

Minutes
Clark County School District
Meeting of the Board of School Trustees

TELECONFERENCE ONLY

Work Session

Wednesday, March 3, 2021

8:09 a.m.

Roll Call: Members Present
Linda P. Cavazos, President
Irene Cepeda, Vice President
Evelyn Garcia Morales, Clerk
Lola Brooks, Member
Danielle Ford, Member
Lisa Guzmán, Member
Katie Williams, Member

Jesus F. Jara, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

Also present were: Mary-Anne Miller, Board Counsel, District Attorney's Office; Luke Puschnig, General Counsel, Office of the General Counsel; Joe Caruso, Executive Director, Community Services Department, Office of the Superintendent; Cindy Krohn, Director, Board Office; Jan Jones Blackhurst, Board Chairwoman, Public Education Foundation; Kirsten Searer, President, Public Education Foundation; Peter Guzman, Senior Vice Chair, Public Education Foundation; Judi Steele, CEO, Public Education Foundation; and John Bailey, Board Member, Public Education Foundation.

Adoption of the Agenda

Adopt agenda, except move Item 3.01 to follow Item 3.03 as 3.03a and note additional reference material provided for Item 3.01 and Item 3.02.

Motion: Cepeda Second: Williams Vote: Unanimous

Public Comment on Agenda Items

Voice-recorded public comments:

John Vellardita, spoke on Item 3.01. He stated the Clark County Education Association (CCEA) believes the District should develop its own professional development program for educators and administrators; that before considering any further work with the Public Education Foundation, an analysis should be done on the effectiveness of their programs; that they have a concern regarding the number of former CCSD employees now employed by the Foundation; and that there should be transparency regarding the relationship of any Trustee and any Foundation staff or board members when engaging in any discussions related to replacing Superintendent Jara.

Public Comment on Agenda Items (continued)

Senator Carrie Ann Buck spoke on Item 3.01. She commended Judi Steele and the Foundation for all that they do for students and teachers. She shared that they provided valuable assistance when she was a principal working on the empowerment initiative. She talked about all the funding they provide to students for college.

Delilah Schultz spoke on Item 3.03. She said if we do not have any anti-racist rules in the District, people will think it is okay to be racists in schools, and she said she does not like that. She said we need to make sure that it is equal and fair for everyone at our schools.

Sarah Comroe spoke on Item 3.03. She expressed concern regarding social media posts made by Trustee Williams regarding this agenda item. She stated that this item on anti-racist policies is extremely important, partly because of people like Trustee Williams. She said all students, and specifically students of color, are seeing this activity on social media. She expressed hope that the Board members will have serious discussions about how the Board is being represented by Trustee Williams.

Akiko Cooks spoke on Item 3.03, stating anti-racist policies need to be in place, and we should not have to be pushed to discuss antiracism. She said anti-racist policies are a big part of education and all students should feel protected, uplifted, and empowered and Trustees should represent all students, regardless of their race or cultural background.

Sasha Landro asked that the Board have a discussion about anti-racist policies and that they create and implement them. She said there should be policies in place to protect all students. She stated that racism is a type of bullying.

Tanisha Freedom said unfortunately in 2021, in this state, county and city, Black children are still subjected to racism and anti-Black rhetoric. She said Black and brown students are targeted more often for school police interaction and jail. She noted that Governor Sisolak created a proclamation in 2020 which stated that racism is a public health crisis.

Ms. Wright commented on Item 3.03 and said she supports an anti-racist policy but said she was unable to find a proposed policy already created by the District.

A caller spoke on Item 3.03 in support of anti-racist policies and curriculum. She shared her experience as a student witnessing openly White nationalists' behavior in school. She said with anti-racist policies in place, we can create safer schools and more caring students. She said Trustee Williams' comments regarding this agenda item are the reason we need this item to be taken more seriously.

Chris Wong commented on Item 3.03 and asked that an anti-racist policy be addressed. He said as an educator and a person of color, he believes that antiracism is an important part of every child's education. He strongly urged the Board to prioritize anti-racist education going forward.

Public Comment on Agenda Items (continued)

Jenna Audia spoke on Item 3.03. She commented on Trustee Williams' posts on social media regarding this agenda item. She referenced one post in particular and addressed Trustee Williams and said students wish they could go to school and just focus on their education, but they cannot. She said there needs to be discussion on this agenda item among the Trustees and within the entire District.

Tameka Henry commented on Item 3.03. She said it is nice to know the Board would be discussing this topic and said a discussion on an anti-racist Districtwide policy is long overdue.

Sylvia Mirza spoke on Item 4.01 and said she and many others are asking for a varsity bowl for high school seniors. She said they have worked hard and it is unfair that they do not get to play.

Mrs. Krohn provided a summary of the written comments submitted, as follows:

Item 3.03

The Nevada Immigrant Coalition supports anti-racist education practices in CCSD. They said children need to understand the history of Nevada that is both heroic and problematic and said children who are taught a more accurate version of Nevada history should understand that anti-immigrant, anti-race, and anti-religious sentiments have been civic issues that Nevadans have had to contend with. In addition, they said that Nevada's future lies in investing in creating a civic environment that promotes a cohesive, diverse community.

Item 4.01

A writer asked the Board to add items to the March 11, 2021, agenda which include Balanced Governance®, revisiting the hybrid model, implementation of the Memorandum of Agreements (MOAs) with the Education Support Employees Association (ESEA) and the CCEA and how they are not being followed. They asked that the Board listen to what parents and employees are saying.

A person said Covid-19 cases have declined and asked that activities resume, seniors participate in at least one event, and parents and students be given a choice to have full-time, in-person learning.

Approve Board Attorney

Approval on solicitation of individual applications or proposals from law firms for the provision of general counsel services to the Board of School Trustees.

Ms. Miller provided information outlining the different types of attorney services models discussed at the February work session, as shown in Reference 3.01.

Approve Board Attorney (continued)

Trustee Ford suggested that they narrow their choices down based on the Board's previous discussion. She spoke in favor of either a law firm providing services per hour or a law firm on static retainer.

Ms. Miller stated that as part of the Request for Proposal (RFP), the Board could request that the firms submit a proposal based on both an hourly fee and a retainer, so the Trustees can have a comparison.

Trustee Guzmán asked Ms. Miller her thoughts on whether having a firm on retainer or paying an hourly fee would be most cost-effective.

Ms. Miller suggested hiring a firm on retainer initially to gauge whether both sides are comfortable with that arrangement. She said the Board could always switch to using that same firm on an hourly basis.

Trustee Brooks said she could support either the law firm on an hourly basis or on retain and said she would want the Board to have a clear understanding of the cost, the services being provided, and who is requesting services.

Ms. Miller advised that the Board could still include the sole practitioners in the RFP responses to be received.

Trustee Williams said her opinion is that the board should follow the Nevada Revised Statutes (NRS) for the use of a board attorney and use the first option presented of a Board Counsel position reclassified from CCSD General Counsel position.

Trustee Garcia Morales said it is important to establish a budget for this item and include in the RFP a range of what the Board could expect to spend.

Trustee Ford said she was not comfortable with reclassifying CCSD General Counsel to work as Board Counsel. She suggested putting out an RFP to begin with a smaller retainer and then modify the number of hours and grant more, if necessary.

Trustee Cavazos agreed with the suggestion made by Ms. Miller and said she would be in favor of having a law firm on static retainer. She said she would not be comfortable with having CCSD counsel as Board Counsel.

Trustee Brooks said she agrees that the Board needs a backup attorney and that there could be a cost savings in reclassification. She suggested that it is possible to do a combination of these options. She stated also that the Board attorney should represent the Board and not individual Board members.

Approve Board Attorney (continued)

Trustee Williams asked if it would be possible to impose a spending cap on the use of the Board attorney.

Trustee Ford said she did not agree with using District counsel to perform some of the Board operations. She said she would be comfortable with a recommendation from the Board attorney if that person felt they could work with District counsel and delegate some tasks.

Motion to submit an RFP for a law firm on static retainer and to include options for an hourly rate.

Motion: Ford Second: Guzmán

Trustee Guzmán asked if the framework for this RFP is already in place.

Ms. Miller explained that customarily they would work with the Purchasing Department to frame the RFP so the responding firms would know what the Board was looking for. She said she would be happy to work with the Purchasing Department and she would likely seek the assistance of CCSD's General Counsel, as well.

Superintendent Jara said staff would simply need a budget line item, not a specific amount, and the Board would then decide on the proper amount. He said once the Board decides to move forward and it is finalized, there would then be a budget transfer to the Board budget.

Trustee Brooks said she can support the motion but would like the RFP to have a range of options for services.

Vote on Trustee Ford's motion was unanimous.

Discussion on Anti-Racist Policies

Discussion regarding options to regularly monitor and receive reports on the District's progress on racial equity/anti-racist policies for all students and staff.

Trustee Cavazos explained that this is a beginning, informational conversation for the Trustees to decide which direction they want to go in. She noted that the question of whether this would already be in the anti-bullying policy came up during the agenda review.

Trustee Williams said she was not opposed to having this discussion. She said she is uneasy about the verbiage used here because when people talk about anti-racism and anti-discrimination policies, they tend to think it only affects Black students, but she wanted to point out that there are students in this District of other races and religions and backgrounds. She said this is already covered in the anti-bullying policy and it is also covered in the NRS. She said if it is not being followed, that is not necessarily a Board issue but an individual school issue.

Discussion on Anti-Racist Policies (continued)

Trustee Cepeda spoke in support of having this discussion. She said while the Board has done a lot of work to incorporate diversity into their policies, there is a difference between diversity and anti-racist policies. She said the Board might want to consider incorporating this into their vision and goals and thinking of incorporating a theory of change. She said as a woman of color, this is something she feels every day.

Trustee Cavazos expressed appreciation for Trustee Cepeda sharing her personal perspective, stating as a woman of color, she has also felt the same. She also appreciated Trustee Cepeda's comments regarding looking at this as a theory of change.

Trustee Garcia Morales said she believes that in order to undo racism, you have to constantly identify it, describe it, and dismantle it. She said she was in support of the Board identifying which elements of anti-racism they want to focus on. She shared that she follows School Board Partners, an organization that focuses on supporting and training board members to become anti-racist individuals.

Trustee Garcia Morales said she believes anti-racist policies must go beyond anti-bullying and address areas such as racial equity training for the Board, ensuring their goals are aligned to anti-racist themes, what individual Board members can do to promote anti-racist policies, curriculum and content, and looking at what wraparound services are needed in different areas. She said she would like to see an update on the work that has been done that came out of the Equity Commission's report.

Trustee Guzmán agreed with the comments and suggestions made by Trustee Cepeda and Trustee Garcia Morales.

Trustee Ford said this is a bigger conversation but suggested it could be approached as a three-part change: realigning the Board's mission through a resolution, followed by a conversation about a theory of change, followed by a change in policy. She shared what the Trustees learned regarding theory of change during their executive training. She also shared the resolution put forth by Cypress-Fairbanks Independent School District.

Trustee Williams reminded everyone that the Superintendent's team is working very hard during this time trying to reopen schools. She expressed concern with taking people and manpower away from that to discuss this.

Motion to table this until after schools have been fully reopened, perhaps until the end of May or the beginning of June.

Motion: Williams

There was no second for the motion.

Discussion on Anti-Racist Policies (continued)

Trustee Brooks said she is in support of this work but is hesitant of a resolution because it seems that once a resolution is passed, no action follows. She said she would like to know the exact steps that are going to be taken and the timeline of those steps and who would be doing the work. She added that she was not opposed to a resolution and would sign a resolution.

Trustee Cavazos said the resolution would be a beginning point. She said she does not see this as being something that would take a lot of staff time at this point. She volunteered to work with counsel to look at resolutions that have been passed by other school districts. She disagreed with postponing this. She stated the Trustees need to approach this in a problem-solving, resolution-oriented manner. She said she would be willing to look at a specific plan for working with staff and she would be willing to take on the brunt of that work.

Superintendent Jara mentioned the Equity Commission report and said a lot of work has been done to address the challenges students are facing in terms of academic success through the District's academic programs and in terms of suspensions and disproportionality with the Clark County School Justice Partnership and My Brother's Keeper. He said he wanted to ensure that they do not move staff away from that important work because he thinks this is all aligned and this would be an opportunity for consistency as a District instead of taking staff away from the work that has been happening. He said staff would be providing the Board with an update in those areas he mentioned.

Trustee Cepeda said she was in support of a resolution but she wanted to hear what the community wants and she wants to hear from organizations, such as the NAACP and local fraternities and sororities. She volunteered to help organize community input events.

Trustee Brooks agreed with Trustee Cepeda's suggestions and said a community discussion is a good starting point. She said the structure of Board meetings is not necessarily as useful as they would like for engaging the community in this way, and she suggested an event that would allow for a two-way dialogue between the Board and the community.

Trustee Ford offered the following draft timeline for the Board to consider: bring a proposed resolution to the March 25, 2021, regular Board meeting for possible approval; commit the month of April to having conversations with the Equity Committee, any taskforce, state committee and community groups, put the information from those meetings in a document for everyone to review; include the theory of change conversation at the May work session; use the month of May to draft a policy to present at the first Board meeting in June for discussion; present a final proposed policy for possible approval at the second Board meeting in June.

Trustee Cavazos said she would work with Trustee Cepeda on that timeline and what could be accomplished.

Discussion on Anti-Racist Policies (continued)

Trustee Garcia Morales said she would be honored to contribute to this work. She agreed that it is critical to align this work to the work the District is already doing in this area.

Trustee Williams said in terms of the draft timeline, she would suggest having the community discussion and then bringing a proposed resolution forward to be able to build a comprehensive resolution.

Trustee Ford said the purpose for the resolution is for the community to know that the Board is committed to this conversation. She said it is for the Board and it is in response to public comments in previous meetings and the community asking the Board to do something.

Public Education Foundation

Presentation and discussion on the partnership between The Public Education Foundation and the Clark County School District.

The Public Education Foundation members shared a video highlighting some of the work they do for educators and for students in partnership with CCSD.

Trustee Guzmán stated she would like to see the Foundation's data on its contribution to student achievement and teacher growth.

Ms. Jones Blackhurst said she would provide that data to the Trustees.

Trustee Garcia Morales said she would like information related to how the scholarship recipients are mirroring the demographics of the District. She said she would also like to see percentages of administrators and educators who are people of color.

Trustee Williams asked how many programs or projects the Foundation has specific to students as opposed to teachers.

Ms. Searer shared the work the Foundation does to help provide funding to the school district and programs as financial managers of the funds invested by organizations. She offered to provide more information to the Board.

Trustee Ford asked what the Foundation's relationship is with the District, what their role is, and how the Foundation differs from any other District partner.

Mr. Bailey stated that the role of the Foundation began 30 years ago with a Memorandum of Understanding (MOA), and he said the Trustees can see the information in the documentation provided to the Trustees.

Public Education Foundation (continued)

Ms. Jones Blackhurst added that the focus of the Foundation was to be a partner with the District in supporting and promoting what the District felt improved the quality of education for students.

Trustee Guzmán asked how District employees working at the Foundation fit into the private-public partnership between the District and the Foundation and how those employees are able to support the Foundation's vision and mission.

Ms. Searer stated that there are currently five CCSD employees assigned to work at the Foundation, which is very helpful because of the amount of interaction between the Foundation and the schools. She said the Foundation has also participated in the budget cuts along with the rest of the District, as they have had as many as 10 District employees working at the Foundation in the past.

Upcoming Meeting of the Board of Trustees – Thursday, March 11, 2021, 5:00 p.m.

Trustee Cavazos stated the March 11, 2021, Board meeting would be held at the Las Vegas Academy of the Arts High School in the Lowden Theater. She said public comment for that meeting will close on Thursday, March 11, 2021, at 2:00 p.m.

Ms. Miller noted that people will still be able to attend the meeting in person and speak during the public comment period.

Public Comment Period on Non-Agenda Items

Voice-recorded public comments:

Lorraine Brooks said if the Trustees visit the Southern Nevada Health District website, they can see current data on Coronavirus cases. She said everything can now be opened back up without any safety measures or mandates.

Victoria McCraney said parents should be paid to have to stay home and supervise and teach their children. She said in addition to supervising their children, parents have to spend their own money on school supplies and gas or other means of transportation.

Mrs. Krohn provided a summary of the written comments submitted, as follows:

A writer stated they are disappointed, discouraged, and dismayed by what is happening at Board meetings and feels certain Trustees are trying to shut down and silence other Trustees. They said Balance Governance® is deceitful and destructive and they hope that actions and behaviors improve at future Board meetings.

A writer would like to suggest a full season of sports and asked that spectators be allowed to attend. In addition, they expressed concern with graduations being canceled before restrictions were lifted and asked why 6th- through 12th-grade self-contained, special education is not a priority.

Public Comment Period on Non-Agenda Items (continued)

A parent, who works outside the home, asked how they are to get their kids to and from school for two classes and then take them home for the other two classes.

Adjourn: 10:35 p.m.

Motion: Ford Second: Guzmán Vote: Unanimous