



Meeting Minutes Duval County Public Schools

May 8, 2024, Duval County School Board/City Council Joint Meeting

Mr. Darryl Willie, Chairman
Ms. Charlotte D. Joyce, Vice-Chairman
Ms. April A. Carney
Dr. Kelly Coker
Dr. Lori Hershey
Mr. Warren A. Jones
Ms. Cindy Pearson
Dr. Dana Kriznar, Superintendent

ATTENDANCE AT THIS JOINT MEETING OF THE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD AND CITY COUNCIL: All Board Members were present except Board Members April A. Carney, Dr. Kelly Coker, and Dr. Lori Hershey. Board Member Warren A. Jones arrived at 10:41 a.m. Dr. Dana Kriznar, Superintendent, and Mr. Ray Poole, Office of General Counsel, were also present. CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS IN ATTENDANCE: Ron Salem (President), Ken Amaro, Michael Boylan, Matt Carlucci (arr. 10:15), Kevin Carrico, Tyrone Clark-Murray, Terrance Freeman, Michael Howland, Reggie Gaffney Jr., Mike Gay, Rahman Johnson, Will Lahnen, Ju'Coby Pittman, Jimmy Peluso.

Excused City Council Members: Raul Arias, Joe Carlucci, Rory Diamond and Randy White.

Also in attendance: Phillip Peterson – Council Auditor's Office; Peggy Sidman – Council Secretary/Director; Mary Staffopoulos and Carla Lopera – Office of General Counsel; Merriane Lahmeur, Maritza Sanchez – Legislative Services Division; Teresa Eichner – Public Information Division; Corey Wright, Chief of Staff, Erika Harding, Assistant Superintendent, Chief of Operations – Duval County Public Schools.

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 10:00 a.m.

Items to be Discussed

1. ISSUES THAT WILL IMPACT GROWTH, FUNDING, QUALITY OF LIFE, AND WORK WITHIN THE CITY OF JACKSONVILLE.

Council President Salem convened the meeting and announced that the Mayor had informed him that the City and Jacksonville Jaguars negotiators had reached a tentative stadium improvement agreement. He will allow representatives of the negotiators to have a few minutes at the start of next Tuesday's City Council meeting to describe the agreement. Mr. Salem said he will announce a process for Council review of the proposed deal starting in June.

School Board Chair Darryl Willie said the cooperation of the two governing bodies represented at the meeting is very important, and it is good to have these joint meetings in a public setting.

The attendees then introduced themselves for the record.

A PowerPoint Presentation was shared on the Mayor's Youth At Work Program (MYAWP) (see attached). Saralyn Grass, CEO of the Kids Hope Alliance (KHA), said MYAWP provides internships for high school and college students to get them used to the work environment and obtain soft skills training through Goodwill Industries. The City has received national attention for this program and received several grants and cost-sharing arrangements with employers to support and expand the program. The program was extended from a summer-only to a full-year program and the participant numbers are growing; enrollment will more than double to 400 students this summer. A large percentage (76%) of the participants are African American, they are more female than male, and the program is targeted at students who don't have readily available opportunities, with over 30% coming from the city's neediest zip codes. Students can stay in the program for 3 semesters. Participant survey results showed that 98% of participants feel they are more prepared for life after taking part in the program. VyStar Credit Union offers non-custodial checking and savings accounts to all participants and over 600 have taken advantage of this opportunity. This summer's program has a wait list because of tremendous demand and insufficient funding to enroll more applicants. KHA wants to link MYAWP with other internships, externships, skill development programs, etc. so that it isn't a one-time event but a continuing connection to more work and life readiness skills opportunities. They also want to expand the program to different kinds of participating businesses.

Discussion included the following:

- Council Member Howland asked about the non-custodial checking accounts, which he does not see as an appropriate role for government to be playing. John Everett, Director of Workforce Development at KHA, said he will provide Mr. Howland with additional information.
- Council Member Pittman asked about pre- and post-program testing. Mr. Everett said KHA tests what works and what doesn't from both the perspective of employers and the students and keeps perfecting the program.
- Dr. Grass said Mr. Everett is KHA's liaison to the world of employers and keeps up with changes in the marketplace and employers' needs.
- Council Member Freeman praised JTA for its participation in providing free transportation to students to get to the MYAWP program and employment opportunities.

A PowerPoint Presentation was shared on the School Superintendent Search (see attached). School Board Vice Chair Charlotte Joyce said the advertisement process started in mid-March and the district received 21 applications which were narrowed down to 6, of which 1 candidate subsequently dropped out. The remaining 5 candidates answered 4 questions posed by the board in writing and answered 3 additional questions via video, which are available for the public to view on the School Board website. The board has selected 2 finalists – Dr. Christopher Bernier and Dr. Daniel Smith. Those two will have final interviews on May 13th with the School Board and the district cabinet members. Then they will have a community meet-and-greet that evening at EverBank Field. On May 14th the board will conduct individual interviews and then will meet to select the new superintendent for a start date of July 1st. Discussion included the following:

- President Salem inquired whether there was a scenario in which neither one of the candidates would be selected, Board Member Joyce shared the 2 candidates are very qualified, highly recommended and she believes both are committed to coming to Jacksonville if offered the job.
- Board Chair Darryl Willie shared all school districts have challenges but these candidates understand that and are ready to tackle them. He wants the community to be involved in the selection process so the candidates can get a feel for our city and the desires of citizens.

- Council Member Boylan asked about the format for the meet-and-greet. Ms. Joyce shared the candidates will make opening statements followed by mingling and one-on-one interactions with the audience.
- Board Chair Willie shared it will be a mutual exploration – the community meeting the candidates and the candidates meeting and getting a feel for the community.

A PowerPoint Presentation was shared on the Master Facilities Plan (MFP) (see attached). Erica Harding, Assistant Superintendent of Operations, and Corey Wright, Chief of Staff, DCPS discussed the progress being made on the facilities construction plan. Since the COVID pandemic, enrollment has dropped due to families wanting to stay with an online learning format permanently, growth of charter schools, and an increased state voucher program which made even more alternative school options possible. Enrollment in traditional schools has been dropping and operating costs have been rising with less funding due to the enrollment decline, so changes have to be made to right-size the district for sustainability. The Master Facilities Plan has to be changed to reflect the new realities and the rising construction costs for the planned renovations and new school construction. Numerous projects have been put on hold while the Master Plan is amended, feeder school patterns are adjusted, and costs recalculated. The revised plan that was the subject of recent public hearings was put together by a consultant as a starting point for discussion and was based solely on costs and facility utilization percentages; now the task is to get community input and discussion of preferences. Moderated public hearings will be held in the 7 school board districts from late May through late June and there will be public surveys to obtain more feedback. District staff will develop an updated proposal for the School Board to consider at a workshop in July, then more public feedback will be solicited before a revised master plan is adopted in the fall. Discussion included the following:

- Council Member Peluso stated that two “A”-rated and two “B”-rated schools in his district are proposed to be closed. He asked if the School Board can close or consolidate charter schools; Mr. Wright said it cannot except in the limited circumstances of a persistent underperforming school.
- Public schools can’t access Public Education Capital Outlay (PECO) funds but charters can.
- Mr. Peluso asked if DCPS tracks state voucher usage in the City by student. Mr. Wright said they used to when the district got that information from the state but that policy changed and now they just get raw voucher numbers and don’t know where individual students go to school.
- Council Member Carrico said he was surprised to hear that sales tax-funded construction projects are on hold and wondered about the degree of public awareness of that fact. Ms. Harding said it was publicly announced by the district in January. Mr. Carrico said that communication could have been better so the general public wasn’t alarmed by recent news stories about potential school closures.
- Board Vice-Chair Joyce said the construction and renovation projects had to be put on hold while the feeder patterns are adjusted to get numerous issues fixed before construction takes place.
- President Salem shared the district is losing 3,000 students a year and asked how the district is modeling that decline for future planning purposes. Mr. Wright shared the district does an annual 10-year enrollment projection, but trends change quickly as the Florida Legislature changes the rules and families make other school choices.
- Council Member Pittman said she’s very concerned by what’s happening to the Master Facilities Plan and the impact that charter schools are having on traditional public schools. Neighborhood schools are going to become untenable if these trends continue. Ms. Harding shared the school district has to change to make public schools a more attractive option to draw students back. Award-winning vocational programs are one way to make that happen.
- Council Member Johnson said he feels well-informed by his school board member and the district staff. He asked how changes to the Master Facilities Plan impact the state’s development

concurrency regulations and asked how the district tells its success stories to the community. Ms. Harding shared the consultant proposal didn't include any concurrency considerations – that is part of what will be added as the process goes along. Mr. Wright shared the district does a lot of social media work to tell success stories and get important information out to the community.

- Council Member Gay asked if other school districts around the state are facing the same crises as our district. Mr. Wright said traditional public schools in other big urban districts with lots of school choice options face the same problems.
- Mr. Gay asked if the local option sales tax revenue is being shared with charter schools; Mr. Wright shared it is based on the number of students enrolled in each school.
- Council Member Amaro said he is a satisfied parent of public school children who had a very good experience. He asked about the timeline for making the proposed changes. Mr. Wright shared nothing happening in this summer's debate will affect schools for the next school year; the changes will take effect in 2025-26 and later.
- Board Chair Willie shared the school board started with an aggressive realignment proposal developed by the consultant and will work from there. He shared \$23M in voucher money went to students via the school district but the district doesn't control who gets it or track where it goes. Small schools can't provide a full program (e.g. full-time art or music teachers, counselors, etc.) so they aren't viable and something has to be done. He said other urban districts are closing schools as well. The positive that has come out of this situation is that it has rallied the general public to voice support for their local schools.
- Council Member Matt Carlucci said parents want their children to be in good schools and those that are updated and improved to 21st century standards are competitive and they keep their enrollments.
- Council Member Howland said school performance being included in the future planning effort will change the initial plan the consultant produced. He asked council members not to vilify charter schools because they are making education better through competition. The public schools need to learn from the best of the charters about how to produce the best outcomes.
- Council Member Freeman said closed schools could be repurposed for affordable housing purposes. He said a plan needs to be developed to re-program the half-cent sales tax revenue that is not used for constructing new schools as originally promised. His perception is that sometimes the trade academies are where students who aren't successful in traditional academic tracks are sent, and that is a detriment to students who want to be there for the vocational programs.
- School Board Member Cindy Pearson shared the district received a \$4M settlement from the state after losing \$10M to voucher payment miscalculations. She shared school choice has often taken the form of families moving to other adjacent counties for their quality schools so it is unlikely they would be closing any schools as our county must. She noted that charter schools don't have to be constructed to hurricane shelter standards as traditional public schools are, and the district would love to have City Council support to change that. The master plan process was slowed down by Council delaying the vote to authorize the sales tax referendum by 1 year. Board Member Pearson shared the district wants to offer more trades education programs but can't find enough teachers to do it for the salary the district can pay. The Legislature is passing new bills every year that change the rules of the game and it's hard to keep up with the pace of change, especially when guidance on legislative intent doesn't come out until months later.
- Council Member Gaffney Jr. said he is alarmed by media reports of potentially 700 layoffs at the district and asked what can be done to prevent that. Mr. Wright shared part of that is due to federal ARP funding running out, and that the district will be looking to move workers to other available positions in other schools where possible.

A Power Point Presentation was shared on the Jacksonville Small and Emerging Business (JSEB) Program

(see attached). Gregory Grant, JSEB administrator, announced a new JSEB Readiness Program for small businesses and said Westside High School has a business entrepreneurship program that could dovetail with the JSEB program. The planned Brentwood business assistance center offers an opportunity to mesh business training and entrepreneurship instruction with the school system's programming for students interested in a business path. He noted there are several available certification programs for entrepreneurship and business ownership that high school students could take advantage of. He already has contacts with the Northeast Florida Builders Association (NEFBA) and Associated Builders and Contractors (ABC) organizations and can forge connections and collaboration which can be valuable for both the companies and the students. Discussion included the following:

- Council Member Boylan said it could be mutually beneficial to both parties.
- Council Member Freeman noted the Junior Achievement is another avenue for business training and entrepreneurship experience.
- Council Member Miller said exposure to new opportunities is important for students who don't already have a career path in mind and could lead them to a productive life. He said the nation is facing a crisis in the skilled trades in the next few years and will need a trained workforce to keep our economy growing.
- School Board Member Warren A. Jones shared career and technical education (CTE) is very important to the district and its graduates get good jobs immediately upon graduation. He also shared youth who don't have transportation have a difficult time getting and keeping jobs in the trades because they can't depend on the bus system to get them where they need to be and when they need to be there.

Superintendent Dana Kriznar shared an update on professional standards. She shared with everyone that the district has faced very challenging issues over the past 5 years – COVID, finances, enrollment, etc. The update shared included the following:

- An investigation is ongoing regarding the allegations of misconduct by teachers at Douglas Anderson School of the Arts and other schools.
- The district is strengthening its policies and procedures to get teachers and staff accused of misconduct out of contact with students immediately.
- New training is being provided for all district staff and all human resource employees are undergoing Society for Human Resource Management certification training.
- The district is enhancing the ability of its Professional Standards Office to perform investigations faster.
- The district has also moved from U.S. Postal service mail to electronic communication with parents.
- Age-appropriate instructional tools are being developed for teaching about sexual harassment or misconduct and an anonymous complaint filing system has been implemented.
- The school district is committed to better training for everyone on awareness about and reporting of any potential misconduct.

President Salem thanked everyone for their participation and for all the hard work from both boards and staffs to make these meetings happen.

Public Comment

The following signed up to speak during public comment:

- Robert Stafford
- Carnell Oliver
- Emily McCarthy
- Starr Prescott
- Wells Todd
- A DCPS Student

Adjournment

1. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 11:50 a.m.

MA

Superintendent

Chairman