

**LITTLE ROCK SCHOOL DISTRICT
810 WEST MARKHAM STREET
LITTLE ROCK, ARKANSAS 72201**

**MINUTES
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
March 20, 2008**

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District held their regular board meeting at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, March 20, 2008, in the Boardroom of the Administration Building, 810 West Markham Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. President Katherine Mitchell presided.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Katherine Mitchell
Charles Armstrong
Melanie Fox
Larry Berkley
Dianne Curry
Robert M. Daugherty
Baker Kurrus

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

ALSO PRESENT:

Linda Watson, Interim Superintendent
Beverly Griffin, Recorder of Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Dr. Mitchell called the meeting to order at 5:35 p.m. Six members of the board were present at roll call; Mr. Armstrong arrived at 5:50 p.m. Ex officio representative, Darnell Bell, teacher at Wilson Elementary School was also present. The student representative from Parkview Magnet High School did not attend.

Dr. Mitchell welcomed members of the audience and asked Dr. Watson to proceed with the citations and commendations.

II. REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS/PUBLIC COMMENTS:

A. Superintendent's Citations & Commendations

Dr. Watson introduced the Hall High School men's basketball team. This team recently won the 6-A state championship title, the sixth state title in the school's history. Coach **George Cirks** and assistant coaches **Jon Coleman**, **Chris Gonterman** and **Larry Bynum** were also present. Coach Cirks introduced the members of the team and distributed citations from the superintendent.

A citation was also presented to ex-officio representative **Darnell Bell**, teacher at Wilson Elementary School.

B. Partners in Education

Debbie Milam announced the upcoming Evening for the Stars, which will be held this year at the Little Rock Zoo on Tuesday, April 22, at 5:30 p.m.

Two new partnerships were presented for the board's review and approval:

Central High School, represented by *Nancy Rousseau and Sheila Wright*, partnering with **Little Rock Wastewater Utility**, represented by *John Jarrett*

Meadowcliff Elementary, represented by *Karen Carter*, partnering with **Metropolitan National Bank – University Branch**

Ms. Curry moved to accept the new partnerships; Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and it carried unanimously.

C. Remarks from Citizens

Kevin Dedner addressed the board concerning the sale of the Mitchell building. He reported that he lives in the Wright Avenue neighborhood, and he asked the board to reconsider the future use of the building. He expressed support for the city's interest in the property and their intent to use it as a stabilizing fixture for the community. He objected to the neighborhood association's assigning of their rights to purchase to an individual who may not have the continuing resources to improve and increase the value of the property. He appealed to the board to "do what is best for our neighborhood."

Lisa Black introduced Ruth Shepherd, Lynn Parker, and other members of the Public Education Foundation Board. She encouraged the Board to consider an open process to select a permanent superintendent for the LRSD. She read a prepared statement that encouraged the board to allow an opportunity for the community to meet the candidates prior to the appointment and to participate in the selection process. She expressed support for Dr. Watson, however she stated that the superintendent is not only accountable to the board, but also serves every parent and taxpayer in the community. She closed by stating that a competitive selection process would build trust with members of the community.

Otis Kirkland introduced himself as a parent, grandparent, district supporter and local photographer. He expressed concerns about opportunities for minority vendors in the LRSD, particularly photographers. He stated belief that there should be a requirement to award at least 10% of the district's business to minority vendors. He asked for an opportunity to provide the school pictures for our students.

Carrie Porter expressed concern regarding the sale of the Mitchell building. She stated that she lives across the street from the school and that she didn't believe selling the school to an individual, Dr. Blevins, was "the right fit" for the neighborhood. She expressed support for the city of Little Rock's proposal to purchase the building and stated that safety, excessive noise, and increased traffic were all of concern to her family. She noted the repairs and renovation that will be needed to maintain the building and she questioned whether Dr. Blevins would be able to afford to maintain the facility.

D. Little Rock PTA Council

Patty Barker, first vice president of the PTA Council, addressed the board. She thanked the staff at J. A. Fair for hosting the March Council meeting, and expressed appreciation for the students who presented drama and poetry performances. She invited board members to attend the next Council meeting on Tuesday, April 8th, at M.L. King Elementary School. She also provided a reminder of the upcoming state PTA Convention on May 9-10, at the Holiday Inn in Springdale, and she encouraged PTA members to attend.

E. Little Rock Classroom Teachers Association

Cathy Kohler reported that the CTA staff was moving back to their offices after having been relocated for several months due to flood damages at their building. She expressed support for the appointment of Dr. Watson as superintendent and noted the importance of building collaborative relationships within the administration and staff. She stressed the importance of making teachers feel valued as a contributing part of the educational process. She reported that the professional development committee is functioning and that the community conversations will increase public support for closing the achievement gap.

IV. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

A. Remarks from Board Members

Ms. Fox reported that she read to second grade students at Franklin Elementary last week on Dr. Seuss' birthday. She wished teachers and students a restful spring break.

Ms. Curry also read at Franklin Elementary, and she encouraged others to support the schools, our district, and our children.

Dr. Mitchell expressed relief that the investigation is over and that she, Dr. Watson and other district employees had been cleared of any wrongdoing. She offered a challenge to parents to become more involved in the schools, to visit with teachers and counselors, and to offer their support in making the school environment more conducive to learning. She wished the listeners a good spring break and a Happy Easter.

Dr. Daugherty stated that he was proud of the position that Attorney General Dustin McDaniel had taken against payday lenders in the state. He noted that these businesses take advantage of poor people and that anything affecting lower income families affects the children in our schools. He thanked ACORN for a letter received today which expressed support for the appointment of Dr. Watson as superintendent of the district.

Mr. Armstrong paraphrased Hillary Clinton's quote that "it takes a village to raise a child" and stated that it takes all of us to education our children. He asked for parents to become involved in the schools.

B. Report: Gains Model – Dr. Charity Smith

Dr. Charity Smith, Assistant Commissioner for Academic Accountability with the Arkansas Department of Education, provided an overview of the Gains Model. Act 35 provides legislative requirements to increase academic achievement, and the Gains Model will provide a means of comparing test scores from 2006-2007 with the scores achieved in 2007-2008.

Dr. Smith provided an information overview of academic achievement and performance gains in the state and noted that Arkansas ranks 8th in the nation. She responded to questions from the board and distributed copies of the information provided in the PowerPoint presentation.

C. Report: Read 180 Expense Worksheet

Information was requested by the board and a summary worksheet was provided as part of the agenda. Dr. Watson responded to questions regarding the additional implementation of Read 180 components.

D. Report: Compass Learning Expense Worksheet

Information was requested by the board and provided as part of the agenda. Dr. Watson reported that the schools had been asked to implement Compass Learning and Read 180 in their before school, after school, and Saturday school programs.

Ms. Fox asked whether these programs would be evaluated for effectiveness, and she questioned whether these programs had a positive impact on student achievement. Dr. Watson responded and reported that the schools may move to a web based program so that parents and students can access the tools from home.

E. Legal Update

Attorneys Chris Heller and Khayyam Eddings were present to provide information and respond to questions from the board. Mr. Heller reported that the recent oral arguments before the Eighth Circuit Court in St. Louis were available in audio at the court's website. He reported that he expected a response within two or three months, however the court has been known to take much longer.

Mr. Eddings reported that the request for an opinion from the state attorney general on responding to requests received under the Freedom of Information Act had been forwarded to Senator Irma Hunter Brown. Senator Brown agreed to submit it on behalf of the district. Mr. Eddings will continue to review requests as they are received and will report to the board once there is an opinion from the attorney general.

F. Report: District Annual Yearly Progress (AYP)

Information on the district's AYP designation by the Arkansas Department of Education was requested by the board and provided as part of the agenda. Dr. Watson responded to questions and reported that the administration was developing accountability instruments for teachers and administrators. These instruments will be presented to the board in April or May.

G. Budget Update

No report.

H. Internal Auditors Report

Mr. Becker's report was provided as an attachment to the agenda.

V. APPROVAL OF ROUTINE MATTERS

A. Minutes

The minutes from meetings held on February 28th and March 6th were presented for the board's review and approval. Ms. Fox moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

VI. ADMINISTRATION

A. Review and Approval of New Position: Assistant to the Internal Auditor

The board requested an opportunity to review information and discuss the creation of a new position to provide support to the Internal Auditor. A job description was developed and was attached to the board's agenda. Mr. Becker had presented justification for his position directly to board members prior to the meeting. Dr. Daugherty moved to approve the request; Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion.

Ms. Fox spoke in opposition to the motion stating specifically that it's difficult to justify expenditures that are not directly related to classroom instruction. She asked the board to wait until Mr. Becker's performance evaluation is conducted and to then base the decision on an identified auditing schedule.

Mr. Berkley questioned the qualifications listed in the job description and noted that it did not appear to be a clerical support position, but one that required an accounting degree and experience.

Mr. Kurrus stated concerns with the accountability measures established by the board for the existing Internal Auditor's position, and whether this additional position was necessary at this late in the budget year. He asked for the superintendent to make a recommendation regarding new positions and to include those in the budget proposal that will come before the board for the next school year.

Dr. Daugherty and Dr. Mitchell spoke in support of the motion and in support of the work Mr. Becker has performed in the past. They agreed that it was the board's responsibility to evaluate Mr. Becker and to establish a schedule for auditing needs. The motion was called, and it **carried 4-3**, with Mr. Berkley, Ms. Fox and Mr. Kurrus voting no.

VII. EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

A. Secondary Social Studies Textbook Adoption

The district's Secondary Social Studies Textbook adoption committee began in November 2007, reviewing and selecting social studies materials for instruction in grades six through twelve. The committee provided their recommendations for the board's review and approval and detailed information was provided in the agenda. Mr. Kurrus moved to approve the selections of the Social Studies Textbook committee; Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

B. Arkansas Department of Education – Grant Submissions: School Improvement Fund

Two grant applications were submitted to the Arkansas Department of Education on Monday, March 3, 2008. These grants would provide professional development, transportation and curriculum materials for summer programs for students at Cloverdale and Mabelvale Middle Schools. These grants are specifically for schools in Year 3 of School Improvement. The request for Cloverdale Middle School was in the amount of \$99,939; the Mabelvale request was in the amount of \$99,672. The board was asked to support the submission of these grants. Ms. Fox made a motion to support the grant applications. Mr. Berkley seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

C. Arkansas Better Chance for School Success Grant Proposal

The board was asked to approve the renewal application for a grant from the Arkansas Better Chance for School Success (ABCSS) program. The grant request was in the amount of \$5,500,000 for 2008-2009, and would provide additional classrooms for three-year-old students. The district would be required to match this grant at 40%, however the district funding currently allocated for this program already exceed that amount. Ms. Curry moved to approve the submission; Dr. Daugherty seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

D. Federal Grant Submission: Carol White Physical Education Program

The U. S. Department of education offered the Carol White Physical Education Program grant for the purpose of expanding or enhancing physical education programs in grades kindergarten through twelfth grades. The district's application is a collaborative effort of the district's Nutrition and Physical Activity Advisory Committee partners. The three-year award would provide \$500,000 for instruction in physical education, nutrition, and professional development for teachers. Ms. Fox made a motion to approve the grant submission; Dr. Daugherty seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

E. Federal Grant Submission: Full Service Community Schools Program

The Full-Service community Schools program establishes partnerships between schools and community-based organizations and public or private entities. The grant application requested five-year funding in the amount of \$500,000. The funds would be used to establish and expand services at Hall High School to assist students who have been suspended and are returning to their regular school setting. Mental health counseling, mentoring services, community service programs, academic enrichment, nutrition services and career counseling are included in the proposal. Ms. Fox moved to approve the submission. Dr. Daugherty seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

VIII. SCHOOL SERVICES

A. West Little Rock School Update: Architects' Project Delivery Schedule and LRSD Implementation Timeline

The board requested information on estimated timetables for completion of the new west Little Rock school. Two schedules were provided: one from the architectural firm and one from the district administration. Board members requested a shorter time frame for completion, with the ideal being a completion date which allows classes to begin in the fall of the 2010-2011 school year.

IX. HUMAN RESOURCES

A. Custodial Bargaining Unit Election

Board policy requires submission of a petition calling for an election to be held among members of a group who wish to establish a union represented bargaining unit. The administration recommended May 15, 2008 as the date to call a representative election of employees who make up the custodial unit. Dr. Daugherty moved to approve the recommended date. Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

B. Personnel Changes

Routine personnel changes were provided as an attachment to the board's agenda. Dr. Daugherty made a motion to accept the personnel changes presented; Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

C. Update: Chief Financial Officer Vacancy

Board members requested an update on the search for a Chief Financial Officer. Dr. Watson reported that the position had been re-advertised. The applications are being reviewed and interviews will be done once a viable candidate has been identified.

The board recessed briefly at 7:45 p.m. and reconvened at 8:00 p.m.

D. Contract – Superintendent of Schools

Mr. Armstrong made a motion to reorder the agenda and to move ***Item IX. D. Contract - Superintendent of Schools***, to the end of the agenda. Ms. Curry seconded the motion to reorder the agenda and it **carried unanimously**. Action on this item was taken as the last item on the agenda and will be reported later in these minutes.

X. FINANCE & SUPPORT SERVICES

A. Donations of Property

The Board was asked to approve the acceptance of recent donations to schools and departments within the District. The donations are listed in the following chart. Mr. Berkley read the listing of donated items. Ms. Fox made a motion to accept the donated items, Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

DONATIONS

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	ITEM	DONOR
Jefferson Elementary	\$500.00 grant for the Art Program	AR Community Foundation / Kay and Mahlon Maris Family Endowment in memory of Marjorie Gage
Metropolitan Career & Technical Center	1994 Honda ACC, 4-door vehicle valued at \$2,800.00	Regina Favors

DONATIONS (continued)

SCHOOL/DEPARTMENT	ITEM	DONOR
Wilson Elementary	\$500.00 cash to supplement the United Way funds for providing uniforms and other personal items for students	St. Andrew's Church
Woodruff Elementary	\$200.00 cash to be used for incentives and materials for faculty and staff	Day Spring Behavioral Health Services of Arkansas

B. Appointment of District Treasurer

Arkansas Code 6-13-701 (b) requires board approval of the appointment of the District Treasurer. This position became vacant upon the retirement of the Chief Financial Officer. Dr. Watson recommended appointment of **Jean Ring**, Director of Finance and Accounting, as the District's Treasurer. Mr. Berkley moved to approve the superintendent's recommendation; Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

C. Mitchell School Resolution

The board accepted an offer from the Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association to purchase the Mitchell School property on September 13, 2007. The Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association assigned right of purchase to Dr. George Blevins who made an offer in the amount of \$200,000. In order to close the sale of this property, a properly executed and approved resolution was presented for the board's adoption. Dr. Daugherty moved to approve the resolution presented; Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion.

Ms. Fox spoke in opposition to the motion and read portions of the letter from the city of Little Rock expressing interest in using the Mitchell facility for city services. Mr. Berkley also spoke in opposition, stating that it was not entirely clear whether the Wright Avenue community was supportive of the sale to Dr. Blevins. Both Ms. Fox and Mr. Berkley expressed confidence in the commitment from the city of Little Rock to purchase the property and stated that it appeared the community was in favor of the offer made by the city of Little Rock.

The district's real estate consultant, Stuart Mackey from The Hathaway Group, responded to questions from board members. Attorney Khayyam Eddings assured the board that the terms of the existing contact with the Wright Avenue Neighborhood Association and Dr. Blevins were conditional upon approval of the resolution before the board.

The vote was **4-3 in favor** of the motion to approve the resolution with Mr. Berkley, Ms. Fox and Mr. Kurrus voting in opposition.

D. Mitchell Property – Addendum to Offer & Acceptance

In conjunction with the sale of the property at Mitchell School, Dr. Blevins submitted an addendum to the original offer and acceptance which would extend the date of closing to no later than April 10, 2008. The addendum was provided for the board's consideration with no recommendation from the administration. Mr. Mackey, Mr. Eddings and Dr. Blevins responded to questions from the board. Dr. Daugherty made a motion to approve the addendum; Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and it **carried 4-3**, with Mr. Berkley, Ms. Fox and Mr. Kurrus voting no.

E. Monthly Financial Reports

The routine monthly financial reports were provided as attachments to the agenda. There were no additional questions or requests for information.

XI. HEARINGS

A. Student Expulsion Recommendations

The board went into a closed session 8:15 p.m. to consider student disciplinary recommendations.

Students #1 and #2 were involved in an incident at Hall High School on January 9, 2008. They were found in possession of a firearm on school property. The weapon was not taken into the school building, but was found locked in the trunk of Student #1's vehicle. Arkansas laws and LRSD policy mandates expulsion for one calendar year for violation of the weapons policy.

Student #1 was recommended for expulsion for one calendar year and assignment to an alternative learning environment. Mr. Armstrong made a motion to accept the recommendation. Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously.**

Student #2 was also recommended for expulsion for one calendar year and assignment to an alternative learning environment. Dr. Daugherty made a motion to accept the recommendation; Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously.**

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Curry made a motion to convene an executive session to discuss personnel matters. Dr. Daugherty seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously.** The closed session began at 8:20 p.m. The board returned from executive session at 8:45 p.m. and reported no action was taken.

Dr. Daugherty made a motion to extend a three-year contract to Dr. Watson to serve as superintendent of the LRSD; Ms. Curry seconded the motion.

Mr. Kurrus questioned whether the terms of the contract had been specified, if the motion intended was to be one that would move the board into negotiation of a contract, and whether the intent was to offer a three year contract which would begin at the end of the current contract term.

Mr. Kurrus expressed commitment to support Dr. Watson and he clarified the intent of his questions as related only to matters of process and procedures. He asked that the board consider the benefits of an open, fair, and transparent process that placed value on community input and discussion. He requested that the motion be to contract with Dr. Watson to serve as superintendent for a period of one year and to then re-evaluate the selection and the process used at the end of that one year term.

Ms. Fox agreed with comments made by Mr. Kurrus and asked that the board consider developing a selection process in order to build a firm foundation for the next superintendent. She also expressed support for Dr. Watson, but stated that she felt that taking action without advance planning and notice would continue to diminish the trust of the community.

Mr. Berkley agreed with the previous comments and reminded the board that they had previously committed to the community that there would be an open and inclusive search process. It was his belief that the superintendent's position with the board and with the community would be compromised by a 4-3 vote.

Mr. Armstrong responded by stating that each board member would cast their vote based on support expressed by their own community members. He stated the importance of appointing a permanent superintendent and the value of selecting someone who is familiar with the district. He noted that although he was willing to open the search and establish parameters for selecting a superintendent, he supported hiring a superintendent already "within the ranks."

Dr. Daugherty spoke in support of Dr. Watson, stating that she had the qualities of leadership, the knowledge and the ability to lead the district. He continued saying that she was dedicated to the LRSD, competent to lead, and that she had continued to do her job regardless of obstacles. He expressed confidence that Dr. Watson would respect each individual board member, treat everyone the same, serve as an advocate for children and would work to make this a smooth transition.

Ms. Curry agreed with Dr. Daugherty's comments and stated that she felt Dr. Watson deserved the opportunity to continue and that she was dedicated to turning the district around.

Dr. Mitchell also spoke in support of Dr. Watson, stating that she was encouraged and confident that Dr. Watson would be accessible and willing to work with different groups in the community. Dr. Mitchell had visited with principals and had received feedback that Dr. Watson was willing to give them an opportunity to be contributors. Dr. Mitchell was pleased that an individual within the district had the ability to work with everyone.

The motion **carried 4-3**, with Mr. Berkley, Ms. Fox and Mr. Kurrus voting in opposition.

Dr. Watson expressed appreciation for the board's support and for the opportunity to serve the district. Dr. Mitchell closed by stating that contract negotiations would take place after the first of April.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the board the meeting adjourned at 9:00 p.m. on a motion by Mr. Armstrong, seconded by Ms. Fox.

APPROVED: 04-24-08

Originals Signed by:
Katherine P. Mitchell, President
Melanie Fox, Secretary