

Bamberg School District One
Minutes of Regular Meeting of Board of Trustees
Richard Carroll Elementary School
May 18, 2020
6:30 p.m.

Members present: Board Chair Janeth Walker, Vice Chair John Hiers, Trustee Gwendolyn Dianne Bamberg, and Trustee Julia “Kim” Berry.

Absent: Secretary Tony E. Duncan

1. **Call meeting to order:** Board Chair Janeth Walker called the meeting to order.

Notice to Media: In accordance with the S. C. Code of Laws of 1976, as amended, Section 30-4-80(E), the following have been notified of the time, date, place and agenda of this meeting:

The Times and Democrat
The Advertizer-Herald

2. **Approval of Agenda**
Trustee John Hiers moved and Vice Chair Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to approve the agenda as written. The motion passed 4-0.
3. **Approval of Minutes**
Trustee Kim Berry moved and Trustee John Hiers seconded to accept the April 20, 2020, meeting minutes with the re-wording of a sentence in Agenda Item 5-f for clarification from Superintendent Schwarting as noted below. The motion passed 4-0.

Question: Board Chair Janeth Walker requested clarification from Superintendent Schwarting on Agenda Item 5-f midway the paragraph on page 3 of 5 that stated, “On March 16, 2020, the Resolution to Consolidate was approved and signed to consolidate. She wasn’t sure if she was referring to the Resolution that was done last year or the Board’s vote on March 16th. Superintendent Schwarting agreed to reword the sentence. Therefore, it was changed to read, “On March 16, 2020, the Board voted to move forward with consolidation with Bamberg School District Two”.

Trustee John Hiers moved and Vice Chair Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to accept the April 14, 2020, called meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

Vice Chair Gwendolyn Bamberg moved and Trustee Kim Berry seconded to accept the April 21, 2020, called meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

Trustee Kim Berry moved and Trustee John Hiers seconded to accept the April 22, 2020, called meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

Trustee John Hiers moved and Vice Chair Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to accept the April 28, 2020, called meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed 4-0.

4. **Election of Officers for 2020-2021**

Superintendent Phyllis Schwarting presided during the election of Board Chair, and Board Chair Janeth Walker presided during the election of Board Vice Chair and Secretary for the board service of May 2020 through April 2021.

Trustee John Hiers nominated Trustee Chair Janeth Walker as Board Chair. The motion passed 4-0.

Board Chair Janeth Walker nominated Trustee Tony Duncan as Secretary. The motion passed 4-0.

Trustee Kim Berry nominated Trustee John Hiers as Vice Chair. The motion passed 4-0.

5. **Student/Staff Recognition Superintendent's Report**

Superintendent Schwarting noted the following:

- a) The following are the training hours that the District's Board Members received from July 1, 2019 – April 9, 2020: Julia Berry – 14; Tony Duncan (Secretary) – 14; John Hiers – 14; and Janeth Walker (Chair) – 42. [Board Packet Enclosure]
- b) Principal Denny Ulmer reported the following guidelines for the 2020 Graduation Ceremony. He noted that things this year would be different due to the coronavirus. The Commencement Ceremony for the Class of 2020 will be held Friday, May 29th at 7:00 p.m. in Leon Maxwell Stadium. After careful planning and consideration, the decision has been made to celebrate the Bamberg-Ehrhardt Class of 2020 with a live, in-person graduation and the opportunity to walk across the stage. Based on COVID-19 guidance from the governor, the SC State Department of Education, and the CDC, the following guidelines will be implemented in the best interest of all in attendance. (1) Each graduate will receive four tickets. The graduation will be livestreamed. (2) Graduates will be seated at least six feet apart across the football field. (3) Each guest will be required to sit in pre-marked areas that are at least six feet apart. Guests are requested to remain in the marked areas for the entire ceremony. (4) Sanitizing stations will be provided throughout the grounds. (5) No guests will be allowed on the field after the graduation ceremony. Graduates and guests should refrain from gathering in groups on campus areas including the parking lots, restrooms, and concession area. (6) Graduates will walk across the stage and receive their diplomas. No handshaking will take place. (7) In the event of inclement weather, the ceremony will be held Saturday, May 30th at 10:00 a.m. at Leon Maxwell Stadium. Also, noted was that the high school, middle school and elementary school faculty members who are not on the graduation committee will not be able to attend the graduation. Board members will be on the stage, however, on the bottom.

Trustee John Hiers noted that he did not see anything about the Marshalls receiving tickets. Principal Ulmer responded by stating that Marshalls will be in attendance but they will not receive extra tickets. Trustee Hiers noted that he believes this is a high recognition for some students to receive during high school and they should be accommodated with at least one ticket. Principal Ulmer responded by stating that he would take this back to the committee.

Principal Ulmer also noted that the band will not be in attendance and the microphones are working clearly. Parents will not be allowed to give out diplomas. He will hand out diplomas but will not shake hands or hug which has been traditionally done. The Awards Day program will be done virtually for social media on Wednesday night, May 27th at 7:00 p.m. Graduation practice will be on Thursday, May 28th at 9:00 a.m. Students will receive bags with their awards enclosed. Students will draw for tickets and their four ticketed guests will sit in a box together. The graduation will be online. Handicapped seating will be available. Assistant Principal Jordan Smith will dismiss the audience by section. The home side of the stadium will be the only side used. The departure will be orderly and there will be plenty of security. [Handouts]

- c) Coronavirus is still in our midst. Board members are receiving emails after each phone conference with the State Department. Molly Spearman, State Superintendent of Education, noted recently that when school resumes they are considering having no more than 8 to 12 students in a class and on the buses have one student per seat unless they are siblings. There is a possibility that the District will have to alternate days present with days online. The District has enough technology equipment for every student to have a device, however, home Internet service is a problem. The District is looking into mini hotspot devices. There is a possibility that teachers will need the summer months in order to prepare to teach through distance learning. Students are being fed five days a week. The summer feeding program will probably begin after school closes on June 2nd and students will receive a hot meal at a school site.

Board Chair Janeth Walker wanted to know if the teachers were adapting to teaching from home. Superintendent Schwarting responded by stating that the vast majority of the teachers have done their very best. Some took heed to the guidelines that came from the State Department. Also, Superintendent Schwarting noted that the administration is discussing some early cleaning and that the state is discussing sanitizing the buildings.

Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg asked Superintendent Schwarting to let the teachers know how appreciative the Board is for all that they have done through these crises.

- d) The return of students will probably be a state decision. There has not been a timeline on the return start-up day for school. The starting of sports will be decided by the South Carolina High School League.
- e) Regular busing of students does not equate to social distancing.
- f) Board members received 2020 GRADS – You are the reason I Serve – Proud School Board Member yard signs. [Handout]
- g) Consolidation Review: Superintendent Schwarting noted that consolidation became an issue with the 2018-2019 Legislative Session when a law was passed stating that small rural school districts with less than 1,500 students would have to consolidate. On July 23rd a Resolution was passed by Bamberg School District One and Bamberg School District Two stating that consolidation would be looked into. A meeting with the public was held with Representative Justin Bamberg and Senator Brad Hutto in Denmark and another one in Bamberg. The attendance was not great at either locations. The Bamberg School District One and Bamberg School District Two 2019 Preliminary Plan for consolidation was developed in Attorney Charles Boykins Office in Columbia. The plan was due August 1st. An attorney who works for Bamberg

School District Two developed a plan asking for money that would be needed for consolidation. We were told to plan for whatever we might need. Approximately \$34 million was requested. However, when the plans were returned, the funding was drastically cut. At the December meeting, it was decided not to follow through with consolidation at this time due to the bonded indebtedness of each district. Therefore, a letter was sent to Betsy Carpentier to this effect. In March it was decided that we would consolidate with Bamberg School District Two. The first Plan was not accepted and we are currently working on one that will bring our amount of money requested down to approximately \$3 million. There are a lot of issues to be resolved between the two school districts and it will take the two years to resolve these issues. Superintendent Schwarting further noted that the Bamberg School Districts 1 and 2 Preliminary Plan for Consolidation is all the information that came from Mr. Boykins' office. The next meeting with both school boards is scheduled for Thursday, May 21, 2020. [Handout]

Board Chair Walker noted that last month she sent Superintendent Schwarting an email requesting a written outline of the information that was gathered at the meeting this year from Mr. Boykin's office where she was in attendance as well as an outline of the meeting that was held at the State Department with Molly Spearman this year be provided to the Board. She does not want the community to think that in March we arbitrarily made a decision to have a board meeting to consolidate. There were meetings that led up to this. Superintendent Schwarting noted that she talked with Cathy Hazelwood who was in that meeting with us because it has been two and half months ago and she didn't take notes because she was doing most of the talking. She doesn't know what was said, it was a general conversation about consolidation. Board Chair Walker noted that Superintendent Schwarting was, however, doing most of the talking and there were a lot of questions being asked about different programs; however, Board Chair Walker wanted to clarify that the outline that she requested was not given by Superintendent Schwarting in her report.

6. **Monthly Financial Report**

Finance Director Devon Furr presented the Financial Report for April 2020, for review.

Vice Chair John Hiers moved and Trustee Kim Berry seconded to approve the April 2020, Financial Report as presented. The motion carried 4-0.

7. **Visitors' Comments**

Mr. Ken Ahlin noted that on December 16th the Board said no to consolidation (taxes too high). From the public standpoint this was a dead issue and the citizens were not informed of a change. He is shocked and appalled that there has not been a public hearing where questions could be asked. He still would like to request that there be a public hearing regarding consolidation and invite the citizens of Bamberg to ask questions even though it has been voted on. He viewed some Board minutes that stated that Board Chair Janeth Walker stated that this would not be the last meeting for a final discussion. Bobbi Bunch also pleaded at this meeting to get the public's involvement.

Mr. Ahlin also noted that “Consolidation for Discussion” that was listed on an agenda as an Executive Session item should not have been allowed; it should have been a forum for discussion in open session.

Board Chair Walker noted that the Board had every intent to include the public with regards to questions, and getting the legislators here; however, a lot of that piece was derailed because of COVID-19. A lot of things stopped because of no meetings, social distancing, and the wearing of masks. Having a public meeting is not off the table and she believes the Board is in agreement of going back to the legislators to see if we are in a position to have a public meeting where social distancing can be observed.

Mr. Ahlin noted further that a public hearing should always come before a vote. It was a slap in the face when the Board went into executive session, came out and it was voted on and it was done. Also, Mr. Ahlin wanted to know who wrote the statement or was it prepared and was it prepared before the meeting or after? Board Chair Walker responded by stating that the statement was prepared by her with assistance from the Board’s attorney and with the anticipation that if it is passed it would be read before the meeting. If it did not pass, it would not have been read.

Trustee John Hiers noted that the Board will go ahead with consolidation meetings with Denmark Two; however, he wanted know what would happen if we can’t come to some agreement and the plan is due in August, would there still be a possibility of not consolidating? Attorney Charles Boykin noted that the question of consolidation will not be made by school districts. Involvement in consolidation will be determined by the legislators. What the District has is an opportunity to participate. The Board does not have the right to try and veto consolidation. This is not within the Board’s power. It is his understanding that if the Board chooses not to participate, it will not stop consolidation. The only impact that the Board would have would be that you will not have any input. Superintendent Schwarting noted that the August 1st deadline is off the table according to Betsy Carpentier.

Board Chair Walker read an email from Sarah Sandifer (Advertiser-Herald Newspaper Reporter). The email noted some unanswered questions and questions of concern from her. Board Chair Walker noted that she will give some thought to the email and a response will be given at an appropriate time. [Handout]

8. **Executive Session**

Board Chair Janeth Walker called for a **motion to enter Executive Session**. Trustee Vice Chair John Hiers **moved and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to enter the Executive Session**. The motion carried (4-0).

The purpose for entering executive session was to discuss:

- a. Personnel Recommendation for Hires
- b. Personnel Recommendation for Resignations
- c. Student Transfer Requests
- d. Other Personnel Matter

Open session: Vice Chair John Hiers moved and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded for the Board to come out of Executive Session and return to the regular session of the meeting. The motion carried 4-0.

9. **Action on Executive Session Items**

Trustee Kim Berry moved and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to accept Agenda Item 8 (a) Personnel Recommendation for Hires for personnel #1, #2, #3, and #4 and to approve the hiring of Mrs. Dottie Brown as Interim Superintendent for Bamberg School District One commencing on July 1, 2020, and further move that we authorize you to execute the employment agreement discussed in Executive Session tonight. The motion carried 4-0.

Trustee Kim Berry moved and Vice Chair John Hiers seconded to accept the request for Agenda Item 8 (b) Personnel Recommendation for Resignations the Non-Renewal for personnel #6 and also to approve the resignations of personnel #1, #2, and #3 as presented. The motion carried 4-0.

Trustee Kim Berry moved and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded to accept the request for Agenda Item 8 (c) Student Transfer Requests for student #1, #2, #3, #4, and #5 as presented. The motion carried 4-0.

Board Chair noted that there was no action taken on Agenda Item 8 (d) Other Personnel Matter.

Board Chair Janeth Walker made a public announcement that stated, "Tonight, after a comprehensive search, the Bamberg One Board of Trustees is pleased to announce our new Interim Superintendent. After conducting a national search and interviewing several well qualified candidates, we found our own Mrs. Dottie Brown to be the best person for our District at this time. Mrs. Brown's reputation as a professional educator was obvious during her interviews and substantiated by her professional references. Mrs. Brown has exhibited a willingness to follow established rules but, when necessary, will ask the tough questions to ensure that the best interest of the children is served. These are characteristics that we believe are an asset and should assist our District. We realize that consolidation is in our immediate future, and Mrs. Brown will serve and assist the District through this transition. Our immediate goal is to have our District and our children ready to fully participate in the consolidated District. It is our belief that Mrs. Brown will help us accomplish this goal on behalf of our children. Please join us in welcoming Mrs. Brown as our Interim Superintendent and Let's work with her for the good of all children."

Vice Chair John Hiers thanked Superintendent Phyllis Schwarting for all of her years as a teacher, administrator and her dedication to the community and the students of Bamberg County. Superintendent Schwarting responded by stating it was a pleasure and thanks for the opportunity.

10. **Adjourn**

Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg moved and Trustee Kim Berry seconded to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 4-0.

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

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The meeting was adjourned at 9:25 p.m.

Minutes approved:

Janeth Walker, Board Chair

Tony E. Duncan, Secretary