



Board of Education

Minutes

A Regular School Board Meeting of the Board of Education of Fort Smith Public Schools was held Monday, September 27, 2021, beginning at 5:30 PM in the Service Center, Bldg. B, Auditorium, 3205 Jenny Lind, P.O. Box 1948, Fort Smith, AR 72901.

Ms. McFerran, president, called the meeting to order. Other board members present were: Ms. Talicia Richardson, Mr. Dalton Person, Ms. Dee Blackwell, Mr. Matt Blaylock and Mr. Troy Eckelhoff and Ms. Yvonne Keaton-Martin. District administration present included: Dr. Terry Morawski, Superintendent; Mr. Martin Mahan, Deputy Superintendent; Dr. Chris Davis, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources and Campus Support; Dr. Tiffany Bone, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Mr. Darian Layes, Executive Director of Student Services; Mr. Vance Gregory, Executive Director of Technology; Ms. Zena Featherston Marshall, Executive Director of Communication and Community Partnerships; and Ms. Nadine Brooks, Office Manager to the Superintendent. Mr. Marshall Ney, of Friday, Eldridge and Clark, District Attorney was also in attendance.

A moment of silence was followed by the pledge of allegiance and mission statement.

RECOGNITIONS

Ms. Marshall presented the following recognitions.

September Superintendent Star Awards

Khyron Bell, Howard Elementary School
Haven Brown, Sunnymede Elementary School
Kaylin Chanthavong, Sutton Elementary School
Yanely Garcia-Reyes, Trusty Elementary School
Kyla Harris, Spradling Elementary School
Kiley Hill, Fairview Elementary School
Bryan Juarez, Park Elementary School
Scarlet Luna, Tilles Elementary School
Dainian Tilson, Ballman Elementary School

Other Recognitions

Brandon Deaton who is a first-grader at Cavanaugh Elementary was selected as the state Arkansas Waterways Commission art competition first-grade category winner. This competition commemorates the 50th Anniversary of the McCellan-Kerr Arkansas River Navigation System.

Northside High School JROTC Cadet Lieutenant Colonel Braden Springs was awarded the Legion of Valor Bronze Cross from the Legion of Valor of the United States of America. The prestigious award recognizes cadets worldwide who have demonstrated excellence in military, scholastic,

and civic affairs. Of more than 305,000 cadets participating in the Army JROTC program worldwide, only 43 cadets were approved for the award.

The Ramsey Middle School Gold Quiz Bowl Team - Vincente Otero, Dipa Patel, Samuel Pritchard, Jackson Austin, Tzideny Romero, Shane Nguyen, Elijah Friery won the Junior National Academic Challenge hosted by Questions Unlimited on June 7. The Rams defeated Hollidaysburg, PA 310-275 for the title. This winning team is managed by Natalie Tucker and Minni Khotsphom and sponsored by Amanda Allen.

The National Merit Corporation recently announced that Southside seniors Jedidiah Lightner, Emma Paulus and Leen Samman are National Merit Scholar Semifinalists in the 2022 Annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The nationwide pool of semifinalists represents less than 1% of US high school seniors.

Southside High School AP Chemistry teacher Jeffrey Rice has been selected as a state finalist for the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Science Teaching. The National Science Foundation, on behalf of the White House, oversees the program that recognizes outstanding STEM teachers who demonstrate a commitment to professional development, innovative teaching techniques, and technology use in their classrooms.

Deborah Hall, Southside High School's Financial Office Administrative Assistant, was selected by the FSAEOP as the 2021 District's Office Professional of the Year and was subsequently selected as the 2021 Arkansas Association of Educational Office Professionals (AAEOP) Office Professional of the Year.

Rozanna Brown, Euper Lane Elementary teacher, was a regional finalist for the 2022 Arkansas Teacher of the Year. There were 12 regional finalists selected across the state. Ms. Brown stated, "It is such an honor to be selected as one of 12 regional finalists for Arkansas Teacher of the Year. I am humbled, bearing in mind the considerable talent I have had the privilege and pleasure of working with throughout the region."

FSPS Chief Financial Officer Charles Warren, CPA, received the 2020 Arkansas Society of Certified Public Accountants (ARCPA) Outstanding CPA in Government Award. This award recognizes the achievements of individual CPAs in government service. Emphasis for selecting the winner of this award is placed primarily on a candidate's contribution to the increased efficacy and effectiveness of their government organization and the growth and enhancement of the accounting profession.

ANNUAL REPORT TO THE PUBLIC

Dr. Morawski presented the annual report to the public. The report included \$7,555,595 awarded in scholarships to 2021 high school graduates. He noted the District had a graduation rate of 96.9%. He reported that the District has a student population of 14,300 students, 1,984 employees, 19 elementary schools, 4 middle schools, 2 high schools, the Peak Innovation Center, one Alternative Learning Campus, one Adult Education campus, K-12 Virtual

Programming and 18 grant-funded preschools. He reported on completion of capital improvement projects, professional development, Professional Learning Communities (PLC), Capturing Kids Hearts, opening of the School-based Health Center at Darby Middle School, leadership of the Board of Education, and 2021-2022 Goals.

CITIZENS PARTICIPATION

Ms. Garrett and Mr. Biggs spoke in support of removing the mask mandate. Ms. Higgins spoke in support of continuing the mask mandate.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Dr. Morawski asked for three board members to assist with reviewing and updating Section I Board Policies. He added that he expected it to take at least two meeting times before taking the updated policies to the full Board for approval. Mr. Person, Ms. Richardson and Mr. Blaylock volunteered to assist.

Dr. Davis introduced Ms. Angie Davis as Director of Financial Services. Ms. Davis has twelve years of District experience and extensive experience in the private sector as a certified public accountant.

CONSENT AGENDA

The consent agenda included August 23 Minutes and September 13 Minutes, August Financial Reports, September Professional Staff Recommendations, and September Student Services Report, and approval of the Arkansas Department of Education Federal Programs Statement of Assurances for Programs Under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 as Amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act.

Ms. Keaton-Martin made a motion, seconded by Ms. Blackwell, to approve the consent agenda items as presented. The vote passed 7/0.

CONSIDER ADOPTING UPDATES FOR STUDENT RELATED POLICY CHANGES FOR FIRST READING

Dr. Morawski reported that the student related policy changes to be approved for first reading were presented at the September 13 work session. There was no further discussion. Ms. Keaton-Martin made a motion, seconded by Ms. Richardson, to approve the updates for student related policy changes for first reading as presented. The vote passed 7/0.

CONSIDER FACE COVERINGS RESOLUTION

Dr. Morawski presented an overview that included the timeline of events to date for the District, a review of action taken by area districts and large school districts in the state, detailed COVID Data, results from a vaccine survey of employees, the ACHI Model and other options for consideration by the Board.

Dr. Morawski stated that the mask mandate in place is for 60 days and would expire on October 8 if no action was taken.

Ms. McFerran stated that Mr. Ney was available for questions and asked for board discussion on this matter.

Mr. Blaylock asked if the District had any campuses that did not currently have any COVID cases. Dr. Morawski reported that three campuses did not have any COVID cases. Mr. Blaylock stated that area school districts such as Van Buren and Alma were not requiring that students and staff wear a mask and were still open. He noted that Springdale, a larger school district were no longer requiring masks. Mr. Blaylock stated that personally he did not like to make the decision for parents to mask their children to attend school.

Mr. Eckelhoff stated that he did not believe school boards should make the decision that students and staff wear masks. He also did not think he should make this decision for parents.

Mr. Person stated that it made him uneasy to make this decision for parents as well. He stated that when he took office as a board member, he never would have imagined that as a board member would be dealing with a pandemic and decision to require others to wear a mask. However, Mr. Person was concerned for staffing.

Ms. Blackwell stated that statistics show that wearing mask kept all schools open and allowed a safe and equitable education for all students.

Ms. Richardson agreed with Ms. Blackwell that keeping children safe and providing an equitable education opportunity was part of Vision 2023. She also expressed concern because many parents have chosen to allow their children to return to school campuses because the mask mandate was in place. Ms. Richardson expressed concern for relying on a survey for vaccination verification.

Board members discussed further the percentages of positive cases in school and outside of school.

Mr. Person stated that he was in favor of flexibility. Mr. Person expressed support for authorizing the Superintendent to monitor the ACHI reports and relax the enforcement of the face covering requirements when known infections for a 14-day period per 10,000 residents ("New Infections"), and when the number of New Infections is 29 or below (yellow level or below).

Ms. Keaton-Martin expressed support of 60 additional days.

Ms. Richardson asked if discussion had taken place with teachers and staff. Ms. Richardson expressed concern for staff having to monitor and have masks available when going back and forth with wearing mask from week to week.

Mr. Blaylock stated that his opinion was that if mask mandate was in place, he felt an obligation to review it every 30 days.

Ms. Richardson expressed support of extending the current resolution 30 days to allow administrators to consider a hybrid resolution.

Ms. Blackwell stated that she was open to Ms. Richardson's suggestion.

Dr. Morawski shared that the Arkansas Department of Health has not projected a change to quarantine and distance spacing.

Mr. Eckelhoff expressed that he would like to let the current resolution expire. He wanted to give the choice to the parents and students as to whether they wear a mask to school.

Mr. Eckelhoff made a motion, seconded by Mr. Blaylock, to let the mask mandate resolution expire on October 8 and revisit it on October 25. The vote failed with a 5/2 vote against.

Ms. Richardson made a motion, seconded by Ms. Keaton-Martin, to extend current resolution for an additional 30 days in an effort to allow the District to review potential strategies for incorporation of a hybrid resolution tied to ACHI data for a specific timeframe.

Mr. Person stated that for the record he will oppose based on his preference of a more flexible model.

The vote passed 4/3 with Mr. Blaylock, Mr. Eckelhoff and Mr. Person opposing.

BOARD MEMBERS FORUM

Mr. Blaylock asked Dr. Davis how many employee vacancies there were on the first day of school and how many yet to fill. Dr. Davis stated that there were approximately 39 certified and 62 classified positions to fill at that time. Dr. Davis stated that there were 10 certified of which six are special education and filled by contractual services. He added that there were 12 classified positions. Dr. Davis stated that Child Nutrition and Custodial and maintenance staff are the areas still needing support.

In regards to a rumor he has heard, Mr. Blaylock asked if Northside High School had stopped accepting transfers due to lack of staff and rooms. Dr. Morawski and Dr. Davis stated that was not the case.

ADJOURN

There was no further business and the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Susan McFerran, President

Dee Blackwell, Secretary