

MINUTES BOARD MEETING

March 13th, 2023

REGULAR MEETING

At 6:00 p.m. Mr. Hartsfield convened the regular meeting of the district Board of Education. Board members present were, Ms. White, Ms. Compton, Ms. Whitaker, Mr. Milner, Mr. Moore and Mr. Frazier. School administrative personnel present were Mr. Webb, Ms. Wilson, Ms. Neely, Mr. Hayden, Ms. Merritt, and Ms. Spain. IC Murrell from the PB Commercial was in attendance. The Pledge of Allegiance was said and Ms. Compton said prayer.

OLD BUSINESS

Minutes. The minutes of the last meeting were unanimously approved 7-0 on a motion by Ms. Whitaker and a second by Mr. Milner.

Financial Statement. The financial statement for the month of February was presented, reporting \$1,265,973.59 in revenue and expenditures of \$1,315,797.74 in the non-activity funds, leaving an ending balance of \$10,559,902.20. On a motion by Mr. Moore and a second by Ms. Whitaker the board voted 7-0 to approve the financial report for the month of February.

NEW BUSINESS

Wildcat Warrior. Ms. Spain recognized the following student for outstanding WCSD Wildcat Activities. Simone Smith of WCHS maintains focus and growth, is a hard worker, determined, and displays perseverance.

Recognize. Ms. Spain recognized the following Dyslexia Program Employees as employees of the month: Tristin Imler, Earnestine Marshall, Daisy Pugh, Rosalind Robinson, and Betty Thomas. They are all always willing to help when asked.

Ready for Learning Committee. Ms. Imler explained the dyslexia program. She gave definition of dyslexia, early clues, late indicators, talked about myths, and misunderstandings related to dyslexia. Ms. Spain said the district has a great group who works in the program. Ms. Spain talked about the parent advisory committee and thanked the parents for their service. ESSER funds and communication on the website was discussed during the advisory meeting. The district has been awarded grants; 1003A for Coleman and the Junior High. We have went over their budgets and the schools want to use Solution Tree, professional development, and curriculum planning. On a motion by Mr. Milner and a second by Ms. Compton, the board voted 7-0 to approve the 1003A grant budget. Mr. Wilson thanked Ms. Spain for her work with these programs.

Update. Mr. Wilson gave a brief update on construction, legislative session, and facilities. Construction is stagnant right now due to waiting on bills to pass; one for a safe room and one for academic partnership share of cost per square foot. Mr. Wilson stated Representative Mike Holcomb has really helped with this legislation. He continued stating the new school means everything to Watson Chapel. We wanted to have a gym and will go to Star City to see what it would cost to have one similar. Construction costs have gone from \$23 million to \$32 million. Once legislation is passed we can will meet with the board and start the process of building the new school. He discussed the new bills: SB206, 389, 378, 391, 1254, 335 and HB1336, 1511, 1539. Mr. Hartsfield stated to call your senators and representatives to get these bills passed so we can build the new school. Mr. Wilson stated you can go online and see the bills.

Mr. Hayden talked about facilities. Coleman-we have the playground equipment in, but haven't been able to get it installed. We are waiting on the rainy season to be over and it has taken longer than expected. Football Field-the AstroTurf is showing its age. Every year they test it to make sure it is okay to play on. The people who test the turf said it's safe to play on one more year, but we may have to look at it after football season next year. Mr. Hartsfield asked if we should go back to grass because he has seen a study on the effects of cancer from turf fields. He asked how much it would cost and Mr. Hayden said it would be at least one million and stated that grass would be a lot cheaper.

Reconfiguration of Grades. Ms. Spain and Mr. Hayden discussed the possible configuration of grades. Mr. Wilson stated if bills pass, we can shut down the Junior High in the fall and demolish. Mr. Spain said DESE stated by June 1st, we had to have LEA reconfiguration done. The process takes 4-6 weeks to go thru DESE and its departments. We will need to plan in stages. There was a walkthrough done of the buildings to see what classrooms are available. We will need to meet with administrators to discuss personnel. We will need to meet with the program directors to discuss technology, cafeteria, etc. Mr. Hayden explained the reconfiguration of grades if we build and if we delay construction. Edgewood- K-2 build or delayed, L.L. Owen-Pre-K, 7-8 build or Pre-K if delayed, Coleman- 3-5 build or 3-6 delayed (largest school we have according to Mr. Hayden with a lot of vacant classrooms), Junior High- 6-8 merge when build or 7-8 delayed, and High School- 9-12 build or delayed (6 vacant classrooms for 9th graders). Mr. Wilson said we feel grades 9-12 and 6-8 would be better fits for the future.

Discipline Plan. Ms. McNeal, Mr. Webb, and Mr. Wilson discussed a proposed new interactive virtual plan regarding discipline and students. Ms. McNeal was absent, so Mr. Webb and Ms. Wilson presented. Ms. Wilson stated we have problems with discipline and we are tired of bad publicity. Mr. Webb discussed the new program GRIP (Gang Reduction Initiative Program) by Judge Brown. This will help provide safe places to live in Pine Bluff and it reduces crime and provides safety. Many of our students that we have that are in trouble fail while using Virtual Arkansas. This would allow them to use Google Classroom instead. The district would need to pay teachers and this could affect technology and instructional staff. Google Classroom would help them be more successful. Mr. Hartsfield asked if these were suspended students and Mr. Webb stated that these are students involved in gangs who cause problems in the school. Ms. Compton stated she thinks it is great. Ms. Whitaker asked how they were identified and how does it work if it was a first fight and Mr. Webb stated they would investigate each student. Ms.

Compton asked what is the criteria to identify them as gang members is and Mr. Webb stated social media and handshakes. Ms. Wilson stated being in a gang is not a crime, but it could lead to criminal activity. Ms. Whitaker stated that this all needs to be written in black and white and put in the handbook. She stated a student can't start a fight and then the administrators say it is gang related and put in them in Google Classroom. She asked if they had to track students before something happened and Ms. Wilson stated they wouldn't punish the students based on being in a gang but if they were involved in a big fight and created a dangerous environment, they would be in this program. Mr. Hartsfield stated that this wouldn't be between two people and Mr. Webb stated yes. Mr. Webb mentioned we have RTI to help with problems, but this program is to keep them engaged. Mr. Hartsfield stated that we needed a safe environment for students and teachers. Mr. Webb stated we still have a lot of good students and this is a prevention program. Ms. Whitaker stated she wants a safe school and wants to protect students and staff, but we can't make rules as we go and we need to do what is in the handbook. Ms. Wilson stated when we have to move students around campuses because there is a hit on them we need to do something to keep others safe and this is the alternative. Mr. Wilson stated this will have to be approved by DOJ, DESE, the state board, and then the local school board. He hopes the reconfiguration helps too. Ms. Whitaker stated that she does not disagree with the program, but wants due diligence.

Calendar. Mr. Wilson recommended the approval of the calendar for the 2023-2024 school year. Mr. Wilson had discussions about a 12 month calendar, but we would be unable to coordinate with SEARK. The calendar was approved by the PPC and 85.8% was in favor of this option. On a motion by Ms. Whitaker and a second by Mr. Moore, the board voted 7-0 on the 2023-2024 school calendar. Ms. Compton asked about the TBA events and if the board will be notified and Mr. Wilson stated yes. Mr. Frazier stated that is looked like the majority agreed on option 3 and we want WC to be different and was glad to have discussions and it may be something we could do in the future. Mr. Wilson said Ms. White mentioned this to help parents who have to work and this would help them.

Wrestling. Mr. White and Coach Moody addressed the board about the possibility of a wrestling program. Coach Moody was absent, so Mr. White presented. Mr. White stated he has tried to do this for 5 years and is finally able to address the board thanks to Mr. Wilson. This would be for both girls and boys and we would only need one set of mats and one set of equipment. He stated he has done research and more girls are interested than boys. There are a lot of smaller kids who get picked on and this builds self-esteem. This will stop the drop because we would be the only school around to offer it. It is an inexpensive sport and the organization will pay half of the price for a mat. Mr. Wilson said the letter states they will pay half of the price with participation in regional tournament with a good roster. Mr. White stated that Brad Burl would volunteer for a stipend. Mr. Wilson ask how much would uniforms costs and Mr. White stated that Donors Choose would provide uniforms and equipment. Mr. Wilson stated there are always hidden costs; referees, match fees, bus driver, etc. and we have a hard time with people keeping within budget. Mr. Wilson said he is all for athletics, but right now with the building and the new Learns act it is not a great time to start something new. Ms. White asked if the school district didn't have to pay anything, is it an option. Mr. Wilson said yes, but it might be hard with sponsors. Mr. Hartsfield stated he wants to know the

pros and cons and isn't against it, but there are other pressing matters going on. Mr. Burl asked if he could start a wrestling club at a community center. Mr. Wilson stated it would be a good idea, but it needs to be away from school and insurance would need to be checked into.

PPC REPORT & CPPC

Ms. Hemphill gave a report. She showed a graph for votes for the new calendar. She brought up a concern about getting paid twice a month on the 1st and the 15th for the 2023-2024 school year. The rationale behind this would eliminate paying a check in August, so this would let the payroll clerk have extra time this summer and wouldn't cost anything extra. Everyone has to do more work, so the payroll clerk can too. Mr. Wilson stated that Norman Hill, the district's financial consultant stated that it would cost extra because the district would need to hire more personnel and it is about managing people's money, and employees can do that with two accounts. Ms. Compton asked if they did a poll and Ms. Hemphill stated that 65% were for getting paid twice a month. Mr. Wilson stated that he did not recommend this. Ms. Compton stated she has been on both sides and it is a challenge to manage money. Ms. Compton wanted the board to do it and said it would build morale. Ms. Hemphill stated it would be a recruiting tool. Mr. Wilson stated there is a lot of bookkeeping issues with people getting docked and he trusts Norman Hill and he does not recommend it. Mr. Wilson asked Norma Walker what other cost would be involved and she stated it would cost extra days for payroll. Ms. Hemphill stated the payroll clerk would just need to do more like they do. Mr. Wilson stated Norman Hill is the expert and he trusts his advice. Ms. Compton asked if the board would act on it tonight because it has been tabled before. Mr. Hartsfield stated the board would table it until next month. He stated he did not want to increase costs and needs more information on it. Mr. Wilson told Ms. Hemphill to check on how many schools in the state pay twice a month. Mr. Milner stated that bookkeeping and electronic checks may not be a cost, but there are other costs involved.

BOARD COMMUNICATIONS

None.

PERSONNEL

Mr. Wilson received a letter of retirement from Janice Oaks, Pearline Price, Julie Taylor, and Gregory White. He received resignations from Constance Howard, Regina Jones, and LaPorsche Scott. On a motion by Mr. Milner and a second by Mr. Whitaker, the board voted 7-0 to approve the retirements and resignations.

ADJOURNMENT.

Respectfully submitted by, Mr. Wilson and Norma Walker.

Alan Frazier,
Board Secretary