

THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ALACHUA COUNTY, FLORIDA
APPROVED MINUTES OF SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Superintendent Search
March 18, 2014

The School Board of Alachua County, Florida, met in special session duly called at 3 p.m. in the Boardroom, 620 East University Avenue, Gainesville, Florida. Present were: Gunnar Paulson, Chairman; Leanetta McNealy, Vice-Chairman; April Griffin, Carol Oyenarte and Eileen Roy, members; Hershel Lyons, Interim Superintendent; and Board Attorney David Delaney.

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Paulson, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Chairman Paulson reviewed the agenda, stating that the standard procedure will be used, with citizen input following the Action Item (*Selection of Superintendent Semifinalists*) presentation by Dr. Wayne Blanton, Florida School Boards Association). After public input, the Board will speak.

ADOPTION OF AGENDA Motion by Dr. McNealy Seconded by Mrs. Oyenarte

Moved to adopt the agenda for the March 18, 2014, Special School Board Meeting, as presented.

The question was called. Upon Vote: Motion passed 5-0

INTRODUCTIONS

Dr. Paulson read dates from a previously established schedule for the Superintendent Search, and then introduced Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA. Dr. Blanton introduced his colleague, Mr. Bill Graham.

SELECTION OF
SUPERINTENDENT
SEMIFINALISTS

Dr. Blanton reviewed the procedure used to arrive at the eight semifinalists.

Mr. Graham stated that out-of-town/state candidates often seem to have great appeal, but noted the learning curve in that case is monumental. He stated that when he was a sitting board member, he found that the best candidates were those who had Florida experience.

Following is a summary of information gathered by Dr. Blanton and Mr. Graham, related to the candidates:

**Dr. James Browder –
Highlights:**

Dr. Browder is experienced as a superintendent and also has higher education experience. He has been principal of several schools and levels, has experience in a rapidly growing district. He has had to make multimillion dollar budget cuts and has a good knowledge of school finance. Dr. Browder has experience with the legislative process, and is very familiar with FHSAA. He is articulate, understands the political process and has the ability to work with community, board and peers.

In response to a question from Mrs. Oyenarte, Dr. Blanton stated that Dr. Browder has a good relationship with Charter Schools.

In response to Dr. McNealy, Dr. Blanton stated that Dr. Browder's intention would be to stay as Superintendent for 8-10 years.

Mrs. Griffin expressed concern about comments Dr. Browder made on an Edison State College issue. Mrs. Roy questioned Dr. Blanton, who stated that what he knows about this issue causes him no concern at all about his candidacy.

Dr. Mark Rendell -

Highlights:

- Great reports as high school principal. Mr. Graham believes him to be an academic leader, not just a good site manager.
- High energy, creative, forward thinking, coach, mentor.
- No negative comments from St. Lucie County administrators: bright, articulate, inspiring, motivating, understands accountability and ‘closing the gap,’ ready to be a superintendent.

Mrs. Oyenarte expressed concern that Dr. Rendell left a principalship a week before the start of school to take a job with a private tech firm, as well as other matters concerning a teacher situation.

Mrs. Griffin also expressed concerns about him leaving the principalship, about other school personnel issues, and the fact that he was at the district administrative level for only a year.

Dr. McNealy noted that Dr. Rendell made much progress in his short tenure in a district the approximate size of ACPS; on some of the same areas this district is working on.

Mrs. Roy commented on the academic achievements in the school where Mr. Rendell was principal and also referred to references that stated ‘impeccable integrity.’ Dr. Blanton stated that in routine interviews, he had been assured there were no hidden problems.

Dr. Paulson stated that sources he has spoken to would most certainly know of any irregularities, but they gave Dr. Rendell rave reviews.

Dr. Marc Hutek -

Highlights:

Great team player, extremely personable, most inclusive-minded of all the candidates, very collaborative. Great presenter in public, extremely intelligent. Dr. Blanton reported that Dr. Hutek handled an issue with FHSAA in an honest and straightforward manner, though the result would be the loss of their school championship.

Fast becoming the go-to person in Hillsborough County. Gets along very well with people, including diverse groups.

Knows accountability issues; not highly experienced in school finance. Dr. McNealy pointed out that Dr. Hutek has no teaching experience. While Dr. Blanton acknowledged that limitation, he stated that at the community forums, he had heard the frequent references to the *School to Prison Pipeline* and thought it worthwhile to present a candidate with extensive law enforcement background, who felt he had more to contribute in education.

Mrs. Oyenarte also expressed concern about the lack of teaching experience

or leadership in the educational field, as did Dr. Paulson. Dr. Paulson also has concerns about the lack of Finance experience.

**Mr. John Small -
Highlights**

Finalist in Polk County Search. He has great credentials and Dr. Blanton feels he is ready to be a Superintendent.

Is out in the community 24/7, is energetic, does his homework, has great community support in Polk County. Visionary, creative, not political in a self-serving manner. His vocational program graduates 98% of students and the minority graduation rate is also extremely high. He has the premiere airline mechanical program in U.S. Great money raiser, works with diverse community, approachable, very hardworking. Hates red tape if it gets in the way of getting things done. Understands accountability and closing the achievement gap. His shortcoming may be that he does not have the overall district budget experience.

Dr. McNealy stated that he's certainly a go-getter; that he has turned around the situation of empty buildings and put together solid programs, in addition to his money raising abilities.

Mrs. Roy commented on Mr. Small putting together a large academy system of middle schools and high schools.

Mrs. Oyenarte was impressed with Mr. Small's fundraising abilities but felt success with that is dependent upon relationship-building. Dr. Blanton responded to the situation of Mr. Small not becoming the superintendent in Polk County. Mrs. Oyenarte doesn't feel he has enough leadership experience.

Dr. Paulson feels that Lakeland does not have a good reputation with charter schools. He also is only candidate without a doctorate.

**Dr. Owen Roberts -
Highlights:**

What Dr. Blanton was told: Dr. Roberts has a Ph.D. from the University of Miami. Several people said he is the most intelligent person they have ever met: brilliant in statistics, academics, and assessments. He is a visionary, is honorable, humble, articulate, and can explain the most complicated data to anyone, according to education leaders. He writes well, is good at decision-making and is good with parents. Has a good understanding of school finance and has been part of the school finance management team.

Mrs. Roy gave Dr. Roberts an A+, out of all the candidates. His evaluations are stellar. She was very impressed with him.

Mrs. Oyenarte stated that Dr. Roberts was on her shortlist when she came to this meeting today. She likes the idea that he is not only credited with being brilliant, but also as having common sense. He has a proven record of academic growth; she stated that this success, with the large migrant

population in St. Lucie County, speaks volumes for him.

Dr. Paulson expressed concern that some of the people behind the computer software company that Dr. Roberts currently works for are not friendly to public education.

**Dr. Robert Bolden -
Highlights:**

Dr. Blanton noted that most of Dr. Bolden's experience is in Oregon. Committed to a diverse multicultural education, big on understanding what motivates students, was put in toughest schools and every one showed substantial academic improvement, though staff changes had to be made. Likes to hear all sides and facts, leads by example, is inclusive, well-liked by parents, good with budgets, served on the negotiating team, demands excellence. Had a controversy with the teachers union over termination of a disruptive teacher, but all that Dr. Blanton talked to said Dr. Bolden did the right thing. Served as an administrator and went back to being a principal.

Dr. McNealy is pleased that Dr. Bolden is one of the highest ranking, since he is one of her favorite candidates, because of his accomplishments in Oregon; the legislature, the State Commission on Black affairs, and honored in other areas for excellence as well. He was Administrator of the Year for closing the achievement gap.

Mrs. Roy thinks he is an amazing principal, but has questions about why he left administration and went back to being principal. She wondered about the demographics of his area in Oregon.

Dr. Paulson also feels Dr. Bolden is impressive. Was a turn-around principal, started an IB program, was a civil rights activist, grant writer, introduced collaborate bargaining, has experience with managing budgets.

Mrs. Griffin provided demographic information.

Mrs. Roy expressed some concern with his connection to the Wallace Foundation, which has corporate reform views and she wants someone who is a strong proponent of public education.

**Dr. Bambi Lockman -
Highlights:**

Dr. Blanton noted that Dr. Lockman is an ESE expert, highly respected at the state level, a pioneer in ADA, a skilled grant writer, and very budget savvy. Understands academic side of the budget, inclusion, etc., but also the totality of the budget. She has positive human relations skills and technical skills. Dr. Lockman understands how the Legislature works; Dr. Blanton has seen her before legislative committees. She is articulate, knows the issues, data driven, personable, easy to work with. He believes she is a strong candidate and her knowledge is much broader than just ESE.

Dr. McNealy would like to see her in the finalists, noting her credentials and stating that she is the only female candidate. Mrs. Roy also agreed that there

should be one or perhaps two females among the finalists.

Mrs. Roy stated that Dr. Lockman seems to have an interest in charter schools and is a member of the National Association of Charter School Administrators. In regard to that membership, Dr. Blanton pointed out that her particular interest is Special Ed charter schools.

Mrs. Griffin stated that she had a discussion with Mrs. Kathy Black, ESE Director, that left her with some concerns. She felt Mrs. Black could share the information with other Board members.

**Dr. Fred Heid -
Highlights:**

Dr. Blanton stated that he received comments including that Dr. Heid is extremely hard working, very likeable, has handled unpopular personnel assignments assigned by the Superintendent, worked very closely with teachers union and is well thought of by members. Data driven. Doesn't have much interaction with Board members as the Superintendent doesn't provide that opportunity; otherwise he might be an even better leader, according to some Dr. Blanton spoke with. His strong point is student improvement and understanding the evaluation and assessment system. Responsibility of 20 schools. Big consensus builder, strong personality, good speaker, always pushing for academic excellence. Not as strong in overall finance.

Dr. McNealy received good feedback on Dr. Heid from calls to Orange County.

Mrs. Roy called Mr. Heid an A+ candidate. He served on committee on reducing school suspensions and student arrests and expanding the Restorative Justice program. Expanded fine arts program, got UF Outstanding Educator of the Year award. Has been called a highly successful teacher and principal in high poverty areas.

Dr. Blanton closed his presentation and invited Board questions.

Dr. Paulson asked procedural questions of Board Attorney David Delaney.

In response to a question from Mrs. Roy, Dr. Blanton commented on a specific background check. He offered to conduct a check on additional candidates if the Board should request.

Further procedural discussion was held, with Dr. Blanton stating that if there is going to be a change to the list of eight candidates he presented, it must be done by a vote of the Board.

In response to Mrs. Roy's question concerning candidate Theresa Stahlman, Dr. Blanton stated that highly conflicting reviews did not indicate the type of collaborative candidate he would recommend.

Other applicants that Dr. Blanton responded to questions regarding several

applicants who were not selected as semifinalists, including Gina Tovine, Paul Sequeira, and Paul Lucas.

Motion by Mrs. Griffin

Seconded by Dr. McNealy

Moved to adopt the list of eight (8) Superintendent candidate semifinalists, as presented by Dr. Wayne Blanton, FSBA president.

The meeting was opened to citizen input.

Katherine Thomas, Newberry, spoke in support of Hershel Lyons being appointed as Superintendent. Karen Curran, Newberry, also endorsed Mr. Lyons.

Cynthia Chestnut, complimented the Board on their in-depth analysis of the candidates. She spoke in support of consideration of Dr. Bolden and adhering to the Board process.

Evelyn Fox, president, Alachua County Branch of the NAACP, spoke in support of Hershel Lyons, who she feels is the best fit for our district.

Several referred to the many supporters of Mr. Lyons.

Dr. Paulson stated that the Board has a process, which he will follow; the rules are firm.

Brandon Wagner, parent of three, came to the meeting because he was concerned that he saw no local candidates on the list. While he stated that there are good candidates, he supports the present leadership.

Discussion was held on the process of applicant consideration. Dr. Paulson emphasized the importance of following the rules that were established. Mr. Delaney supported that view. Dr. Paulson stated that Mr. Lyons would not be precluded from consideration in the future, should a candidate not be selected during this process.

Mrs. Oyenarte pointed out several local high-level national searches that were discontinued in favor of a local candidate.

Mrs. Griffin stated that after seriously reviewing and researching the candidates, she feels that none are better qualified than Mr. Lyons. She requested that the Board forward to Mr. Moore all emails they've received concerning Mr. Lyons, to be compiled and distributed to Board members.

Dr. Paulson noted that a DAC member had almost quit because she felt the process was being compromised.

In regard to a request that was made for departments to consider ways to trim 10% from budgets, Mrs. Griffin stated that the Board should look very seriously at the money that will be spent to bring candidates in for interviews, etc.

Mrs. Roy stated that the process cannot be deviated from, as the district would be severely censured, since a nationwide search has been conducted. Regarding the cost, she stated that, since the district is a member of the Florida School Boards Association, the cost is very low.

At Mrs. Roy's request, Dr. Blanton commented on the selection of a superintendent from out-of-state some years ago. He explained the situation and stated that on behalf of the FSBA, he had clearly informed the Board at the time, that Dr. Larry Marazza should not be on the top-five list. He stated that all the candidates at this time meet the requirements of this Board.

Mrs. Oyenarte stressed the importance of listening to the community.

The question was called. Upon Vote: Motion passed 5-0

VISIT ITINERARY FOR
SUPERINTENDENT
FINALISTS

Motion by Mrs. Oyenarte

Seconded by Mrs. Roy

Moved to adopt the Superintendent Finalist Itinerary as presented.

The question was called. Upon Vote: Motion passed 5-0

CITIZEN INPUT ON
SUPERINTENDENT
SEARCH

A citizen expressed that she would like the community to have some input at the time of the Community Reception.

KEY DATES

Mrs. Jackie Johnson, Public Information Officer, reviewed the remainder of the Search schedule and noted some of the details that must be decided.

1. DAC Templates (Completion of templates for all Semifinalists 3/19-3/31)
2. School Board (Review of Semifinalists and DAC templates 4/1-4/15)
3. Special Board Meeting on April 15, 3 p.m. to select Finalists.
4. Selection Process for Finalists

Mr. Delaney stated that the selection process can't be decided upon outside of a Board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was declared adjourned at 5:43 p.m.