



MINUTES
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE BOARD OF EDUCATION
Washington County School District
121 West Tabernacle, St. George, Utah
January 22, 2024
5:15 p.m.

Present: Board President Becky Dunn, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Vice President David Stirland, Board Member LaRene Cox, Board Member Terry Hutchinson, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Nannette Simmons, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Executive Director Craig Hammer, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Communications Director Steven Dunham, and Technology Director Jeremy Cox.

Minutes: Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

Reverence offered by Board Member Stirland.

WORK SESSION

Employee Recognition – Superintendent Richard Holmes

The employee recognition was tabled.

United We Pledge – Superintendent Richard Holmes

Dennis Leavitt, President of United We Pledge, shared his passion for St. George and the culture that is here in the community. He said he was approached by teachers in Washington County asking for donations of the Give Me Liberty program in their school. He said they want to give more to the schools and help in areas that will make a difference. They have worked with the creators of Give Me Liberty to run the program. He shared a video explaining the program. The program embraces 12 education methodologies. Teachers and administrators have concerns about having good civics learning in the schools. Give Me Liberty is non-partisan and meets the State's core standards. They would like to invite every elementary school in Washington County to use the Give Me Liberty program in their 5th grade. They would give the schools the program books as well as \$7,000-\$8,000 in other program materials. They would also like to offer programs for 8th and 12th grade students. He explained the Awards Program that is part of Give Me Liberty. The Awards Program includes memorizing, reading, interviews, and service. The Awards Program also includes a mobile exhibit and class encounters with historical characters. He shared about Liberty Village which is 32 acres with historical building replicas that will be available for field trips and educational tours. The field trips and tours would be free for the Give Me Liberty schools. He shared some of the community events such as Liberty Week, Constitutional Month, and Bill of Rights Month. Give Me Liberty students would be those selected to participate in the community events. They also have family activities that will help families engage and a Kids Club for interested students. United We Pledge will do work to raise the funds for the school programs but would ask schools to also contribute a small amount for the program. Historical character Patrick Henry was invited to share a highlight from his speech. Dennis Leavitt said they would like to help students be great citizens. Superintendent Richard Holmes suggested that the District would need more information on the cost to the schools. Two Heritage Elementary teachers that currently use the program said there are 12 units that they do throughout the year. They have students work for 30 minutes each week in class and encourage students to also work at home to meet the requirements for the Awards Program recognition. Dennis Leavitt mentioned that 8th grade would be similar with work done at home and additional projects. Craig Seegmiller feels the District would

need to see how the program works in the schools to see if it is something we want to get in all schools. Dennis Leavitt said it would not be an all or nothing offer but would just like to offer it to schools that are interested. Heritage Elementary teachers said they do make accommodations for students with special needs. Board members expressed that learning these constitutional things are vital for students.

Cell Phones in Classrooms – Superintendent Richard Holmes

Superintendent Richard Holmes reported on the letter from Governor Cox on the use of cell phones in classrooms. Schools all handle cell phones differently, even in other districts. Most principals and teachers feel that we have control, but it would give reinforcement for schools that do want to eliminate cell phones in the classroom. Nannette Simmons mentioned being in a classroom where students put phones in a holder as they came into class without issues. Superintendent Richard Holmes said it does start with the school to get buy-in from parents. He encouraged the Board to contact him with any questions. Darin Thomas said many of the older teachers want cell phones to be put away, but the younger teachers want the students to use them. Superintendent Richard Holmes said we have had issues at certain times such as the start of the year. He reported on some of the schools in our District that have changed their policy on phones as well as what other schools in the state are doing. Most feel it is best not to mandate it but let the schools decide. The administration will get a list of what the schools are doing.

Proposed 2025-2026 Calendar – Cheri Stevenson and Nate Esplin

Nate Esplin shared information from the elementary principals on the last day of school and making accommodations for teachers to attend graduations of their children. Principals are willing to work with teachers so they can attend a graduation for their child. Cheri Stevenson reviewed the draft calendar options. Option 3 would require the graduations to all be on the same day. She mentioned that we have had one principal provide links for individuals to stream the graduation. Craig Seegmiller feels it is best to keep it two days to allow the Board and administration to attend multiple graduations. It was explained that having a prep day on the last day of school would be a day for the teachers to take care of the classroom, so the classroom is ready to be cleaned. Burke Staheli mentioned that even having a half day is helpful for elementary teachers. Nate Esplin said that the big thing is for principals to allow teachers to take the time needed with family when they have a student graduating. Teachers do like to have the prep days during the school year. Becky Dunn said she has thought about it and likes the idea of having a teacher prep day on the last day to allow time for families and to allow teachers to say good-bye to their students rather than missing the last day. The majority of the Board members are leaning toward calendar option #2 that has the prep day earlier in the year. Cheri Stevenson said we have a prep day on the last day this year also. The Board will also need to decide for this year.

Strategic Plan Update – Cheri Stevenson and Nate Esplin

Nate Esplin shared an update of the Strategic Plan showing the growth made. Most areas did trend up. Third grade literacy shows a slight decrease with the Acadience Assessment used. The ACT scores also dropped a little. Overall, we are doing well. Our kindergarten is one of the highest in the state and we hope to continue to see the trend continue up. Cheri Stevenson explained that we are way above on growth even though the proficiency showed we were down. Teachers are working on interventions to help students improve.

Boundary Updates – Nate Esplin

Nate Esplin said the next boundary hearing will be on February 13th. If the Hurricane boundary change passes, there is a letter ready for parents explaining what will happen with the Dual Immersion students. Families with a child in the Dual Immersion Program would also be able to have siblings participate in the program at Hurricane Elementary. Plans are continuing for the boundary change at Coral Cliffs Elementary. The majority would go to Paradise Canyon and the remainder to Red Mountain. Superintendent Richard Holmes mentioned the administration has been looking at plans to move the Snow Canyon/Enterprise Post High program to Coral Cliffs. They would need to build a bathroom for Post High and there may be times that the elementary and Post High students would cross paths. It would also cost more to have the Special Education staff split. Hollee Cullen said the Occupational Therapists are housed at Post High and they have shared concern trying to go back and forth between two locations. The classroom sizes are a little larger at

Coral Cliffs and the lunchroom would be larger. She said overall the staff sees more opportunities at Coral Cliffs. Some of the job opportunities are more downtown local and we would need to find job opportunities in that area. Burke Staheli asked about the additional cost of travel in taking Post High students to Coral Cliffs. Hollee Cullen said the majority of students are bused. Brent Bills said we would get reimbursed from the state for the transportation costs. Hollee Cullen said the staff feels as they are running out of room at the current location and like the idea of moving to Coral Cliffs. Superintendent Richard Holmes said if the proposal goes through to move Post High, the JROTC would move into the Post High building. Some of the building could also be used for Technology offices. It is a hard decision with the Coral Cliffs students being successful in their little school. Nannette Simmons feels that parents do not know what other options have been looked at to keep the school open. She would like to communicate to parents what other options have been looked at. Craig Seegmiller suggested it could be part of the recommendation presentation. LaRene Cox suggested to also share pros and cons. Terry Hutchinson feels the Board has to look at the cost per student to be fair to all of the other students in the District. Coral Cliffs has grown into something that was not intended. Nannette Simmons feels that parents need to know it is about all students and what has been looked at. David Stirland said every elementary will give students the opportunity to succeed. The schools the students would go to are great schools and will be welcoming to those students. Nannette Simmons asked about out-of-boundary students being able to go to Red Mountain or Paradise Canyon if they do not want to go back to their boundary school. The schools are open enrollment schools. Craig Seegmiller mentioned the Boys and Girls Club that has worked hard to build the program. It will be available for students at the other schools. Burke Staheli asked about a teacher placement plan for teachers and leaders at Coral Cliffs. Nate Esplin said the District will be meeting with the staff this week to assure them of the process. Nannette Simmons suggested that it would be good for parents to know that teachers will be looked after also. Burke Staheli said the parents and staff need to know that the decision was not made all along. The Board has listened and has thought about this decision. Becky Dunn said it is hard but feels that the principals and staff will rally around the students if the decision goes through. She would like the Board to think about everything and be prepared to decide in the next couple of weeks.

Legislative Update – Brent Bills

Becky Dunn mentioned that Legislative Session is now going. She appreciates that the JLC has been working on bills for weeks. Terry Hutchinson mentioned the gender bathroom bill (HB 257) that was just rolled through the house. The legislature is voting on some of the bills right out of the gate. Brent Bills said there are a lot of horrible bills and legislators are arm in arm looking to pass them. He said there will be an amendment to the bathroom bill. Brent Bills mentioned the referendum on Truth-in-Taxation. The JLC has been working on the bills fairly heavily. He said the biggest issue is funding. He said public education was asked to go back and find programs to cut if they want programs added on. He has talked with legislators who realize the 14% was created in July before they had the numbers. The JLC will be watching the legislature closely to see what decisions are made for education. The legislation is listening a little more. It sounds like 5% will be the amount given. It depends if there are a lot of unfunded mandates. Updates will be shared with the Board as the bills come down. Superintendent Richard Holmes said he felt communication was an issue. Terry Hutchinson is concerned that JLC does not see the vision. The Board discussed HB 257 that included private restrooms, showers, and changing areas. Brent Bills mentioned some of the other items in the bill to include bullying.

Becky Dunn said it was discussed moving the caucus meetings to March 5th. She said the scheduled board meeting will be kept short so caucus meetings can be attended.

Parent Teacher Conferences – Superintendent Richard Holmes

Superintendent Richard Holmes said he received a nice letter from a parent in support of parent teacher conferences who feels we should do more. Previously he heard from parents that feel we have too many conferences with students getting out of school early. Nate Esplin said principals feels it should be kept to two, but they would prefer to move the second one to February. Burke Staheli said he told the parent that they could contact the teachers anytime with questions.

Water Conservancy Board Position – Superintendent Richard Holmes

Terry Hutchinson briefly reviewed the statute. The Board reviewed some who are serving on the Water Conservancy Board. Terry Hutchinson suggested it is time for the District to put in a request with the County Commission about serving on the Water Conservancy Board as we are the biggest water user in the county. As the Board is elected, he suggested that one of the Board members ought to be on the Water Conservancy Board. He also pointed out that the District now has a water company. LaRene Cox said they have used Mayor's in the past for the Water Conservancy Board. It was suggested to talk with the county commissioners as the Board is appointed by them. Brent bills said they want elected officials on the Board and the School Board is elected. The Board should approach them and let them know that they would like representation. Burke Staheli feels that we need to make our intentions known. Terry Hutchinson said there are three positions open as terms are ending for Hurricane, Ivins, and Enterprise. David Stirland, LaRene Cox, and Superintendent Richard Holmes will visit with the commissioners. Becky Dunn said the statute also allows for them to add another position.

LaRene Cox asked if the Board is interested in taking a stand on the Constitutional Amendment. She feels the JLC is not representing the Board and is concerned that the JLC is going to make a deal. Brent Bills said the legislature is not even talking about it at this point. He feels they are waiting to pass some other bills first. He feels the conversations will not be brought up until next week. He suggested the Board not make a statement until the session is done and feels that is what JLC is doing. He has communicated with the JLC members on how school districts feel about fighting the Constitutional Amendment. David Stirland expressed concerns with the legislature blindsiding education. Brent Bills said there is a ballot initiative out there. LaRene Cox asked if it would be helpful to make a statement. Brent Bills said he has talked with the legislators. They are not offering anything more at this point. Superintendent Richard Holmes said the legislators seem to feel it will pass. Terry Hutchinson said they will be putting the welfare groups against us. Brent Bills said it is an election year, so we will see another tax cut. LaRene Cox would like the Board to think about it so a discussion can be held later. The Board briefly discussed the security bill in legislation.

Board Member Simmons presented a motion to go into a closed session at 7:25 p.m. Board Member Seegmiller seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

CLOSED SESSION

Present: Board President Becky Dunn, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Vice President David Stirland, Board Member LaRene Cox, Board Member Terry Hutchinson, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Nannette Simmons, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, Assistant Superintendent Nate Esplin, Assistant Superintendent Cheri Stevenson, Executive HR Director Darin Thomas, Executive Director Steve Gregoire, Executive Director Craig Hammer, Executive Director Wade Jensen, Communications Director Steven Dunham, Technology Director Jeremy Cox, and Executive Secretary Kajsia Boyer

Personnel, Safety, Property, and Legal Items

Present: Board President Becky Dunn, Board Member Craig Seegmiller, Board Vice President David Stirland, Board Member LaRene Cox, Board Member Terry Hutchinson, Board Member Burke Staheli, Board Member Nannette Simmons, Superintendent Richard Holmes, Business Administrator Brent Bills, and Executive HR Director Darin Thomas

Legal and Personnel Items

Board Member Stirland presented a motion to go out of the closed session at 9:42 p.m. Board Member Seegmiller seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

PUBLIC COMMENT ON BOARD ACTION ITEMS

No public comments were given.

ACTION ITEMS

Principal Selections

Board Member Simmons presented a motion to approve the selection of Kyle Campbell as the Snow Canyon High Principal. Board Member Cox seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

LEA Specific License Items

Board Member Hutchinson presented a motion to approve the LEA Specific License Items. Board Member Staheli seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

Board Member Cox presented a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:44 p.m. Board Member Hutchinson seconded the motion that passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT