

SPECIAL MEETING/PUBLIC HEARING – JANUARY 19, 2010

The Invocation was offered by Mrs. Thigpen; the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Dr. Tibbetts.

The School Board of Okaloosa County held a Public Hearing on January 19, 2010, in the School District Administration Building, 120 Lowery Place, SE, Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

PRESENT: Rodney Walker, Chairman
Cindy Frakes, Vice-Chairman
Howard Hill
Chuck Kelley
Cathy Thigpen

Alexis Tibbetts, Superintendent
C. Jeffrey McInnis, Esq., Attorney to the Board

The Chairman called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m. and welcomed visitors.

The Chairman stated that before public input would be heard, Mr. Hill would address the Board with a proposed amendment to Resolution No. 10-03, establishing new student attendance zones for certain schools in the central zone.

Mr. Hill gave a PowerPoint presentation showing a two-part proposal to amend Resolution No. 10-03 if Resolutions 10-01 and 10-02 are adopted. Mr. Hill stated that an increase in middle school students would be needed for Lewis Middle School to remain a viable and competitive middle school, particularly in music, sports, co-curricular activities and electives. There would be a possible decrease of 68 students at Lewis with the District's realignment proposal in Resolution No. 10-03. The first part of his proposal included a map showing a dual attendance zone for middle school students to go to Ruckel Middle School or to Lewis School with transportation to both schools, starting the School Year 2010-2011. The middle school portion of resultant K-8 Lewis School would continue to encompass grades five through eight.

The second part of Mr. Hill's proposal included a map showing a dual attendance zone for elementary students to attend Plew or Lewis, with transportation to both schools, starting the School Year 2010-2011. Additionally, Mr. Hill suggested that both of his realignment proposals be reconsidered in three years.

Mrs. Frakes agreed that there is a need to make Lewis whole, and that even with the realignment with Valparaiso Elementary School, it will be hard to compete with other middle schools.

The Chairman stated that copies of Mr. Hill's PowerPoint presentation would be made available upon request.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Motion to approve the Agenda was made by Mrs. Frakes, seconded by Mrs. Thigpen and carried unanimously.

PUBLIC HEARING:

The Chairman explained that the purpose of the hearing was to receive input from the public regarding the proposed re-missioning of Valparaiso Elementary School and Lewis Middle School at the end of the 2009-2010 school year. In addition to the public hearing this date, the Board would receive public input at their next regularly scheduled meeting on January 25, 2010, at 4:00 p.m., at the Crestview Courthouse, at which time the Board would make a decision on the matter.

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Mr. McInnis explained that individuals requesting to speak would be allotted three minutes to make their comments if speaking on their own behalf, and five minutes if speaking on behalf of a group or organization.

The Board members and Superintendent addressed questions and concerns from the public as they were presented. The following parents addressed the Board members and the Superintendent: Stacey Marks, John Havard, Melissa Thrush, Hannah Moore, Nancy Estep, Marcena Bohler, Neal Shermer, Heather Tidwell, and Wendy Keller.

Concerns and questions that were raised included using portable buildings as classrooms for elementary students, the proposed start time of the school day and the traffic at the East Gate of Eglin Air Force Base at that time, Lewis School remaining competitive in sports and academics, considering the option of closing Eglin Elementary School, elementary students combined with secondary students in a K-8 school setting and on the bus, and the cost savings with school realignment.

In response to comments regarding the cost savings of realigning a school, Mr. Walker responded that if a school is completely closed without making accommodations at another school for the students, the District could save approximately \$1 million; however, in this case there would not be a \$1 million savings the initial year because accommodations will have to be made at Lewis.

Mr. Havard asked if both schools would fail if they were not combined. Mrs. Frakes responded that it would depend whether the District could continue to supplement both schools. Dr. Tibbetts added that as enrollment decreases, programs would eventually begin to suffer. She stated that the goal is to preserve one viable school in Valparaiso.

Mr. Heyward Strong, Jr., City of Valparaiso Commissioner, spoke to the Board regarding the quality learning environment at Valparaiso Elementary, the numerous ESE services that are offered, and the anticipated negative impact on property values without the school's presence. He cited requirements in several Sections of an interlocal Agreement between the School District and the City of Valparaiso that he believed qualifies in regard to issues such as this. He requested that the Board table their decision until they have adequate time to meet with city officials for their input and to discuss all other options.

Mr. McInnis responded that the Superintendent sent correspondence to Mayor Arnold last week in response to questions on this issue. In regard to Mr. Strong's comments concerning the Interlocal Agreement, Mr. McInnis stated that the proposal is not classified as a school closure, but rather a re-missioning or realignment of the schools; therefore, the Sections in the Interlocal Agreement which Mr. Strong made reference do not apply in this matter. Additionally, it is Mr. McInnis' understanding that the City of Valparaiso has not yet adopted the educational portion of the Public Schools element to their comprehensive plan and under the terms of the Interlocal Agreement, it is not effective in any particular municipality until that plan element has been properly adopted and approved by the State.

Mr. Kelley responded to comments that the Board was rushing the re-missioning process. He explained that each school budgets individually each year. The District evaluates each school's ability to fund itself, and each year determines how much supplemental funding is needed. The re-missioning proposal has been an ongoing process for several years and a final decision has not yet been made. He stated that the Chairman has suggested that the Board members consider the concerns and questions addressed at this special meeting, and review information before making a decision at the next Board meeting.

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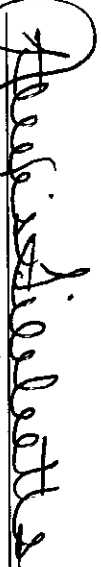
The Chairman stated that the Board has not come to a decision, and will give thoughtful consideration to the points and concerns that have been addressed before making a determination at the next Board meeting on Monday, January 25th.

Mrs. Frakes stated that she has concerns that will be addressed through discussion at the next Board meeting on Monday. She requested the following information be provided before the next Board meeting on Monday, January 25th: a written transition plan, ESE accommodations, financial projections, and facilities for elementary students. She stated that she has concerns regarding classrooms in portable buildings for elementary students.

Mr. Hill suggested that the District review the Eglin Air Force Base/Hurlburt Field Military Housing Privatization Initiative and provide written comment to the Eglin Public Affairs Office by February 1, 2010.

There being no further business, and upon motion being duly made and seconded, the meeting was adjourned at 7:05 p.m.

Jan Crawford, Recorder


ALEXIS TIBBETTS, Ed.D.
SUPERINTENDENT AND
CORPORATE SECRETARY


RODNEY L. WALKER
CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD