

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA
APPROVED MINUTES OF INFORMAL SCHOOL BOARD MEETING
February 10, 2009

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida, met in informal session duly called at 9 a.m. in the Boardroom, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. Present were: Tina Pinkoson, Chairman; F. Wesley Eubank, Vice-Chairman; Ginger Childs, Eileen Roy, and Barbara Sharpe, members; and W. Daniel Boyd, Jr., Superintendent.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Pinkoson.

CHARTER SCHOOL
POLICY

Mr. Tom Wittmer, staff attorney, provided Board members with a copy of the Charter School contract template. He also pointed out that Policy 9800, *Charter Schools*, will need to be amended to incorporate ethics language enacted in 2008, and he will bring this amendment forward to the Board this coming year.

He explained that the issue of an applicant making changes or improvements to the application has been an ongoing issue, and last year the Board considered an amendment prohibiting an applicant from making changes effective October 1st, which is more generous than state law of August 1st for the following year.

Following Board discussion, consensus was to change the deadline for submissions no later than the state law deadline of August 1st, unless staff agrees to the changes.

Mrs. Sharpe encouraged review of the entire policy.

Mrs. Childs made the following suggestions:

- To ensure that in the future things cannot happen, include in the contract that any funds available cannot be disbursed.
- Expenditures must be appropriate—principal or head of the Charter Board of Directors must sign off each month that these expenditures are in accordance with general accounting procedures, and certify that the money is going to benefit the students.
- Charter Board of Directors should submit certification that they are, in fact, active members of the Board and do not have a conflict of interest.
- Do not believe it is fair for employees to receive extended leaves of absence in order to work at others jobs and then decide to come back and bump a current employee out of that particular job.
- Require the Board of Directors to meet at least twice a year.
- Add to the section dealing with students withdrawing, FTE funds will be prorated accordingly between the charter school and the District for the remainder of the school year.
- Require schools to verify monthly financial reports.

Following a question from Mrs. Sharpe, Superintendent Boyd explained that District staff is extensively involved in providing charter schools with many services to ensure they are meeting both state standards and federal requirements.

Mrs. Sharpe suggested incorporating language into the contract to establish a deadline for spending funds if the charter school gets in to trouble.

Mr. Eubank made the following suggestions:

- Include a statement incorporating Senator Gaetz's language, which would not allow a member of the governing body to be an employee of the charter school.
- Enforce the requirement that charter schools are required to provide the School Board copies of meeting minutes no later than 15 days following the meeting.
- The School Board will be given reasonable public notice and be informed three days prior to the Board of Directors meeting with the time and date.
- The paragraph dealing with conflict of interest references the fact that charter schools are public entities; therefore, they have to follow state statutes on reimbursement for travel expenses and per diem.

Mrs. Roy agrees that the contract should be enforced and minutes should be provided in a timely fashion. She referred to the non-discrimination of students section, and noted that it has come to her attention that some charter schools do not accept ESE students, or provide reasons why they do not provide services.

Mr. Eubank pointed out that on page 8, Section 2.5.5., refers to students whose needs cannot be adequately addressed are to be referred, which insures that the students are being instructed.

Mrs. Roy also suggested a "Bill of Rights" for parents.

Mr. Wittmer will review the Leave of Absence section to ensure Florida Statutes are being followed, and suggested not granting indefinite leave to charter schools.

Mrs. Pinkoson stated that Mr. Wittmer will review the input provided by the Board and incorporate the changes into the contract and bring back to the Board for a policy amendment.

Mr. Eubank noted that charter schools are violating the policy and contract and District staff needs to enforce the requirements.

Responding to Mrs. Roy's question, Mr. Wittmer stated that the Hoggetowne Middle School case is in the hands of the Board of Directors and a report is expected by February 13.

Mrs. Childs suggested the Board consider closing Hoggetowne Middle.

Responding to a question from Mr. Eubank, Mr. Wittmer reported that an update on the Love to Learn Charter School will be provided. He also noted that he is currently preparing a complaint.

SCHOOL UNIFORMS

Mrs. Sandy Hollinger, Deputy Superintendent, informed the Board that she has been working with principals and input has been received from SAC's and PTA's. The major concern related to the uniform clothes closet for students who cannot afford to purchase them. Contributions to purchase these uniforms would be needed and principals felt that due to the current economy, it would be a hardship.

Mr. Eubank stated that his suggestion for a student dress code was to improve discipline, increase student safety and enhance the learning environment.

Mrs. Roy stated that she is backing off the idea of a student dress code at this time because she does not feel like going to battle over uniforms due to so many other pressing issues.

Mrs. Sharpe believes that leveling the playing field is one of the many reasons she supports mandatory school uniforms, but she does not intend to force the issue if there is not a ground swell supporting uniforms.

Suggestions:

- Tighten up the Code of Conduct and be more specific of what is acceptable.
- Strictly enforce and tighten up the current dress code and be more specific of what is acceptable and consistent with implementation.
- Amend the school adopted policy to have a majority.
- Make principals aware that if the dress code is not enforced, the people responsible will be replaced.
- Involve student government in the process.

Mrs. Hollinger stated that the discipline committee will review the Code of Student Conduct and tighten up the district dress code, and review the individual school dress codes.

GENERAL DISCUSSION Mr. Eubank expressed concern with charter school issues and possible fraud, and felt the Board should protect themselves from liability.

Mrs. Roy expressed concern with Hawthorne Middle/High School and the high truancy rate. She believes the Hawthorne community is committed to helping and suggested conveying to the citizens of Hawthorne the need for establishing a mentoring program.

Mr. Eubank suggested involving the Hawthorne community leaders in pursuing a conversion charter school for the students in the Hawthorne area. He pointed out that a conversion charter school would make the school a community school run by the community, with increased parental support and mentoring.

Mrs. Sharpe suggested that since the Hawthorne community asked to have input, the Board should allow the Superintendent time to exercise his role and speak to the community.

Mrs. Childs feels a conversion charter school might help financially, but would not improve the achievement of the students, and that must be the main goal. She also expressed serious concerns with the truancy problem and suggested the District challenge the community to improve the problems. She suggested informing the community of what changes need to be made in order to make any type of improvement.

Mrs. Sharpe expressed her opposition to a conversion charter school because it means the District has given up on these children. She suggests the Board defer the issue to the Superintendent to work out recommendations and bring back to the Board for discussion. She also suggested pairing up gifted teachers with these children.

Mrs. Roy made the following requests/suggestions:

- Requested information related to the awards/incentives energy consumption. She stated that faculties have been involved, but the policy indicates that students should be involved but they have not been.
- Work closely with the Board of County Commissioners on issues of sustainability and broaden the District's goal of reducing energy consumption to save money, including recycling. She suggested a staff liaison, not someone to sanction schools in a punitive manner, but to educate.
- Noted that there is a solar project in the works and her preference is to go solidly toward solar because she feels it is an excellent investment and the District should push forward quickly. Suggested examining the District's plans for the future and aligning them with what the Board of County Commissioners are doing.

Mr. Eubank stated that the Legislature recently passed a law to increase cooperation between different governmental agencies, i.e., sharing buses, maintenance, vehicle repair, etc., and he feels it is something worth pursuing.

He also suggested that the City may wish to locate the Homeless Center at noted that since the location of a Homeless Center location—believes there is a suitable former school facility suitable for the new homeless center.

Mrs. Sharpe feels that locating a homeless center at Prairie View would require involvement by the Prairie View community.

ADJOURNMENT

The Informal School Board meeting adjourned at 11:22 a.m.