

**Minutes**  
**Special State Board of Education Meeting**  
**Wednesday, January 28, 2015**

The State Board of Education met Wednesday, January 28, 2015, in the Auditorium of the Department of Education Building. Chairman Sam Ledbetter called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

Present: Sam Ledbetter, Chairman; Toyce Newton, Vice-Chair; Alice Mahony; Dr. Jay Barth; Diane Zook; Joe Black; Mireya Reith; Vicki Saviers; Kim Davis; Jonathan Crossley, Teacher of the Year; and Tony Wood, Commissioner.

Absent: none

**Action Agenda**

**A-1 Consideration of Possible Action Pursuant to Ark. Ann. Code §6-15-430  
-Little Rock School District**

Chairman Ledbetter read a prepared statement of procedures for the meeting.

Department General Counsel Mr. Jeremy Lasiter said on May 1, 2014, the ADE notified the Little Rock School District that six schools met the criteria for academic distress. The district did not appeal the classification. On July 10, 2014, the State Board of Education classified the following Little Rock School District schools as being in academic distress: Baseline Elementary School, Cloverdale Aerospace Technology Center, Henderson Middle School, Hall High School, J.A. Fair High School and McClellan High School. He said on January 8, 2015, the State Board of Education voted to hold a special State Board Meeting on January 28, 2015 at 10:00 a.m. to consider options available pursuant to Ark. Ann. Code §6-15-430. Notice of the meeting was sent to the Little Rock School District and Board of Education.

**Little Rock School District**

Little Rock School District Superintendent Dr. Dexter Suggs said the district submitted a report to the State Board.

Little Rock School District Attorney Mr. Chris Heller said the district had six schools in academic distress, 42 schools are not in academic distress, and the district was not in academic distress. He said the State Board does not have the authority to take over the district when that step is not necessary. He gave three main reasons: 1.) the LRSD Board of Directors will do whatever it takes to fix the

problems; 2.) the State can fix the problem without taking over the district, and 3.) democracy was working. He said the school board has done nothing to impede the progress of these six schools. He said the district has already taken steps to reorganize the schools. He said the board is willing to do whatever is needed including reconstitute the schools. He said the board is committed to change. He asked the State Board to avoid a district takeover and continue to work together to focus on these six schools.

Dr. Suggs said the LRSD has challenges and it will take considerable work and risks to accomplish the goals. He said the district must abandon the status quo.

LRSD School Board President Mr. Greg Adams said the board asked to be held accountable in a fair way. He asked to be held accountable for the work that this board had contributed to during the past year and a half. He recommended finding a way to collaborate and to be held accountable.

### **Public Comment**

Representative John Walker presented a prepared statement to the State Board. He said the necessity for this action was generated by a small group of community persons. He said the community leaders have allowed educators to move to other communities and educate their children in other schools. They have promoted flight from the district. He said the current school board is working and asked that the State Board not take over the district.

Senator Joyce Elliott said there is an urgency to address the needs of students. She said literacy and numeracy test scores alone do not tell the story of the other good things that are happening in Little Rock schools. She said LRSD is the only urban district in the state. She recommended taken action other than state takeover. She said El Dorado was a model of how a problem can be resolved when the school and businesses work together.

Ms. Mahony said the assessment is being used as an evaluation of the schools and she requested legislators consider additional factors for academic distress. Senator Elliott said the legislation has given the State Board an impossible task.

Representative Charlotte Douglas said LRSD should be the flagship district for the state. She said the tie between economics and education required a partnership between schools and businesses. She said accountability was needed regarding state takeover and the steps necessary for success.

Representative Charles Armstrong said the community, city, and churches must be involved.

Mr. Bill Wells read a prepared statement asking the State Board to consider

quality over quantity in their decision.

Mr. Drew Pritt said the State Board should not take over the Little Rock School District. He said the community should have the will of the vote to guide the progress of the district.

Mr. Toney Orr said the district has worked well with his children. He encouraged the State Board to assist the district and not take over LRSD.

Mr. Andres Moreno said the Latino population is growing in Southwest Little Rock. He said the community issues are pushing into the schools.

Mr. Jordan Borst said that the student voices should be heard. He asked the State Board to consider the struggles of the students not just their test scores. He also asked the State Board to listen to the teachers.

Ms. Josie Efirid said LRSD did not fail her. She asked that the school board continue their work.

Ms. Hannah Burdette said the students of the district should have their voices heard. She said the students are involved in the district and have served on campaigns for board members. She said the board members do represent the members of the community. She encouraged the school board and State Board to include student voice.

Ms. Paola Moreno said she is a full time student and works a full time job to support her family. She said the LRSD needs help but the systematic change should be made with the Latino voice included.

Mr. Ed Bullington said he wanted every child to be successful. He said he does not support a takeover of the six schools. He recommended a strong oversight to the district.

Mr. Dale Charles said he had concerns about LRSD. He said the district is in its infancy with a new superintendent and school board. He said the business community needed to invest in the school.

Mr. Luis Campos said Hispanic students have struggled for the past ten years. He asked the State Board to intervene.

Ms. Henri Smothers said parents are energized to help. She said the parents support the board and the superintendent.

Mr. Michael Lerderman said the center at Hall High School has been supportive of Latino students but that many Latino students need additional assistance to graduate. He said the Latino voice should be considered.

Mr. Angel Perez said learning a new culture and a new language was challenging. He said the Hall High School ESL Coordinators helped him.

Ms. Yazmin Santillan said she graduated from Hall High School with honors. She said the education she received included support from her teachers that helped her. She said the ESL program at Hall High School worked for her.

Ms. Caroline Newbern said in 1991, the LRSD was given a directive to develop programs for ESL students. She said the program was developed, training was provided, and changes were made to design the newcomer centers. She said 17 years of experience has gone into the Hall High School Newcomer Center. She said there are a significant number of students from Latino backgrounds and others at Hall High School. She said 23 teachers have received training to support these students. She said these accommodations could be a model for other schools. She recommended the Hall High School Newcomer Center be maintained.

Dr. Charity Smith said students who score below proficiency should be considered. She said the promise for excellence must be kept. She requested the board, the community and parents work collaboratively.

Mr. Dean Patterson said student voices are being heard for the first time to activate the change they want to see in the district.

Ms. Marla Johnson asked the State Board to take a bold action that hears all voices and treats everyone with respect.

Ms. Kierre Mitchell said she wanted to get an education. She said there are good things happening at Hall High School.

Ms. Amanda Warren said teachers are being heard at Hall High School and at the LRSD school board meetings. She said she was encouraged by the recent changes in the district.

Mr. Luis Arellano said he was selected for Governor's School and took AP courses. He said immigrant students need assistance for high school and college. He said the teachers helped him get an international scholarship.

Mr. Roberto Ramirez said there are many success stories from Hall High School. He said many ESL students face issues such as family members being deported and having to balance work and school. He said a teacher redirected him to make better decisions for his education.

Mr. John Riggs said the students are the focus of this decision. He said the inadequate academic outcomes are a concern in the LRSD. He said the district needed stable leadership.

Dr. Cheryl Washington said parents should be able to select the school that best meets the need of their child. She said she supported wrap-around services for each child.

Mr. Rich Nagel said a new partnership of respect and collaboration should be formed. He spoke against state takeover.

Ms. Theatrice Collier said she holds the district and state responsible for the education of her son. She said students with disabilities are not being heard. She said the district should be held accountable but not be taken over by the state.

Mr. Robert Webb said he is against state takeover of the district. He asked that the school board have an opportunity to make the needed changes. He committed his support to assist the district.

Ms. Emily Kearns said Hall High School served her daughter well. She said she supported the school board.

Ms. Mary Austin Jones said her grandson has done well in LRSD. She said the school board should be permitted to implement their plan.

Reverend Tyrone Bloomfield said the district should look to the future and put the children first. He pledged to work for the district.

Dr. Deborah Anderson said the school board should represent the students. She said the school board should remain.

Mr. Andre Guerrero said the Latino community was concerned about the Hall High School Newcomer Center. He said the program has a record of success. He said the program should be sustained. He said more Latino representation is needed.

Mr. Ontario West spoke against state takeover.

Chairman Ledbetter thanked everyone for speaking.

### **Board Members**

Ms. Reith said she has spent the last several weeks speaking to families in the LRSD community. She said she believed in democracy. She said she

considered capacity in her decision-making. She said the state would be remiss to not take action. She said the school board deserved a chance to work with the Department. She recommended a diverse community partnership and that student voices be considered as part of the plan.

Mr. Black said everyone was united in the focus on students. He said the district needed one more chance.

Ms. Mahony said her concern was only having test results as the measure for academic distress. She said the transition period of standards and assessment has caused her to be willing to give the LRSD board another chance.

Ms. Saviers said there was a long history of chronic low performance with no bold action to change these schools. She said the superintendent does not have confidence in the current plan. She said she was concerned about the school board's ability to make the best decisions for the students.

Ms. Newton said it was the responsibility of the State Board to facilitate a decision for the students. She said she was concerned about students in a failing system. She said the State Board must speak for the voiceless. She said she could not sit by and do nothing.

Ms. Zook said she had talked with many students and parents. She said she considered facts in her decision. She said the data showed the stagnate performance of the schools over time.

Dr. Barth said he considered multiple pathways to remediate the issues.

Mr. Davis said he considered the facts and the history of progress. He challenged businesses to be at the table during implementation. He said the momentum needed to be sustained. He said he felt obligated to take action.

Mr. Crossley said a student's zip code should not determine their academic attainment. He said even though he does not have a vote he does have a stake in the outcome for this district.

### **Motions**

Dr. Barth moved, seconded by Ms. Mahony, between now and the March regularly scheduled meeting of the State Board of Education (SBE), appropriate ADE staff, the chair of the SBE, the LRSD superintendent, and a representative of the LRSD School Board shall meet with a goal of developing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for an ongoing partnership between LRSD and ADE centered on creating positive change in achievement in the LRSD, with a particular focus on those schools currently in academic distress. Although other

components would properly be included, the MOU shall focus on these areas: two-year achievement goals for each academically distressed LRSD school; ongoing oversight by the ADE's Office of School Improvement over decisions related to curriculum and school leadership and teaching staff decisions in the schools currently in academic distress; ongoing consulting by the ADE's Fiscal Distress Services Unit to ensure the fiscal sustainability of any reform measures; identification of an academic distress monitor to serve as a liaison to the Commissioner and the SBE on the progress towards sustainable reform being made in the LRSD; the process and timeline for creating a formal body of parents, students, community and business leaders, reflective of the Little Rock community, and philanthropic organizations to serve as a Civic Advisory Committee to aid in improving the performance of students in academically distressed schools. If a MOU is successfully developed, it shall be made available to the SBE and the public at the March State Board Meeting scheduled for March 12, 2015. A vote by the SBE to accept or reject the MOU would occur at the March 12 meeting. If a MOU is not successfully developed, state takeover of the LRSD shall occur. It is anticipated that both the school board and superintendent shall be removed. However, a formal motion by the SBE to carry out this action at the March 12 meeting could be amended to add additional conditions regarding the takeover. On a quarterly basis, a report on progress in the LRSD with regards to sustainable improvement of academic achievement shall be on the SBE action agenda with the possibility of full state takeover with removal of the school board and/or superintendent of LRSD being an ongoing option for the SBE. Ms. Mahony, Dr. Barth, Mr. Black, and Ms. Reith voted for the motion. Ms. Newton, Ms. Zook, Ms. Saviers, Mr. Davis, and Mr. Ledbetter voted against the motion. The final vote was 4-5. The motion failed.

Ms. Saviers moved, seconded by Ms. Zook, pursuant to Arkansas Code Annotated Section 6-15-430, to remove all of the current board of directors of the Little Rock School District, effective immediately; and in the absence of the board of directors, that the Commissioner of Education assume all authority of the board of directors as may be necessary for the day-to-day governance of the school district; and that the current superintendent of the Little Rock School District remain in place on an interim basis and that he continue to work under the authority and supervision of the Commissioner of Education; and that a formal body of parents, students, community and business leaders, reflective of the Little Rock community and philanthropic organizations serve as a Civic Advisory Committee to aid in improving the performance of students in all schools. Ms. Newton, Ms. Zook, Ms. Saviers, Mr. Davis, and Mr. Ledbetter voted for the motion. Ms. Mahony, Dr. Barth, Mr. Black, and Ms. Reith voted against the motion. The final vote was 5-4. Motion carried.

Dr. Barth made a motion, seconded by Ms. Saviers, to establish a State Board committee charged with studying the appropriate school district lines within Pulaski County, taking into account communities of interest, student demographics, facilities, and property tax base with a report due back to the

State Board no later than the June 2015 regularly scheduled meeting. The motion carried unanimously.

### **Appointment**

Chairman Ledbetter appointed Dr. Barth to chair the subcommittee charged with studying the appropriate school district lines within Pulaski County, as mentioned above. He said he would accept volunteers to this committee and/or make additional appointments.

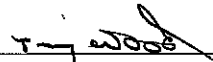
Chairman Ledbetter said to parents, students and teachers that school will go on tomorrow. Commissioner Wood said the State Board action taken today is a change in governance of the district. Mr. Wood said the day-to-day operations of the district would continue successfully.

### **Adjournment**

The meeting adjourned at 3:33 p.m.

*Minutes recorded by Deborah Coffman.*

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Sam Ledbetter, Chair

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Tony Wood, Commissioner of Education