



E-AGENDA MANAGER

# Duval County Public Schools

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April 19, 2016, Special Board Meeting, Public Hearings

Ms. Ashley Smith Juarez, Chairman  
Ms. Paula D. Wright, Vice-Chairman  
Ms. Becki Couch  
Mr. Jason Fischer  
Ms. Cheryl Grymes  
Dr. Constance S. Hall  
Mr. Scott Shine  
Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent

ATTENDANCE AT THIS MEETING OF THE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD: All Board Members were present. Dr. Nikolai Vitti, Superintendent, and Ms. Karen Chastain, Chief Officer of Legal Services, were also present.

Call Meeting to Order

## [CALL MEETING TO ORDER](#)

Minutes: The meeting was called to order at 6:03 p.m.

## [INVOCATION](#)

Minutes: There was a moment of silence observed.

## [PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE](#)

## [PUBLIC COMMENTS](#)

Minutes:

The following people approached the microphone to voice their support for the proposed boundary changes:

Peter Bishop, School Advisory Chair, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary  
Baladitya Ganty, Parent

Ms. Sheila Andrews, Advocate

Ms. Andrews voiced her support of the Board giving the James Weldon Johnson building to Edward Waters College.

Bettye Miller

Ms. Miller expressed her frustration over not being able to speak her mind at the last Board meeting and feels her First Amendment Rights were hindered. She tolerated it the last time but threatened litigation if it happens again. Ms. Chastain explained that the Supreme Court upholds case law that support Rules of Decorum which states we do not have the right to say anything we want anytime we want if it disrupts the function of meetings.

[APPROVAL OF THE APRIL 19, 2016, AGENDA](#)

Motions:

THAT THE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD APPROVE THE APRIL 19, 2016, AGENDA AS SUBMITTED ON APRIL 15, 2016. - PASS

Vote Results

Motion: Cheryl Grymes

Second: Paula Wright

Rebecca Couch	- Aye
Jason Fischer	- Aye
Cheryl Grymes	- Aye
Connie Hall	- Aye
Ashley Juarez	- Aye
Scott Shine	- Aye

Operations - School Choice & Pupil Assignment

[PUBLIC HEARING ON PROPOSED BOUNDARY CHANGE FOR SMART POPE LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL #149 AND SUSIE E. TOLBERT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL #128.](#)

Minutes:

The following two people spoke in support of the proposed boundary changes:

Cibi Anbarasu - Student at Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School  
Anbu Ponniah - School Advisory Council, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School

Board Member Hall noted that Susie E. Tolbert was not originally on the list of schools planned for boundary changes. She asked Dr. Vitti to explain how it ended up on the list. He explained that this change was suggested by the working group for the R. L. Brown, John Love and Long Branch Elementary changes done last month. Stakeholders from Susie E. Tolbert and S. P. Livingston Elementary were concerned that the changes made last month to R.L. Brown, John Love and Long Branch would adversely affect the gifted program at their own schools, so the suggestion was made to make this current item dedicated magnets.

Board Member Couch noted the schools currently are at 59% utilization. She asked Dr. Vitti why he thinks the utilization is that low. Dr. Vitti explained that many go to the gifted program at Jacksonville Beach Elementary since some perceive the program there to be better than the one at Susie E. Tolbert. Many parents of gifted students prefer their student to be in an environment that is all gifted students rather than one that is a combination of gifted and non-gifted.

[PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF R.V. DANIELS K – SECOND GRADE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL #162 INTO S. P. LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL #149](#)

Minutes:

The following people spoke in support of the proposed boundary changes:

Kabria Jackson, student, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School  
Loietta Holmes-Jones, Parent  
Lila Alvarado, Student, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School  
Mary Wright, Teacher, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School

Tiffany Sanders, Parent  
Krish Patel, Student, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School  
Nina Patel, Parent  
Natasha Terry, Parent  
Rhanetta Stanford, Parent  
Gerald Davidson, Parent and Teacher, S.P. Livingston Elementary  
Shayla Velmon, Parent  
Jenawas Montena, Parent  
Anbu Ponniah - School Advisory Council, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary School  
Peter Bishop, School Advisory Chair, Susie E. Tolbert Elementary

Board Member Hall noted the engaged atmosphere she sensed whenever she walked into Susie E. Tolbert and R.V. Daniels. When R. V. Daniels was designed for the PK-2 program, it was opened to students across the district. She wonders if they truly used that opportunity for growth and development. Can the successes at some schools be replicated at others? She sees strides being made in the schools and fears that coming in to make these proposed changes may take things back a step; possibly creating a "haves" and "have nots" atmosphere.

Dr. Vitti gave details of the entry process for the two schools if the recommendation were passed and how that would affect the teachers at the schools who contracted with Quality Education for All. Board Member Hall expressed concern that R.L. Brown and R.V. Daniels would be competing for students due to their proximity to each other. Dr. Vitti feels there is enough of a need for their programs that he doesn't think it would be a problem.

Board Member Couch noted that the reason behind such a long waiting list for Jacksonville Beach Elementary is because parents don't feel their students are being challenged at their neighborhood schools. She would like to see the district provide more gifted services at the neighborhood schools so students don't have to be pulled out of their school once a week, bussed a considerable distance, then sit in a crowded class to try getting their gifted needs met. She sees a trend in changes that appear as though the district is attempting to "dedicate" its way through the problem.

Vice-Chairman Wright noted that many non-dedicated magnets are at a higher utilization rate than Susie E. Tolbert Elementary. She asked Dr. Vitti to weigh in on why he thinks the utilization is lower. Dr. Vitti cited several factors such as:

- The residential rate in surrounding area
- Lower social-economic backgrounds
- Families moving out of the area; not necessarily into the area

Vice-Chairman Wright reflected on what she feels is the importance of the role neighborhood schools play in helping communities thrive. She asked the Board if it is willing to push out neighborhood students to make room for other students. She then cited a 2013 newspaper article that reported

Dr. Vitti talking about the importance of students feeling pride in their neighborhood schools.

Board Member Grymes asked the Board if they don't do this change, then what? When she sees neighborhood schools that are below capacity, she views it as a problem they need to address. Board Member Hall feels we need to look at the parts of the schools that are successful and "tweak" them to draw more students.

Dr. Vitti reminded the Board that, whether right or wrong, the past Boards have established a trend toward dedicated magnets that many parents now see as possibilities, which makes it very difficult at this point to walk away from that practice. The buildings for these schools have an issue with low utilization. He sees this change as an opportunity to meet multiple challenges in one effort. He cautions everyone not to romanticize the concept of neighborhood schools. If the district doesn't adapt to parents' demands and needs, they risk losing their competitive edge with other districts.

Vice-Chairman Wright said there is nothing about the schools in her district that is theoretical or romanticized; they are real and the choice of the parents. She wonders if the change will create more dissension.

Board Member Couch noted that she has received emails from frustrated parents whose students received high grades but still did not get into the dedicated gifted magnets. She reminded everyone that creating more dedicated magnets creates more of a priority track that many parents find frustrating. She suspects the low enrollment at Susie E. Tolbert to be due to people moving out of the area, not necessarily opting out of the school. She suggested they consider offering transportation to help fill those empty seats.

[PUBLIC HEARING TO CONVERT WEST JACKSONVILLE ELEM SCHOOL #143 INTO THE OVERAGE PROGRAM HOUSED AT JAMES WELDON JOHNSON ACADEMIC & CAREER TRAINING CENTER #54 & THE REBOUNDARY OF K-2 STUDENTS FROM WEST JACKSONVILLE ELEM SCHOOL #143 TO SMART POPE LIVINGSTON](#)

Minutes:

Nathaniel Glover, President, Edward Waters College

President Glover gave some historical background information on the relationship over the years between the James Weldon Johnson School and Edward Waters College (EWC). He assured the Board there are no plans to make James Weldon Johnson into a charter school. It would be used for classroom and activities that currently crowd the EWC campus.

Bettye Miller, Advocate

After making reference to recent open border legislation signed by Florida Governor Rick Scott, she asked the Board if there is an intent to break the law by asking parents to sign papers for their children to be admitted to a school. She questions the legality of the process.

Antonio Owens, Parent

Mr. Owens feels there is a double standard going on in the district. He wonders why the neighborhood schools are not given the proper resources. Ten years ago West Jacksonville Elementary was a thriving school. He feels if the right programs were put back in the schools, the school would thrive again. Putting an overage program into the school will not help the neighborhood.

Sheila Andrews, Advocate

Ms. Andrews read some of the names of schools on the list of the Lowest 300. She noted that while she spent quite a bit of time in a coma, there were many changes to schools within the district. She asked why that was done.

Bradford Hall, Advocate

Mr. Hall noted the low enrollment numbers of Finegan and Mayport Elementary Schools and asked what the Board has planned for those two schools. With overall numbers throughout the district dropping, is there still a need for Paxon and Stanton? Why aren't those schools getting closed down like they would be if they were on the north side?

Board Member Shine asked Dr. Vitti to reflect on the utilization challenges related to Mayport and Finegan Elementary Schools. Dr. Vitti explained the ships coming in and out of port and deployment patterns are what keeps the enrollment numbers fluctuating up and down.

Board Member Hall asked Dr. Vitti to explain why West Jacksonville Elementary wasn't considered for a STEM magnet. Dr. Vitti said after studying the demographics in that area, they concluded there would not be enough interest in that location to support that type of magnet. The equipment that is currently at the school for young children would be removed, inventoried, then relocated to other age-appropriate locations.

Board Member Grymes is perplexed over the concept that some members of the public suspect the Board Members are attempting to do bad things to the students in Duval County. She views these potential changes as answers to current problems and noted her own children attended both neighborhood and magnet schools and saw value in both.

Vice-Chairman Wright wondered how the James Weldon Johnson building would be transferred to Edward Waters College. He explained it would be leased to buy.

Adjournment

ADJOURNMENT

Minutes:

The meeting was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

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Superintendent

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Chairman