



Meeting Minutes Duval County Public Schools

October 29, 2024, Special Board 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. Cynthia Pearson
Dr. Christopher Bernier, Superintendent

ATTENDANCE AT THIS MEETING OF THE DUVAL COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD: All Board Members were present. Dr. Christopher Bernier, Superintendent, and Mr. Ray Poole, Office of General Counsel, were also present.

Call Meeting to Order

The meeting was called to order at 4:03 p.m.

Approval of Agenda

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Motion:

That the Duval County School Board approve the agenda as submitted on October 22, 2024, with the following changes:

Following the Special Board Meeting, Public Hearings will be held with a start time of 6:00pm in the Cline Auditorium for the below listed school consolidation recommendations, originally noticed in the Jax Daily Record on Thursday, September 26, 2024.

Published start time for below public hearings is 6:00pm:

- Executive Session - Safety and Security*
- Consolidation of Annie R. Morgan Elementary and Biltmore Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of Kings Trail Elementary and Beauclerc Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of Don Brewer Elementary and Merrill Road Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of Susie Tolbert Elementary and Smart Pope Livingston Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of George Washington Carver Elementary and Rufus E. Payne Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of Hidden Oaks Elementary and Cedar Hills Elementary Schools
- Consolidation of Bridge to Success Academy Middle and Bridge to Success Academy High

at West Jacksonville into Eugene Butler Middle Schools

Vote Results:

Motion: April A. Carney

Second: Cindy Pearson

PASSED - 7-0

Aye:

April A. Carney

Cindy Pearson

Kelly Coker

Lori Hershey

Warren A. Jones

Darryl Willie

Charlotte D. Joyce

Nay:

None

Public Comment

The meeting reconvened at 6:01 p.m. Chairman Willie thanked the public for signing up to speak. There were 22 members of the public that signed up to speak. In addition, District 9 Councilwoman Tyrone Clark-Murray addressed the Board requesting fairness and inclusivity.

Topics to be Discussed

1. EXECUTIVE SESSION - SAFETY AND SECURITY*

*NOTE: Pursuant to Section 281.301, Florida Statutes, any portion of this meeting that directly relates to, or reveals, confidential and exempt information of the district's security system, will be closed to the public.

The meeting was closed to the public and the executive session began at 4:06 p.m. All parties not included in the executive session were asked to leave the room. The meeting resumed at 5:34 p.m. There was no further discussion held on the topic. The meeting was then recessed at 5:35 p.m. and set to reconvene in the Cline Auditorium for the 6:00 p.m. for the Public Comment and Public Hearing session of the meeting.

2. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF ANNIE R. MORGAN ELEMENTARY AND BILTMORE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- There is a shortage of VPK learning options.
- Requests were made for VPK opportunities in the Lackawanna area.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- A follow-up was requested regarding the transportation plans.
- Concerns were raised about the school's grade at the time of consolidation.
- Ensuring enrollment and other issues are addressed before the board takes action.
- Identifying the best predictor for combining schools.
- Clarification was given regarding the merging of the schools and the identification number for which the school will operate. If the schools merge, they will operate under the Biltmore identification number.
- Discussion on how potential school grades would be calculated with the combined population.
- Annie R. Morgan is currently under state monitoring.
- Clarification was sought on the enrollment process.
- Scenarios were provided to illustrate potential school grades.

3. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF KINGS TRAIL ELEMENTARY AND BEAUCLERC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- The Emotional and Behavioral Disorder (EBD) program at Beauclerc is facing challenges.
- It's important to strengthen Beauclerc before integrating another school into the building.
- A more thorough evaluation of Beauclerc is necessary.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- Concerns were shared regarding 2025-26 being the right year to consolidate.
- Ensuring there are safe routes for students and transportation is provided.
- The ability of Beauclerc to accommodate over 300 students.
- What the district is doing to ensure the healthiness of the school.
- Appreciation was shared for everyone that came to advocate for the schools.
- Concerns were shared about the feeder patterns and boundaries.
- Ensuring the right programs are in the right places.
- The community meetings have created perceptions and did not serve well.
- Budget savings. Identify the correct place to take the money from the 2025-26 budget.
- A follow up was requested to identify how families and staff benefit from the moves.
- A follow up was requested that included how to reserve successful programs without the numbers to fund the programs.
- A follow up was requested for the proposed operational savings for 2025-26.
- A follow up was requested for the options for achieving the same budget.
- Hardships and loss from school closures.
- A follow up was requested for the benefits of consolidations for each school closure.
- Family communication timeline regarding new school experiences. Families need to be made aware of what the new school experience will look like.
- Voluntary Prekindergarten (VPK) and other Exceptional Student Education (ESE) programs will stay embedded in the schools they come from.
- Continuity.

- Ensuring through feeder patterns that the students have the same opportunities.
- When schools combine, the programs will remain in the schools.
- Boundaries must be reviewed.

4. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF DON BREWER ELEMENTARY AND MERRILL ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- Appreciation for the Merrill Road and Don Brewer communities.
- Focus on the best interests of students.
- Appreciation for district staff and their work during community meetings.
- Emphasis on the need to get the process right.
- Concerns about the process, including the need for Temporary Duty Elsewhere (TDE) for staff to attend meetings.
- Concerns about involving the community without providing adequate time.
- A board member expressed concerns and explained her “no” vote on the capital plan.
- Discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of the buildings.
- Safety constraints.
- Concerns about voting on a capital plan without available funds.
- Need for answers to outstanding questions.
- Request for a traffic study to identify modifications needed for Merrill Road’s campus.
- Ensuring space for ESE/VPK classes with 60–70 students.
- Potential population increase due to a new apartment complex.
- Identifying the percentage of the apartment complex that is subsidized.
- Playground concerns, ensuring suitability for all age groups.
- Concerns about the most vocal communities getting what they want.
- Ensuring school closures does not disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.
- Every district must share the responsibility.
- Appreciation for Dr. Bernier and district leadership, despite many unanswered questions.
- Traffic safety concerns and a request for a district plan to address them.
- Concerns about unanswered questions from district leadership.
- Mention of nine children involved in vehicular accidents, with three fatalities.
- Concerns about combining two communities into an unsafe situation.
- Appreciation for everyone’s comments.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- Gratitude was expressed for the Merrill Road and Don Brewer community.
- Emphasis on prioritizing students’ best interests.
- Appreciation for district staff and their efforts at community meetings.
- The importance of the district getting this right.
- Concerns about the process, particularly the need for Temporary Duty Elsewhere (TDE) approval for staff to attend meetings.

- Worries about involving the community without providing adequate time.
- A board member shared her reasons for voting “no” on the capital plan.
- Discussion on the pros and cons of the buildings.
- Safety constraints were highlighted.
- Issues with voting on a capital plan without sufficient funds.
- Questions that need to be addressed.
- The necessity of a traffic study is to improve Merrill Road’s campus traffic flow.
- ESE/VPK classes have 60–70 students, raising concerns about adequate space.
- Potential population increase due to a new apartment complex in the area.
- Need to determine the percentage of subsidized units in the new apartment complex.
- Playground concerns, ensuring it is suitable for all age groups at the school.
- Worries about the most vocal and visible communities getting preferential treatment.
- Avoiding school closures that disproportionately affect vulnerable communities.
- Every district must contribute fairly.
- Appreciation for Dr. Bernier and district leadership, despite many unanswered questions.
- Traffic safety concerns, with a request for the district to develop a plan.
- Concerns about unanswered questions from district leadership.
- Nine children have been involved in vehicular accidents, with three fatalities.
- Concerns about merging two communities into an unsafe situation.
- Appreciation was shared for everyone's input.

5. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF SUSIE TOLBERT ELEMENTARY AND SMART POPE LIVINGSTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

No Public Comments.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- The community is dissatisfied but has come to terms with the situation.
- SP Livingston was slated for a new school, but the plan was halted due to Covid.
- Questions were raised about the specific improvements that will be made.
- Appreciation was expressed for Sharwonda Peek, Assistant Superintendent of School Choice, for her support during the community meetings.

6. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF GEORGE WASHINGTON CARVER ELEMENTARY AND RUFUS E. PAYNE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- Concerns were raised about the dismissal area and car rider zone at Rufus E. Payne.
- Potential problems were anticipated.
- A call to adopt a more solution-oriented approach.

- More time is needed to streamline the process.
- Students are likely to be the ones who suffer.
- Discussion on the impact of school closures.
- Ensuring student safety and providing adequate space for sick students.
- Question about whether additional health aids will be added to the school.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- Concerns were raised about neighborhood schools being closed.
- Seven schools have already been closed in District 5.
- Parents expressed a preference not to drop their children off at multiple schools.
- A request was made to take parents' concerns into account.
- Efforts should be made to avoid discouraging parents.
- Parents need time to process and address their concerns while getting involved.
- An inquiry was made about postponing the consolidation of certain schools listed on the November 4, 2024, Regular Board Meeting Consent Agenda.
- Clarification was provided to the public regarding the agenda items.
- A board member informed everyone that the Superintendent has the authority to reschedule an agenda item.

7. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF HIDDEN OAKS ELEMENTARY AND CEDAR HILLS ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- A request was made to reconsider the consolidation.
- The community was not given sufficient time to gather and discuss.
- The school enrollment numbers provided did not reflect actual enrollment.
- A request was made for Dr. Bernier to send staff to schools to address questions during community meetings.
- The community wants to feel heard and acknowledged.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- Questions around the fairness of the process.
- Dedicated parents that the Board has not heard from.
- Consolidation of these schools would cause the school to go beyond its capacity.
- Suggestions for pausing to ensure the right decision is being made.

8. PUBLIC HEARING: CONSOLIDATION OF BRIDGE TO SUCCESS ACADEMY MIDDLE AND BRIDGE TO SUCCESS ACADEMY HIGH AT WEST JACKSONVILLE INTO EUGENE BUTLER MIDDLE SCHOOL

The public hearing was opened.

Members of the public shared the following comments:

- Available programs.
- Dedicated magnet programs.
- Ongoing programs.
- Parental options.
- Parents chose programs for their children based on what the district offered.
- A request to pause the decision to consolidate all schools and discontinue the Young Men's and Women's Leadership Academy (YMWLA) academic program.
- Shared successful experiences of parents and students with the YMWLA leadership academic program.
- The leadership program benefits many students.
- Opposition to the school closure.
- The leadership program is underutilized.
- Poor marketing of the leadership academic program.
- Ensure students are not neglected.
- Constituent email provided context for parental support.
- Consider sustainability when creating programs.
- School performance has declined.
- Board members were reminded of their campaign promises.
- Suggested solution: consolidate Matthew Gilbert into YMWLA.
- Concerns that demographic, geographic, and social factors have been historically overlooked.
- Request for everyone to visit the school before making decisions.
- Shared experiences of parents and students.
- The school did not receive adequate marketing funds.
- Previous discussions and changes.
- Enhance the program's academic rigor.

The public hearing was closed.

Board Member and/or Superintendent Comments:

- Concerns about the fairness of the process.
- Dedicated parents whose voices have not been heard by the Board.
- Consolidating these schools would exceed the school's capacity.
- Suggestions to pause and ensure the right decision is made.
- Clarification that YMWLA is not being closed.
- Appreciation for the parents and students who spoke.
- Need for greater focus on the single-gender concept.
- Commendation for the School Advisory Committee's efforts to energize the school.
- Commitment to continuing the school's legacy.
- Opposition to closing the program.
- Caution against using power indiscriminately.
- Identification of board policy that placed all programs at YMWLA.
- Importance of reviewing board policies.
- Continuity of programs for high schools.
- Prioritization of current students if the program is discontinued.
- Reflection on past school choice expo experiences.

- Previous communications about moving the YMWLA program to a high school.
- Concerns about potential school deserts.
- Acknowledgment of community feedback.
- Need for creativity in the district.
- Encouragement to learn from past consolidations and provide resources to principals.
- Preparation for uncertainties.
- Reiteration of follow-ups.
- Request for a summary of community meetings for board members.
- Focus on academic achievement, student safety, and fiscal responsibility.
- Careful process to ensure consistency in future school closures.
- Notification to the public about upcoming school closures.
- Ensuring constituents get answers to their questions.
- Proper planning for school closures.
- Encouragement of community communication.
- Discussion on closures and marketing.
- The Board was thanked for the robust conversation.

Adjournment

1. ADJOURNMENT

Motion:

That the Duval County School Board move to adjourn the meeting at 9:46 p.m..

Vote Results:

Motion: Charlotte D. Joyce

Second: Kelly Coker

PASSED - 7-0

Aye:

Lori Hershey

Warren A. Jones

Charlotte D. Joyce

Darryl Willie

Kelly Coker

Cynthia Pearson

April A. Carney

Nay:

None

MA

Superintendent

Chairman