

SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT

GADSDEN ARTS CENTER
13 N. MADISON STREET
QUINCY, FLORIDA

April 28, 2021

9:00 A.M.

This meeting was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Leroy McMillan, Chairman; Mr. Steve Scott; Mrs. Karema D. Dudley; Ms. Cathy S. Johnson; and Mr. Charlie D. Frost. Also present were Mr. Elijah Key, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board; and others.

1. Call To Order

The meeting was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Leroy McMillan, at 9:05 a.m.

ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

2. Way of Work

Mr. Key stated that this was a meeting to gather ideas on how to handle certain things including working relations. He stated that decisions will be made in administration in order to move the district forward.

Mr. Frost stated that he does not want to be involved with personnel but wants to know what is happening via phone call.

Mrs. Dudley stated that the current way of communicating with the Superintendent is working for her.

Ms. Johnson stated that the current way of communicating with the Superintendent is working for her

Mr. Scott stated that he would like to be able to meet more often. He stated that the open door policy is good. He stated that he would like to be informed about potential issues. He stated that the Board should know who to direct questions to. He stated that he wished to know the reasons for personnel changes. He stated that he likes the truth. He stated that he also likes things simple and straight. He made it clear that Board members have no responsibility when it comes to personnel.

Mrs. Minnis reminded the Board that if two board members are coming together it is considered a sunshine meeting. She stated that a Board member cannot talk with the Superintendent and then call another Board member to discuss that conversation. She stated that Board members can ask for clarification but cannot override the Superintendent's recommendation on personnel. She stated that because of this, Board members may not know all the personnel changes made by the Superintendent. She stated that the Board is the policy maker, and the Superintendent implements.

Mr. McMillan stated that the more he knows about what is going on in the district the better he can serve. He stated that he likes the way things are currently being done. He stated that he will never say to anyone if there are problems between any of the Board members or Superintendent. He stated that he wants to receive the Board packet earlier and the summary sheets precise and to the point. He stated that he does not agree with the Sunshine law. He stated that a foundation must be built for students in the 3rd grade. He stated that he has a desire to see Gadsden become a model district with graduated students being a productive member of society. He reminded the Superintendent to delegate and expect the jobs are completed in a timely manner.

Mrs. Minnis stated that attorneys will dispose and accuse you. She stated that the Board's legal duty is to make policies, and the Superintendent's duty is to enforce the policies. She stated that the Board should not get into the "we" on every decision. She stated that getting information and being knowledgeable is fine but Board members should not be involved in all personnel issues. She stated that the Board cannot override the Superintendent's recommendation on personnel without "good cause".

Mr. Key stated that he expects the Board to protect the school district from any possible lawsuits and to express their concerns.

Mrs. Minnis stated that the statute is tricky because they ultimately make the Board responsible. She stated that the Legislature has decided who can do certain things. She stated that the Board is removed from the day-to-day operations.

Mr. Key stated that board items for the meetings are due by the 10th of each month.

3. Carter Parramore Academy

Mr. Key stated that he will keep the Board members informed on what is going on in the district and schools. He stated that he visited an alternative school in Walton County that had a PreK setting and alternative school. He stated that he wants to provide some plans for Carter Parramore Academy that will serve the students and teachers. He stated that Gadsden Central Academy is another center that he wants to provide some plans for. He stated that it is a possibility to reduce the number of students and staff at Carter Parramore Academy. He stated that it would a good start to have certified personnel at Gadsden Central Academy. He stated that staff should be qualified based upon the job description. He stated that he needed the Board's guidance on restructuring Carter Parramore Academy and Gadsden Central Academy.

Mr. McMillan stated that principals should handle all student discipline issues at their respective school. He stated that an alternative setting should be at the student's home school.

Mr. Frost stated that CPA is not being utilized as credit recovery. He stated that CPA is being used as alternative placement for students. He stated that in the beginning, CPA had only 50 students, was used for credit recovery and alternative placement. He stated that CPA should be used for what it is intended.

Mr. Scott stated that he agrees that CPA needs to be reformed. He stated that credit recovery should be sent back to the schools. He stated that handling student discipline issues is a challenge for teachers. He stated that sometimes a student must be removed in order for the rest of the class to succeed. He stated that the district has tried to use in-school suspension. He stated that very few in-school suspension programs work. He stated that teachers must be certified. He stated that the Board has to decide if they want to put students on the street or educate them in an alternative school. He stated that the public feels that the schools are not safe and if we can't control the perception of the public then students will not return to the district.

In response to Ms. Johnson's concern whether there was mental health counseling for students, Mr. Key stated yes.

The Chairman recessed the meeting at 10:15 a.m. for a short break and for the Board to tour the Gadsden Arts facility. The Board reconvened the meeting at 10:47 a.m.

Mr. Key continued the discussion of CPA. He stated that he was in agreement to have an alternative placement setting at CPA with better structure.

Mr. Frost stated that an effective alternative placement program is very important.

Mrs. Dudley stated that the right staff is very important for an alternative school. She stated that to reduce the number of students is important as well as placing the right people where they are most effective. She stated that people are the most important resources. She stated that she wants students to become productive in life. She stated that she is all about educating students.

4. Gadsden Elementary Magnet School

Mr. Key stated that he has had conversations with teachers and parents regarding GEMS. He stated that he was concerned about the health and safety of staff and students. He stated that there have been some kickbacks from educators regarding GEMS changes.

Mrs. Dudley asked if a gifted and talented program in the elementary schools would be feasible.

Mr. Frost stated that GEMS was originally located in Midway with a grant. He stated that when the grant ended the program was moved. He stated that he was concern about the student and staff safety. He stated that the Board needed to move forward with GEMS. He stated that a school-within-a-school is a possibility.

Mr. Key stated that personnel settings and the right environment for student learning is necessary.

Ms. Johnson stated that she was concerned about hall monitors assisting in the classrooms at GCHS because teachers are not present. She asked if more employees could assist with being hall monitors.

Mr. Frost stated that there is a lot of discussion on issues, but it is time to start getting things done.

Mr. Key stated that he will do the leg work and include Board in conversations about building a new school. He stated that Shanks is a possible location. He stated that Mr. Hunter has been having discussions with an architect. He stated that other sites have been looked at but there are more reasons that Shanks is a better location.

In response to Ms. Johnson's question whether or not Shanks would be rebuilt, Mr. Key stated yes. She stated that she hoped that it would have a similar look because of the sentimental emotions with residents. She stated that research needed to be done to see what can be done with remodeling schools and/or building new schools.

Mr. Key stated that the facilities committee will look at other districts to see how they remodeled or built schools. He also stated that a sales tax referendum may be needed to provide funding.

Mr. McMillan stated he has heard GEMS students say if they close the school, they will leave the district.

Mr. Key stated that a gifted school within a school is a great idea. He questioned whether it was too close to plan for the 2021-2022 school year.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson asked if it was the consensus of the Board to look at the cost of placing portables at George W. Munroe and West Gadsden Middle to relocate GEMS students.

Mr. Scott stated that he wants the sign removed at West Gadsden Middle that states it was one of the top schools because that was 10 years ago. He stated that GEMS parents want a calm setting and the "A" school. He stated that a central location, and historical value are all reasons parents want their child at GEMS. He stated that he was not opposed to relocating GEMS but thinks moving to a far location at West Gadsden Middle or Havana Magnet will not be accepted by parents and they will remove their child from the district.

Mr. Scott stated that he is aware of the AC, steps, and floor issues at GEMS. He stated that he would like to know the extent of the damage. He stated that he is concerned about safety for students and staff. He stated that Robert F. Munroe will be opening a new school soon and because of scholarships, they are able to get more students. He stated that sports programs attract people and that entices parents to send students to a particular school. He stated that he feels that removing GEMS students will result in losing students to another district.

Mr. Frost stated that it might be a good option to repair and keep GEMS safe and allow the students to continue there until a new school is built.

Mr. Key stated the reason Robert F. Munroe had such a good sports team is because of students leaving the district and going there following the merging of West Gadsden and East Gadsden.

Mr. McMillan asked Mr. Key to meet with Dr. Sylvia Jackson and Mr. Hunter and figure out what would be best for GEMS and CPA students and report back to the Board.

5. Organizational Chart

Mr. Key stated that he was not going to use the deputy superintendent's position at this time. He stated that the area directors will be assistant superintendents. He stated that the director of curriculum and instructional positions are just another position not a department. He stated that instructional personnel located in the back of the Walker building work at the schools and not the district level. He stated that he will not be adding new positions but moving some individuals back to the school level. He stated that there are federal funds that need to be spent by June 30th. He stated that teachers and other staff should be part of federal programs. He stated that some employee positions are not meeting the requirements of the job description. He stated that there will be more changes at the school level because of qualifications. He stated that employees should be allowed to progress and move up to other jobs when qualified.

Mr. Frost stated that the district needs to build on the foundation of our schools in order to build up.

Mr. Key stated that he will not request or do anything that is not aligned with the budget. He stated that he plans to revamp the instructional coaches and possibly move them to the school. He proposed a position for Adult Ed so that it will be a self-sufficient school. He stated that he is trying to move as much as possible from the general fund to federal funds.

Mr. Frost requested Mr. Key search for a grant writer.

Mrs. Dudley stated that she wants to make sure there is accountability and proper support is provided to every employee. She stated that professional development is needed for all employees. She stated that the opportunity for growth should be provided to all employees. She stated that leaders need to be created. She stated that teacher certification is important, but the district also need to provide opportunities for additional pathways and growth. She stated that all employees are educators whether cafeteria workers or custodians.

Mr. McMillan stated he has concerns about the professional development program. He stated that teachers often say they are hired and placed in class and then forgotten about. He stated that he was concerned whether the district was providing what the teachers need for professional development.

Mr. Key stated that the first line of professional development is with the principal. He stated that professional development is provided on campus during planning period. He stated that the district provides professional development for teachers that cannot be provided at the school level.

Mr. Scott stated that the district used to have a strong beginning teachers program and it worked but then somewhere it failed. He stated that professional development must be provided.

The Chairman recessed the meeting at 12:20 p.m. for lunch; and reconvened the meeting at 1:22 p.m.

6. Personnel Changes

Mr. Key continued the conversation on professional development and how to improve professional development for teachers. He stated that there will be some personnel changes based on people in positions that do not have the qualifications.

7. School Board Requests and Concerns

Mrs. Dudley stated that there needs to be transparency and accessibility. She suggested using more technology so people want think the Board is hiding something. She stated that having zoom meetings available at Board meetings would be a way of being more accessible to the community.

Mr. McMillan stated that he will bring the issue of having zoom meetings up at the next board meeting.

Dr. Sylvia Jackson stated that she will meet with Dr. Wiggins to see if the district is equipped for zoom board meetings.

In response to Ms. Johnson's concern whether the meetings are being advertised, Mr. Key stated yes.

Mr. Key asked Minnis if the directors needed to go through the Code of Ethics training when entering contracts or purchases.

Mrs. Minnis stated yes and perhaps principals should have the Code of Ethics training.

8. The meeting adjourned 1:40 p.m.