

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA
APPROVED MINUTES
BOARD WORKSHOP – WALDO COMMUNITY SCHOOL
April 1, 2015

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida, met in workshop session duly called at 6 p.m. in the Boardroom, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. Present were: Leanetta McNealy, Chairman; Eileen Roy, Vice-Chairman; Robert Hyatt, April Griffin, and Gunnar Paulson, Board members; Superintendent Owen Roberts; and staff members.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman McNealy, who welcomed citizens and explained the public input procedure. She then turned the meeting over to Dr. Roberts, who noted that concerns regarding student academic achievement preceded the Superintendent's recommendation concerning Waldo Community and Shell and Lake Forest Elementary Schools.

Dr. McNealy then called citizens to speak, in the order in which they had signed up. Many spoke about the school's importance to the community's future itself, as well as their individual family history. Teachers and the Principal were commended. Other comments and questions included:

Shannon Boal – A smaller environment like Waldo is beneficial to young students.

Karin Krutzfeld, Waldo student – Please don't close my school.

Debra Boal – Potential loss of funding if parents move children to home school, charter school or other district. Costs not felt to be accurate.

Robin Davis – Transitioning to a new school will affect special needs children

Dudley Wade – Length of time spent on the bus. Savings is a very small percentage of the District budget. Give consideration to busing Hawthorne High students to Eastside.

Tracy DeLuca – Waldo is a great environment for special needs students. Questions about special needs busing.

Kim Worley, City Manager – Quoted from published reports on consolidation, cited detriments of distance busing.

Kristen Jacobs - Why can't students go to any elementary school that is closer? Raceway Road question.

Louie Davis – Traffic on U.S. 301, migrant schooling, every community needs an elementary school.

Tracie Griffith – The timing of this plan resulted in loss of alternative opportunities

Lelia Powell, Waldo Teacher– Look at behavioral data and parent survey data. Teachers are at a disadvantage with the timing of this plan.

Emma McNeal – Concerned about children riding the bus with middle and high school students.

Maurice Dykes – busing issues; important to keep their community school.

Tommy Powell – Son missed an opportunity for Foster Gifted Program by the timing of this announcement. Questioned whether this decision is a separate issue, not intermingled with any other vote. Requested a separate vote on Waldo only.

Attorney Brian Moore responded that this is a boundary line/attendance Policy vote and would be voted on as a whole, with the other schools involved. He clarified that amendments would be allowed.

Amy Tanner - ESE teacher at Waldo – Concerned that Waldo teachers are at a disadvantage regarding employment. HR Director Beverly Finley explained the process, which puts Waldo teachers first for available openings.

Marihelen Wheeler – Is there data for the economic impact on the community? If not, please keep open for another year so that can be considered.

Kendra Fields – capacity – move students from over enrolled to under-enrolled schools.

Susan Thomas, Waldo teacher - Dr. Roberts and Budget Director Alex Rella responded to Budget questions.

Dr. Paulson addressed the audience concerning alternatives and stated that that he would like to see the Waldo decision delayed for another year, so that options such as a Charter School could be explored, but noted he cannot speak for the rest of the Board.

At the request of Dr. Roberts, Jackie Johnson, Public Information Officer, reviewed the budget information that had been distributed. Mr. Shane Andrew also responded to budget questions concerning facilities.

Ky Chu – Waldo is the best place for his child, but at least delay for one year.

Stephen Carlisle – Feels the budget numbers are in error. There has to be a better way than closing the school.

Talisa Jester, Waldo parent and Data Base Clerk - Not going to save the amount of money indicated in information provided; east side schools need more funding because they don't fundraise the amount of money as west side schools; doesn't see the savings indicated in transportation numbers; will career service employees have jobs?

HR Director Will Calsam stated that the Reduction of Force Procedure will be followed, giving Waldo ESPs first choice of available positions. Dr. Paulson promised that these employees will be taken care of.

Brooke Huguley, Waldo Media Aide – Will there still be a bus stop in front of the school? Any thoughts of bringing sixth grade back to Waldo?

Mr. Speers stated that they will try to not interrupt the present bus service, but route planning for next year has not yet begun.

Kimberly Hennkson – This is changing lives in Waldo; the future is being taken away.

Heather Surrency, Hawthorne citizen –Closing schools closes communities. Give them another year. Recommended an Advisory Committee to look at the budget.

Heather Krutzfeld –. Her children will go to Bradford County if Waldo is closed.

Hayley Johnson – If Waldo is closed and people move away, the town would be taken away.

Bill Whitten – Two thirds of the savings is coming from the lowest income employees.

Cindy Paulson – She has family roots in Waldo; “this is not busing students, this is killing a community;” find the money elsewhere.

Brenda Keith – Made a suggestion about tweaking a bus route along SR 225, which Dr. Roberts requested Mr. Speer review and consider.

Melissa Daugherty – Spoke about benefits of a smaller school for a special needs student. Why couldn't Hawthorne High have been closed, moving older students rather than elementary students?

The Superintendent stated that this plan was based on extensive research and the Board will make the decision.

Susan Thomas – Questions included: What programs will shell and Lake Forest have to enhance student learning and success? Did Waldo's cost savings include Head Start and EDEP maintenance heating and air? Are we going to lose *Fast Forward*? How many kids will be on buse? Will middle schoolers be on buses with elementary? Who will protect her child? How long a ride will this be? What is this really saving the county? Will you consider cutting our budget and allowing current schooling? Add some students to see what they can do in a year? Or give more time to consider alternatives?

Mr. Speer responded to some of the transportation questions and Dr. Roberts stated that, to ensure accuracy, the other answers will be provided to Mrs. Thomas later.

Mr. Andrew responded to some Facilities questions.

Pam Burnseal –Reasons given for closing were: under capacity, school grade and cost per student but five other schools are in worse shape. Is it true there is a meeting this summer about new schools? What if students miss the bus? When are parents notified?

Mr. Andrew responded to questions, including a statement that there is no meeting scheduled, but the state-required School Plant Survey is due in 2016, so later this year, a District survey will take place.

Dr. Roberts and staff attorney Moore responded to questions from Mr. Wade concerning a separation of the three parts of the proposal: (1) reorganization of district staff, (2) reorganization of east side schools, and (3) the closing of Waldo.

Mayor Louie Davis noted that he had previously missed asking the cost of (1) Pre-K and Head Start programs at Waldo, (2) having some school activities at Waldo and (3) transportation expense to promote parent involvement at Shell.

Dr. Paulson made a statement in which he noted some differences of opinion with the Superintendent on this issue. He also commented on the possibility that a charter school may be worth a try, cautioning that it would require a lot of hard work in a short period of time.

Dr. Roberts thanked those who came out to address the Board. He stated that he is attempting to solve problems in a pragmatic way, and because it is the right thing for children. He takes nothing lightly that has been said in this meeting and has no desire to close a school. He does, however, have a charge from the Board to provide children the best quality education.

Dr. McNealy adjourned the meeting at 9:07 p.m.