



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

MINUTES
REGULAR BOARD MEETING
February 24, 2011

The Board of Directors of the Little Rock School District held their regular board meeting at 5:30 p.m. on Thursday, February 24, 2011, in the boardroom of the administration building, 810 West Markham Street, Little Rock, Arkansas. President Melanie Fox presided.

MEMBERS PRESENT:

Melanie Fox
Jody Carreiro
Michael Nellums
Greg Adams
Charles Armstrong
Dianne Curry
Katherine Mitchell

MEMBERS ABSENT:

None

ALSO PRESENT:

Morris Holmes, Interim Superintendent
Beverly Griffin, Recorder of Minutes

I. CALL TO ORDER / ROLL CALL

Ms. Fox called the meeting to order at 5:38 p.m. Six members of the board were present at roll call; Ms. Curry arrived at 6:15 p.m. The teacher ex-officio **Gail Harris** from M. L. King Elementary School was also present. The student representative did not attend.

II. REPORTS/RECOGNITIONS/PUBLIC COMMENTS

A. Citations and Commendations

At the agenda meeting on February 17, Dr. Holmes presented citations in recognition of achievement by several students and district employees.

Two Central High School students were recently named **Siemens Award Winners for Advanced Placement**. Each year, the Siemens Foundation selects two winners, one male and one female, from each state. It is a proud tradition for these students to be from Little Rock Central High School. They were selected based on their AP math and science performance. **Whitney Gao** and **Boshan Zhao** were presented with the official Siemens Foundation Awards along with Superintendent Citations and \$2,000 scholarships from the Siemens Foundation.

Coach Johnny Johnson, the district's Athletic Director, was recently inducted into the **Sports Hall of Fame at the University of the Ozarks**. It was noted that he was the basketball coach at the University of the Ozarks from 1990 to 2001, winning a record high 173 games during his eleven seasons. He was named Conference Coach of the Year in 1993 and again in 2000. Coach Johnson was named Athletic Director of the Year in 1997, and he currently serves as President of the Arkansas High School Administration Association and as an advisor for the Baptist Health System's Healthy Children Initiative. Dr. Holmes presented a superintendent's citation in recognition of these honors.

Each year, teachers in the Little Rock School District strive to achieve the highest level of certification possible for their profession from the **National Board for Professional Teaching Standards**. This process takes several years to complete, and many of those seeking certification do not earn it on their first attempt.

This year, twenty teachers in the LRSD achieved National Board Certification. These teachers were introduced and presented with a citation in recognition of their achievement: **Ashley Atkins**, Fulbright Elementary; **Brandi Bailey**, Forest Heights Middle; **Holly Brown**, Williams Magnet Elementary; **Terri Cross**, Williams Magnet Elementary; **Alisa Dixon**, Jefferson Elementary; **Terri Finkbeiner**, Jefferson Elementary; **Keysha Griffith**, Roberts Elementary; **Timothy Hughes**, Central High; **Alvena Jones**, Parkview Magnet High; **Heidi King**, Terry Elementary; **Marie Mendillo**, Parkview Magnet High; **Christopher Olson**, J.A. Fair Magnet High; **Mary Katherine Parson**, Central High; **Julie Shelton**, Roberts Elementary; **Mary Shollmier**, Parkview Magnet High; **Claudia Smith**, Dunbar Magnet Middle; **Kellie Smith**, Mann Magnet Middle; **Matthew TerAvest**, Hall High; **Shauna Thomas**, Forest Heights Middle; **Margaret Wang**, Booker Magnet Elementary

B. Update: Volunteers in Public Schools

Debbie Milam reported briefly that schools are documenting their number of volunteer hours which are due to the ViPS office on or before March 15. She encouraged those who volunteer in the schools to report their time either at the local school or online at the LRSD website. Volunteers will be recognized at the *Evening for the Stars*, on April 26, 5:30 p.m. at Philander Smith College.

C. Little Rock PTA Council

Sandy Becker reported that the February Founders Day program was very successful. The next meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, March 8, at Washington Magnet School.

D. Little Rock Education Association

Cathy Koehler welcomed staff members from the Arkansas Department of Education who were present to provide a report to the board later in the agenda.

Ms. Kohler asked the board to consider an inclement weather policy for employees. She reported too many questions had come out of the recent school closings due to inclement weather and the issues surrounding travel and safety of employees trying to get to work.

She asked the board to support the salary agreement which will provide a 1.5% raise and an additional contribution to the employee health care benefit. She reported the association membership had voted on Tuesday to ratify the tentative agreement. They also supported the administration's recommendation to hold a full day of school on March 18 to make up one of the snow days.

Addressing Arkansas Education Commissioner Tom Kimbrell, she asked if the state would consider adjusting the spring testing calendar to allow additional time to make up instruction lost due to the inclement weather.

She closed by expressing disappointment that the issue of providing bonuses through the education jobs fund was not on the agenda at this meeting. She expressed confidence that it would be presented and supported by the board at the March meeting.

III. REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

A. Remarks from Board Members

Mr. Adams welcomed Gail Harris, the teacher ex officio and reported that she had taught his son at M.L. King Elementary.

Mr. Nellums greeted audience members from the Arkansas Department of Education, some of whom he knew from the Pulaski County School District.

Dr. Mitchell expressed appreciation to the ViPS staff for the work they do in recruiting volunteers for the LRSD. She reported that she served on that board, and was aware firsthand of the work they do to support the schools with volunteers.

Dr. Mitchell also thanked the employees who had waited patiently for their raises. She encouraged parents to become involved in the educational process of their children, and noted the importance of working together to build a strong alliance between the schools and the homes. She reminded listeners that there is information available at the schools and at the Instructional Resource Center to help parents work with their children at home. She noted the Computers for Kids program which makes computers available for those who cannot afford to purchase a new computer.

Mr. Armstrong welcomed audience members, and stated he was pleased to see the members of the ADE present. He expressed appreciation for their support and gratitude for being able to depend on them to support LRSD efforts to close the achievement gap.

He reported that he had attended a meeting of the Chamber of Commerce, along with Dr. Holmes and Mr. Glasgow, for the purpose of reviewing and discussing implementation of the Strategic Plan. He assured the audience that the goal remains that every student will read on grade level by the third grade. Students not only have to pass, but they have to be ready to succeed after high school even if they aren't planning to attend college.

Mr. Carreiro recognized student musicians from Parkview, Central and J. A. Fair, who participated in All-State competitions over the previous weekend. LRSD was well represented in all areas, including choir, jazz band and orchestra. He also congratulated seven teams from the LRSD who were participating in *Destination Imagination* competition in Conway on Saturday. He also encouraged the audience to support the district's basketball teams who are competing in the state tournament beginning next week.

Ms. Fox reported that *Parenting* magazine, which annually sponsors the national *Moms Congress*, had once again selected a parent from the LRSD to attend the conference. Michelle Easter, PTA president from Carver Elementary, will represent Arkansas. Ms. Fox was the Arkansas delegate last year, and reported her attendance resulted in resources, books and other materials for the LRSD.

Ms. Fox also reported that she had attended a U. S. Department of Education conference in Denver, along with Dr. Holmes and Cathy Kohler. This conference emphasized the importance of working collaboratively with classroom teachers to improve student learning.

B. Legal Update

Mr. Heller discussed the recent ADE directive regarding redrawing school election zones and the section which states representatives from all zones would be required to run for election in 2012. The law and the directive were confusing, and Mr. Heller reported there would be an exception to the reelection of board members in school districts where the elections are governed by the Voting Rights Act, or those which had been declared to be in compliance with the Voting Rights Act. He reported that the Arkansas Supreme Court recognized these exceptions in 2003, and it was his belief that the district would not be required to elect seven new members, but only to elect representatives from those zones currently scheduled for election in 2012.

He reported that the attorneys would work with UALR and Metroplan to determine the current LRSD population and develop a recommendation that would make only the smallest adjustments to the current zones in order to remain in compliance with the law.

Mr. Heller also reported briefly on the filings in the desegregation case regarding the district's questions on approval and operations of charter schools. The lawsuit is in discovery, and we have answered to a point, but he didn't believe we had all the information needed in order to respond completely. The state had objected to a subpoena requesting information, and the judge has decided to hold discovery in abeyance until the North Little Rock and Pulaski County districts are declared unitary.

C. Update: ADE / School Improvement

Arkansas Department of Education staff members, Tony Wood, Phil Goff, Charity Smith, Tom Kimbrell, Laura Bednar, Phyllis Stewart and Beverly Williams were present to report and provide information on the district's receipt of federal school improvement grant funds. These grants will provide around \$40 million dollars for intensive improvement efforts in seven schools in Arkansas.

ADE staff is mandated to provide assistance and support in monitoring the implementation of the grant criteria for school improvement. It was noted that the application process was very difficult and the deadlines provided a very short turnaround time for getting the applications to the U. S. Department of Education. In the LRSD, Cloverdale Middle, Hall High and J. A. Fair High were successful in their applications for approximately \$18 million.

The ADE leadership team reported their role in the process was to assist the schools in securing the grants and also to continue to support the schools in implementing the plans as stated in the applications. The grants were intended to provide unique opportunities to support student learning and achievement through professional development, innovative instructional methods, and appropriate evaluation, monitoring, and tracking of progress.

Dr. Kimbrell thanked Dr. Holmes for stepping in to fill a leadership role in the LRSD. He expressed belief that Dr. Holmes understood the importance of monitoring the progress of the grants and making a significant contribution to the success of the students in these schools.

Dr. Laura Bednar spoke to the board, and thanked Ms. Fox for earlier comments regarding board support for student success. She also noted the importance of involving parents and the community in forming a spirit of cooperation within the school families.

Dr. Bednar reported there were successes in each of the schools where the grants are being implemented. However, it is of utmost importance to stay within the specifics of the grants and to ensure the things proposed in the statement of assurances of the grants are being implemented with fidelity. The grants require a high level of leadership at all levels, but they also provide an opportunity to try innovative strategies to assist students. It was noted that if there were any aspects of the grant that weren't being implemented or could not be done, there is a process to revise the application and redirect the money to more effective strategies.

Dr. Bednar expressed confidence that with the appropriate levels of support, the LRSD schools would begin moving in the right direction. The grants provide focus and an opportunity to focus on the things that will make a difference with the varying student populations.

Dr. Holmes thanked ADE representatives for being at the meeting and for their willingness to support the LRSD in their efforts to implement the grants successfully. He accepted the challenge as an opportunity to take all the varying factors of school operation, collapse some of the things that are unnecessary, and to focus on the things that will result in success.

Dr. Holmes reported that he had spent a considerable amount of time with the district grant writer, Linda Young, seeking perspective on the requirements of the grants. He introduced principals, Mr. Myton from J.A. Fair, Ms. Blaylock from Hall High, and Mr. Vinson from Cloverdale Middle. He also recognized members of the staff from those schools who were present.

Dr. Holmes notified the board that he would be developing a response to the ADE monitoring reports, and that he would provide copies for the board when they were complete. The monitoring visits are to be done quarterly or on an as-needed basis to ensure the appropriate resources are provided.

D. Second Quarter Reports from Schools on Improvement and from School Improvement Specialists

Dennis Glasgow reported to the board and reviewed the reports from the school improvement specialists included in the agenda. He noted that twenty-eight (28) LRSD schools are designated in some level of school improvement. The school improvements specialists meet and report to the superintendent each month and report to the board quarterly. Twenty-one of the district's 29 elementary schools are designated as either "achieving" or in "alert" status.

Richard Mills, principal at Geyer Springs Elementary School, reported the focus at Geyer Springs was on the mathematics priority of their School improvement plan. He stated that his staff had reviewed past test scores, identified individual students' weaknesses, and set a goal for achievement. They work together to monitor progress and reevaluate the needs of the students on a regular basis.

Ms. Curry asked about past problems with open response questions on the tests, and whether appropriate professional development was being provided. Mr. Glasgow responded that there was a step-by-step process for focusing on open response items and that strategies to encourage students to work through the open response portion of the tests have been implemented.

School Improvement Specialist, Shekita McKissack, currently serves Dunbar, Forest Heights and Henderson Middle Schools. She reported her role as one of support and accountability to the principal and other school-based personnel. She briefly discussed the Scholastic Audit process which helps to identify the resources appropriate for the students in a particular school. A review of the Scholastic Audit provides a determination for the principal of where to begin and how to fit all the pieces together to support the individual student learner.

Ms. Fox asked for more consistency within the quarterly reports from the specialists. She stated that although the reports are necessary and helpful, they aren't evenly formatted and are sometimes difficult to understand.

E. Update: Middle School Task Force

Mr. Babbs reviewed the report provided in the board's agenda. Six priorities had been identified by the Middle School Task Force as a result of input from the PTA focus groups. Each elementary and middle school PTA's conducted parent surveys and the results were included in the report.

Mr. Carreiro emphasized that although the survey provides information, it wasn't a statistically sound survey and was intended to identify areas that need further discussion and review at the middle school level. He also reported that the middle school visits conducted a few weeks earlier had provided more information for him in one day than he ever realized prior to those visits.

Mr. Armstrong agreed with Mr. Carreiro's comments and said he had learned what parents are most concerned about and what the board and the district can do to address those concerns. He acknowledged that middle school is a challenging place for students and also a difficult place to work for teachers.

Dr. Holmes addressed the issues regarding the drop in attendance at the middle school level. He noted that parents in west Little Rock remove their children from LRSD schools at the middle level. They place their children in private, parochial or charter schools, and then some return to the LRSD for high school. West LR parents are demanding a middle school, and it was noted that the board had agreed to look for land in the western part of the city for a middle school several years ago.

Dr. Mitchell discussed the problems of poor perception at the middle level. Some parents believe that the schools aren't safe, aren't providing a quality education, and aren't as well maintained as schools in the western part of the city. She also noted that it would take millions of dollars to build a school, but in the meantime the LRSD should be ensuring that the schools we currently operate are attractive and well-maintained.

Mr. Adams agreed with Dr. Mitchell's remarks and said that he supports the effort to look for land in the west for purchase, but that parents have a sense of urgency in addressing the need for middle school options. He also appealed to parents to really look at the schools and stated that the current perceptions aren't based on reality. He reported that good things are happening at Forest Heights, but they aren't being made known. He asked that middle level students be tracked in the coming years and that an effort be made by the board and the administration to build the middle school reputation to make the schools attractive to students.

Mr. Nellums spoke to the reality of the "have-nots." The city is moving west, so new schools are eventually needed in the west. However, most families in the inner city don't have an option to move their children out of the public schools. Therefore, there has to be an effort to improve the infrastructure of the schools in the inner city to make them more attractive to the families.

F. Update: Hall High School

Hall High School Principal Ann Blaylock presented an overview by PowerPoint presentation which highlighted the mission statement and operational goals at Hall High School. She invited board members to visit Hall and reported that she was very proud of the things going on at Hall. In addition to Ms. Blaylock, Hall High teachers, students, and parents were present to speak to the board. Hall currently houses 1278 students.

Parent Kevin Scribner reported that he has had five students who attend or have attended Hall High School. One son is currently enrolled in college out of state; his daughter attends ASU, majoring in psychology. He reported that both had made the dean's list and were achieving in their post-secondary education. He reported his personal experience was that Hall teachers were accessible to parents and supportive of students. He was pleased to report that all of his children had attended Forest Heights Middle School. He agreed with previous comments that Forest Heights is a good middle school, but he acknowledged that the perception isn't what it should be. He encouraged parents to go into the schools to see for themselves.

Teacher Tracy Mason reported there were currently 70 students at Hall enrolled in the AVID program. She stated the first class of seniors who have been in the AVID from the 8th grade would graduate this year. All of them have a 3.0 or higher grade point average. They are all enrolled in AP classes, and are beginning to receive and accept scholarships for admission to multiple colleges. At this time 50% of the class will qualify for a scholarship, and she was pleased to report that Hall High School teachers contribute financially to support these scholarships.

Taylor Luckadue, student council president, expressed pride in her school. She reported that Hall is one of the best schools in the LRSD. She discussed the rewards systems and the wearing of the orange vest, which prevents students from being in the hallways without permission.

Miquel Ramos, an ESL program participant, spoke highly of the teacher support system and the encouragement he received in his efforts to succeed at Hall.

Jose Morales, also an English language learner, reported that he participated in football and soccer. He reported that all teachers help students in the ESL program to keep moving forward as one instead of feeling separated from the group.

Ann Blaylock closed by mentioning the greatest areas of need at Hall: updated computers and an expansion of the Hall High attendance zone to make it a more true neighborhood school.

The board took a brief recess at 8:05.

G. Update: Safety & Security

Mr. Babbs reviewed the Safety and Security report provided in the board's agenda which compared statistics from the 2009-10 school year with the 2010-2011 school year. Mr. Carreiro asked that the information be extracted and a discipline report be provided for next month.

H. Internal Auditors Report

Mr. Becker's report was provided as part of the board's agenda.

IV. APPROVAL OF ROUTINE MATTERS

A. Minutes

Minutes from the regular board meeting held on January 27, 2011, and from a special meeting held on February 3, 2011, were presented for review and approval. Mr. Armstrong made a motion to approve the minutes as corrected. Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

V. ADMINISTRATION

A. Proposed Contract between LRSD and Connect Arkansas

Mr. Becker presented a proposal and asked the board to approve entering into a contract with Connect Arkansas to provide used but refurbished computers for children and families who can't afford new computers.

Mr. Becker responded to questions concerning the physical movement of computers, noting that it was the intent to contract with a nonprofit entity to provide this service. In addition, the position of coordinator of the program would be built into the budget as a half-time position. Mr. Becker would oversee the contract, but someone else would oversee the project.

He discussed the program at Metropolitan which includes a teacher computer programmer who trains the students to refurbish the computers. It was noted that the district would not assume any financial responsibility and the contract would cover the costs.

Mr. Heller was present to respond to questions regarding the contract. He noted that Connect Arkansas planned through this contract not only to provide computers to people who don't have them, but to also teach people who don't know how to use computers. They are buying used computers from us, teaching people to use them, and then distributing the computers to low income families.

Dr. Mitchell made a motion to approve the Connect Arkansas contract. Mr. Armstrong seconded the motion, and it **carried unanimously**.

VI. SCHOOL SERVICES

A. Felder Academy: Update and Recommendations

Dr. Holmes reviewed the information on Felder Academy provided in the board agenda. Mr. Babbs was asked to review the options being proposed for Felder.

One option would close the school, and the other two options would keep Felder open but operating under different enrollment and operational guidelines.

Mr. Babbs reviewed the report presented within the agenda. Felder was approved to operate as an ALE charter school in the 2004-05 school year, and originally opened as a Tri-District Charter School. The North Little Rock and Pulaski County School districts contributed to the operational expenses with support from the Pulaski County Juvenile Court system and the Pulaski County government.

Pulaski County pulled support for the ALE, and began serving their students within a separate alternative environment. Felder is currently in the second year of a three year charter agreement, with financial support from the Little Rock and North Little Rock School districts.

Enrollment information was provided in the agenda. Board members asked for information regarding continued operation of separate middle and high school alternative facilities. They requested financial information regarding the possibility of merging Hamilton and Felder into one facility, and also a review of the facility requirements if that was to be an option.

It was noted that a request to revoke or rescind the charter at Felder would have to go before the Arkansas Board of Education for approval. If the board decided to close Felder or to modify the grade level configuration of the students being served at Felder that request would be referred to Mr. Heller for advice on filing a request with the state.

Mr. Bailey responded to questions regarding the budget, noting that funding is based on per pupil cost and the rate of attendance. Although the enrollment figures appear stable, the attendance rate is not as consistent as it should be to support the operations. He reported that all revenue for Felder is accounted separately within the district's budget for auditing and reporting purposes.

Mr. Nellums requested options to provide financial detail on possible savings of separating middle and high school alternative programs. He asked Dr. Holmes to explore the possibilities and viable options and to bring information to the board for further discussion. He would like to see as much information as possible regarding potential savings and future costs.

The board also requested information on the cost of closing Felder completely, and a report of how many adjudicated youth are attending Felder at this time.

B. Update: Racially Identifiable Scholarship Program

A report on the administration of the Racially Identifiable Scholarship program was included in the board's agenda. The criteria for eligibility for these scholarships were included and are also available on the LRSD website. Mr. Babbs responded to questions.

VII. HUMAN RESOURCES

A. Personnel Changes

Routine general personnel changes were printed in the board's agenda. Dr. Mitchell made a motion to approve; Ms. Curry seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

B. School Calendar Modification – Inclement Weather Make-Up Day

David Hartz reviewed the recommendation to make up a snow day on March 18, which is currently on the calendar as a teacher record day. Students would attend a full day of school on that day. The remaining days would be added to the end of the current calendar. Mr. Armstrong moved approval, Mr. Carreiro seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

On a related note, Mr. Hartz reported that the governor had signed legislation that will allow school to start earlier, prior to August 19th. He is reviewing the proposed 2011-12 calendar to see if school can begin on August 15th or 16th in the LRSD. That proposal will be presented for the board's review and approval in March.

C. LRSD and LREA Proposed Salary Recommendations 2010-2011

Dr. Holmes presented a recommendation to provide an across the board salary increase in the amount of 1.5% retroactive to July 1, 2010. Mr. Nellums moved to approve the superintendent's recommendation and Dr. Mitchell seconded the motion.

Prior to the vote, Mr. Carreiro expressed disappointment with the district's negotiating team. He noted that the Board had approved a Strategic Plan that clearly stated the objective to raise the starting salary of teachers. By all present evidence, the negotiating team did not take any of the Strategic Plan's recommendations regarding teacher salaries into consideration with the current proposal.

Mr. Armstrong agreed with Mr. Carreiro and asked that the administration begin planning a revised salary scale that would allow room for a greater increase at the lower levels of the scale.

Mr. Nellums also expressed concern with the district's negotiating team, saying that true progress is being hampered by the current type of negotiation. He asked that in the future, the negotiating team confer with the board during negotiations and make a greater effort to develop a plan that will take us where the Strategic Plan says we want to go.

Ms. Fox suggested efforts to "compress" the salary scale and to shorten the distance between the bottom and the top. Current percentage increases only serve to widen the gulf. She noted that there was a current contract with the teachers that runs through 2012. Once that contract expires, the Board will insist on moving in the direction adopted by the Strategic Plan.

Ms. Curry also expressed concern for members of the support staff, who are at the lowest levels of the salary schedule. She stated the ultimate goal is to increase the pay for all employees.

Mr. Adams agreed with remarks from other board members. He stated he was happy the district was able to provide a salary increase, but agreed that there has to be a way to make progress toward our goals

On the 1.5% salary increase, the board **voted unanimously** to approve.

The superintendent recommended providing an increase to the employee's health insurance benefits from \$ 283.00 to \$ 301.44 per month. Mr. Carreiro moved approval. Dr. Mitchell seconded the motion and it **carried unanimously**.

There was a brief discussion regarding the provision of Education Jobs Funds and the possibility of providing a bonus for district teachers and support staff. Action on that issue will be recommended at the March board meeting.

VIII. FINANCE & SUPPORT SERVICES

A. Monthly Financial Reports – January 2011

Financial reports were provided in the board's agenda. Mr. Bailey reported that expenses were tracking as expected.

B. Budget Update

A tentative budget calendar was attached to the agenda for board's review. Additional budgeting discussions will be held over the next few months.

CLOSING REMARKS

Mr. Nellums commented on the recognition of February as Black History Month. He stated the importance of taking a moment to acknowledge the significant contributions of African Americans to our country, state and our city. He especially thanked members of the community who have advocated for quality public education. Mr. Armstrong agreed, and encouraged recognition of black history throughout the year.

Ms. Fox announced the week of March 7 - 10, when representatives of McPherson and Jacobson would be conducting public forums in conjunction with the superintendent's search. The specific dates will be posted in the media and on the LRSD website.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the board, the meeting adjourned at 9:33 p.m.

APPROVED: 03-17-11

Originals Signed by:
Melanie Fox, President
Michael Nellums, Secretary