

Board of Education Work Session

April 12-13, 2013

Friday, April 12

The meeting was called to order at 9 a.m.

The Agenda was approved.

Following the Pledge of Allegiance and Invocation, Dr. Jeffrey Moss, the new Superintendent, addressed the board.

Presentation by Office of Civil Rights

Mr. Howard Kallem from the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights presented an overview on the role of OCR in the school district, which signed a voluntary desegregation agreement with OCR 43 years ago. Mr. Kallem provided an update on the status of the Bluffton Community Committee Recommendation and reviewed the OCR approval process and potential sanctions for not following the desegregation agreement. Board members queried Mr. Kallem on several issues, including the possibility of applying for unitary status, which would mean an end to the voluntary desegregation agreement with OCR.

The Board entertained comments from a Bluffton parent who stated that OCR-mandated student reassignments, despite OCR's good intentions, can have unintended negative consequences for children's educations and that small changes in ethnic enrollments are less important than whether all children at a given school, regardless of race, are getting good educations. Mr. Kallem said that OCR tries to determine the reasons why racial balances in schools have changed and whether any imbalances were unavoidable and beyond the school district's control. He also cited research showing that schools with large percentages of minority and high-poverty children face greater education challenges.

Bluffton Community Committee recommendations

Board members revisited the issues of reassigning students from the Rose Hill neighborhood from Okatie Elementary to Bluffton Elementary. In March, the Board reaffirmed its 2011 decision to assign students from three neighborhoods – Rose Hill, Old Carolina and Buck Island Road – to Bluffton Elementary School beginning with the 2013-14 school year.

The Board also revisited its postponement of a decision on changing middle and high school grade configurations in Bluffton-area schools in order to address overcrowding issues. As a temporary solution to alleviate overcrowding at Bluffton High, the Board had previously assigned ninth-graders to the community's two middle schools, with Bluffton Middle serving grades 6-7 and H.E. McCracken Middle serving grades 8-9. But in 2011, the Board voted to return the two middle schools to the traditional 6-8 format starting in the 2013-14 school year while simultaneously moving ninth-graders to Bluffton High.

The Board tasked a 27-member committee of educators and parents to reanalyze enrollment issues in Bluffton using up-to-date projections and to make recommendations for short-term and long-term planning. After eight meetings in January and February, the committee sent recommendations to the Board last week that reaffirmed the Board's 2011 decision.

Board members who voted for the postponement thanked Bluffton Community Committee members for their recommendations but stressed the importance of making a decision that would complement long-term plans to handle enrollment growth in Bluffton.

Two issues – table recommendations from the Bluffton Community Committee so that Dr. Moss can review and have input on the decision. Second reaffirm 2011 decision to move Rose Hill, Old Carolina and Buck Island. Mr. Evans recommended that the Rose Hill issue be brought to the Board of Education on Tuesday evening as new business and discuss the Bluffton issue of all three communities at the first meeting in May. Dr. Moss commented that a timely decision was imperative as the ordering of any modular units has to be made very soon. His suggestion would be put the modular units at the high school to alleviate crowding at Bluffton High School. Board members commented that parent and teacher input supported the current configuration of 6-7 and 8-9 grades in the two Bluffton middle schools.

Mr. Evans commented that the Bluffton issue is on Tuesday's Board of Education Agenda as an action item. The Board moved on to discuss the process to develop a new five year plan.

Five-Year Strategic Plan

Dr. Rosswurm and staff presented an update of the Strategic Plan. Dr. Rhoads began the presentation with Goal 1 – Academic Achievement. He reviewed the progress the district has made over the past five years with emphasis on the 2012 numbers. Following Dr. Rhoads' presentation, the Board moved on to establish the process of developing the new five year plan.

Dr. Gerrita Postlewait, a former superintendent and policy/planning professional, was introduced to the Board to facilitate the process of developing the new five-year plan. Dr. Moss also addressed the Board on the task ahead. The Board put forth ideas in a brainstorming session to lay groundwork for the new strategic plan. Preliminary questions posed to the Board included:

- What are your highest aspirations for Beaufort County Students?
- What do you want to accomplish during your term on the Board?
- What are your greatest fears or concerns or frustrations?
- What are your suggestions about the best way forward?

From the responses to the previous questions, Dr. Postlewait defined themes of focus for study teams:

- Choices and equity

- Graduating digital learners and successful entrepreneurs
- Growing every child, every day
- Facilities and Finances (10-year plan)
- Deeply engaging internal and external constituents

The Board adjourned at 4:15 p.m.

Saturday, April 13

The meeting was called to order at 9:04 a.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

Invocation by Jim Beckert

Dr. Moss stressed the importance of the upcoming day's work, particularly with regard to reaching consensus on Board policies and operations. Dr. Moss initiated a discussion about the seating of the superintendent during Board meetings (past practice has been for the superintendent to sit at a separate table from Board members). Board members expressed a desire to continue the discussion after Dr. Moss officially takes over as superintendent on July 1.

Attorney Shirley Fawley, representing the law firm of Childs and Halligan, gave an overview of the historic role of local school boards in the United States and in South Carolina, as well as their responsibilities under the law.

Dr. Postlewait led a discussion among Board members on the concept of strategic governance as it applies to school boards. Board members talked about how best to handle diverse viewpoints among Board members, and among Board members' various constituencies, in ways that don't damage the Board's ability to function in productive ways and serve the best interests of children.

Dr. Postlewait led a discussion designed to guide Board members in reaching consensus about governance principles, Board commitments and responsibilities.

Board members engaged in an extended discussion about the possibility of converting one of its two monthly meetings into a work session format, which would allow Board members to have more detailed conversations about issues that come before it. Chairman Evans asked district staff to investigate the logistics of converting to such a system and report back to the Board.

Board members continued their discussion about how to deal with overcrowding in Bluffton-area schools.

The Board adjourned at 3:44 p.m.