

The Ouachita Parish School Board met in regular session on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 at twelve (12:00) o'clock noon at its regular meeting place, the Ouachita Parish School Board office.

President Hicks called the meeting to order and welcomed visitors and guests to the meeting.

The roll was called and the following members were present: Tommy Comeaux, Shere May, Scotty Waggoner, Jerry R. Hicks, Dabo Graves and Greg Manley. Harold McCoy was absent.

The Pledge of Allegiance to the American Flag was led by Board member Scotty Waggoner.

The Invocation was given by Board member Greg Manley.

On motion by Shere May, seconded by Greg Manley, the Board unanimously approved the Minutes of January 12, 2021 and January 29, 2021 as presented. Mr. McCoy was absent.

On motion by Tommy Comeaux, seconded by Scotty Waggoner, the Board approved the Agenda as presented. Motion carried unanimously with all members present. Mr. McCoy was absent.

Dr. Coker did not submit a Personnel Report to be considered.

In honor of School Board Appreciation Week, our Communication Specialist, Aline Smead addressed the Board publicly thanking them for their dedication to students, faculty, staff and community of Ouachita Parish Schools. She directed her attention to the members and stated that she hoped they felt the love today with their special lunch and all of their well wishes from students, faculty members, and their Central Office family. It is a privilege that our parish is served by these fine, outstanding representatives of our school district.

Mrs. Smead acknowledged Daylan Davis as West Monroe High School's outstanding "Student of the Year". Daylan, a senior, is expected to achieve her goals in the future, was also accepted into Harvard University class of 2021. Her community is so excited to celebrate that honor with her.

Mrs. Smead excitedly announced our two faculty member finalists of the "Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching. Dr. Coker presented each of the following award winners a plaque for their accomplishments: Anna Redding from George Welch Elementary and Robbie Evans from Sterlington Middle School. These are the highest honors bestowed by the United States government specifically for K-12 STEM teachers. The Ouachita Parish School Board is proud to extend its appreciation to these two distinguished educators for their excellent performance representing our district and the State of Louisiana. These two recipients will be recognized at the Governor's mansion in the near future. Meanwhile, they are competing at the national level as well. We are hopeful they will become national winners.

Giving tribute to our School Board members in honor of "School Board Member Recognition Month", Dr. Coker read aloud, a resolution from State of Louisiana, House of Representatives of The Louisiana Legislature, Representatives Pat Moore, Fredrick Jones & Senator Katrina Jackson offering a motion as follows: *"Hereby extend its heartiest congratulations and commendation to the Ouachita*

*Parish School Board members for their dedicated service to the community they represent.”* After framing, the document will be mounted on the wall in the conference meeting room of the Board located outside the boardroom. The Ouachita Parish School Board appreciates the efforts of these three local Louisiana Legislature Representatives in recognizing our Board members with this resolution of excellence commanding their performance in leadership.

Upon the recommendation of Mr. Grant Schlueter with the law firm Foley & Judell, L.L.P., bond counsel, Greg Manley moved, seconded by Dabo Graves, that the Board consider and take action with respect to adopting a resolution giving preliminary approval to the issuance of not exceeding Six Million Two Hundred Thousand Dollars (\$6,200,000) of General Obligation School Refunding Bonds, in one or more series, of East Ouachita Parish School District of the Parish of Ouachita, State of Louisiana; making application to the State Bond Commission for approval of said Bonds; and providing for other matters in connection therewith. The Board’s Municipal Advisor Nnamdi Thompson with Government Consultants was on hand to answer questions. Mr. Schlueter reminded the Board that this is a potential refinancing on the Eastside of the series 2012 General Obligation School Refunding Bonds. This action will permit the Board to start the process to file with the State Bond Commission to get their approval. Assuming the interest rates remain favorable, we can complete the transaction. If it does not, we will have the Bond Commission approval then we can proceed to complete as soon as it is feasible. All of the savings from this refinancing would accrue to the property tax payers of the East District. There will be no extension of the debt; so, it will be simply reducing annual payments each year, which directly benefits the property tax payers and reduce the tax level. President Hicks offered public comment and motion carried unanimously with all members present. Mr. McCoy was absent.

A former West Monroe High School student graduate and organizer of an on-line petition to ban the name “Rebel” that is used by WMHS as their mascot, Ms. Dalia El-Giar, and her team of former graduates of West Monroe High School, addressed the Board with their reasons for wanting to ban the controversial WMHS Rebel mascot asking their (*the Board’s*) permission to allow the selection of a more neutral one. The principal of West Monroe High School, Mr. Shelby Ainsworth, with his instructor of the (JROTC) program, Sgt. Campbell, were also allowed to speak to Ms. El-Giar’s complaints defending their reasons for retaining the “Rebel” name for West Monroe High School’s mascot. After each side was allotted their appointed time to speak on the issue of changing the WMHS mascot’s name from “Rebel” to a more neutral one, Shere May moved, seconded by Scotty Waggoner, that the Board allow the high school to continue to use the “Rebel” name since there have been many alternative changes implemented through the years at the school, some of which include newly designed drill team and band uniforms, banning all forms of the confederate flag (emblem & logo) on school campus, as well as prohibiting the song “Dixie” at all school functions. Whereby, Mrs. May further moved to recommend that everything pertaining to the mascot be left as is and there be no additional changes made. The vote was unanimous following an offer for public comment by President Hicks. Mr. McCoy was absent.

On motion by Greg Manley, seconded by Dabo Graves, the Board approved the recommendation of Title I Supervisor Cynthia Osborne as she presented the following three policies to the Board for approval that have been reviewed and approved in advance by district personnel, Board attorney Elmer Noah and the Board’s policy provider, Forethought Consultants, Inc.: **1) Policy: BCAD**

(Teleconference/Remote Participation in School Board Meetings); **2) Policy: GBRIB** (Sick Leave); and **3) JGE** (Student Health Services); and further moving that the Board review the following eleven policies for consideration at the next Board meeting to be sent by email: **1) Policy: DFAA** (Industrial Tax Exemptions); **2) Policy: EFE** (Business Continuity and Technology Disaster Recovery) **3) Policy: FDC** (Naming of Facilities) and Dedications/Memorializing a Facility within a Facility); **4) Policy: GAAA** (Equal Opportunity Employment); **5) Policy: GAE** (Non-Title IX Complaints and Grievances); **6) Policy: GAMC** (Investigations) **7) Policy: JAAA** (Title IX Sexual Harassment) **8) Policy: JCEA** (Sexually Related Student Misconduct) **9) Policy: JD** (Discipline); **10) Policy: JDD** (Suspension); and **11) Policy: JDE** (Expulsion), all eleven policies to be emailed to the Board before the next Board meeting. Following an offer by President Hicks for public comment, motion unanimously carried. Mr. McCoy was absent.

At this time, Dr. Coker announced that Mrs. Cynthia Osborne will be retiring this Friday with 35+ years of service. After thanking her for her services, he wished her a very happy retirement.

Tommy Comeaux advised that two separate properties have become available near West Monroe High School the Board has been interested in purchasing. The first property is located on 108 Riggs Street and is offered for sale at \$50,000, with the other property located on 412 Cryer Street is offered for sale at \$20,000 and occupies a vacant corner lot owned by South Central Church of Christ. Once these two properties are appraised and found acceptable, Mr. Comeaux recommends that our Board Attorney, Elmer Noah, proceed to purchase these two properties. Whereby, Mr. Comeaux offered a motion, seconded by Shere May, that the Board authorize Attorney Elmer Noah to proceed with the purchase of the properties located on 108 Riggs Street for \$50,000 and 412 Cryer Street for \$20,000, pending their appraisals are found acceptable. Following an offer for public comment from President Hicks, motion unanimously carried. Mr. McCoy was absent.

Business Director Regina Mekus presented the monthly 2020-2021 Interim Financial Report for the Period ended December 31, 2020. She reviewed the end of the period financial statement with the Board stating that the fund balance in the General Fund was \$25,200,761 with the fund balance in the District No. 1 M&O at the end of the period was \$20,332,821. Both of these are approximately 100% of the value at this same time last year. Ms. Mekus briefly touched on the fund balances for the Special Revenues, Internal Service, Debt Service, and Capital Projects that are all individually included. The Board was asked to look on the back page of the report where she pointed out the recap fund balance of the three-year history for the General Fund and the District No. 1 M&O to show where we are for the current year. She remarked that we are at 125% of our estimated budget for the General Fund balance and 141% of our estimated balance for the M&O Sales Tax. Part of the reason M&O Sales Tax is at 141% is due to the holdup of the expenditures given in the pandemic and the effects it had receiving items timely for projects. However, we are being very conservative with those funds, especially with the uncertainty of the economy and the sales taxes. Sales Tax collections are continuing to rise for the current month. The sales tax collections for December 2020 went from 5.2% to 5.9% increase in taxes. Even though they are still rising, we are still being very conservative going forward with expenditures and projects. The MFP Budget Letter we received for the month of January was disappointing in that we had a significant decrease in students across the board which affected our MFP funding about \$3,000,000. We are starting to have meetings on staffing that affects our budget on our student count.

These are the things we are looking at closely over the next few months coming into the next year. This in part was anticipated and Ms. Mekus believes student enrollment will continue to decline. She reported a decline of 87 students from October to the February count and will continue to be more vigilant in preparing for unexpected drops in both student counts and revenues and is actively putting measures in place to control spending to address these concerns going forward. She remarked that the business department is trying to be more pro-active in anticipation of a possible drop in revenue. We will have to be ready to make necessary changes to sustain us and go forward with the students we currently have. Hopefully, those students that opted to stay home will start to feel safer with the pandemic issues, then maybe we will gain those students back into our system and have our staffing back to where it was a year ago. Ms. Mekus concluded her report with an announcement that there will be a Financial Committee meeting held next week where plans for the district's drop in student enrollment will be discussed along with more details of MFP declining revenues. Following Ms. Mekus' report, Scotty Waggoner moved, seconded by Shere May, that the Board approve the 2020-2021 Interim Financial Report for the Period ended December 31, 2020 as presented. President Hicks offered public comments and motion carried unanimously by all members present. Mr. McCoy was absent.

On the recommendation of Supervisor of Safety/Construction Kenneth Slusher, Tommy Comeaux moved, seconded by Greg Manley, that the Board approve the Change Order Proposal dated 1/29/2021 for Boley Elementary School site in the amount of \$14,870.06 as presented. Following an offer for public comments by President Hicks, motion carried unanimously. Mr. McCoy was absent.

The Supervisor of Safety/Construction, Kenneth Slusher, presented the Board with a status report on Boley Elementary School while announcing their next construction meeting will be held at 2:00 p.m. today. He followed up with a field report from TAG (The Architecture Alliance Group, LLC) on the Woodlawn Music Building project, stating that they have made a lot of progress in the last month and announced that their next construction meeting will be held next Tuesday at 9:00 a.m. in the cafeteria. Mr. Slusher concluded his report with an announcement that bids will be going out for the new football stadium and covered awnings projects at East Ouachita Middle next Thursday starting on February 18 with bids to be opened on March 18 at 2:00 p.m. Bids are set to open at the end of March to begin the construction of the new Sterlington Middle School project.

On the recommendation of Purchasing Agent Bobby Jones, Greg Manley moved, seconded by Dabo Graves, that the Board accept the following low bids meeting specifications from: **1. Economical Janitorial for Toilet Paper Jumbo Rolls Item B (*Specified*) @ \$0.001679/lineal foot [Bid No. 12-21]; 2. Economical Janitorial for Toilet Paper Regular Rolls @ \$0.2673/roll [Bid No. 13-21]; and 3. Reject [Bid No. 19-21] for Library Books** since no responsive bids were received. President Hicks offered public comments for a brief moment and motion carried unanimously. Mr. McCoy was absent.

On the recommendation of Purchasing Agent Bobby Jones, Tommy Comeaux moved, seconded by Shere May, that the Board grant permission to bid the following items: **1) [Bid No. 23-21] Construct a Football Stadium budgeted for \$1.7 million and extend the covered area on each side of the cafeteria budgeted for \$500,000 for East Ouachita Middle and paid with Eastside Bonds; 2) [Bid No. 24-21] Doc Cameras, Monitors, Power Towers for Title I, paid from various funds; 3) [Bid No. RFP25-21]**

Administrative Software, paid from General Fund; **4)** [RFP26-21] Education Kits for Title I, paid from various funds; **5)** [Bid No. 27-21] Classroom Books for Title I, paid from various funds; **6)** [Bid No. 28-21] Copy Paper, paid from All Funds (Various); **7)** [Bid No. 29-21] Library Books, paid from All Funds; **8)** [Bid No. 1-22] Band Uniforms for Ouachita Parish High School, paid from Band Funds with a budget of \$400.00/Uniform; and **9)** [Bid No. FS12-21] Kiroli Walk-in Cooler & Freezer (replacing 3 small/old freezers), paid from CNS Equipment Fund budgeted for \$55,000. Following an offer for public comments from President Hicks, motion unanimously carried. Mr. McCoy was absent.

President Hicks set the next Board meeting for Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at 12:00 noon.

There being no further business to discuss, Mr. Manley moved, seconded by Mr. Comeaux, that the meeting adjourn. Motion carried unanimously.

**OUACHITA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD**

Jerry R. Hicks, President

**ATTEST:**

Don Coker, Secretary

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