

Approved April 10, 2007

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA
MINUTES OF INFORMAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
March 13, 2007

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida, met in informal session duly called at 9 a.m. in Conference Room E, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. Present were: Virginia S. Childs, Chairman; Janie S. Williams, Vice-Chairman; F. Wesley Eubank, and Eileen Roy, members; and W. Daniel Boyd, Jr., Superintendent. Mrs. Pinkoson was absent.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Childs.

APPROVAL OF
MINUTES

Motion by Mr. Eubank

Seconded by Mrs. Roy

Moved to approve the minutes of the following meetings as presented: February 14, 2007, as presented.

Mrs. Roy clarified that her point at the last meeting was that recess should be encouraged *before lunch*. The minutes will be changed to reflect that.

A comment Mr. Eubank made at the previous meeting concerning Magnet programs was clarified.

The question was called on the Minutes as amended.

Upon Vote: Motion passed 4-0

GENERAL
DISCUSSION

Mr. Eubank:

- Pointed out two recent newspaper articles that advocated more time on task in school.
- Commented on the apparent organized and concentrated effort by some to denigrate Lofton High School. Does not believe it is possible to be a guidance counselor at a school toward which you have such negative feelings. He pointed out the previous low graduation rates at Lofton, which compelled change. He stated that he wanted to go on record as totally supporting the efforts of the Principal, Superintendent and Deputy Superintendent.

Mrs. Childs:

- In consideration of previous staff, the Board did not sufficiently explain the situation at Lofton, e.g., poor attendance rate, poor graduation rate, better staffing than other schools (highest number of teachers per student) and entrance test requirements. She feels that the detrimental impact the public criticism has on students now requires Board response, perhaps in the form of a public presentation, as well as placement elsewhere for those at Lofton who feel they cannot support the School's mission. She believes the incorrect community perception must be actively countered.

Mr. Eubank:

- Believes the opponents of the Loftan change would rather see the total demise of the school than accept change. In actuality, the school was dying from the old methods and he will never support returning to them.

Mrs. Roy:

- A big problem is that Loftan teachers were not invested in this decision to make these big changes. It was foisted on them with no warning and no dialogue. Most have been there for years and are totally committed to the students. The change could have been done in a more gradual, constructive way. Students in this school were the least motivated and the least able to make it in a traditional school setting, so it follows that graduation rates would be low. The faculty, those who are closest to the situation, were not included in any way and there are bound to be hurt feelings over changes that go against their deepest convictions.
- Thinks the Superintendent should write a column responding to the questions that have been raised so that the public is apprised of what is going on there.

Superintendent Boyd:

- When he became Superintendent, he found that Loftan was operating at about a million dollars in the hole. That means the number of people hired to work there exceeded the FTE in all the programs generated. This out-of-control fiscal irresponsibility has been ongoing for probably a decade or more.
- He has probably spent more time working with the Loftan faculty than any other group in the County. We spent a lot of time on the visioning that Mrs. Roy mentioned, where a cross section of the community considered what could be done to turn Loftan into an exemplary career/technical school with applied academics. The person that Dr. Boyd considered to be the most facilitative principal in the school district was brought in as principal.
- The competency-based instruction at Loftan was ineffective.
- Many Loftan students had been there for over a year and had not earned a credit; there was no grade recorded on their record.
- Grades were extremely low, as well as average daily attendance rates.
- Loftan had basically an adult education model running the entire program. We separated Adult Ed from Loftan by holding classes throughout the county, and participation has probably increased.
- Was most amazed when the faculty and administration thought the way to get to a quality program was to build a gymnasium. A gym may be built someday, but the purpose of Loftan is to develop quality career tech programs and prepare kids for the future.
- At the next Board meeting, construction of an almost \$5 million classroom building will be authorized for Loftan. This will provide teachers with a state-of-the-art classroom facility.

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- Concerned that going public about the Loftan situation, although it may become necessary, is that it would denigrate the past administration.
- It was clear that something had to be done at Loftan.

Mrs. Childs:

- Meetings were held as far back as 1999-2000, when she met with the faculty because of dissatisfaction with Loftan's academic achievement. When other problems of major proportion hit the District, the Loftan matters were necessarily suspended. The opportunity to change was not taken and the situation continued to fester.
- Suggested that guidance counselors in other schools could make students aware of the Loftan program.
- Supports giving Dr. Sanders the ability to select faculty who will work for the mission of the school.

Mr. Eubank:

- The Board was also criticized when they made the decision to spend \$5 million for classrooms and food service, rather than a gymnasium.
- He once saw a Loftan teacher's roster and the total number of students in a day was 10 - 12. Such a class size is much easier than that of other high school teachers.
- Loftan's success is the Board's responsibility. The answer is not to talk publicly about what happened in the past, but to talk about the positive plans underway right now to make it a much better place for students.

Ms. Williams:

- If some of the difficulties are due to faculty member problems, they should be offered the option of requesting a transfer.

Mrs. Roy:

- Felt that a positive account of the changes is in order, as well as a tactful explanation of how the changes will improve the school.

Ms. Williams:

- Has a concern about Horizon parents not getting student progress reports on CROP program.

Mrs. Childs:

- Requested an update concerning implementation of a plan that addresses the various student behaviors that result in assignment to Horizon.

Mrs. Roy

- Has not heard good things about CROP. It is too easy and does not compare well to competency-based education.

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- Is interested in discussing solutions for economically polarized eastside elementary schools, as covered in the Rusk Report. While a longer school day might be in order, per an article shared by Mr. Eubank, other things might be done in the meantime.
- Schools without magnet programs are hurting the most. Not only are no motivated, talented students coming in to the school and providing examples for the other students, the school also loses the talented, motivated students they do have to schools that have Magnets.
- Commented on the evidence of the positive effects that music has on all school subjects and would like to see the arts emphasized in eastside elementary schools.
- Suggested the possibility of establishing an Environmental Magnet or a school with a requirement of wearing uniforms, to encourage pride in belonging.
- Requested that a copy of the Al Gore movie, *Inconvenient Truth*, be purchased for each school, stating that its global warming message is important to the state of Florida.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.