

The Ouachita Parish School Board met in regular session on Thursday, March 17, 2022 at twelve (12:00) o'clock PM at its regular meeting place, the Ouachita Parish School Board office.

The roll was called and the following members were present: Tommy Comeaux, Shere May, Scotty Waggoner, Jerry R. Hicks, Harold McCoy, Dabo Graves and Greg Manley. There were none absent.

The meeting was called to order by the President, with Tommy Comeaux leading the Pledge of Allegiance, followed with a prayer led by Bobby Jones.

On motion by Shere May, seconded by Dabo Graves, the Board approved the Minutes of February 08, 2022 as written. Motion carried unanimously.

The revised Agenda was presented for approval with the addition of Item No. 8 (*Middle School Science*) submitted under XI. Permission to Bid and was approved as amended by motion of Greg Manley, seconded by Tommy Comeaux and unanimously adopted by all present.

In following the Board's "new" policy on Public Comments, anyone wishing to address the Board on a specific item should complete the "Request Slip" provided outside the Boardroom before the meeting begins where they designate a specific Agenda item they want to address and place it in the comment box in the lobby prior to the beginning of the Board meeting where it is collected and given to the Vice President to monitor during the meeting. A separate request slip is required for each Agenda item addressed and all comments must be limited to no more than three minutes for each item. The comment cards should be completed by those wanting to speak to the Board with the following information: **Full Name, Time, Street Address, City, Zip Code, List Ouachita Parish School affiliation(s), Indicate if Parent, Grandparent, Guardian, Employee, or Community Member.** As the Board addresses the items in the order listed on the Agenda, Vice President Greg Manley announces the name of the person interested in commenting on that same item prior to the Board's discussion of the item, then allows the individual(s) three minutes for public comment on this same particular item.

Upon discussing with a guest, Mr. Spencer Young, using information from his public comment card, he and Mr. Manley determined that Business Item No. 3 on the Agenda (*Finance Committee Report by Todd Guice*) best fits Mr. Young's interpretation of his friend's request to address the Board. Ms. Kaitlyn Ross desired to address the issue with the Board, but had not arrived at the meeting in time because she was delayed in traffic and asked Mr. Young to speak on her behalf until she could get there. However, he was not clear on the subject matter of Ms. Ross's item she wanted to address, and asked if she could be allowed to speak when she arrived. According to Mr. Young's statement, she wanted to address the "Bond Notice" issued verbally at the last meeting by Mrs. Tiffany Hatten, representative from "Parent's Choice LA", in which she placed the Board on formal notice accusing them of several violations in their duties while representing the citizens in their respective districts, indicating that this "notice" evolves from parents' complaints. However, Mr. Manley made it clear that Ms. Ross would not be

allowed to address the Board if she did not arrive before Business Item No. 3 was presented and discussed by the Board.

Upon the request of the superintendent, Tommy Comeaux moved, seconded by Scotty Waggoner, that the Board grant permission to Dr. Coker to open and advertise the position of the Director of Middle Schools for application through the interview process. Mr. Werner Aswell is currently in this position and will be retiring soon. Motion carried unanimously.

Communication Specialist Aline Smead and Dr. Coker presented special recognition awards to winners of the Monroe Regional National History Day competition. This organization creates opportunities for teachers and students to engage in historical research designed for middle and high school. The following three Ouachita Parish students placed in regional competition and will be competing in the Louisiana State National History Day competition: *Hannah Buckley & Jacob Green* from Ouachita Parish High School and *Ella Mayfield* from West Ouachita High School. The Board wishes them the best of luck in their state competition.

Mrs. Smead continued with her special recognition awards given to three more district Student of the Year finalists competing for the Louisiana Region 2 Student of the Year titles. They are as follows: *Elly Semmes* – Kiroli Elementary; *Elliana Grace Sheppard* – East Ouachita Middle and *Zach Johnson* – West Monroe High. After being recognized as their school honorees, these same three competed in the local district honors which included writing an essay, interviewing with a panel and composing a portfolio highlighting many achievements. Now they will move forward to State Competition where they are required to repeat the above requirements for this competition. The Ouachita Parish School Board wishes them a successful outcome at the next level of competition.

Next, our Communication Specialist Aline Smead proudly recognized three of our newest teachers that have been selected by their peers and district selection committee as honorees in the state's newest awards program, "Louisiana New Teacher of the Year". Teachers having less than one year of full-time teaching experience are recognized with this award for their outstanding teaching contributions that promote inspiration and professionalism for our new teachers across the state. Representing Ouachita Parish's "New Teachers of the Year" are: *Alyson Coburn* from Sterlington Elementary; *Mark Yates* from Good Hope Middle and *Olivia Myers* from West Ouachita High. Congratulations to three of our best first-year teachers in Ouachita Parish.

Two more of our finalists were announced by Mrs. Smead honoring the Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching (PAEMST) finalists are the highest honors bestowed by the United States government specifically for K-12 science, technology, engineering, mathematics, and/or computer science teaching. The award recognizes those teachers who have deep content knowledge of the subject they teach and the ability to motivate and enable students to be successful in those areas. For the PAEMST Award, teachers are selected at the state and jurisdiction level as State Finalists. This year, our 2021 Louisiana Math

Finalist is **Lainey Hodge** from Ouachita Parish High. Lainey will move to national competition and the OPSB wishes her well during her national experience.

Our next honoree, **Robbie Evans** was introduced as the 2020 National Presidential Award of Excellence Honoree for Science. Robbie will receive a certificate signed by the President of the United States, a \$10,000 award from National Science Foundation and attend an award ceremony with the White House. (*Robbie was also the 2020 Louisiana Science Finalist at this time last year*). Robbie, the OPSS is very proud to have you as one of their best and brightest teachers and wishes you great success in your future endeavors.

Last but not least, Mrs. Smead introduced Jason Dunavant, President of Louisiana Athletic Trainers Association, whereby, inviting him to come up to the podium along with Dr. Coker to recognize a few more of the Ouachita Parish School System's employees and individual athletic trainers and present them with a Certificate of Appreciation award. Receiving their awards for their dedicated services were: **Athletic Trainers** - Shenna Galloway - *Richwood High*; Anna Wigley - *Sterlington High*; Phil Shaw - *Ouachita High*; Kirk Frantom - *West Monroe High* and Jansen May - *West Ouachita High*. The OPSS is fortunate to have these qualified trainers on hand to help keep our student athletes free from injuries.

Upon the recommendation of Mr. Grant Schlueter with the law firm Foley & Judell, L.L.P., bond counsel, assisted by the Board's Municipal Advisor, with Government Consultants, Mr. Nnamdi Thompson, Greg Manley moved, seconded by Dabo Graves, that the Board consider and take action with respect to adopting a resolution recognizing the final form and execution of the Bond Purchase Agreement in connection with the issuance and sale of \$20,205,000 of General Obligation School Bonds, Series 2022, of the East Ouachita Parish School District of the Parish of Ouachita, State of Louisiana, and providing for other matters in connection therewith. Mr. Schlueter explained that this is a confirming resolution while the underwriter, Mr. Charlie Sides, with the undersigned, Stifel, Nicolaus & Company, Inc. of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, confirmed that the Bonds were sold for Twenty Million Two Hundred Five Thousand Dollars (\$20,205,000), with an interest rate of 2.79% and appreciated the opportunity to underwrite the sale. Mr. Nnamdi Thompson was also complimentary of the Board's excellent financial position in maintaining their Bond Rating of AA-, which helped tremendously with a low interest rate award. Mr. Thompson described the award of the Bond sale as hitting the market just at the right time that helped in the Board receiving an excellent interest rate just as the rates were beginning to rise across the board in the capital markets. He thanked the Board for the opportunity to serve them these last eight years. Happy sounds were heard across the room when Mr. Schlueter closed his remarks with an announcement that the transaction on the Bonds will close next Thursday, March 24, and the Board's money will be in the bank. Whereby, President Hicks called for a roll-call vote on the approval of the resolution and the following votes were recorded: Tommy Comeaux, yes; Shere May, yes; Scotty Waggoner, yes; Harold McCoy, yes; Dabo Graves, yes; Greg Manley, yes; and Jerry Hicks, yes. Motion carried unanimously with seven (7) "Yes" votes; zero (0) "No" votes; zero (0) "Abstentions" and there were no absences.

Personnel Director/Assistant Superintendent/Chair of the Finance Committee Todd Guice provided a copy of his Finance Committee Report to each Board member and announced that the Finance Committee met on February 16, 2022. The Agenda and the approved Minutes for the November 17, 2021 meeting have been approved and placed in Board packets for review. Mr. Guice briefly discussed several topics listed on the Agenda but no action was taken at that time. He concluded that more discussion will follow on these ongoing topics at the May 17, 2022 Finance Committee Meeting. Whereby, Scotty Waggoner moved, seconded by Shere May, that the Board approve the Finance Committee Reports for the meeting of February 16, 2022 as presented. Motion carried unanimously.

Personnel Director/Assistant Superintendent Todd Guice presented the proposed 2022-2023 Ouachita Parish School Calendar for consideration and Shere May moved, seconded by Dabo Graves, that the Board approve the 2022-2023 Ouachita Parish School Calendar as presented by Mr. Guice. Motion carried unanimously.

Business Director Regina Mekus presented her monthly 2021-2022 Interim Financial Report for the Period ended January 31, 2022 with a fund balance in the General Fund of \$39.6 million and running revenues at 60% of budget for the year with expenditures at 50% of budget for the year. We have a balanced budget adopted for the year which means we intend to end the year with a 16 percent fund balance and are on track to do that if the numbers stay where they are now. In District #1 M&O is ending the period of January 31, 2022 with \$24.0 million in the fund balance. This week in District #1 1968 Sales Tax, 1995 Sales Tax and West Ouachita Sales Tax, we received a sales tax report for the month of January 2022. The Board was reminded by Ms. Mekus that in the last couple of years, there has been a lot of discussion about these sales tax increases not staying at a level they have been since the pandemic started. We have not seen a decrease but have seen a drop in the increase. We have been averaging about 12 – 15% increase over the last 2 1/2 years, but for the month of January we were at 4% for an average across the board increase in the prior year. These sales tax collections will continue to be monitored closely. We have budgeted very cautiously while being conservative because we understand that those high rates of increase in the sales tax are not usual. In a typical year we would expect to see 2 – 4 % increase in our sales tax collections, not 12 – 15%. We are keeping an eye on our sales tax collections to make sure we are watching those numbers. There is a possibility they could come back up for the month of February but it remains to be seen. However, we budget based on prior trends and consider current year actions; but have been very conservative in our budgeting because, with these unprecedented increases, we want to be sure we are prepared up front when these increases in collections start to fall. Ms. Mekus remarked that she had rather get to the end of the year having sales taxes higher than expected than get to the end of the year and say we have to dip into our fund balance because our sales tax collections did not continue to rise as expected. Ms. Mekus concluded her report with a statement that she usually looks back to the last three years when she budgets and in some cases goes back as far as 10 years to look at revenues to make sure she is on solid ground. She offered to answer questions from the Board, followed by a motion by Greg Manley, seconded by Dabo

Graves, that the Board approve the Monthly 2021-2022 Interim Financial Report for the Period ended January 31, 2022 as presented by Business Director Regina Mekus. Motion unanimously carried.

Ms. Mekus concluded her report with additional information regarding the \$1,500 one-time salary supplement check the Board had authorized at their meeting of January 18, 2022, announcing that it would be distributed tomorrow March 18, to all qualifying regular OPSB employees, as well as, our long-term substitutes that covered classes and helped take care of kids during the COVID pandemic. Ms. Mekus feels we could not have made it through the pandemic crisis without them. This is the first time the long-term substitutes were included in a pay distribution like this. Ms. Mekus admitted that it was a challenge to her team having to take each individual employee and thoroughly research records, making sure those that qualified for the extra pay were not missed. She complimented her team saying they worked extra hard on this distribution and did a great job. The Board was also alerted by Ms. Mekus that if they receive phone calls from employees about this supplement, please encourage them to call and leave a message referring them to her department staff with their questions or give her or a staff member the name and phone number where the individuals can be reached. Ms. Mekus assured the Board that she and her staff would be diligent in their research to make sure everyone individually will receive answers to their questions, as her staff has been doing throughout the last two weeks in making sure everyone gets their check as the Board intended.

Upon the recommendation of Board attorney Elmer Noah, Harold McCoy motioned, seconded by Shere May, that the Board approve the Resolution authorizing Board President Jerry Hicks to execute on behalf of the School Board any and all documents necessary in connection with the sale of the Logtown School Site to the Tensas Basis Levee Board as presented. Motion unanimously carried by all present. There were none absent.

Safety/Construction Supervisor Ken Slusher presented the OPSB Project Status Report provided by TBA (Tim Brandon) Architects regarding updates and activities on the “new” Boley Elementary School and West Ouachita High School projects. Mr. Slusher announced that on March 24, 2:00 p.m. there is a bid opening on Riser School restrooms; March 22, at 9:00 a.m. there is a pre-bid at Pinecrest on the canopy project out front; March 23, at 1:30 there is a construction meeting at the new Sterlington Middle School. The stadium is about 80%-85% complete at East Ouachita Middle School and has word that the entire project will be completed around May 1.

At this time, Mrs. Kaitlyn Ross arrived at the meeting too late to speak to the Board regarding her issue; whereby, she agreed to wait until the next Board meeting on April 12 after President Hicks offered to allow her to speak at that time.

On the recommendation of Interim Purchasing Agent Waylon McCormick, Harold McCoy moved, seconded by Scotty Waggoner, that the Board **1)** Accept the bid from Jackson Paper for Copy Paper for Items 1-41 [*Bid No. 32-22*] funded with all funds; **2)** There was no responsive

bid(s) and none accepted due to quality compliance for Chromebook Cases (these will be re-bid under RFP [Bid No. 26-22]; **3)** Accept the bids from the only bidder (Teacher's Pet) for Items 1 & 2 for Portable Tracks & Trikes [Bid No. 37-22] funded with ESSER funds; **4)** Accept the bid from Guy Paper for Item #1 [Bid No. 34-22] funded with General Funds; **5)** Accept the bid from Amplify for Educational Curriculum [Bid No. RFP 36-22] funded with ESSER funds; **6)** Accept the bid from Curriculum Associates for Math Curriculum [Bid No. RFP 38-22] funded with ESSER funds; and **7)** Accept the bid from Economical Janitorial for Bid Items #1 & #2 and from Guy Paper for Bid Item #3 for Paper Hand Towels [Bid No. 35-22] funded with ESSER funds. Motion carried unanimously.

President Hicks set the next meeting for Tuesday, April 12, 2022 at 12:00 P.M.

There being no further business to discuss, Harold McCoy motioned, seconded by Dabo Graves, that the meeting adjourn. Motion carried unanimously.

OUACHITA PARISH SCHOOL BOARD

Jerry R. Hicks, President

ATTEST:

Don Coker, Secretary

/ps