



# Duval County Public Schools

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October 25, 2016, Board Workshop

Ms. Ashley Smith Juarez, Chairman  
Ms. Paula D. Wright, Vice-Chairman  
Ms. Becki Couch  
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 with the exception of Board Members Cheryl Grymes and Scott Shine. 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 9:11 a.m.

Items To Be Discussed

## [GOVERNANCE](#)

Minutes:

### Letter from the Office of General Counsel (OGC)

Board Members expressed concern regarding a letter sent to Chris Guerrieri, Duval County School Board Employee, from the Office of General Counsel. The letter stated it was written on behalf of the Duval County School Board and School Board Member Cheryl Grymes. Discussion

included the following:

- The Chairman spoke with OGC who indicated that the letter was generated through conversation with staff and at the request of staff. When a request comes to OGC, there is a presumption that there has been conversation or direction.
- Karen Chastain, Chief of Legal Services, followed up with OGC who thought the term "Board" referred to the organization. OGC will clarify this with Chris Guerrieri, that it is on behalf of the District not the Board. Vice-Chairman Wright stated she will not accept this as an excuse. She will send a response to Chris Guerrieri concerning the fact that she had no knowledge of the letter.
- Chris Guerrieri posted in his blog information that he portrayed as fact which was not accurate. The District provided the correct information, but he continued to post the information. The purpose of the letter from OGC was to ask him to remove the inaccurate information from the blog.
- Board Member Hall asked the letter be rewritten or withdrawn.
- Board Member Couch responded to Chris Guerrieri to indicate that she had no knowledge of that letter and the Board had not discussed it. She also agreed the letter needed to be corrected.
- Ms. Chastain indicated, to her knowledge, Chris Guerrieri did not retract his blog before he received the letter from OGC.

#### Attendance

Board Member Couch suggested the District do a campaign on attendance matters. There is a lot of research concerning why students are absent. Let's share best practices with our schools. The Superintendent will send the Board information concerning what we are currently doing to improve attendance. Mark Sherwood, Assistant Superintendent, Communications, will work with Board Member Couch on a campaign. She also requested attendance data by school be sent to the Board.

The Chairman asked the Superintendent to remind schools that there is an opt-out policy concerning uniforms. Students should be allow to attend school if they do not have a uniform.

#### Letter from the Office of General Counsel (OGC) - Discussion continued

Vice-Chairman Wright inquired as to how the letter from OGC came about. Dr. Vitti, Superintendent, stated that Chris Guerrieri made a public records request concerning district funds that are provided to the Jacksonville Children's Commission (JCC). The information was provided to Chris Guerrieri. He took that information and made some assumptions regarding those dollars that are given to JCC in relation to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida. There was evidence that there was an exchange and information posted on his blog that was inaccurate about dollars that comes from the District to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Northeast Florida either directly to the organization or through JCC.

Dr. Vitti, Superintendent, indicated that Board Member Grymes was concerned that information was knowingly posted which was inaccurate. We then treated it as a possible disciplinary issue with an employee.

A cease-and-desist letter was generated from the OGC as a disciplinary strategy because of the inaccurate information about another employee. Sonita Young, Assistant Superintendent, Human Resource Services, and OGC then collaborated regarding where this issue stood in the disciplinary process. This was done under the direction of the Superintendent. The Superintendent did not see the letter from OGC before it was sent out. Karen Chastain indicated she did see the letter, but passed right over the wording indicating the "Board".

The Superintendent stated he does not have any concerns regarding the substance, legality or the strategy. The term "School Board" is concerning. His feeling is the term "School Board" is used traditionally when referring to the organization. If he had seen the letter before it was sent out, he probably would have said it was concerning and would have raised questions.

At the September 26, 2016 Board Workshop the Chair asked about information relating to the letter from OGC. She had no knowledge of the letter prior to it being posted on-line. The Superintendent did not offer information regarding the letter at that time. He assumed that the Board was very aware based on the emails that they were included on and whether the Board as a whole or individually spoke with Karen Chastain.

The details of the disciplinary action were not received by the Board until Friday, October 21, 2016. The Superintendent stated that he would not comment at a public meeting on a disciplinary action. The Superintendent said he did not recall the conversation at the September 26, 2016, Board Workshop concerning the letter. When the Chairman saw the letter on-line from OGC, she went to OGC to piece information together. At the September 26, 2016, Board Workshop meeting, she indicated that she was questioning OGC and looking for more information. The Superintendent stated he did not authorize, generate or read the letter because this was a legal process. The information that was provided in September was accurate and substantial. There was no reason to add more. Karen Chastain spoke about this in September. She indicated she said she was aware of the letter and had reviewed it and passed over the opening phrase.

The Chair inquired as to when an investigation is handled internally without information coming to the Board versus a discussion with the Board about the request and the investigation. Dr. Vitti, Superintendent, indicated that we move forward when we have an employee who has violated the Employee Code of Ethics.

Board Member Couch stated we have inconsistencies in what is done for different Board Members by the District. No action was taken when Board Member Hall also asked for an investigation. There is also a lack of consistency with OGC. We need to have a discussion with the entire Board concerning what our practice should be. If Board Member Grymes was going through OGC, then the Chair should have known. The Superintendent indicated, because this was a disciplinary manner, those often go to OGC without the Chairman's approval or the Board.

The Chairman reiterated that the Board "continues, over and over again to have conversation about communications issues, to have conversation about consistency, to have conversation about equal treatment of Board Members, we go through this, treating every situation like it's brand new. It does not seem to her that there is a consistent and genuine commitment to do things differently." We have this conversation so things will change. Everything cannot be corrected with policy changes.

Dr. Vitti, Superintendent, indicated that communication is always a work in progress, always, whether between your children or your spouse. He knows communication could have been much stronger but based on email exchanges and conversation between the Chair and Karen Chastain he thought the communication was there. In the future, he would just like Board Members to call him.

Vice-Chairman Wright was not aware that the Superintendent had any involvement before today to know to contact him concerning additional information.

#### Legal Plan

The Legal Plan is still on our workshop agenda. OGC has indicated that they would be ready in November following a conversation with Karen Chastain. We are on a track to address some of the issues the Board is having through structured services.

#### Teacher Vacancies

The Superintendent indicated coaches and interventionists are being placed in the classroom until a full-time teacher can be hired. Once a teacher is placed, the coach or interventionist is moved back to their previous position. The position is not eliminated. Chairman Juarez requested the Superintendent send her the number of vacant positions. The Superintendent does not have any projections as to when the positions will be filled at priority schools. Vice-Chairman Wright would like to have a deep discussion concerning a targeted plan to attract teachers and give additional support to the ones we have. A grant won by University of North Florida (UNF) in partnership with the District will take our paraprofessionals in English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) and develop them into teachers.

#### Make-up Days

The Board recommended the Superintendent send a letter to parents explaining the make-up days for Hurricane Matthew.

## [ACHIEVEMENT GAP](#)

Attachment: [Achievement Gap PPT.pdf](#)

Minutes:

The Superintendent provided an overview of the Achievement Gap. A PowerPoint is attached to the minutes. It is about subgroups achievement, the gap, and moving the conversation into what we can do differently as a district to hone in on the achievement gap more than we have done in the past. Discussion followed:

- Our students by subgroup are improving.
- We have the narrowest gap in the Big Seven School Districts based on 2015-2016 Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) results.

Motion: To allow Board Member Scott Shine to participate via telephone.

Moved: Becki Couch

Seconded: Paula Wright

Ashley Smith Juarez-Aye

Paula Wright-Aye

Becki Couch-Aye

Constance Hall-Aye

PASSED - 4-0

- The research is clear that any strategy regarding the achievement gap has to focus on low performing schools because we have a concentration of minority students in low performing schools.
- The strongest way to improve the achievement gap is having the best principals and teachers working with students that are below grade level.
- We are seeing improvement as far as school grades are concerned in the Raines, Ribault and Jackson High School feeder pattern.
- Low performing schools district-wide are improving where 90% of "F" schools are improving and 67% of "D" and "F" schools are improving.
- City Year has been expanded at each of our high schools and middle schools in the Raines, Ribault, Jackson and Ed White feeder patterns.
- Achievers for Life program is targeting our at-risk middle school students.
- The Nonviolence Project is at all middle schools, where we have a life coach to work with at-risk students on behavior and attendance.
- The Young Guns initiative targets elementary schools with our African American boys at select elementary schools.
- The District has incentivized principals to stay in low-performing schools and to incentivize when the school improves.
- Diversity of district administrators has been improved from the cabinet level to supervisors than before.
- The District has the Jacksonville Residency program to develop a pool of teachers to serve.
- More focused on technology and the whole child. We are one-to-one

- in the Raines, Ribault and Jackson High Schools feeder patterns.
- All schools have wireless access.
- The Arts have been expanded.
- All district administrators and principals participated in the Cultural Competency training.
- \$40 million has been raised to support recruitment and retention of high quality teachers.
- Expanded Pre-K and developed the Early Learning Centers.
- Increased mental health training.

All of the components listed above are central to narrowing the achievement gap. The main challenge is literacy.

Board Member Shine joined the meeting via telephone at 11:00 a.m.

- The Superintendent will be having data chats with schools about the subgroup data. The deeper conversation will be about literacy. At the District level it is time to drill down and get input from the Board.

Board Member Couch requested the Superintendent disaggregate the attendance data. He will provide last year's attendance data and this year's data up to the first quarter.

What is the Superintendent initiative for attracting teachers outside of Duval County, the State and the county? The Superintendent would recommend focusing more on retention of teachers. As far as recruiting, he hopes the District can make a decision and commitment soon regarding the incentives for 2017-2018. Some recruiting was done in South Florida. He feels it will be hard to recruit through the incentives outside of the District because we do not have Value-Added Model (VAM) outside of Florida.

Are there other organizations that the District could partner with concerning teaching positions? University of North Florida (UNF) does work to recruit retired military personnel with a fast track program. Board Member Couch requested that we get a list of all of the initiative and the costs, even the ones below \$75,000, so we can evaluate what we are spending and is there a better way to reallocate to some of the smaller initiatives.

Board Member Hall would like to know if there is still a Council for Higher Education. Representatives from every college met regularly and they were able to provide resources and support for our schools. It would be a good initiative for Family and Community Engagement. Until we can build a culture, we will not close the achievement gap. If we deepen the research, then we will see that most of those initiatives will move student achievement to a degree, but will do every little to close the achievement gap.

The Superintendent stated it is time to create a Master Teacher/Lead Teacher component of the salary structure. We want to retain higher

performing teachers while keeping them at their school.

Board Member Shine has pulled a study from other districts that are closing the achievement gaps. He will send this information to the Board.

Vice-Chairman Wright would like to see diversity of achievement levels. That removes where the student attends, but what is happening among the achievement levels, and what are we doing to move students from one achievement level to another. Each school will look a little different.

Chairman Smith Juarez, asked that the Superintendent go through what is behind the targets and the rationale for adjustment. This way the Board can give some feedback. The Chairman would like for the Superintendent to go through scenarios 1-5, which were presented at today's meeting, look at each accountability area and give us a breakdown just, "x" and "y" axis by grade levels, by ethnicity in a graph for each scenario. The graph should show where we are and where we see improvement. The information provided by the Superintendent is too broad and are not tied specifically to understanding where we are now, given the measure we have now, with impact and results for children.

## STRATEGIC PLAN TARGETS

Attachment: [Updated Strategic Plan Targets.pdf](#)

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Minutes:

The Superintendent revisited the Strategic Plan Targets. He sent more aggressive baseline targets, or initial targets and aspirational targets to the Board. Discussion followed:

- The baseline targets are based on increasing it by looking at the largest increase that a district showed among the Big Seven School Districts.
- The aspirational targets would move us in one year to be the highest performing district of the Big Seven School Districts in a particular area or above the State average.
- Board Member Hall asked how the Superintendent arrived at the targeted numbers. He stated the original targets were based on what we through were more aggressive than the rate of change for our district, the Big Seven School Districts, and the State. We increased it by looking at the Big Seven School Districts and who has seen the most improvement, and at what amount in that particular area, and tried to match that. The majority of the targets are based on this.

Board Member Shine disconnected at 12:12 p.m.

- Board Member Couch suggested we have a conversation to achieve the targets when the new Board Members come on the Board in November. We need a conversation to include the following

elements: What did other districts do that worked? How will this translate? Budget alignment?

- Chairman Smith Juarez recommended the targets be voted on at the November 1, 2016, Regular Board Meeting.

#### Other Topics

The Superintendent discussed the Florida Virtual KG-12 Charter School. Hillsborough County has taken action to terminate their contract. There are about 300 students who are enrolled. Those students do not have a school. Their contract with Hillsborough allows them to move students to nearby districts, but those districts have not agreed to take these students. They have reached out to Dr. Vitti to see if he would be willing to take the students. There has been a legal concern as it relates to how you define a nearby district. He was not comfortable doing this without consulting the Board. The students need a school and the Superintendent is willing to accept them. It may help us long-term. The Charter organization is willing to give us a person to man the input process.

Adjournment

#### ADJOURNMENT

Minutes:

The meeting was adjourned at 12:41 p.m.

CSM

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Superintendent

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Chairman