MUSCOGEE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT
COLUMBUS, GEORGIA

CALLED BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING
BRADLEY LIBRARY CONFERENCE ROOM
MONDAY, JUNE 7, 2004, 5:00 P.M.

MINUTES

A called meeting of the Muscogee County Board of Education was held on Monday, June 7, 2004, 5:00 p.m. in the conference room at the Bradley Library.

The following Board Members were present: Mary Sue Polleys, Chairman, James Walker, Vice Chairman, Brenda Storey, Philip Schley, David Ebron, Fife M. Whiteside, John Wells, Naomi Buckner, and Owen Ditchfield.

Others present: John A. Phillips, Jr., Superintendent of Education, Greg Ellington, Legal Counsel (Mr. Humes was absent), Del Parker, Treasurer, Robin Pennock, Chief Academic Officer, Brenda Dozier, Assistant Superintendent for Student Services, Don Cooper, Chief of Human Resources, Myles Caggins, Assistant Superintendent for Business Affairs, Billy Kendall, Administrative Assistant, Bill Hortman, Associate Superintendent, Richard Hyatt from the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer, and other media.

Dr. Polleys called the meeting to order with an invocation and pledge of allegiance to the flag.

Dr. Polleys stated that the first purpose of the called meeting was to hold a public hearing on the tentative budget, take action on a tentative budget, a resolution on setting a millage rate and discuss the Pay for Performance plan.

Dr. Polleys called on those who wanted to speak on the public forum regarding the budget: Casey Gamotos, Reginald Pugh, Ronni Collins, Paul Coward, Lucy Davis, Jane Ramsey, Hal Majett, Varetta Reed, Cindy Kendrick, Susan Krysak, Mary Moreland, Amelia Hoag, and Annette Walters. Dr. Polleys acknowledged that most of the comments on the budget from the parents and teachers are directed to the Reading Recovery Program. Dr. Pennock, Mrs. Greyer and Mrs. Steed from the Instructional Division spoke regarding the reason for suggesting that the teachers in the Reading Recovery Program be reassigned to the State-funded Intervention Program where a larger number of students will be served rather than one-on-one.

Mr. Wells made a motion, seconded by Dr. Schley to approve the Tentative Budget. Mr. Ditchfield offered a substitute motion, seconded by Mr. Walker to table this item until a date certain (June 14, 2004) to allow Dr. Phillips to bring back an alternative recommendation regarding the Reading Recovery Program.

Dr. Polleys called for a vote on the substitute motion to table until a date certain. The vote was (5) affirming and (4) opposing. Mr. Ditchfield stated, "I don't want to vote against the budget without giving it every possible chance of being modified to support something that I believe strongly in, that is Reading Recovery. I don't think anyone in this room doesn't support it. It's just a matter of philosophy over a business decision." Ms. Buckner stated, "We should always consider the greatest need. As a minority, the philosophy, the greatest good for the greatest number has not always worked for people in minorities and for this minority group of at-risk kids." Mr. Whiteside stated, "I am not

a warm and fuzzy person. I will support Reading Recovery. Let me explain why. I think there's a very strong likelihood it's too late now to do anything about this on a system-wide basis for this next year. I suspect that the case is, that there have been financial committeement made of employment contracts either promised or offered and that some of those things just cannot be reversed. I was aware of the fact that the budgets for the Title I schools have been turned in fairly recently but once they have been turned in, they are fairly difficult to change so that's the context we deal with here. First, I want to address the issue of whether or not for us to ask the Administration for an alternative recommendation is an inappropriate interference in school district administration. Somebody will ask that. It is not. The proposal of the Administration which is incorporated into the budget as I understand it is to eliminate Reading Recovery which is an expensive program involving one-on-one remedial reading instruction and replace it with the use of smaller class sizes into which children who need remediation are arbitrarily assigned. The first alternative involves a much greater allocation of resources for each child than the second. The fact that the issue involves how resources are to be allocated is what makes this perfectly a policy issue. Today, Dr. Phillips has made it clear that this is ultimately our choice. The best way to make this our choice is for an alternative recommendation to be brought." Mr. Ebron stated, "unlike Mr. Whiteside, I consider myself a warm and fuzzy guy. I do have some concern about our decision. I don't want the impression to be that not supporting delaying the budget does not mean that we do not support Reading Recovery. I think everyone on this board sees the importance for Reading Recovery. I don't want anyone in the public to think that the recommendation by the Administration in anyway suggests that the Administration doesn't care about at-risk children. I know that they do. I'm concerned about kid's ability to read and I certainly know what happens to young black males when they can't read. In the State of Georgia alone we have 75-80% of black males in jail. I have my stories. It was suggested that I go to special education and fortunately, I didn't have to go. I also know that in terms of doing the greatest good for the greatest number is more worthwhile to me than leaving some out. It's a real tough decision and that is why we are here, to make the tough decisions. If I had to feed 100 children and I only had $100. I could give all 100 of them a hamburger and everyone would have something or I could take that $100 and give 50 of them a very nutritious meal. That's a tough choice because, all of them are hungry. I think we face these decisions all the time. I think we have asked the Administration to do an enormous task. As Mr. Whiteside has said, we have a responsibility. We need to be the best fiscal managers as we can and I believe that is what the Administration is trying to do. I certainly do appreciate all of the Reading Recovery teachers and the tremendous amount of work that they do. Because we don't have the funds doesn't mean that I do not support Reading Recovery. I feel as Dr. Pennock, if I could find a way to fund Reading Recovery not to the tune of $2.1 but to $4.2 in order to address the need of every child. There is a real awareness. At Harvard a study was done about the number of black males in special education. It's the tough choices that we have to make." Mr. Wells stated, "Mr. Whiteside has said that he is not warm and fuzzy and Mr. Ebron says that he is, I guess I fall somewhere in the middle. All of this reinforces my contentions about where a lot of learning takes place, early ages. Would it be asking too much to ask a Reading Recovery teacher to serve 2, 3, or more students rather than one-on-one?" Mr. Walker stated, "The learning of kids 0-4. Those who have been taught during that time is all well and good. We get them and we have to do what we can and that is why we are asking the Administration to look at the budget and see what we can do to help those children who need the most help."

Upon motion of Mr. Ebron, seconded by Mr. Wells, the Board unanimously approved a resolution setting the millage rate for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2005. It was noted by Mr. Wells that this is the 15th year without an increase in the millage rate.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Walker, the Board unanimously voted to go into executive session for a personnel matter and to complete deliberations that were begun on Friday, June 4, 2004.

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

Dr. Polleys announced that, it is the decision of the Board regarding the fair dismissal hearing held on Friday, June 4, 2004 that the decision be delayed until Wednesday, June 9, 2004.

Upon motion of Mr. Wells, seconded by Mr. Ditchfield, the Board unanimously voted to adjourn the called meeting.

James E. Humes, II
Legal Counsel