

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

**MINUTES
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
July 17, 2007**

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District convened a special meeting on Tuesday, July 17, 2007, at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held 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:

Roy G. Brooks, Superintendent of Schools
Beverly Griffin, Recorder of Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Dr. Mitchell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m. All members of the Board were present at roll call.

II. Watson Intermediate / Chicot Primary Class Size Reduction

Dr. Brooks reviewed the Watson / Chicot Update which was provided to the board by Dr. Sadie Mitchell at the June 2007 regular board meeting. Information was provided regarding the cost to reduce class sizes at Watson and Chicot to 1:18 teacher/student ratio. Mr. Milhollen reported on the fiscal impact, reporting that \$699,000 was the estimated projection for implementing the lower class sizes.

Principal Betty Mosley responded to questions from the board regarding the restructuring at Watson Intermediate School. She reported that Watson was entering year five of school improvement. Representative members of the staff from Watson were present and recognized and it was announced that an open house would be held on Sunday, August 12, 3:00 p.m. Parents and students will have the opportunity to meet their teachers and members of the Junior League of Little Rock will continue to purchase necessary school supplies for students through their "Stuff the Bus" community service project.

Mr. Milhollen responded to questions regarding allocation of funds for lowering class sizes.

Mr. Kurrus discussed the proposal and the impact on the overall district budget when allocating funds for lowering class sizes. He noted that this was a perfect example of the fact that the district does not spend more in the schools in west Little Rock and that the schools of greatest need, such as Watson and Chicot, are funded at a higher per-pupil cost. He stated that it was unfair to continue to misstate facts about school funding. He encouraged the board to work together to increase enrollment in the schools where the student population generates revenues that can be used to fund the schools where there are students of greater need.

Ms. Curry and Dr. Mitchell spoke in support of lowering class sizes, especially at the primary grades. Dr. Mitchell stated that she wanted to ensure that an equitable formula was developed for meeting the needs of students in all schools.

Ms. Curry made a motion to accept the proposal to reduce the class size ratio to 18:1. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

III. Interviews for Position of Interim Superintendent

Ms. Fox made a motion to conduct interviews for the position of interim superintendent in public session as opposed to executive session. Mr. Berkley seconded the motion. The motion **failed 3-3-1**, with Mr. Armstrong abstaining.

Ms. Curry made a motion to convene in executive session. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion.

Prior to the vote, Mr. Kurrus stated that the process gave the appearance of being "flawed," or not a fair and open process. He stated that in order to be fair to the candidates, he would not participate in a closed session. Ms. Curry stated that she felt the process would be fair and open, but that she was not opposed to holding the interviews in a public session. She withdrew the motion for executive session.

Ms. Curry stated that it was her belief that the communications department was asked to be responsible for getting out the notification of the vacancy. She then made a motion to interview the candidates in an open session. Ms. Fox seconded the motion and it **carried 4-2-1**, with Dr. Mitchell and Dr. Daugherty voting "no" and Mr. Armstrong abstaining.

Applications were received from Robert Holitik, Mary Jane Cheatham, Steven Wise, and Linda Watson. Each candidate participated in a 45-minute question and answer session.

Mr. Holitik stated that he recently relocated to Little Rock after serving as an attorney in Memphis, TN and Marion, AR. He reviewed his educational background and admitted a lack of experience in education, but a solid background as an administrator. He stated that he would follow a proven decision making process: gain information; set priorities; identify adequate funding; and maintain a cost-effective approach that would lead to positive results. He stated that the board and administration should participate in consensus building efforts to identify their common interests.

Dr. Cheatham reported that she retired from the LRSD after serving in various roles for over 30 years. She provided a written summary of personal beliefs and stated that she was passionate about education and would be open to everyone in the community. She stated that she would perform in an interim capacity, at the will of the board, for \$25,000 per year. This salary would allow her to continue to receive the teacher retirement benefits she is already drawing. She stated that involving the community would help to heal the division between the board and superintendent, noting that all parties should be involved.

Dr. Wise opened by reading a prepared statement of his beliefs and qualifications. He has administrative certification to be a superintendent and is currently an assistant principal at Pulaski Heights Middle School. He stated his selection as interim superintendent would provide the district with quality leadership during the transition, and would allow the board time to step back, gather data, and assess the overall needs of the district. He stated his goal would be to reclaim public trust and to prove that the current conflict is not just a school district problem but a community problem. He would involve parents and members of the community who are overwhelmingly supportive of the schools.

Dr. Watson reviewed her educational qualifications and career background and stated her highest priority would be to address the issues of student achievement. She would review and monitor test scores to insure improvement and progress, advocate for additional extended day / extended year schools, implement proven remedial reading programs, and provide more one-on-one or small group instruction. She responded to questions on building the west Little Rock School, increasing community involvement, and the current status of the desegregation case. Dr. Watson asked for the opportunity to prove that someone from inside the district was capable of serving as interim superintendent.

EXECUTIVE SESSION

Ms. Fox moved to convene an executive session to review the information received from the candidates at 8:27 p.m. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

The board returned from executive session at 8:55 p.m. and reported that no action was taken. *Ms. Fox did not return from executive session.*

Mr. Kurrus made a motion to appoint Dr. Linda Watson as interim superintendent with details of the contract to be determined. Dr. Daugherty seconded the motion and it **carried 6-0**.

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. Curry.

APPROVED: 07-26-07

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