

SCHOOL BOARD WORKSHOP

CHATTAHOOCHEE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL MEDIA CENTER
335 MAPLE STREET
CHATTAHOOCHEE, FLORIDA

February 20, 2017

6:00 P.M.

The workshop 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; and Mr. Tyrone D. Smith. Also present were Mr. Roger P. Milton, Superintendent and Secretary to the Board; and others. Mrs. Audrey D. Lewis and Mrs. Deborah Minnis, Attorney for the Board, were absent.

1. CALL TO ORDER

The workshop was called to order by the Chairman, Mr. Isaac Simmons, at 6:03 p.m.

2. DISCUSSION OF RECONFIGURATION OF SCHOOLS

Mr. Simmons stated that the community meeting was being held to share information with the community regarding the proposed school reconfiguration. He turned the meeting over to Mr. Milton.

Mr. Milton shared a power-point presentation with the community outlining his school reconfiguration proposal. He stated that there was a need to make changes to the schools in the district. He stated that the district currently has thirteen (13) schools. He stated that there are fewer than 5,400 students and 860+ employees in the district. He stated that the district has aging facilities that are in dire need of major repairs. He stated that there is a need to reduce the number of facilities and staff. He stated that the district needs additional funds in order to provide better wages for its employees. He stated that most schools in the school district are not positioned to offer a wider variety of courses to meet the needs of students. He stated that schools slated for closing are very old and do not meet modern day standards for schools. He stated that classrooms are too small to provide for active learning environments. He stated that in essence, the district must have recurring revenue streams, improved academic opportunities for our students, more up-to-date school facilities to provide wholesome environments that are conducive to teaching and learning, and the opportunity to "Move Gadsden County Public Schools from Good to Great". He stated that the school current enrollment are as follows: Chattahoochee Elementary School current enrollment 202 for school year 2012-2013 and district student enrollment 6,077; 2013 – 2014 school year Chattahoochee Elementary School student enrollment 184 and the district student

enrollment 6,006; 2014 – 2015 school year Chattahoochee Elementary School student enrollment 198 and the district student enrollment 5,942; 2015 – 2016 Chattahoochee Elementary School student enrollment 188 and the district student enrollment 5,808; 2016 – 2017 school year Chattahoochee Elementary School student enrollment 172 and the district student enrollment 5,620. He stated that the Third Grade FSA Reading and Math Scores for Chattahoochee Elementary School compared to the district for the 2014-2015 year in Reading was 37% and 38% for the district; the 2015 – 2016 year Chattahoochee Elementary School Reading scores 32% and the district 33%. He stated that the majority of the district schools are old with failing equipment and infrastructure, which provides a less than desirable learning environment for students and working environment for staff. He stated that eight of the district schools are years behind current code requirements with Chattahoochee Elementary School being one of those schools. He stated that there is no way to solve these issues without major renovation or replacement with new construction. He stated that the longer these issues remain unaddressed, the greater the likelihood of HVAC system failures. He stated that with so many schools in the same shape, the likelihood of multiple failures challenges the district to reconfigure schools and relocate before such failures occur. He stated that being proactive by reconfiguring and/or replacing the old schools puts the best interest of the students and staff in the forefront of planning. He stated that the proposed action for the 2017 – 2018 year includes the movement of grades 4 and 5 from Chattahoochee Elementary School to what will become West Gadsden Middle School; movement of grades 1 thru 3 from Chattahoochee Elementary School to Greensboro Elementary School; and keep grades PK and KG at Chattahoochee Elementary School where it will become an early learning center. He stated that as a result of the schools reconfiguration proposal, there will be no earlier school starting times than the district currently have; no loss of certified teachers as they will be reassigned to other schools which will in turn afford the district to a more highly qualified staff, and no loss of non-instructional staff that received satisfactory evaluations and who were recommended back for employment. He stated that other proposed actions for the school year 2017 – 2018 include discontinuing operations at Gretna Elementary School by moving grades PK thru 3 to Greensboro Elementary School and grades 4 and 5 to West Gadsden Middle School; discontinuing operations at St. John Elementary School by moving grades PK thru 3 to Greensboro Elementary School and moving grades 4 and 5 to James A. Shanks Middle School; movement of grades 4 and 5 from Greensboro Elementary School to what will become West Gadsden Middle School; movement of grades 9 thru 12 from West Gadsden High School to East Gadsden High School; the School Board applying for Special Facilities Funding from Florida Department of Education. He stated that other proposed actions for the school year 2020 – 2021 include discontinuing operations at Gadsden Elementary Magnet School and move all grade levels to the newly constructed K-8 facility.

Mr. Simmons thanked Mr. Milton for his presentation on his proposed school reconfiguration. He stated that the workshop was held to gather input from the community. He stated that a Board workshop will be held on Monday, March 13th at 6:00 p.m. to discuss and compile information regarding the community concerns. He stated that he will fight for Chattahoochee Elementary School to remain open. He stated that he do not agree with bussing students 18 and 30 miles to be educated. He stated that the one high school concept is good if the school is centrally located. He stated that student's health, safety and welfare must be taken into consideration.

Mr. Elmon Lee Garner, City Manager, addressed the Board to share his concerns regarding the closure of Chattahoochee Elementary School. He stated that he was standing as the City Manager of Chattahoochee, Immediate Past Chairman of the Gadsden County Tourist Development Council and Chairman of the Gadsden County Tourist Development Council. He stated that he officially urges the Superintendent and Board not to close one of the truly great schools in Gadsden County. He stated that Chattahoochee Elementary School, for years has suffered a disadvantage from the rest of Gadsden County and has apparently been considered the red headed stepchild of Gadsden County. He stated that he has been working hard for the last nineteen years to attempt to create an economic atmosphere in Chattahoochee to attract other business entities, and when the high school closed, there were two large size firms that closed the door on our area and went to South Georgia because Chattahoochee did not have a high school. He stated that over the past three plus years he has been working with the county commission, chamber and the Gadsden Council Development Council, and have placed Gadsden back on the state map and as a result have been able to attract several large concerns to the county, with more in the pipeline. He stated that the city is currently working on a business move to Chattahoochee, and he hoped that the reality of closing the only school in Chattahoochee does not cause Chattahoochee to lose out on this opportunity. He stated that the result of a three story school house, housing 1st thru 12th grader, with one principal, one janitor and two cafeteria workers, plus the teachers. He stated that the principal also did additional duties as basketball and baseball coach. He stated that he fully understands and the district is not responsible for what happens in our school system, but he is hopeful that the new president is successful in getting the federal government out of the public school system, turning it over to the states and hopefully in years to come, all public schools will be back on the local level where it should be. He stated that he understands the principle of economics, but he also understands what it takes to have a viable community. He stated that he was asking the Superintendent to consider keeping Chattahoochee Elementary School open, as such the distance is the same to bus someone from some other place as it is for our children to be bused to another location. He thanked the Superintendent for his consideration and stated that he stands by to assist in any way he can.

The following individuals from the audience participated in the discussion and shared their comments regarding the closure of Chattahoochee Elementary School: Mr. L. B. Howell, City Councilman At-Large; Mr. Bill Hoatson; Mr. T. J. Carlisle, Assistant City Manager; Mr. Chris Moultry, Mayor; Mr. Ben Chandler, Main Street Executive Director; Mr. Bobby CarMichael; Ms. Sophia Grandison; Mrs. Judith Reder; Mrs. Jane Wynn; Mrs. Dorothy Patterson; Mrs. Annette Bates, Councilman Member; Mrs. Amelia Price; Rev. Hollis McClendon; Mrs. Frances Brown; Mrs. Learther Yhapp; Mr. Ronnie McMillan; Mrs. Lisa Revels; Mr. Gary Moore; Ms. Tyeisha Reed; Mr. Gene Morgan; Rev. Amos Jackson, Sr.; Ms. Victoria Johnson; Mr. Ken Kimrey, Mayor Pro-Tem; Mrs. Bridgette Copeland; Ms. Shameka Dixon; Mrs. Ruby Hairston; and Mrs. Pam Medley, President Chattahoochee Main Street.

3. EDUCATIONAL ITEMS BY THE SUPERINTENDENT

None.

4. SCHOOL BOARD REQUESTS AND CONCERNS

Mr. Smith stated that he was elated to have everyone attend the meeting. He stated that no one wants to see their education school closed. He stated that it is vital for the schools and the community to work together. He stated that as a community supports the schools the needs of the schools should be addressed. He stated that the Superintendent and Board is not against schools. He stated that governmental agencies have taken away from schools. He stated that the objective is to keep a healthy educational system. He encouraged the community to come together and rally resources for the schools.

Mr. Frost stated that he will vote against the school reconfiguration proposal. He stated that the school reconfiguration proposal was presented to the Board by the Superintendent. He solicited the community to bring students back to the schools. He thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

Mr. Scott thanked everyone for coming out and showing support for Chattahoochee Elementary School. He stated that he was a former teacher at Greensboro. He stated that no one wants to close their school. He stated that there will be some educational changes to the schools. He stated that support of the community is needed in the schools.

Mr. Simmons thanked everyone for coming to the meeting. He stated that he was proud of Chattahoochee. He stated that the community of Chattahoochee has a voice on the Board. He stated that he has been engaged in everything on the Board. He stated that an exit interview with parents need to take place to see why students are being moved to other districts. He stated that everyone need to find ways to get our students back.

5. The workshop adjourned at 8:20 p.m.