.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved change order no. 1 in the amount of \$3,141.00 to be added to the original contract for landscaping at East Columbus Magnet Academy.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously approved change order no. 13 in the amount of \$9,055.28 to be added to the original contract for construction at Double Churches Middle School.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board unanimously approved the purchase of .457 acres of land located at 1191 Double Churches Road from Mt. Moriah Baptist Church at a cost of \$32,450.00.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Ditchfield, the Board unanimously approved the surplus property list and declares the Old Baker Middle School as surplus property to be advertised for sale to the highest bidder.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Ebron, the Board approved the implementation of a program to use a Medicaid billing provider to secure Medicaid reimbursements. A Georgia School Based Medicaid Clearinghouse is recommended to assist the school district with Medicaid billing. Mr. Whiteside wanted it noted that he will abstain from this vote because this decision will have a direct impact on his wife's work with the school district. Mr. Ditchfield wanted to note for the record that "Mr. Sims' recognizes that the additional income needs to go to the highest priority which at this time is giving some administrative assistance to the people who will be doing all of the paperwork". Mr. Sims commented that what he actually said, "one of the first things we would be looking at is hiring some clerical help to assist with this paperwork". The vote was (8) affirming and (1) abstaining, Mr. Whiteside.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mrs. Storey, the Board unanimously approved the change of the April Board meeting and committee meeting dates because of spring holidays. The regular board meeting will be held on Monday, April 30th and committee meetings will be April 23rd and 24th. It was the consensus of the Board to delay until May the request to hold a committee meeting in conjunction with a public hearing at Forrest Road Elementary regarding the Courtland Avenue surplus property. Mr. Wells asked if a consultant could be hired to look at where SPLOST projects are at the present time. Mr. Wells made a motion seconded by Mrs. Storey requesting approval from the Board to allow him to contract with a consultant that would report directly to the Board regarding the progress of SPLOST projects. The vote was (8) affirming and (1) opposing, Mr. Ditchfield.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mrs. Storey, the Board unanimously approved the following consent agenda items with the exception of item B:

- Personnel Report (Appendix A)
- Purchase order to Southlake Ford, \$16,283.00 for a cargo van in Warehouse.
- Confirmation purchase order to G&P Heavy Truck Body Works, \$11,280.16 for bus repair.
- New budget for Outdoor Classroom Grant at Carver High, Rothschild Middle and Dimon Elementary, \$750.00 each.
- Budget adjustment over \$25,000 from Blanchard Pay for Performance Grant.
- Budget adjustment over \$25,000 for Department of Systems & Data Processing.
- Budget adjustment Reading Challenge Program at Rothschild Middle.
- Budget adjustment over \$25,000 for Instructional Technology Department.
- Financial Assistance grant for a total of \$462.00.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board approved the employment of David E. Ebron, Jr. to the position of applicant tracking specialist in the Personnel Division. The vote was (8) affirming and (1) abstaining, Mr. Ebron.

Mr. Ebron asked if a date has been finalized for the re-election of employees. Dr. Polleys commented that Personnel had asked for Friday, April 6th at 12:00 noon. A quorum of the Board would not be available on this date. Dr. Polleys asked for the number of Board members that would be available on Thursday, April 5 at 12:00 noon. It was the consensus of the Board that the called meeting for re-election of employees be held on Thursday, April 5th.

Upon motion of Mrs. Storey, seconded by Mr. Wells, the Board unanimously voted to go into executive session to hear three student discipline appeals.

Upon motion of Mrs. Storey, seconded by Mr. Wells, the Board unanimously voted to come out of executive session.

Upon motion of Mrs. Storey, seconded by Mr. Ditchfield, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn the regular March meeting of the Board.



James E. Humes, II
Legal Counsel