



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

**MINUTES
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Thursday, January 9, 2014**

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District held a Special Board Meeting on Thursday, January 9, 2014, immediately following the regular agenda meeting, in the Boardroom of the Administration Building, 810 West Markham Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. President Greg Adams presided.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Greg Adams
Norma Johnson
C. E. McAdoo
Jody Carreiro
Dianne Curry
Leslie Fisker
Tara Shephard

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

ALSO PRESENT:

Dexter Suggs, Superintendent of Schools
Beverly Griffin, Recorder of Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Mr. Adams called the meeting to order at **8:20 p.m.** All members of the Board were present at roll call.

II. PURPOSE OF THE MEETING

The agenda for the meeting included the following action items:

- A. Forest Heights STEM Academy
- B. Geyer Springs High Ability Academy
- C. Employee Hearing

III. ACTION AGENDA

A. Forest Heights STEM Academy

Dr. Suggs presented his recommendation to transform Forest Heights Middle School into the Forest Heights STEM Academy. A full report had been provided at the January agenda meeting, and information was provided in the board's agenda.

Board members asked questions on the following:

Will be school be balanced by race and gender? *Yes, using the same formula that is used to assign students to the current magnet schools, FH STEM school will be balanced.*

Questions regarding STEM programs currently in the district: *Information on current STEM curriculum was provided in the board's agenda. There are STEM components in many of the district schools, but not one school dedicated to STEM instruction and curriculum.*

Concerns regarding students in Kindergarten and grade one: *Those students would be assigned first from the school's walk zone.*

Ms. Fisken made a motion to accept the superintendent's recommendation to transform FHMS to the FH STEM Academy. Mr. Carreiro seconded the motion.

Ms. Fisken spoke in support of her motion, expressing confidence and trust in the recommendations made by Dr. Suggs and the work done by the administrative team.

Mr. McAdoo expressed concerns regarding the amount of communication with board members and stated he had to think deeply about how the process has come about and the way in which the proposal has been brought to the board.

Mr. Carreiro spoke in support of the motion noting that with Forest Heights and with Geyer Springs, "we have to do something" to transform these schools. The district has had trouble breaking out of the mold. In order to succeed, we have to break out and do something bold. This type of school has the greatest impact on the education of African American males, and the board has been talking about doing something drastic to improve their performance for many years.

Ms. Curry expressed support for the STEM initiatives, but stated she was still uncertain about how "things are going to go." She asked to consider implementing STEM after providing the information the board is still unclear on.

Mr. Adams noted the board had been talking about making these kinds of changes since adopting the Strategic plan. He stated belief that this will be a more effective way of engaging students, and there is a good chance it will keep more students in the district at the middle school level.

Mr. Adams called for a vote by show of hands. The motion **carried 4-3**, with Ms. Johnson, Ms. Curry, and Mr. McAdoo voting no.

B. Geyer Springs High Ability Academy

Dr. Suggs made the recommended to transform Geyer Springs to a High Ability Academy. Ms. Fisken made the motion to approve the recommendation. It was seconded by Mr. Carreiro.

Ms. Shephard discussed the concerns she had received from the community surrounding Geyer Springs. The board has received much information on the Forest Heights and STEM initiatives, but the community is not supportive of the changes proposed for Geyer Springs. She acknowledged that something had to be done because it is a Priority School at risk of state intervention. The school is in year six, and there are other things that can be done before transforming it to the Academy.

Ms. Curry stated she had also received comments from her community. She agreed with Ms. Shephard's comments that there was a need to change the leadership and provide additional support to meet the needs of the students currently attending Geyer Springs.

Ms. Shephard suggested allowing the students currently enrolled to remain at Geyer Springs and creating an environment more conducive to learning. She asked that the current proposal be taken off the table and reconfiguring it to allow the students enrolled there to remain instead of sending them off to other schools.

Dr. Suggs withdrew the recommendation and agreed to bring back an alternate plan to allow current Geyer Springs students an opportunity to attend the new school. Ms. Fisker withdrew her motion; Mr. Carreiro withdrew his second.

The recommend was tabled for further discussion and research.

The board took a brief recess and reconvened at 9:30 p.m. to conduct an employee hearing.

C. Employee Hearing

The hearing was closed at the request of the employee, Jason Gaunt. Mr. Gaunt was a Spanish teacher at Forest Heights Middle School and had been arrested and charged with furnishing a weapon to a convicted felon; possession of drug paraphernalia and equipment used in the processing of drugs. Mr. Gaunt was represented in this hearing by Attorney John Wesley Hall.

The LRSD was represented by Attorney Khayyam Eddings.

Mr. Gaunt addressed the board and reported he had been employed in the district for six years. He had been at Dunbar for one year, then was at Forest Heights for the remainder of the time. He noted he had served as an interim assistant principal Forest Heights.

Mr. Gaunt was arrested in April 2013. This arrest was publicized in the newspaper and in various local news broadcasts. He reported he had been working at the IRC and at the science warehouse since his appeal of the termination recommendation. He had also been placed for a time at Dunbar Magnet Middle School.

Robert Robinson was questioned regarding the decision to place Mr. Gaunt in a position at the IRC instead of being on paid administrative leave. The superintendent had directed the placement as opposed to sending Mr. Gaunt home on leave with pay.

Prior to the placement in the science department, Mr. Gaunt served as a teacher at Dunbar Middle School. Eunice Thrasher, principal at Dunbar, addressed the board regarding written concerns she had received from parents when she hired Mr. Gaunt. The newspaper articles regarding his arrest were of great concern.

Although Mr. Gaunt and his attorney had asked for a delay on the termination hearing, Mr. Eddings informed the board they did not have an obligation to stay board deliberations until after criminal matters are decided. On May 1 of each year, contracts are automatically renewed for another school year. Once an employee begins to work a new contract, the district would not be able to go back and terminate Mr. Gaunt for something that happened in the previous school year.

The board recessed for deliberations at 10:17 p.m. They returned from recess at 10:35 p.m. and reported no action had been taken.

Mr. Carreiro made a motion that the four items listed in the recommendation for termination were proven, and that the superintendent's recommendation for termination should be upheld. Ms. Fisker seconded the motion. It **carried 6-1**, with Ms. Johnson voting no.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the Board, the meeting adjourned at 10:36 p.m.

APPROVED: 01-23-14

Originals Signed by:
Greg Adams, President
C. E. McAdoo, Secretary