

Anderson County Board of Education
402 Bleckley Street, Anderson, South Carolina 29625
November 18, 2013

Call to Order

Mr. David Draisen called the meeting to order and Reverend Mitchell gave the invocation after which everyone joined in the pledge of allegiance to the American Flag.

Board Members Present:

The following Board Members were present: Mr. David Draisen, Ms. Brenda Bradberry, Ms. Dana Grant, Dr. Gary Burgess, Mr. Dale Martin, Mr. Mike Brock, Rev. Dr. Rufus Mitchell and Joey Nimmer, Ex Officio.

Dr. Craig Drennon and Mr. Mike Upton were not in attendance.

Approval of Agenda

Ms. Brenda Bradberry made a motion to approve the agenda, with the inclusion of one item under Old Business as it relates to budget items for District Five. Reverend Mitchell seconded the motion and the Board members approved the agenda unanimously.

Approval of Minutes – October 21, 2013 Meeting

Mr. Dale Martin made a motion to approve the minutes of the October 21, 2013 meeting. A second for approval was made by Mr. Mike Brock and was followed by a unanimous vote from the Board.

Recognition of Media and Patrons / Public Comment Period

Many parents and students from District Five were in attendance and Chairman Draisen asked if anyone present wanted to address the Board. Mr. Brandon Grace, a parent of a sixth grader at Southwood Academy of the Arts thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak to them regarding Southwood and the decision that was recently made by District Five Board of Trustees, not to continue the plan to extend the school to include grades nine through twelve. Mr. Grace stated that after several years of planning, public hearings and budget readings District Five's Board of Trustees had made a decision, not included as an agenda item, to change the vision and direction of the original plan with no public input.

Mr. Grace stated that they are trying to have that decision turned around and have an informed public debate about the issue to see if there is something that can be done to have it changed to the original plan that addresses the special needs of children who perform much better in an arts infused education environment. Mr. Grace told the Board that he was asking for their help by providing whatever assistance possible. Mr. Grace continued that they understand Superintendents and Trustees change from time to time, and circumstances may change, but there should have been a public debate and not just a vote on the issue that wasn't placed on an agenda. Mr. Grace concluded any information that could be provided by the Board would be helpful in order to have a public hearing regarding the issue.

Mr. Grace again thanked the Board for the opportunity to speak with them.

Anderson County Alternative School Report

Mr. Mike Brock called the Board's attention to the report included in their packets for the Alternative School. Mr. Brock stated that the enrollments had not varied much from October's report, but was a bit higher. Mr. Nimmer stated that the enrollment had only increased by five students since the last meeting. Chairman Draisen questioned the total enrollment reported as 89 and Mr. Brock stated some of the students have gone back to their home schools. Mr. Nimmer confirmed that the total number of students enrolled at the Alternative School was 74 and that 15 students have transferred out for various reasons as reported on page two of the report. Ms. Bradberry stated that the total of 89 total students refers to the total number of students served at the Alternative School since the beginning of the current school year and Mr. Nimmer agreed this was correct.

Ms. Dana Grant asked how the current enrollment total compared to last year's total for the same time period. Mr. Nimmer answered that it was slightly higher this year, but that was due to issues with some of the enrollment and has been corrected this year. Mr. Nimmer stated the total number of students enrolled for the same period last year was approximately 60 students enrolled out of the approximately 72 or 73 that had been in attendance at the school at this point in time as last year.

Administrator's Report

Mr. Nimmer informed the Board that the South Carolina School Board Association annual meeting would be held February 20-23, 2014. He stated that every board member had a reservation at the Embassy Suites, and to please let him know as soon possible if they would not be attending so that any rooms not utilized could be cancelled and released back into the room block held for the conference.

Mr. Nimmer stated that all school visits had been completed for the year and everything went very well and they had been well received at the schools. The schools appreciate the services the County Board of Education is providing back to them which now include all five school districts with attendance, truancy and dropout prevention services and the implementation of four new school-based mental health counselors that have been put in place for this school year that now service all five districts.

Mr. Nimmer updated the Board on the South Carolina Association of School Business Officials Conference and stated he was unable to attend due to his wife's illness. Mr. Nimmer stated she was hospitalized briefly and was treated for severe anemia but was recovering and doing much better.

Mr. Nimmer reported that the on-site audit was completed Thursday, November 14, 2013, and the final audit should be completed by the end of the upcoming week. Mr. Nimmer stated that upon completion, the audit would be submitted to the State Department of Education by December 1, 2013. Mr. Nimmer stated that the initial reviews were very good and that the firm of Martin and Smith was very complimentary of the staff and how business has been conducted throughout the past year.

Mr. Nimmer stated that at the request of Vice Chairman Brenda Bradberry, he was providing board members with a millage report that contained the adjusted millage from 2012. Mr. Nimmer stated the 2012 millage was based on the reassessment and the new growth rate that was applied will match up with the levy sheet that was provided last month.

Chairman Draisen stated that he had visited and been given a tour of Southwood Academy of the Arts and was very impressed and that they were doing a great job.

Mr. Mike Brock asked Mr. Nimmer if the Board had recognized Dr. Keith Cole's passing in any way? Mr. Nimmer stated he had not been made aware of this but would prepare and send a memorial on the Board's behalf. Chairman Draisen stated the Dr. Cole had served on the Board for many years.

Financial

A. Tax Collections YTD vs. Budget

Mr. Nimmer stated that the tax collections were fairly consistent throughout the districts ranging from 7.99 % at the Alternative School up to 9.19% for District 3 who is slightly higher as they are the only school district that has collected any FILO money as discussed at last month's meeting. Mr. Nimmer stated that District 4 will lag behind until January 2014 as they have more local revenue than the other school districts. Ms. Bradberry questioned why District 3 doesn't include in their budget any delinquent taxes. Mr. Nimmer answered that it was included in their tax collections but budgeted differently than the other districts. At the time the audits are complete they will make the adjusting entries and we will be provided a copy. Ms. Bradberry questioned if this is the reason District 3 was ahead of the other districts. Mr. Nimmer answered no that it was because of the FILO revenue. Ms. Bradberry asked why District 3 was the only district to receive any FILO revenue at this time and Mr. Nimmer answered because it was because of specific fee agreements with specific industries.

Ms. Bradberry commented that the Alternative School was normally ahead of the other districts at this time of year. Mr. Nimmer answered because of the adjustments to revenue streams, primarily Act 388, the Alternative School has been impacted. Mr. Nimmer concluded they are only slightly behind some of the other districts a percentage amount and in terms of money it is fairly small.

B. Assessment Totals – October 31, 2013

Mr. Nimmer stated that county-wide the growth for the 2013 year has now been posted. He continued that there was a growth approximately in the amount of \$30,000 per mill for 2013 and is fairly modest growth in terms of percentage, but it is significantly better than it has been in the past three years and the trend is continuing in the right direction. Mr. Nimmer stated that some of that will be adjusted as appeals are made on the new classifications of property, but the report is how it stands as of the end of October 2013.

Old Business

Ms. Bradberry had some questions prepared for Superintendent Tom Wilson of District Five. Ms. Bradberry first asked Mr. Wilson to explain the reasoning behind District Five's Board of Trustees vote to do away with the high school expansion at Southwood Academy and if it was due to the budget as she had read in the newspaper. Superintendent Wilson asked if she was referring to the vote that had taken place at the September 30th Board of Trustees Meeting and Ms. Bradberry replied yes. Superintendent Wilson stated that he had had previous ongoing discussions with the Board about concerns of the ability to sustain a high school with such small numbers and to be able to offer the courses that the parents would want to be made available to their students.

Mr. Wilson stated that in order to have such a high school with a student population of approximately 500 to 600 students would be difficult because of the way the schedule is being constructed. Mr. Wilson continued that he assumed the parents wanted the same rigorous curriculum as the students at T.L. Hannah and Westside High School are being offered and that it would be impossible to build courses of the same caliber with two or three students per class and is one reason why smaller high schools suffered as they simply could not afford to provide the advanced courses.

Mr. Wilson stated that in light of the circumstances he recommended to the Board to expand and offer advanced arts classes at Southwood Academy to 9th through 12th grade students in the district and those same students receive their core curriculum courses at their home schools. Mr. Wilson stated that as those students attending Southwood Academy would then funnel to their perspective high schools and would continue taking the advanced art curriculum along with the other students in 9th through 12th grades by being bussed to Southwood as students were bussed currently to the Career Center. He stated that some of the students were providing their own transportation to the Career Center which was of great concern, so providing the transportation to students to the Academy and Career Center was the plan moving on.

Mr. Wilson stated that the new block scheduling that was being implemented would also allow students to be able to participate in classes offered at Tri County Technical College and other dual enrollment programs. Superintendent Wilson stated that he fully supports the Arts and Southwood Academy but that in consideration of all the circumstances and the inability to sustain adding grades nine through twelve and be fair and fiscally equitable to all District Five students, this was the decision that was made going forward.

Dr. Gary Burgess asked Superintendent Wilson to assist him to envision what Southwood Academy under the current proposed structure would provide for a high school student. Superintendent Wilson gave example of the proposed block schedule classes which will offer Carnegie Units to students at T.L. Hannah and Westside and offer advanced Arts classes to students at both high schools. Dr. Burgess asked Mr. Wilson how a student currently at Southwood Academy in grades six through eight would be able to take classes that would provide the advanced classes offering Carnegie Units. Superintendent Wilson stated that they are currently already being offered at the Academy now. Dr. Burgess asked the District Board Five trustees that were in attendance had a promise been breached that was made to these students and how would they deal with that breach of promise. Several of the members of District Five's Board of Trustees were in attendance and added their support for the decision and reasoning behind the decision not to expand the school to include grades nine through twelve. Dr. Burgess was also concerned about the fee charged to parents for information requested under the FOIA. He saw this act as antagonistic.

Ms. Brenda Bradberry interjected that she felt the Anderson County Board of Education had been led astray and lied to. Ms. Bradberry continued that the concept of the school becoming a stand-alone high school had been proposed back in 2006 and she had read all of the minutes of the meetings regarding the proposed grade expansion at the school. Ms. Bradberry stated she approved the budgets each year which included the funding for this proposed expansion and asked how could she in good faith approve these budgets and then learn from a parent that the expansion was not going to be made. Ms. Bradberry expressed her disapproval that she had no knowledge of the change in plans to expand the school as originally planned and budgets approved for the past several years. Ms. Bradberry questioned the removal of administration that had been hired to carry the school to include the higher grades and that an administrator from the District Five staff had put in place at the school. Ms. Bradberry also stated she was very displeased that the decision not to continue the school on its original path and was

never placed on the agenda. As reflected in the minutes an executive session for personnel recommendations was held and after the session was a vote to change the original proposed school vision to expand through grade twelve. Ms. Bradberry asked how the District Five Board could make such a decision without including public awareness after there had been several meetings that were held regarding the proposed school expansion and gain public approval.

Chairman Draisen stated that he had been present at the September 30th District Five Board meeting and no mention of this decision had been mentioned and then when he had been made aware of this by a parent he was floored. Chairman Draisen stated if this and had this item been on the agenda and discussed he would have spoken in disagreement. Chairman Draisen continued that the Anderson County Board of Education represents the tax payers of Anderson County, not just one specific school district and stated that he didn't feel District Five was doing justice to the taxpayers of Anderson County because a promise had been made and was not being fulfilled.

Superintendent Wilson stated that the agenda for the November 19, 2013, meeting of the District Five Board of Trustees included the approval for Southwood Academy of the Arts and discussed the verbiage that would be on the ballot to expand the school to make the additions to expand the school to host grades six through twelve. Chairman Draisen and Ms. Bradberry spoke about the discussions at previous County Board meetings where the previous superintendent Betty Bagley had stated that a high school diploma would be offered at Southwood Academy.

Dr. Burgess questioned the referendum, which he stated in actuality is a tax payers vote to tax themselves, and asked would they have voted on this issue if there was no intent of the school being expanded through grade twelve offering a high school diploma. Dr. Burgess also questioned why a public debate was not held and was dismayed that parents had not been involved in this decision. Dr. Burgess stated although the decision may be legal it does not make it ethical. Dr. Burgess stated that at the end of the last fiscal year that each school district had a tax overage and District Five's overage could cover the expansion. At this time, Mr. Tommy Price, Chairman of District Five's Finance Committee, stated that after expending most of the budget reserves, District Five barely broke even and reminded them that they also funded additional School Resource Officers. Ms. Bradberry asked the amount of District Five's fund balance as she estimated is was approximately \$18 million dollars. Mr. Nimmer stated that this was there to fund cash flow during the year. Ms. Bradberry stated that she understood this as she had been in education for over 45 years, but the main point was when promises were made to parents, and a decision to do away with it without it being on the agenda really grinds the wrong way. She stated that you always involve the community and you don't do it behind their backs illegally. Superintendent Wilson stated that there was a lawsuit pending on the case and it would be on the next meeting agenda as an agenda item and would address any legal issues, and would be voted on again. Ms. Bradberry stated that she was not aware of the lawsuit that had been filed.

After further discussion regarding budgets for District Five and the expenditures for which they are intended for all district schools and students in District Five, several parents and students spoke to the Board of their need for this type learning environment. One student spoke of the violence and illegal drugs which were present in the other high schools, and the absence of this at Southwood Academy. Another student spoke of the academic excellence that was attainable in the arts there at the school and the dedication of the students to achieve that excellence. Several parents also spoke in favor of the school and the comfort of the safer environment in which their children were experiencing at the Academy. One parent requested that going forward that the Board of Trustees to engage the parents in the decisions because it doesn't have to be one way or the other as they as parents and a community can contribute to the success of all the students in the district and to not underestimate their willingness to assist in making this happen. He also stated that some of the things discussed at the current meeting

that led to the Board's decision were things that he wish that he had heard before this meeting so that good open and honest discussions could have taken place and in going forward to please trust them to not be selfish and only consider what they wanted but to be involved as our community as a whole.

New Business

A. ADM Accounts Payable

B. SFS Accounts Payable

Ms. Brenda Bradberry moved to pay both bills and Reverend Mitchell seconded the motion. With a unanimous vote, the Board approved the expenditures as listed.

Adjourn

Mr. Draisen adjourned the meeting.

Respectfully submitted,

Dr. Gary Burgess, Secretary of the Anderson County Board of Education
This is a true and correct copy of notes taken at the meeting.