

RETREAT MINUTES

Murfreesboro City School Board
3 p.m., Tuesday, January 27, 2015
Administrative Conference Room
City Hall

ATTENDANCE

Chair Butch Campbell, Vice Chair Nancy Rainier, Collier Smith, Nancy Phillips, Phil King, Dr. Andy Brown

Staff: Dr. Linda Gilbert, Gary Anderson

Staff Attorney: David A. Ives, Kelley Baker

I. CALL TO ORDER BY BOARD CHAIR

Chair Campbell called the meeting to order at 3 p.m.

II. DISCUSSION ITEMS

BO 43 – Travel Expense Policy

BO 44 – Reimbursement of Expenses Policy for Murfreesboro City School Board

Chair Campbell opened the meeting by passing out a synopsis of the history of Board policies BO 43 and BO 44 provided by Ms. Baker. Ms. Phillips had previously requested Ms. Baker to ask surrounding counties how they handle travel for Board members (refer to sheet). Chair Campbell opened the items for discussion. He stated the particular issue regarding BO 43 is the language that says the Director of Schools must approve Board travel. He also called attention to lines 25 & 26 of BO 44 regarding reimbursement for food and beverage expenses during conferences and seminars. Chair Campbell said he believes the Board needs to develop a policy.

Ms. Phillips said she really does have concerns about approval becoming political in the future. Ms. Phillips believes approval decisions would be best in the hands of the finance director.

Dr. Brown said he thinks there should be a base amount for each Board member, and then each Board member can pick and choose which meetings they attend within the allotted amount. Dr. Brown added that, above the individual allotments, a general shared pool of money would be kept to go to national and state conferences, and they would decide jointly who gets to go. Chair Campbell said he likes Dr. Brown's idea. Chair Campbell proposed a committee of two or three Board members to approve or disapprove of out of town meetings and make sure the Board adheres to policy. He added the committee could rotate from year to year. Ms. Rainier said she does not like that idea. Ms. Smith said she liked Dr. Brown's idea, but wants public disclosure of expenses. Dr. Brown agreed adding that it should be an item on the consent agenda.

Ms. Smith said she does not agree with a beyond 50-mile radius limit to a hotel stay especially if someone has trouble driving at night like former Board member Mary Wade did. Mr. King said it is difficult to get to an 8 a.m. meeting in Nashville due to traffic. Ms. Smith said she does not want to close the door for out-of-town retreats. Dr. Brown said the Board has to remember to be good stewards of the school's money, and every dollar that is spent on the Board is not spent on children, and they are to be put first. He said the Board needs to be an example for teachers. He added that he agrees with Nancy that they do have a responsibility to further professional development, but it should be reported at the meetings. Ms. Smith agreed. Ms. Baker said travel could be put on the Board agenda under communications.

Ms. Smith said expenses should be announced at Board meetings, and Ms. Baker should put language into policy. Ms. Smith said it should be in the consent agenda and in the minutes. Ms. Baker asked if they want to include the total amount or itemized. The Board consensus is that it should be total amount. Chair Campbell asked Ms. Baker if she had enough direction for the language. Ms. Baker said she thought so.

NSBA Attendance

Chair Campbell asked the Board secretary who was registered for the NSBA Conference. Ms. Price advised that Nancy Phillips, Nancy Rainier, and Jared Barrett were the only registrants. Chair Campbell asked the members if they had registered for sessions yet. Ms. Rainier said registration has not opened for those yet. Chair Campbell advised they can go to the NSBA website to see the sessions and individual costs. Ms. Phillips noted that it is rare for the NSBA Conference to be in our hometown.

City Council Meeting Attendance

Ms. Rainier asked if Board members need to continue attendance at City Council meetings. She thinks it is very nice to be represented there, and she has dates and forms for those who want to attend. Ms. Smith said she called Mayor McFarland to ask if the Board's attendance means anything to City Council. She said Mayor McFarland would like to have an annual joint meeting with the School Board. She said she thinks the Board should meet with its funding body. Ms. Smith said that the mayor said most of the time there are no school issues on the agenda and that attendance is not necessary, but they are always welcome. She said that each Board member has been assigned a (City Council) Board member, and if those relationships are maintained attending all the City Council meetings is not necessary. Dr. Gilbert said she and Mr. Anderson meet with the City Manager once a month because they [the City] know what MCS is facing as far as building and budget concerns. She said MCS takes the budget to City Manager Rob Lyons, and he takes it to City Council.

Ms. Smith said it sounds like we need to tell them in the next few weeks that we want more money. Dr. Gilbert said the reason it has not been presented to Council as far as the budget is because we are following their timeline. Dr. Brown said the \$4.8 million and has not changed for 12 years. He said when we are talking about teacher salaries this year; he does not want to feel like the Board cannot give teachers a raise because of the budget. He said he does not know how the Board needs to make that happen but that it does need to make it happen.

Chair Campbell asked the Board what their pleasure is as far as attending Council meetings or just continuing relationships. Ms. Phillips said to leave it up to the individual. Chair Campbell asked if the Board wants Nancy to continue giving the Board a schedule of meetings. Ms. Rainier asked if they would like to vote on whether to attend Council meetings, and the vote took place by going around the table.

Ms. Phillips said no.

Ms. Smith said no.

Chair Campbell said yes.

Ms. Rainier said yes.

Mr. King said maybe go once a quarter.

Dr. Brown said that if Dr. Gilbert is going to be presenting to Council, the Board should be there.

Legislative Update

Dr. Gilbert presented a legislative update based on conversations with TOSS. She said that while we are not seeing them yet, there might be changes to BEP that will hurt municipalities. She said 12-month insurance would come up and probably fail because of cost. Standards changes are an issue. Seat belts on buses could be an issue. She said there are two bills presented on standards. White and Womick have been appointed to the House Education Administration Committee, and Tracy is on the Senate Education Committee.

Gresham in the House and Tracy in the Senate will present bills to review and develop new standards. She said that in states that have developed their own standards, these standards are very similar to common core. She said there is a bill by Massey and Brooks that the fiscal capacity of each LEA is to be determined by the previous year. She added that people are afraid of a small schools lawsuit.

Dr. Gilbert said there is a citizenship test bill that would require all high school students to pass the immigration test. She said there is also a bill extending the date for appeal of the Virtual Schools Act to November 2019, which is interesting because the state's virtual school has not produced positive results. Dr. Gilbert said one bill that people are talking about is very similar to the governor's voucher proposal, but is concerning special education. Her example was that if a special education student leaves Anderson school and goes to Rainier school, the receiving school is not required to provide accommodating special education services except what they already provide. Ms. Baker said someone might need to ask for an Attorney General opinion because that sounds like it conflicts with federal law.

Dr. Gilbert said there is a bill out of Williamson County to say that superintendents do not need to be involved with politics. This is because of the way Williamson's Board has changed. Ms. Baker advised the Board they can go to the General Assembly website and sign up to follow bills by topic or by bill number. She said this is a really good resource, and she has tagged education so she gets emails to follow bills on education. As a session attorney at General Assembly, Ms. Baker said she became familiar with legislative process. She said when they first file the bills, the caption is written broadly, but they will gut the bills making them completely different (sleepers). She said to watch for those. She said to be sure to look at the amendment and the

fiscal note. She said to look at the amendment because a lot of times language is deleted and the amendment says something completely different than the original bill.

Dr. Gilbert said TOSS has hired another lobbyist to try to keep up with bills, and that vouchers are huge. Ms. Phillips spoke about the Community Advisory Council, and said Dr. Gilbert presented many things to them. Ms. Phillips said former Mayor Bragg said we should look into lobbyists. He said Discovery Center has a lobbyist, the hospital has a lobbyist, Swanson Company has a lobbyist, etc. She said her thought was through TSBA, but they have their own unique agenda working for TSBA and not individual school systems. She said Mayor Bragg mentioned the City, and could the City and the school system share a lobbyist.

Ms. Rainier asked if the Board is interested in Day on the Hill. Chair Campbell said they have not invited any of our legislative delegation and will not due to the \$60 per person fee and last year they did not show. Ms. Rainier asked what the point would be in spending \$60 for a legislative breakfast if there are no legislators. Ms. Phillips said the other side of it is that you can talk to other people on the education committee even though they are not in your district. They may see the message is consistent throughout Tennessee. Ms. Baker said the key is to find out who the influential people are on the committees whether from Rutherford County or not.

Dr. Gilbert advised the Board that Capitol Connections starts week after next and the legislators are typically at the chamber on those days. She said it starts February 13th. She said they will have it every other week or so and that she and Gary typically go. She said that Mr. Barrett and Mr. Campbell have gone in the past. She said they begin at 7:30 a.m., and there will be a room full of business people and other folks as well.

Audit Overview

Mr. Anderson reported there is an additional \$1.5 million in the fund balance, but it cannot be spent because the money is in assets. He said the system did not have to dip into the fund balance either. Mr. Anderson said that every week, he monitors cash balances. At the beginning, there was a little over \$6 million. He said the fund balance now is over \$9 million, but remember it cannot be spent because it is in assets. He added that they did not have to borrow from the City to make payroll this year. Mr. Anderson said they hired 23 teachers during the year without going to the City because of the fund balance. He stated the growth money has come in, which is a little over \$800,000, adding that half is in the fund and the other half is expected in July.

Ms. Smith asked about the progress on finding audit firms. Mr. Anderson said he plans to bring the Board information at the second meeting in February.

Dr. Brown asked Mr. Anderson to explain why we are \$3 million better off than we thought we were. Mr. Anderson said there was \$2 million budgeted to use that was not used. He said the year ended with about \$6 million, and that we did not spend money we thought we would. Ms. Phillips asked for an estimate for the end of the school year. Mr. Anderson said he does not know about capital outlay money and how much will be spent before the end of the year. He approximated it would be close to \$6 million again. Mr. Anderson said he keeps expenses at the higher end and does not count growth money when considering the budget. He said he is very

conservative when preparing the budget. Mr. Anderson said when he came to the District, the fund balance was \$3 million, and we have built it up.

Transportation Update

Mr. Anderson said there are two big concerns regarding transportation. One concern is the number of students transported that are part of the McKinney Vento (homeless) program. He said there are 77 students, and 21 of those are at Hobgood. The second transportation issue is Discovery School transportation. He said in the afternoon, it is door-to-door service using six buses to transport 80 students. Mr. Anderson proposed the Board consider continuing morning service as usual, but change the afternoon service to take students to their zoned schools. He said it would basically be a reverse of the morning service. Mr. Anderson said the last drop off is at 4:30 or a quarter til 5, and that is a long time for children to be on a bus. He added they could more than double the load by doing this.

Chair Campbell asked if this is being proposed for this year. Mr. Anderson said no, we wanted to get the Board's opinion about next school year. Ms. Phillips said Discovery School transportation was purposely designed this way so any child in the community who qualified could access this school. Ms. Smith said most Discovery parents are working, and this would be a hindrance when they have been getting door-to-door service. Ms. Smith stated that Discovery's students are a part of Murfreesboro City Schools just like every other school in the system and should be treated as such. Ms. Phillips said she thought the next time this discussion was held, it should be at a televised Board meeting.

Dr. Brown asked if there is any way to send information to Discovery School parents about what is being proposed to give them a chance to comment. He said if there were 10 or 15 families that say this is going to be a hardship, he would not be willing to vote for this. Ms. Phillips said ethically she cannot support a change when any child can go there as long as they qualify. Chair Campbell said it might be a good idea to do what Dr. Brown suggested and poll the parents. Dr. Brown asked if discussion could be tabled this time.

III. BOARD MEMBER CONCERNS

Chair Campbell told Dr. Gilbert that when people are interviewed for a position, it is common courtesy to pick up the phone and call them to let them know if they did not get the job. He said nurses were interviewed not too long ago, and some people still have not heard back.

IV. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Campbell adjourned the meeting at 5:48 p.m.

Director of Schools