

Beaufort County Board of Education work session

July 20, 2012

Executive session

Chairman Washington called the meeting to order at 8:30 a.m., and the Board went into executive session to discuss personnel matters.

Following executive session, Vice-Chairman Wilson called the meeting back to order at 9:50 a.m.

Mr. Campbell moved (Mr. Rivers seconded) to amend the day's agenda to add a discussion about recently passed legislation concerning home school and charter school students participating in extracurricular activities at district schools. Unanimously approved.

Pledge of Allegiance, invocation, statement of media notification.

Home school/charter school participation in extracurricular activities

Student Services Officer Gregory McCord answered Board members' questions about legislation recently passed by the General Assembly that allow home-schooled students and students at charter schools to participate in extracurricular athletics at district schools.

Achievement gaps among student populations

Dr. Truesdale presented data on the achievement gaps between the district's minority and nonminority students. Parenthetically, she noted that the district recently was selected as the only South Carolina school district to participate in Grad Nation, a nationwide initiative of America's Promise aimed at graduating 90 percent of students graduating "on time" in four years by the year 2020.

Dr. Truesdale particularly focused on the low graduation rates for Hispanic students, who too often leave school to take full-time jobs.

Mr. Evans, Ms. Bush and several other Board members expressed an interest in emphasizing greater person-to-person contact between students and school staff, particularly guidance counselors.

Mr. Rivers pointed out that district schools have only a limited number of years to affect children's lives, which should inject a sense of urgency into the Board's efforts to make education more engaging and effective for students. Dr. Truesdale said that district principal had engaged in discussions on that topic at last week's daylong training workshop.

Mr. Washington said that the graduation rate problem is systemic and won't be solved solely with a focus on high schools. Solving the problem, he said, will also involve an emphasis on improving the quality and effectiveness of early childhood programs that lay a foundation for student success early in their academic careers. He distributed a description of Pre-K programs operated by Neighborhood Outreach Centers in Hilton Head and Bluffton. We know what the problems are, he said. Now is the time to solve those problems.

Mr. Washington explored the possibility of identifying community organizations that might designate people to work in district high schools and focus on students at risk of dropping out.

Mr. Rivers expressed a concern that a tourism-related economy based on low-wage employees might not feel a sense of urgency in addressing the problem of low graduation rates and preparing students for high-wage jobs. He added that community members would be impressed by principals being more visible and approachable in high-poverty neighborhoods and being better able to connect with students in those neighborhoods.

Ms. Bush and Mr. Speaks advocated closer monitoring of students during their high school years to make certain that they are taking the proper coursework needed for graduation. Ms. Bush also expressed her belief that the minimum 2.0 GPA requirement for interscholastic athletic participation would have a positive effect on high school graduation rates.

Mr. Speaks stressed the importance of involving parents, community members and school staff in addressing on-time graduation rates. Mr. Wilson explored the possibility of approaching local clergy about greater personal involvement in student mentoring programs.

District energy policy

Director of Facilities Robert Oetting briefed the Board on details of the technology being used by the district to reduce energy usage in school buildings. Mr. Oetting also answered questions from Mr. Washington and other Board members about the prospects of incorporating various scientific and economic aspects of the district's efforts toward greater efficiency into classroom lessons.

Mr. Wilson moved (Mr. Evans seconded) that the Board approve \$10.1 million in routine maintenance for district schools, including roof repairs, repainting, upgrades to make buildings more energy efficient and replacement of aging furniture. Unanimously approved.

Expanding community involvement in schools

Board members had a wide-ranging discussion about ways to get community members, civic organizations and churches more closely involved in schools. Mr. Washington, Mr. Evans and

other Board members advocated the practice of educators reaching out more energetically and more often to their local communities.

The Board adjourned at 3:25 p.m.