

Monroe City School Board of Education  
2006 Tower Drive  
Monroe, Louisiana 71201

MINUTES

The Monroe City School Board met in regular session, Tuesday, November 14, 2023 at Monroe City School District Central Office, 2006 Tower Drive, Monroe, Louisiana 71201. The meeting was called to order at 6:00 p.m. by President Bill Willson. Prayer was offered by Pastor Michael Thompson of Olive Branch Baptist Church, West Monroe, La and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by the Monroe Federation President, Ms. Sandie Lollie.

Agenda Item 1C – Roll Call

Present: Mr. Michael Sampognaro, Ms. Jennifer Haneline, Mrs. Betty Ward Cooper, Mr. Johnson, Mr. Daryll Berry, and Mr. Willson.

Absent: Brenda Shelling

Action Item 1D – Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Johnson made a motion to amend the agenda that workplace investigation of the south LC has completed the investigation that the school board retained it to perform on October 6, 2023. Considering the completion of the investigation, it is his belief that the public needs to the extent it is legally permissible to be informed of the conclusions reached by the investigators as soon as possible. For those reasons, Mr. Johnson moved that the following items be added to the agenda, under new business. (1.) The board will take action to accept the confidential final investigative report of workplace investigations of the South. LC. (2.) The Board will take action to implement the recommendations of workplace investigations of the South, LC contained in the confidential final investigative report. Under Reports Mr. Johnson moved that the following item be added to the agenda (1) The Board will receive, in summary fashion, the confidential final investigative report of workplace investigations of the South, LC. Mr. Johnson moved that an Executive Session Item be added to the agenda for the Board to receive the full confidential final investigative report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC pursuant to La. R.S. 42:17 (“Investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct”).

Board President, Mr. Willson suggest that these items be addressed in the following order:

1. Open Session: Receipt of a Summary of the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC.
2. Executive Session: Receipt of the entirety of the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC not to exceed 45 minutes.
3. Open Session: Acceptance of the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC.
4. Open Session: Action to implement the recommendations of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC contained in the Confidential Final Investigative Report.

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline to approve the agenda with these changes.

Public Comment: Mrs. Krutzer stated she would like to see the financial reports and minutes from the past three (3) executive sessions call meetings added to the agenda.

The motion carried unanimously.

#### Action Item 2 Consent Agenda

It was moved by Mr. Berry and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro, to approve October 3, 2023 board meeting minutes; 2024 board meeting schedule; Approval of Memorandum of Understanding for appointment of supervising physician Medical Director for the Monroe City School District Emergency Medical Responder course at Carroll High School; Awarding of RFP#24-01 Trash Pick-Up Services; Awarding of Bid# MC24-04 New Multi-Purpose Building - Sallie Humble Elementary; Change Order for Lexington Elementary and Sallie Humble Elementary Playground Equipment Additional Artificial Turf for \$30,410.48; Change Order for Carroll High School Band Room for \$109,690.26; Change Order for Neville High School Multipurpose Project for \$4,308.15; Change Order for Carroll, Neville and Wossman High School Press Box for \$110,205.25

The motion carried on a unanimous vote.

#### Action Item 3 Consent Items for Separate Consideration

None

#### Action Item 4A The Board will take action to approve the process for selection of a new Superintendent of Schools.

Mr. Willson noted this will get the process going to advertise for a new superintendent.

On a motion by Ms. Haneline, and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro to advertise the position of Superintendent of Monroe City Schools and furthermore work together to develop a rubric scoring for evaluating the applications once they come in.

Mrs. Cooper commented that it's imperative to choose a Superintendent with a proven track record of successfully revitalizing underperforming schools. She believes it should be an open transparent process aligned with best practices. It is crucial that their approach includes parents, the community, and all the stake holders in the City of Monroe. Mrs. Cooper believes it should not be only one or two board members but collaboratively and must include all the stakeholders. She believes it is advisable to engage a professional search firm that specializes in assisting school boards and identifying qualified candidates. A public meeting should be convened to discuss and select a search firm. They are striving for active involvement by all the stakeholders. Mrs. Cooper noted this decision is too important, there is no room for error, and we must get this right, the future of our children is at stake.

Mr. Johnson inquired about the search firm Mrs. Cooper spoke of. He asked does it or does it not take away from the Board Members being a part of that process. Mrs. Cooper stated the search firm will solicit board input. Mr. Johnson voiced his concerns about a firm coming to out city to recommend a Superintendent for our schools and students. Mr. Johnson is ok with a national search and trying to

find the best fit candidate for our schools. He believes the people that live, serve, and have kids in our city know what we need within our city than a search firm. Mr. Johnson thinks it will be more effective with people within our school system and community. Once each board member has a representative from their district to be able to represent them on the panel to bring back the top candidates to the Board. Mrs. Cooper noted the search firm will execute the instructions that will be given by the Board. Mr. Willson explained the previous process on applicants. He noted the process will be similar. Ms. Lollie will represent teachers, the employees' union, and each school board member will have one person from their district community to be on that committee. That committee will deliberate. Mr. Johnson inquired about the normal base cost for a search firm service. Mr. Blackwell responded between \$30,000 to \$70,000 depending on the services requested. Ms. Haneline inquired about an advertisement for this position. Mr. Willson stated local and an outside that covers a larger scope.

Ms. Haneline amended her initial motion and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro to follow the recommendations outlined by President Willson in his email communications to them and that in advertising for the superintendent position that the search be expanded beyond the local region that rubric is posted for the people who are on this committee there will be points given to candidates who have worked locally. She wanted to add for the scoring that all names in identifying information be redacted from applications so that favoritism is not given to people that people may know by name but would focus more on qualifications.

In Favor: Michael Sampognaro, Brandon Johnson, Jennifer Haneline, Daryll Berry and Bill Willson.

Opposed: Betty Ward Cooper

The motion carried on a majority vote.

Action Item 4B - Approval of written employment contracts employing and appointing on an interim basis Co-Superintendents of Schools for the Monroe City School District.

It was moved by Mr. Berry and seconded by Ms. Haneline to approve written employment contracts employing and appointing on an interim basis Co-Superintendents of Schools for the Monroe City School District.

Public Comment: Mrs. Bryant voiced her opinion on the contracts. She believes the public should be able to view the contracts prior to approval.

The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 5A Report of Superintendent

Public comment: Mrs. Krutzer inquired about a public request on previous contracts.

Mr. Willson thanked each of the Interim Co-Superintendents (Sam Moore and Serena White) for a great start from an academic and financial standpoint. He thanked them for coming forward with a lot of ideas and ways that can improve our system.

Mrs. White noted that it's an honor to serve the students, faculty, and staff of The Monroe City Schools. There were several schools with positive gains and assessments results that came out yesterday. The five top gain schools were J.S. Clark, Sallie Humble, Lexington, Neville High

School and Cypress Point Elementary. We have three schools that increased their letter grades which included Carroll Junior High, Sallie Humble and Lexington Elementary. We have five schools that increased five or more points which included Carroll Junior High, Sallie Humble, Martin Luther King Jr, and Lexington Elementary. There is work to be done and the Interim Co-Superintendents are excited about embracing the work. A few things that are ongoing instructionally is the center for literacy and learning in our schools coaching our literacy coaches. These are professionals that come in to help Literacy Coaches find their craft as well as for the Eureka math square. Math was the biggest gain by far as assessment index points. In addition, there is NIET (National Institute for Excellence in Teaching) that coaches the administrators. This teaches them how to lead effective instructional leadership teams and professional learning communities. The Bailey Educational group is coaching the special Ed Teachers. Also, Tier 1 interventions for ELA and math are in all the schools which includes Lexia Zearn and reflex for the math facts that are used in younger grades. The first nine weeks are completed and something that is systematic that has been established is there are benchmarks test that are created that students take at the end of each nine weeks. This is being reported, then the district supervisors meet with each instructional leadership team at each campus to see the next steps. In October the LDOE sent their three (3) ELA content leads to visit four (4) Monroe City Schools to see writing instruction because of the growth.

Mr. Moore gave heartfelt thanks for the opportunity to be a part of this leadership team, to continue to push our students forward. Everything that is done, every decision that is made is based on student achievement. They were able to define their role as Interim Co-Superintendent because they were already a part of these roles in the system. On the operational side of Monroe City Schools, they met today with Ross Bus Company out of Alexandria, LA in reference to the electric buses. Mr. Moore stated there has been talk about the batteries being expensive but coming from the business perspective we are gaining 20 electrical buses that will cost the district out of pocket \$10,000 per bus. This past week two new buses were purchased that cost \$136,000 each. Mr. Moore stated school is a business and we should run it like a business. The electric buses are limited on miles and will be used only for local routes. They are in the process of installing the charging station that will hold two buses per station. We will be the first area in Louisiana that will have electric buses on the road. The battery life is expected to be 8 years. The change orders that were discussed in the facilities meeting for Lexington and Sallie Humble projects will continue and are on time. Mr. Moore noted that they will move forward aggressively to do everything they can to meet the September 30, 2024, deadline. Mr. Moore and Mrs. White were working together before this took place. Mr. Moore noted to the Board that he and Mrs. White do not want division. Mr. Moore serves a God of Unity not confusion. He embraces this to continually work together and do what is best for the students. Mrs. White has already been working with academic and instruction. Mr. Moore noted he successfully turned Wossman High School around academically, did it for 12 years and in those years, it was a gain. Mr. Moore loves academics and the business operation. He stated to the Board that the decision they made was probably the best decision for the community and for our system. This would have been a huge undertaking for one person. Mr. Moore and Mrs. White feed each other, focus on the students, and will continue to do what's best for the students. Mr. Moore thanked everyone for the opportunity and to remember to put our kids first, faculty and staff. That's what it's all about.

#### Agenda Item 5B – Report of Board Members

Mrs. Cooper – No Report

Mr. Sampognaro – No Report

Mr. Johnson thanked Interim Co-Superintendents Mr. Moore and Mrs. White for continued work that needs to be done in the Monroe City School District. Mr. Johnson mentioned two of our high schools within Monroe City Schools and Ouachita Parish Schools to be within the top three, Neville and Wossman High School 1 or 2 points away from being back an A school. Sterlington, Neville and Wossman are in the top three. We want to continue the work that is being done within all our schools and improve. Mr. Johnson represent District VI and graduated from Wossman High School however, based on the information that was received and knowing the work that Mrs. White does on the academic side with our school district, he wants to see a plan with help from the Board to figure out how to make the Elementary Schools as a whole grow academically.

Ms. Haneline recognized some of the school leaders that were present, Administrators from Sallie Humble, Mrs. Embanato, Mrs. Dumas and Principal Toni McCarty from Lexington Elementary. Ms. Haneline congratulated them on their gains and continued to do such a great job of leading their staff. Ms. Haneline thanked Mrs. White and Mr. Moore by leading by example. She noted they are a beautiful example for this community about working together, listening to one another, and building on each other's strengths. She stated the role as Superintendent is huge and for years, the Board has mentioned it is too much for one person. Ms. Haneline is excited about moving forward and hopefully having Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent because the district deserves that kind of leadership so strongly devoted to the things that we need to improve despite of the things that are going on. Ms. Haneline inquired about the safety and having SROs in all the schools.

Mr. Berry – No Report

Mr. Willson noted the Board has been trying to have Parental Involvement where Mr. Berry shares this committee. Mr. Willson invites all the Board Members to attend the meetings. There is a committee of almost 20 people. Mr. Willson noted they are trying to address the schools primarily on the Southside where there's a great need for academic improvement. He welcomed anyone that would like to be a part of the process. He noted truancy is another area that leads to poor test scores. If they can get parent involvement and engagement, truancy reduced you will be able to see tremendous gains in education. He reminded everyone to vote this Saturday if not already early voted. He wishes good luck to all the teams in the playoffs this Friday and a Happy Thanksgiving.

It was moved by Ms. Haneline and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro to adjourn into executive session not to exceed 45 minutes.

Agenda Item 5C (added) – The Board will receive, in Summary Fashion, the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC

Mr. Brian Blackwell of Workplace South LC gave a report on his five-week investigation that is now closed. He believes it's important to be transparent to the public and Board to know what was found and take action to fix any deficiencies. A summary of his investigation revealed significant failings at every level of authority in the Monroe City School System. Because of the nature of the investigation and in light of the parallel investigation of the legislative auditor, they felt it necessary to identify things that were found during the investigation but not retained to find. They were not hired to do a comprehensive audit but recommend doing one as expeditiously as possible. Considering findings that he will discuss, in their opinion, the Schol Board should consider the

adoption of additional policies, practices and procedures that mitigate the risk of financial loss of the school system. In addition, the Board should consider the adoption of operational policies and practices that specifically delineate minds of authority or the lack thereof various aspects of the school board's operations. In their opinion, in the absence of the adoption of such policies, practices and procedures the findings are likely to be perpetuated far into the future.

Mr. Blackwell met with Mr. Moore, Mrs. White, and Mr. Willson on yesterday about the findings and to solicit their input concerning recommendations. Mr. Blackwell stated part of what was discussed is the part of the solution needs to be providing the Superintendent with an outlook for problems that person encounters in the performance of his or her duties. That outlet should be formalized through the creation of a committee of the entire school board, the superintendents committee, that would address issues that the superintendent has in the operation of his duties as well as the problems that the board has with the Superintendent and how he or she is performing with their duties. They believe the school board should undertake a thorough and comprehensive review and vision of critical policies practices and procedures, particularly those included in the Board's policy. It's recommended that this function be performed by an external consultant to avoid any appearance of improper influence. Mr. Blackwell stated they were hired to do an independent investigation to find out what happened and to help determine how best to fix it, so it doesn't ever happen again. They suggest the Board adopt and enforce an unwavering code of ethics that specifically identifies honesty, integrity, character, and morals as attributes required by all employees of the school system, including the Superintendent. Every contract the Board enter with a Superintendent or Interim Superintendent should identify a breach of that code of conduct or code of ethics and the failure to implement and follow the policies, practices and procedures adopted by the Board as caused for determination. Finally, they think it is important to ensure that the delineation of the responsibilities of the Board's General Counsel ensure that when conflicts arise, it needs to be appropriately addressed and documented so everyone knows their rights or responsibilities.

The first final investigative finding that was made is based upon facts that they observed the school board's policies, practices, and procedures. Mr. Blackwell identified there were a lack of adequate internal controls with respect to the office of the Superintendent and are in their opinion a lot of adequate internal controls with respect to the boards payroll system and for that reason they strongly urge the Board to adopt appropriate policies, practices and procedures to ensure that adequate internal controls exist to prevent payroll errors from being made by employees and at a minimum those policies should require that the Superintendent not be permitted to be the sole approval of his own compensation package. Mr. Blackwell stated they suggest adopting a policy that would mandate that such compensation be approved in writing by not only the Superintendent but by the Director of Humna Resources and Chief Financial Officer before it's entered the payroll system. With respect to other employees that are people other than the Superintendent, the Board should adopt policies that require that each payroll change for both new and existing employees be verified in writing by a second set of eyes. These internal controls will mitigate the risk of errors being made or being perpetuated without discovery. The next finding was the Superintendents contract that was effective June 1, 2018, was never approved by the school board. Their recommendation is that no contract should be entered Superintendent or Interim Superintendent unless the Board is made aware of 1. All terms and conditions of the contract. 2. The contract be on the agenda for a regular or special meeting for approval. 3. The contract is attached to the agenda to be viewed by the public. 4. A majority of the entire membership of the Board approve the contract prior to being executed. Prior to implementing the June 1, 2018, contract, the Board should have been advised of the cost of purchasing service credit for Dr. Vidrine in the retirement system. Their investigation determined that there was no effort made by anyone connected with the school system to determine what it cost to carry out the promise made in the superintendent's contract. Based upon the documentation they reviewed the cost was over \$325,000. They recommend before approving such a contract in additional

to the recommendation that this set forth that the Board should be presented with the entire cost of implementing a contract on an annual basis and a breakdown of what each item is going to cost. Next finding, prior to implementing that contract, the finance department should obtain independent verification of the cost of purchasing service credit for Dr. Vidrine. Their recommendation before any check is issued for the benefit of any employee other than their normal payroll check, that the approval of at least two people not benefiting from the transaction be obtained.

The current contract of the Superintendent, which was effective July 1 of this year, is not aligned with state law. This put the Board at risk for potential mitigation inability to enforce disciplinary action and other things. In their opinion, all contracts between the Board and Superintendent must be aligned with Louisiana Revised Statute 17:54. Another provision in the current contract calls for indemnification of the Superintendent, this provision provides that if the Superintendent in good Faith thinks there is a conflict, that he can hire his own lawyer that they will have to pay for. This part of the investigation is completed. Mr. Blackwell gave an overview of his background.

Ms. Haneline voiced her concerns about Forethought Consulting for policy advisement for many years. She asked if there are other agencies that should be used to help with the policy advisement. Mr. Blackwell stated it should be a single personnel file that has all your documentation in it. His recommendation is to let the Superintendent get estimates and bring recommendations to the board as to who they would recommend doing the vigorous work. Ms. Haneline asked how the school board ensures that this doesn't happen again with policies. Mr. Blackwell stated there are critical functions that need to be looked at on a continuous basis. That's the Superintendent job but someone must watch the Superintendent. You will need someone external to watch your organization and go behind them on the schedule determined by the Board, this is something that needs to be addressed as quickly as possible.

Public Comment: Mrs. Lollie noted she's been in this audience for 30 years. She's watched it grow, come, and go and it's her passion for not only employees but for all the students. She can attest to seeing the impropriety going on for years and asked for a forensic audit and it was voted down. Employees' paychecks are not matching up and this is an ongoing problem. Cafeteria, custodian staffs are suffering. This is upsetting to her. The employees and students deserve so much more. No one will listen or understand, and the pennies taken away from employees leaves bad morals and spirit. She hopes the Board takes heed of what Mr. Blackwell said and make something happen to make our district what she knows it can be.

Public Comment: Mrs. Krutzer noted she tried desperately to get an internal auditor because of issues that have been seen and tried to improve it but couldn't get the votes. She noted when the district was with Hoffman, they would meet with them, and Hoffman would explain the issues with a thorough presentation. Mrs. Krutzer stated she does this for the betterment of the children. She believes there are issues because they are not trained to do their job. We need checks and balances, to protect each of us and the taxpayers. There has been an effort among some on the Board to keep the public in the dark. She stated the public want to see the money spent in the best areas that they can, which are in the classroom.

### Future Meetings

December 5, 2023 and January 23, 2023 at 6:00p.m.

Executive Session (added to the agenda)

On a motion by Ms. Haneline and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro, the board convened in executive session at 7:32 p.m. not to exceed 45 minutes to receive the entirety of the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC.

Reconvene in Open Session

On a motion by Mr. Berry and seconded by Ms. Haneline, the Board reconvened in open session at 8:41pm. The Motion carried unanimously.

Action Item (added to the agenda) – the Board will take action to accept the Confidential Final Investigative Report of Workplace Investigations of the South, LC

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline, that the Board accept the confidential final investigation report of the Workplace Investigation of the South, LC. The motion carried unanimously.

Action Item (added to the agenda) – the Board will take action to implement the recommendations of the South, LC contained in the Confidential Final Investigative Report.

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Mr. Berry that the Board implement the recommendation of Workplace Investigation of the South, LC contained in the confidential final investigative report. Mr. Johnson further move that the Interim Superintendents seek proposal from qualified vendors to perform the services identified by the investigators and make a recommendation to the Board concerning the selection of a vendor at its meeting to be held on December 5, 2023.

Public Comment: Mrs. Krutzer inquired about Dr. Vidrine’s retirement.

The motion carried unanimously.

Recess/Adjourn

There being no further business to come before the Board, on a motion by Ms. Haneline and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro, the meeting adjourned at 8:49pm.

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/William Willson\  
William “Bill” Willson  
Board President

/Sam L. Moore, III/  
Sam L. Moore, III  
Interim Co-Superintendent

\Serena White/  
Serena White  
Interim Co-Superintendent

*Note: These minutes summarize the final decisions made by the Board at the referenced meeting. This meeting was also audio recorded and that recording is available for review by contacting the Board clerk at [tonya.robinson@mcschools.net](mailto:tonya.robinson@mcschools.net).*