commercial appeal

MSCS accountability plan vote deferred for more community feedback

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The Memphis-Shelby County Schools Board has opted to take its time to vote on a local accountability plan.

The school board posed a state takeover alternative plan on March 6, which aimed to establish the "structure, oversight and urgency" of the state proposed takeover. Local and federal lawmakers from across the county were present at the announcement.

The school district, which has struggled with poor academic performance for years, came under fire last year after the ousting of the former superintendent. Marie Feagins, who was selected as the MSCS superintendent after a nearly two-year search, was fired from her position after 9 months. Her firing prompted state lawmakers to, yet again, propose a state takeover.

State Sen. Brent Taylor, a Republican representing parts of Memphis, Shelby County and Eads, told reporters at the March 6 event he had yet to see the plan from the school district. He added that the state legislature still planned to pass legislation that would force a state takeover of MSCS.

Taylor, at the time, said the state takeover would not be withdrawn in place of the plan drafted by the district.

But, in a March 19 special-called meeting where the item was supposed to be voted on, board member and sponsor Sable Otey opted to pull the item for a vote and have it discussed during one of the board's upcoming work session meetings.

The school board discussed the item during its March 23 committee meeting. Otey said she was in the process of speaking with various community stakeholders.

"I wanted to have the opportunity to speak with some individuals in the faith-based community to get input from them, and also input from the legislators," Otey said. "I did speak with a legislator on (March 20) and I have a meeting tomorrow to speak with the legislator (March 24)."

School board member Amber Huettgarcia said the school board is working with the Council of Great City Schools, and offered as a part of the accountability plan for the organization to give a public update twice a year. She added having a third party that also has some level of scrutiny over how the board is performing would help the public see the accountability.

"We are really great at plans, and thinking through the components and I think the components are there. What I would like to see is a level of accountability for us to actually execute the plan and follow it," Huett- Garcia said. "For me, I would like to see someone else sort of giving us a report card on how we are doing."

The board is slated to have more discussion on the item and take a vote during the March 31 business meeting.

This week and next

The MSCS school board will meet for its business meeting on March 31. The public can attend either meeting in person at 160 Glenn Rogers Sr. St., or watch online at www.youtube.com/@scsk12unified.