

**LAURENS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT #55
BOARD OF TRUSTEES MONTHLY MEETING
LCSD 55 ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICE
MAY 22, 2023 - 6:30 P.M.**

Present: Cathy Little (Chair), Anthony Carpenter, Mike Hughes (by phone), Peggy Nance (by phone), Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas

Call to Order - Board Chair Cathy Little called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m. in the auditorium of Gray Court-Owings Elementary/Middle School.

Confirmation of Notice to Media - Candice Branim confirmed that broadcast and print media were notified of the date, time, agenda, livestream access, and public participation information for the meeting.

Confirmation of a Quorum - Cathy Little confirmed that a quorum was present with 4 trustees in attendance.

Approval of Agenda - Cathy Little made a motion to make an adjustment to the agenda noting that the wording of "First Reading" be added to the Monthly Financial Report under the Finance and Operations heading presented by Mr. Jim Lollis.

Welcome - Cathy Little welcomed those in attendance.

Pledge of Allegiance - Corbin Hylton, 8th grader at Gray Court-Owings student, led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Prayer - Trustee Peggy Nance led the meeting in prayer.

Approval of Minutes - Anthony Carpenter made a motion to approve the minutes from March 27, April 24, and May 3, 2023. Mike Hughes seconded. The motion carried with no opposition.

Gray Court-Owings Elementary/Middle School Report - Mr. Farrell Thomas, principal of Gray Court-Owings Elementary/Middle School, presented the

school's theme of "Under Construction". Mr. Thomas shared a presentation on the district's main goals of:

1. Providing world-class safety and a positive school culture
2. Providing world-class high quality instruction to increase student achievement
3. Providing world-class communication and family engagement

Mr. Thomas gave examples of each goal with the various activities that Gray Court-Owings School offers to their students and the community such as the Positive Wall of Fame, Student of the Month Luncheon, Red Ribbon Week, GCO Spirit Week.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

1. District Updates - Superintendent Dr. Ameca Thomas reported on the following:

- Our district won the Golden Achievement Award
- Top 10 Awards for Laurens District 55 High School
- Rotary Top 10
- 50th Anniversary of the 1st graduating class of LDHS
- Mental Health Support through the Cook Center
- Ford Elementary had enough growth to be removed from the Priority Schools List, but noted that there is still a lot of work to be done
- Preliminary 2023 SC Ready reading results for our third-grade students are showing a drastic improvement in student achievement. The Read to Succeed law stipulates that all third-grade students scoring in the lowest achievement category on our state assessment attend Summer Reading Camp, and be retained in third grade if they do not show acceptable improvement in reading achievement by the end of camp unless they qualify for one of the predetermined exemptions. In 2021 Laurens 55 had 85 third-grade students scoring in the Does Not Meet 1 category, or 23% of all third graders. That number decreased to 51 students in 2022, or 15%. This year's preliminary scores show a drastic decrease of more than half of the number in 2022.

- The elementary school data shows growth from 2021 to 2022 from 23.6% to 32.1% in ELA which is above our 2018 scores of 24.8%. In math the data shows growth from 19.8% in 2021 to 27.3% in 2022
- Gray Court Owings School has shown improvements in their reading and math scores, but are still recovering from the pandemic and still have much growth ahead of them
- Staff absences are too high, a possible contribution to the lower student test scores. Need to get the teacher absences lower
- Student absences are also high. Students do not learn when they are not in class.
- The Amazing Shake Competition was held on Saturday. Dr. Barksdale is doing a great job.
- The 2023 Navy Military Ball was held with Dr. Thomas in attendance.
- Two of our school nutrition staff won state awards from the SC School Nutrition Association. Angel Tollison from E.B. Morse won Cafeteria Manager of the Year for the entire state and Connie Godfrey from Ford Elementary won Employee of the Year for the entire state.
- Dr. Thomas encouraged us to “Finish Strong”

2. 2023-2024 Federal Programs Filing Report - Dr. Jody Penland requested the board to authorize the superintendent and/or the superintendent’s designee to file for the federal funding program for the 2023-2024 school year. Mrs. Cathy Little (Board Chair) asked if there were any questions. Mrs. Little then asked the board if there were any objections. The motion passed without any objections. Dr. Penland presented a planning guide for all to see.

3. 2024-2025 School Calendar - Dr. Jody Penland requested the board to approve the 2024-2025 School Calendar. He stated that this is a joint calendar with Laurens District 56 and was discussed three times in a committee to discuss calendar options. A survey was sent out to both districts with both receiving 70% approval in favor of the calendar. Mrs. Cathy Little made a motion to approve the 2024-2025 district calendar. The motion passed without any objection.

- 4. Facilities Report** - Dr. Rhett Harris presented the Facilities Report for Laurens District 55. He thanked Ms. Ortiz for all the years she had spent with the district and said she will be missed. Dr. Harris discussed the safety issues and costs associated with upgrading the schools to make sure that they are up to code. He discussed SCSBIT insurance and the free inspections we receive in order to give us time to bring our grounds up to code. Dr. Harris discussed the safety upgrades on the football stadium. Dr. Harris also discussed the BARD HVAC Project. The district is in the process of upgrading the HVAC systems and the problems with funding the district is having due to the DOT's regulations on the new drop off/ pick up at Sanders Middle School. With the DOT's regulations, this is an unexpected new bill of \$3,000,000. Dr. Harris also stated that we need more cameras installed at all schools. Mrs. Cathy Little asked if this was all included in the budget presented by Jim Lollis in the work session. Dr. Harris answered that it is included.

BOARD OPERATIONS

- 1. For Information - Administrative Rule IKF-R Graduation Requirements**
- Mrs. Jennifer Abercrombie presented the graduation requirements set forth by the State Board of Education. These requirements include 24 units of credit in state-approved courses for graduation.
- 2. Board Officer Election** - Chair Cathy Little asked if there were any nominations for Vice Chair.
- **Vice Chair** - Mrs. Peggy Nance nominated Anthony Carpenter for the position of Vice Chair. Mr. Anthony Carpenter seconded.
 - Chair Cathy Little called for the vote.
 - Vote Totals as it relates to Mr. Carpenter as Vice-Chair:
 - YES - 2 votes (Mrs. Nance and Mr. Carpenter)
 - ABSTAINED - 1 (Mrs. Little)
 - Mr. Mike Hughes did not vote
 - Nay-There were no nay votes

Secretary - Mrs. Cathy Little stated that “we will move forward with the Secretary positions.” She asked if there were any nominations for the Secretary position. Then Mrs. Little stated that “At this point we will not vote on the Secretary position.” and said that it is prudent that they wait until their full board is in place. She said that there’s 43% of the voter base not being represented by not having 3 people. Mrs. Little stated that she wanted to move forward with the meeting and move into Finances and Operations.

FINANCE AND OPERATIONS

1. **Monthly Financial Report** - Jim Lollis presented financial information for the month ending April 30, 2023, as follows:

Balance with the County Treasure = \$13,959,267

Revenues = \$46,046,259

Expenditures = \$39,432,306

Difference = \$6,613,953

Total Tax Collections = \$1,840,085

2. **Cenergistic Update** - Mr. Phillip Roberts reported that the goal is to increase energy uses and decrease the costs of operations.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - Cathy Little read the guidelines for public participation and recognized 5 individuals who had submitted requests.

1. Jackson Edwards - Where Our REAL Focus Should Be
2. Chivalrous Shumate - Effective Operations
3. Janice Kennedy - Encouragement
4. Rev. David Kennedy - Racism, Injustices, & Plots to Harm the Administration
5. Derrick Quarles - Effective Superintendent and School Collaboration

EXECUTIVE SESSION

MOTION TO ENTER EXECUTIVE SESSION - Mrs. Cathy Little made a motion to enter into the Executive Session. Mr. Anthony Carpenter seconded.

RECONVENE IN OPEN SESSION - Mrs. Cathy Little called the meeting to order in open session in the Gray Court-Owings School Auditorium at 8:08 p.m.

ACTION ON EXECUTIVE SESSION

- 1. Additional Certified Employment Contract Recommendations for SY 2023-2024** - Mr. Mike Hughes made a motion to approve the certified employment contract recommendations for the 2023-2024 school year. Mr. Anthony Carpenter seconded. The motion carried with no opposition.

ADJOURNMENT - Mrs. Cathy Little made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Anthony Carpenter seconded. The meeting adjourned at 8:09 p.m.

Candice Branim
Recorder

Cathy Little
Board Chairperson

cbranim May 24, 2023