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## THE SCHOOL BOARD OF LEE COUNTY, FLORIDA

### Town Hall Meeting – N O T E S

Monday – February 26, 2007 / 6:30 p.m. (Ida Baker High School Auditorium)

**Participants:** Mrs. Jeanne S. Dozier, Board Chairman  
Mr. Robert D. Chilmonik, Board Member (and Host)  
Dr. James W. Browder, Secretary & District Superintendent  
Mrs. Sandi Agle, Media Services Coordinator  
Dr. Jane E. Kuckel, Vice Chair  
Dr. Elinor C. Scricca, School Board Member  
Mr. Keith Martin, Board Attorney  
Mr. Joe Donzelli, Communications Director  
Mrs. Denise Mangus, Recording Secretary

- I. CALL TO ORDER** – The Town Hall Meeting was called to order by Mr. Chilmonik at 6:30 p.m. He thanked staff and acknowledged the Superintendent and the Board. Mr. Chilmonik noted this is the first of these forums and parents/children are welcome to attend for closer interfacing/reaching out with the District.
- II. GENERAL INFORMATION ABOUT THE DISTRICT** – Mr. Chilmonik read some District facts with general information—e.g., 79,000 students (9<sup>th</sup> largest in Florida, in top 60 largest in U.S.), with about 10,000 in Exceptional Student Education (around 4,600 gifted and 5,400 having special needs). There were 3,400 graduates last year. There are approximately 700 buses daily with 45,000 students; 72,000 miles are driven daily (13.5 million/yearly, equaling 26 round trips to the moon). Food Service provides 9,000 breakfasts and 36,000 lunches daily (7 million/year). There are 11,000 full- and part-time teachers (5,000 of which are teachers). Re the Governor’s A++ plan, 79% earned an A or B; the state average is 75%. The District’s dropout rate is 2.9% (state average is 3.0%); our average was 7.5% three years ago. There’s been amazing growth with 4,000-5,000 students annually. Another challenge has been teacher recruitment; the 2006-07 school year began with 50 vacancies (state shortage was 2,500), and colleges/universities won’t have enough teacher graduates to fill the openings. Mr. Chilmonik noted the Board oversees policy, public oversight of budget, and works with and hires the Superintendent to carry operations; the right policies are needed in place and schools open to service student needs. School Board Members are elected in a countywide election.
- III. COLLECT INPUT/INFORMATION FROM AUDIENCE THROUGH STRATEGIC LISTENING** – The strategic listening exercise was administered (copy of results on file with these notes) with the following majority noted of those in attendance: 45% have lived in the county more than 20 years; 64% do not have school-age children; 31% strongly disagree FCAT testing positively contributes to increased student achievement (but 14 + 14% in the strongly agree range); 36 + 43% perceive school safety in the excellent range; 40% + 28% note school-to-home communication in the excellent range as well as school lunches being excellent to meet nutritional needs (40 + 20%); 58% (+19%) feel instructional materials’ handling (e.g., books) satisfactory and/or excellent; 36% (+28%) strongly agree homework assignments given meet children’s learning needs; 30% (+ 4%) strongly agree children are being educated in practical areas as budget and citizen responsibilities; 22 and 22% strongly agree Student Assignment Plan meeting families’ needs; 46% (+ 31%) strongly agree community schools well maintained; 17 and 26% strongly agree Transportation meeting needs; 52% (+22%) strongly agree Strategic Listening good way to listen to community; and 46% (+25%) strongly agree they’re optimistic of the direction being taken by District to benefit students.
- IV. QUESTIONS FROM AUDIENCE** – One parent asked about Island Coast High School (choice slip was in mail) re administration and principal appointment; it’s anticipated for 3/13 (Challenger Middle will be ready to move out of portables). The first batch for Choice concludes 3/16 (disruption wasn’t wanted for current FCAT testing). Also asked (from individual who served on DAC a few years) was the need for more character building in middle schools as she feels self-esteem may be a problem; something for preparing middle school students to be teenagers is desired in a program for their issues—going to middle, changing classes, different students versus elementary (getting ready for high school), etc. Mr. Chilmonik noted, as a former middle school teacher, encouragement by schools for open house attendance; hopefully the media will

pick up that parent involvement assists to ensure success and participation in helping programs as suggested. He encourages 6<sup>th</sup> graders be involved in intramural programs as sports can be a confidence builder and teach fair play; the parent feels not all students are chosen for sports but she noted some schools had prior piloting programs (her son attended freshman camp before high school—about it and what to expect) and she's looking for this at the middle school level. One of her sons had a problem with organizational program process; Bonita Middle had a summer camp and one would like to be seen in the Cape. Dr. Browder noted the Learning for Life program; there's hopeful legislation re bullying/self-esteem (Dr. Jones can share info). This parent is active at Caloosa Elementary and inquired as to the School Improvement Plan (SIP) being altered for the number of students not speaking English. Front school offices have SIP and it's posted on some websites. The Board and Superintendent decided at a recent workshop to look at issues of students not speaking English and areas to improve. Mr. Chilmonik noted the visit of U.S. Senator Mel Martinez and if anything at the federal level can provide help for teachers (to non-English speakers). The Governor's Citizen Review Group (Mr. Chilmonik serves on) noted at a December meeting the mechanics of English and going back to basic grammar skills for students. The move towards education is positive but can be slow. The parent knows the Sanibel School incorporates some things into classrooms; it would be nice at other schools besides elementary. Dr. Scricca agrees with foreign language being taught in elementary schools and is positive the Superintendent will review (with Board Members' urging).

Another parent asked about traffic confusion for parent pick-up at Veterans Park, there seems to be a situation in the mornings with only have one lane coming through (from Lehigh Middle to Veterans Park) instead of two lanes in the circle. In the afternoons, two lanes are used and it works. He noted the gates open for Arthur Avenue at 7:15 a.m. and close at 7:50; one can be in line at 7:40 a.m. and the child is marked tardy since not getting in until 8:05. He would want late treatment as buses receive. Perhaps another gate/lane could be at the recreation center, as students going to middle school can get dropped on there (their building on that side); parents were told it was tried but didn't work. Parents are getting fed-up with the current plan; parents are coming in from Homestead Road and stopping in the middle of the road. There's problem with left made off of Homestead at stop sign re bus stop; parents are making u-turn in open lot which is not school property. There's fussing with those parents who are frustrated. Mr. Chilmonik noted Dr. Browder will try to best address this matter; the Superintendent noted Messrs. McNerney, Moore, and Hayhurst will look into this.

Mr. Traube commended the National Board Certified Teachers (NBCT); he noted reduced standards for sub teachers and the raises weren't rewarding to those with bachelors' degrees/experience and asked about returning to 60 credit hours. Mr. Chilmonik noted the Board did approve a new program last year, with the purpose of getting substitute teachers for the classroom; he noted appreciation to subs when covering his classes due to multiple eye operations. Mr. Chilmonik expressed his support of high standards and necessity to have well-motivated workforce. Mrs. Dozier noted this Board's dedication to employees and feelings of "we're here to serve." Filling vacancies in the classroom had to be looked at; there's been a diminishing workforce, and the District had problems with classes not being covered (there are teachers out due to illness). The Board faced a situation, data was reviewed, and the situation made it tough for decisions. The Board appreciates subs as another arm to keep schools open. The NBCT is a rigorous program and teachers choose to do this elective. The Board made a data-based decision (looking around state re other districts' work on sub shortage) in allowing individuals with high school diplomas; not all are completely satisfied with this but it's desired to have classrooms covered. Mrs. Dozier had conversations with Dr. Browder about the potential of 18-year-old subs in classrooms; he assured it would be looked at. Four years work experience was equated (like teacher attending college four years or working), which pretty much puts individuals at 22 years old. Mr. Traube would've suggested using money to help subs feel comfortable.

Ms. Laura Mansfield asked about ESE and/or more profoundly needy children re clustering. She feels there's lack of communication regarding needy children, with concerns about previous desegregation case, and IEPs may be in jeopardy re compliance (choice for meeting IEPs re personnel). She would like to see bottom dollar hit kids (compliantly needy). Mr. Chilmonik agrees with some comments, noting it's important for the

District to be transparent re funding; the Board was briefed on ESE clustering but he's still studying it. Dr. Browder noted one thing in trying to provide support for needed programs—not every school has profoundly handicapped as an example; in a lot of schools, there'd be a K-5 unit. Maybe a K-1/k-1,2 may be better served. In trying to be more thoughtful, if a unit was put in every school to serve more age appropriateness of youngsters and assure those in schools (e.g., speech), enough people can't be found to travel around district. If put by zones, there'd be schools with a variety of levels. Best support as possible for children is wanted. The parent noted thanks for the clarification; with her son in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, there'd probably be 2-3 options in the West Zone, per Dr. Browder. Maximum use of dollars is desired for assuring programs to have all support needed. Dr. Browder noted the ESE parent meetings; hopefully 150 will attend the next one (30 were at the first and 75 at the second). The Board wanted disruption minimized.

Ms. Mansfield asked next about her son currently on alternative diploma (can't get regular since not taking FCAT) and having an alternative FCAT. Dr. Browder noted contacting school principals to work with ESE and ensure IEP is appropriate for her son; he also suggested talking with a staffing specialist to help get data and head down the right path (since that group works with the child daily) for the written IEP. Separately, she asked about the cost of the strategic listening technology; it was purchased three years ago for \$70,000 (used first for new student assignment plan) and it has paid for itself by others using it. Re FCAT, Mr. Chilmonik noted the Citizen Review Group discussing publicly where we're going, and he feels there'll be changes re FCAT. Dr. Kuckel noted, re communication, rationale for ESE clustering should've been know as it impacts this woman's child and others; it's a critical piece and important to Board Members. There's always the window of working out the bugs and it's not desired to have parents nervous of what's happening. Dr. Kuckel feels it's imperative parents know who their legislators are and how to contact them as the latter create laws on how we function within the school setting. The News-Press has legislators' e-mail contact information daily in the paper; Ms. Mansfield's comments are well taken.

Lynn James noted following up on the last speaker who has a son also; she hears about monies going to autism center in another county. She can't say enough about the principal and staff at her son's school. Against others' wishes, the son of Ms. James left a Trafalgar autism class (inclusion now) and he's doing fine; their sons are going to have to live in the world. It may be too late for theirs to get a regular diploma though. She doesn't want steps backward re money for programs and she wouldn't sue the system. She was told years ago what her son couldn't do but with inclusion done right, it's been good and she's unsure what her son can still accomplish. Ms. James noted concern towards clustering and noted staff shouldn't intimidate re not wanting kids in inclusion (not case in West Zone). Mr. Chilmonik noted his firm belief in inclusion, and he never had a problem in his six years of teaching of others making fun of exceptional students. Principal Vetter was thanked. Mr. Chilmonik noted communication is key. Ms. James noted it's cheaper to have her son in life skills (15 kids) versus 7 prior in class.

Judy Piesco thanked Mr. Chilmonik for his position on transparency; she has strong feelings as well as the Governor and hopes the latter will be there if we need him. Ms. Piesco noted her public information requests hasn't been to her satisfaction. Mr. Chilmonik noted his previous sales force experience that all books were open to every single sales person (and money wasn't lost but it helped); he noted trusting people, teaching, and budget. Good things do happen though some may be uncomfortable; Mr. Chilmonik feels we do need to get better. Ms. Piesco feels some information requested should've been more readily available, noting under \$25,000 contracts. It was explained some things not in simple format (if not required). She also felt some prices to obtain information was high. Mr. Chilmonik noted all being on the same page; he's tried to work on this in the District but with \$1.5 billion budget, mistakes can be made though it's key to not repeat the latter and make sure public clearly understands. He reluctantly hated to have staff generate 30+ lbs. of paper but he'll continue to ask and hopefully the Board and Superintendent understand what's being done. Ms. Piesco feels Board Members have attacked Mr. Chilmonik but she doesn't want the latter to stop asking questions.

Kathy Woolston, parent, thanked the Board and Dr. Browder for this meet-and-greet opportunity. Re the East Zone, she feels kind of pushed aside and kids are behind the eight ball when waiting for new schools to be built, as it may take a couple of years to get the kinks worked out (e.g., technology). Her son really enjoys East Lee County High, and the new building/comprehensive high school next year is looked forward to. Another son wants a different high than his brother, as he's a different scholar. Ms. Woolston noted being an involved parent who's trying to make informed decisions. She has concerns about electives being different at schools (latter choosing different themes/topics). In middle school, principals have final say in what will be in schools; concerns her is that a decision may be made not to do Spanish but there's a high population of Spanish-speaking students. Feels Spanish transition speaking needs to be addressed at elementary;. She knows funding is by school and can seem kind unequal; some schools may have many electives. At East, there's been no fields to have games and activities are limited though almost 1,000 students there; hallways are one way due to crowding and she noted some kids missed meals in beginning of this school year as they couldn't get to the cafeteria. How many times will this happen at other schools in transition? Is the education of children put on hold until things are up and running?

Mr. Chilmonik noted he's sorry to hear of kids possibly missing lunch; staging schools are here because of the growth explosion the last four years but there could be some negatives. Our hands are mandated by the state re reading when it comes to electives and/or needing foreign language. There are 69% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders across the state not reading at grade level. Dr. Browder noted that, inside middle school, an elective is reading; with 7 periods and 2 opportunities to pick other things. If level 1 or 2 ready, the law requires to have a class. Re the East Lee County High, it was not the best situation but the school was delayed due to the Army Corps of Engineers; a decision was made to keep in that building two years. There is excitement for the new school and be assured there'll be classes/programs of a full high school; South Fort Myers High and Ida Baker had the same growing pains. Spanish will probably be the foreign language of choice in middle school. Dr. Browder noted the District wants to do everything it can to make the students successful.

Ms. Woolston feels, re subs, much training goes on during the workday; classroom settings may be disrupted. In private sector, time taken off would not be compensated and it can be unfair having subs thrown in to cover (though they do a good job). She knows there are teacher issues with the bargaining contract but we pride our children on perfect attendance and this reflects to children. Ms. Woolston noted approaches in a different manner. Re construction, with leaps and bounds at the fast pace and cost, there could be creative ways to do—e.g., split sessions, summer school—for utilizing schools more. Mr. Chilmonik noted it's difficult re teacher training, as the latter do a lot at night on their own—depending on certification areas. ESOL training (300 hours) is really not compensated and for endorsements, many go at night and on weekends. Unfortunately, some training does occur during the week. Re the class size amendment and the state, the Board and Superintendent discuss to see if on the right track and to make sure every dollar is spent wisely.

Marvin Goetz noted the facts given by Mr. Chilmonik at the beginning of the evening and asked how many teachers are successful in gaining. He noted this Board thinking out of the box; Mr. Goetz works with FGCU in the Serve program. Of new teachers in their first years, 60% don't stay in teaching; District turnover is heavy. There's an untapped source of highly trained educators (outsiders brought in to teach Adult Ed) who are retired and could be adjunct instructors (teaching 1-2 classes); the state allows for this to occur, it would help administrators having teachers, and it could be looked at to see if viable. Mr. Chilmonik thinks this is a wonderful comment and may need discussion. Re retirees, they may be more stable role models for children.

Mr. Chilmonik noted thanks for this meeting which allowed a cordial opportunity to listen without a lot of conflict; Dr. Kuckel's is March 15<sup>th</sup> (6:30 p.m.) at Rayma Page Elementary. Meeting adjourned at 8:07 p.m.

/dwm