

SCHOOL BOARD RETREAT

GADSDEN COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD
MAX D. WALKER ADMINISTRATION BUILDING
35 MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR. BLVD.
QUINCY, FLORIDA

January 11, 2017

9:00 A.M.

This meeting was open to the public and electronically recorded.

The following Board members were present: Mr. Isaac Simmons, Chairman; Mr. Steve Scott; Mr. Charlie D. Frost; Mrs. Audrey D. Lewis; and Mr. Tyrone D. Smith. Also present were Mr. Roger P. Milton, 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. Isaac Simmons, at 9:05 a.m.

2. RECONFIGURATION OF SCHOOLS

Mr. Simmons stated that the Board's retreat was scheduled to further discuss the Superintendent's proposal for reconfiguration of schools. He stated that the Board members were asked to present a plan for the schools and give feedback on the Superintendent's proposal. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Milton.

Mr. Milton stated that staff were present to answer questions for the Board. He recognized Mr. Hunter to share with the Board the state of the district school facilities.

Mr. Hunter shared with the Board a power-point presentation outlining an overview of the district school facilities. He stated that the newer schools were removed from the equation because they are code compliant and operating normally. He stated that because of the type of school Gadsden Technical Institute is, renovation of its mechanical systems and re-roof the campus, it will be removed from the equation also. He stated that the eight schools left are the oldest and the ones that present the most problems. He stated that Gadsden Elementary Magnet School, Gretna Elementary School, Carter Parramore Academy, George W. Munroe Elementary School, St. John Elementary School, Stewart Street Elementary School, Shanks Middle School, and Chattahoochee Elementary School will be the focus of attention. He stated that the older schools will be examined from a facilities standpoint. He stated that by looking at the older schools closely, the district was able to identify several issues that are consistent at each site throughout the district. He stated that while reviewing these issues it is important to understand a few things. He stated that first, most of the older schools were designed before air conditioning became a standard, before accessibility was a concern and before fire/life safety was even thought about. He stated that second, the district never adopted a preventative and deferred maintenance program to replace aging systems and update spaces with new technology and current codes. He stated that with the exception of a few roof overs, there have been very few changes to these older buildings. He stated that third, with no preventative maintenance program, repairs were made on an as needed basis and

when equipment failed it was replaced like for like without engineering performed or a current code review done. He stated that this was known as reactive maintenance. He stated that the consistent issues throughout the district are: HVAC systems do not work well, even with new equipment, because the original AC system designs were done when conditioning interior spaces was a new science. He stated that for the most part the district is still using these obsolete systems; HVAC equipment is at or past normal life expectancy and overdue for replacement. She stated that the majority of the systems are at the point of critical failure. He stated that no building envelop or infrastructure modifications were ever performed after the introduction of air conditioning. He stated that additionally, none has ever been done when replacing equipment either. He stated that no building or infrastructure modifications have ever been done to comply with current Federal and State energy, life safety or accessibility requirements. He stated that the district schools are Non-compliant in; site lighting, parking, controlled access and entry, storm water management, accessible routes, accessible restrooms, energy conservation requirements, fire safety, ADA grasp ability, mechanical, electrical and plumbing requirements, and construction materials just to name a few. He stated that the district has eight campuses with their HVAC systems at the point of critical failure. He stated that the district is non-compliant in many areas of state and federal requirements. He stated that there is not enough time or money to address all the issues before they become problems. He stated that corrections of all schools will take years. He stated that the district is at the point where some tough decisions need to be made. He stated that the district maintains 13 campuses. He stated that when the bus garage, maintenance and the administration buildings are added, there are 16 facilities the district is paying to keep up and running. The district has the options to install all new HVAC equipment like for like. He stated that this option does not address any compliance issues or updating system design; or the option to total campus replacement by new construction. He stated that this option covers everything but for all schools is very costly. He stated that the total cost of option 1 exceeds the available amount of funding the district could spend at once, but the district could feasibly do one school a year. He stated that unfortunately that puts the district 8+ years to complete the renovations and it is extremely unlikely any of the schools will last that long. He stated that additionally it does not address any of the other critical issues. He stated that this option is not part of a sound maintenance program. He stated that option 1 is not recommended. He stated that with the current and projected student enrollment, option 2 will never get funded by the Department of Education. He stated that this option is not feasible nor recommended. He stated that because of the critical state of the district facilities, a compliance plan needs to be developed and initiated as soon as possible. He stated that understanding the complexities of reconfiguring and closing schools the Superintendent offers option 3 for consideration. He stated that this option allows the district to get started this year if acted on by the end of January.

In summary, Mr. Hunter stated that from a facilities standpoint the majority of the district schools are old with failing equipment and infrastructure providing a less than desirable learning environment. He stated that all eight sites are years behind current code requirements. He stated that there is no way to solve these issues without major renovation or replacement by new construction. He stated that the longer the district leave these issues unaddressed the greater the likelihood of system failure becomes. He stated that with so many schools in the same shape, the likelihood of multiple failures forcing the district to relocate students before the district is ready is an ever increasing possibility. He stated that being proactive by reconfiguring and/or replacing the old schools puts the best interest of the students in the forefront of planning. He stated that the district space utilization is very low at most of these schools. He stated that it's important to understand that the Department of Education will not approve Special Facility Construction Money for projects without a balanced, well-structured plan that includes adequate FTE. He stated that to qualify for this funding, some combining of schools will have to take place. He stated that option 3 is a short term plan that meets the Department of Education criteria. He stated that while the district feels Stewart Street Elementary School would be the

easiest site to quickly move forward on, the district could meet the deadline by building the new school at George W. Munroe Elementary School site, or by relocating the students at Carter Parramore Academy and building it there. He stated that any one of these three directions could help the district avoid losing a year in positive movement.

During the discussion, Board members asked questions, shared their concerns, and made comments regarding the state of the district facilities.

Mr. Milton shared with the Board the proposed school reconfigurations for 2017 – 2021. He stated that reconfiguration of the schools would reduce the overall cost of operating schools for improved efficiency, discontinue use of antiquated buildings, optimize the potential for greater course and program offerings for students, increase and improve school access to technology through redistribution of resource, and increase the availability of funds for employee compensation. He recognized Dr. Hightower to share with the Board the academic advantages for greater course and program offerings to students.

Dr. Hightower stated that the academic advantages for greater course and program offerings for students include the following: a) expand curriculum and course offerings will allow the addition of high level advance math and science classes (AP, chemistry, calculus). Eliminate duplication of course at two different schools; b) stronger instructional staff. Best teachers (HQ) at each school will become a part of staff. Best strategies from each school will be combined; c) improve educational quality and equality. All students will be provided the same opportunities and experiences through expanded curriculum offerings; d) resources at both schools will be combined allowing for a larger materials and supplies budget to support instruction; e) maximize class size will eliminate under enrolled classes and would reduce the number of teachers and administrators needed as well as would allow for more elective courses to be offered; f) one larger school can provide a wider range of curriculum offerings and educational opportunities than smaller schools. He stated that positive efforts merged schools include increase diversity, funding stability, more course offerings, enhanced programs and a higher quality of education. He stated that the pros to merger will be to save money through economies of scale; improve the quality, availability, and number of educational choices; maintain or expand extracurricular/sporting programs; gain specialized teachers and staff; gain better instructional materials and equipment; achieve greater cultural diversity; and reduce teacher turnover due to higher pay and benefits.

Mr. Milton stated that his vision is to move the district to higher grounds.

Mr. Simmons stated that each Board member was requested to present a plan for the schools, or share feedback on the Superintendent's proposed plan to reconfigure the schools. He shared the proposed school reconfiguration plan: 1) close Gadsden Elementary Magnet School and relocate students to a school within a school at Chattahoochee Elementary School. Close Gadsden Elementary Magnet School the year of 2017 – 2018; 2) apply for special facility funding for a New Elementary School (K-5) built between both communities of St. John and Gretna. Apply for funding during the year 2017. Estimated time of construction is two years; 3) the year of 2018, apply for special facility funding for the consolidation of Stewart Street Elementary School and George W. Munroe Elementary School. The combined schools would continue to be a K-5 structure; 4) renovate and repair James A. Shanks Middle School. This process would take place the year of 2020; 5) year of 2021, renovate and repair Carter Parramore Academy. He stated that he does not support razing this facility, too much Black History, need to be reserved; 6) this proposal would eliminate a total of five schools and reduce the overall impact of trying to close schools fast. The district currently have a total of fourteen (14) schools. This proposal would reduce total to nine (9) facilities. He stated that he supports reducing staff/personnel through attrition, a gradual process that would minimize the impact of

cutting so many positions at once. He stated that the district could eliminate at least 15 to 20 positions per year. He stated that he supports the current two high schools structure that the district currently have. He stated that bussing and school start time would have to be impacted, which would be a hardship on students and parents. He stated that the proposed elementary school structure of 4-8 is not a traditional school setting. He stated that this format is only piecing together classes to justify closing schools and not taking into consideration the overall effect on parents and students. He stated that transportation would be a major issue, bussing elementary kids across the county. He stated that the any changes to the current work schedules will require the approval of both unions.

Mr. Milton stated that he will wait on feedback from the Board. He requested the Board have open dialogue in regards to the concept of one high school.

The Board recessed the meeting at 11:45 a.m. for lunch; and reconvened at 1:05 p.m.

Board members shared their concerns, made comments, and expressed their sentiments regarding the concept of one high school.

Mr. Milton stated that as educational leaders this is an important responsibility to make decisions to do what is in the best interest of the students. He stated that the decision was in the Board's hand. He stated that he needs direction from the Board on reconfiguring the schools.

The following individuals from the audience shared that concerns regarding the reconfiguration of schools: Mrs. Millie Forehand, and Mr. Michael Simmons.

Mr. Simmons stated that something needed to be done to improve student academics. He requested the Board put their plan of action in writing regarding the reconfiguration of schools in an effort to be ready to make a decision at the February Board meeting.

3. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

None.

4. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

None.

5. The meeting adjourned at 3:20 p.m.