

Board gets update on state budget cuts; extends Wright's contract



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Lake City News & Post Reporter
Published: September 24, 2008

Florence School District 3 board of trustees' members received an update on state budget cuts during their regular meeting on Sept. 18.

According to information received from FCSD3 Communications Coordinator, Brian Huckabee, under the Educational Finance Act (EFA), the projected based student cost was \$2,578. The actual student cost is \$2,498.82. According to South Carolina State Department of Education Communications Director Jim Foster, EFA is the foundational program for funding schools in South Carolina. It was passed in the 1970's and is a system that allows the state to fund schools based on how affluent or poor they are, and it is tax based.

In the Educational Improvement Act (EIA), district officials were anticipating a budget reduction of \$57,693 and by September 2008 the actual amount of the cut was \$54,045 the information from Huckabee stated. The EIA was passed in 1984, under former South Carolina Governor Dick Riley's leadership and the sales tax was raised from four cents to five cents, taking revenues from the pennies and applying it to educational programs, according to Foster.

Foster said for the 2007-08 school year, state funding for K-12 public schools came from three places: \$690 million from the EIA, \$48 million from the South Carolina Education Lottery and \$2.315 billion from the General Fund, of which \$1.5 billion was EFA dollars.

In the Superintendent's report, Florence County School District 3 Superintendent Beth Wright gave an update on student enrollment. She said the student population is 3,451 and there are 957 students at Lake City High School. "This is not putting us over capacity in our classrooms," she said. Wright said, particularly in kindergarten through third, she and principals are looking at ways to bring class size down and will keep board members updated on their findings.

In other issues, Senior Director of Curriculum and Instruction Barbara Woodbury gave a presentation on a new electronic grade book, TeacherEase, which teachers can access from home and has an email component for parents. Woodbury said the progress reports are now detailed, specific and exact. Because of the new test, Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (PASS), which replaces the Palmetto Achievement Challenge Test (PACT), the grading system had to be changed to coincide with the new test.

According to Woodbury's powerpoint presentation, the new ratings are E for Exemplary, M for Met and NM for Not Met. Exemplary consist of 93-100, Met is 77-92 and Not Met is 76 and below, the powerpoint states.

Woodbury said there will be numerical grades with the rating beside the content area. For example, she said, beside Math, there may be an M for Met but there will also be the numerical grade of 83.

Board members Bernard McIntosh and Paula Morris questioned whether parents would understand the new grade system, and suggested having a community meeting.

Woodbury said a letter from her office has been prepared and sent to all elementary schools, so students can take the information home to their parents as well as a report card brochure. Woodbury said copies are available at the district's Technology Center, on the FCSD3 website and individual school's websites. She also showed an example of how the new report card will look.

TeacherEase was piloted at Olanta Elementary School recently and Principal Becky Hobbs said they sent letters out to parents to inform them and received very few phone calls afterward. Hobbs said parents liked the fact TeacherEase, is linked to the standards and they know exactly where they can help their child at home.

In new business, school principals gave results on this past year PACT scores.

J. Paul Truluck Middle School Principal Katherine Tisdale said they are working to close the achievement gap between white and black students. Ronald E. McNair Middle School Principal David Laws Jr said he and his staff are increasing the rigor so students can score better. Olanta Elementary School Principal Becky Hobbs said she is proud of the gains her school has made and hopes to continue.

During special recognitions, Kentrell Palmer, a senior at Lake City High School, was recognized for being elected Secretary of Palmetto Boys State, the third highest office held at the University of South Carolina during the week of June 8.

Following executive session with district attorneys to discuss Wright's contact.

According to information received from Huckabee, Bernard McIntosh made a motion not to extend the superintendent's contract. Paula Morris seconded the motion. The following Trustees voted in favor of the motion: Gracie Hanna, Bernard McIntosh, and Paula Morris. Trustees voting in opposition to the motion were Richard Cook, Patsy McCutcheon, Kimberly Sims, and Dianne Smith. David Eaddy abstained from voting. (Debbie Matthews did not attend the meeting). The motion failed 3-4 with one abstention.

Smith made a motion to extend the superintendent's contract through the year 2013, providing a 5-year contract. McCutcheon seconded the motion. The following Trustees voted in favor of the motion: Cook, McCutcheon and Smith. Trustees voting in opposition to the motion were Eaddy, Hanna, McIntosh, Morris and Sims. (Matthews did not attend the meeting). The motion failed 3-5, according to Huckabee.

Information provided by Huckabee states Sims made a motion to extend Wright's contract for one year through the year 2011, providing a 3-year contract. Eaddy seconded the motion.

The following Trustees voted in favor of the motion: Cook, Eaddy, Sims and Smith. Trustees voting in opposition to the motion were Hanna, McIntosh and Morris. McCutcheon abstained from voting. (Matthews did not attend the meeting). The motion passed 4-3 with one abstention.

According to a public statement from Huckabee, board members concluded its annual evaluation of the performance of Wright. The evaluation consisted of a review by Board members of Wright's performance in the areas of Educational Leader/Facilitator, Chief Executive Officer of the Board of Trustees, Staff Personnel Management, Facilities Management, Financial Management, Community Relations Activities and Pupil Personnel Services, the public statement said.

The overall evaluation results indicate that a majority of the Board members believes Wright has met or exceeded the Board's expectations in the performance of her duties and responsibilities. As a result of this positive evaluation, the Board extended Wright's contract of employment through June 30, 2011, according to the public statement.

The Board appreciates Wright's efforts in putting programs in place that are designed to improve the educational success of our students, and looks forward to continuing to work with her as Superintendent, the public statement said.

The next board of trustees meeting will be Oct. 16 at 7 p.m. in the District Office on Blanding Street.