

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

MINUTES

The Monroe City School Board met in regular session, Tuesday, December 5, 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 Ike Byrd of Mount Zion Baptist Church, Monroe, La and the Pledge of Allegiance was led by Board Member Brenda Shelling.

Agenda Item 1C – Roll Call

Present: Mr. Michael Sampognaro, Ms. Jennifer Haneline, Mr. Bill Willson, Mrs. Betty Ward Cooper, Mr. Brandon Johnson, and Mrs. Brenda Shelling

Absent: Mr. Daryll Berry

Action Item 1D – Adoption of the Agenda

Mr. Johnson asked Mr. Willson if he could add a few items to the agenda under new business. Mr. Willson gave Mr. Johnson the ok to add the items. Mr. Johnson added 1. the approval to advertise for policy audit services RFP. 2. The forensic financial audit. 3. The approval to distribute a previously planned COVID supplement of \$1,000 to all personnel on January 12, 2024. Mr. Willson stated we will have a new business section added between agenda item 3 Consent agenda and agenda item 4 Reports which in effect will come item 5.

On a motion by Mrs. Shelling and seconded by Mrs. Haneline the Board approved the agenda with the additions added by Mr. Johnson as stated above. The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 2A Presentation – Bonekrusher Youth Program Personal Trainer – Sammie Crawford

Sammie Crawford, his staff Ernest Muhammad, and Mrs. Vera Matthews with bonekrusher Youth Program, gave a brief background of themselves. They are currently enrolled in after school mentor program. Over the Summer they partnered with Monroe City schools to teach their TKO bullying program for summer activities. They are currently active in boxing and working with mentors utilizing the sport of boxing just to mentor youth that's having some bad decisions or struggling with parents. Mr. Crawford gave an overview on his job readiness program. This program gives students that are enrolled in school the opportunity to learn about health and fitness, to be able to apply for a job. Mr. Crawford requests partnership with Monroe City Schools. They are currently working with students in the area. He believes this would be a great opportunity for athletic aspired, students that may have goals that may not be able to play professionally at risk, and students inspired to start learning work skills that they can probably find employment now while in school. Their goal is to initiate a pipeline of mentors in the community with Monroe City Schools. They want to see success in the students and the citizens in our community.

Board Member Betty Cooper asked how many students have been through the program. Mr. Crawford responded that their program has been enrolled since 2007 and has mentored approximately 70 to 80 students.

Board member Jennifer Haneline stated she has known Mr. Crawford between 8 and 10 years. She stated we are third in the Nation for violent crime behind two other cities in Alabama. She appreciates Mr. Crawford and admires him for being honest about his background. She noted he is receiving a grant from the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, through her organization Louisiana Public Health Institute. This is to address tobacco use in African American communities that tends to be one of the higher using communities and trying to promote health and wellness anti-bullying. There is a lot that he stands for and she appreciates that.

Board Member Brenda Shelling stated she never had the opportunity to meet Mr. Crawford. She appreciates the work he does with the youth in our community and asks him not to give up on them.

Mrs. Cooper inquired about mentors. Mr. Crawford stated there are a couple of different mentors in their network who are personal trainers and are set if an opportunity comes to an agreement or set to assist with internship with some of the students.

Ms. Haneline inquired about the financial ask from Monroe City Schools to assist with this program. Mr. Crawford stated 24,500. The breakdown covers 15 students, \$980 per student, the remaining will go to staff support. Ms. Haneline confirmed that this amount does not include a personal training manual or the certification exam. Mr. Crawford confirmed that is correct. Ms. Haneline inquired about receiving additional funds from somewhere else. Mr. Crawford stated there's money in their general fund but the partnership with Monroe City Schools is much needed. Mr. Willson noted to Mr. Crawford because of the financial request, this would have to go through the finance committee for an overview and recommendation to the full board.

Public comment: Mr. Josh Madison shared his experience with Mr. Crawford. He stated he is a definition of being in the community and trying to save the youth.

Public comment: Mr. Patrick James shared his experience with Mr. Crawford. He stated he's like a father figure. He gives good advice and makes sure he stays out of trouble.

Public comment: Mr. Reginald Brown the Program Director of OIC noted everything Mr. Crawford stated is 100% reality. Mr. Brown program is a juvenile justice-based program that is supported by the department of labor, and it targets 15- to 18-year-old men and women that are in the criminal justice system. They've partnered with Mr. Crawford's program for about a year and had roughly about 30 participants that he is training. Mr. Brown stated OIC is nonprofit organization that's been around almost 50 years providing life skills and certifications to the Monroe area as well as Ouachita Parish. Mr. Brown stated any additional organizations that can give support like what Mr. Crawford is doing is great. They support Mr. Crawford 100% and will do whatever they can to help make this decision.

Agenda item 2B Presentation - OIC

Mr. Jamie Mayo, Board Chairman of OIC (Opportunities Industrialization Center), Director, Pastor Smith, and Architect, Fred Hemphill of Ouachita presented information on OIC. Mr. Mayo stated they are interested in purchasing the old Martin Luther King Jr Middle School building on Nutland Road. Mr. Mayo met with the Co-Superintendents, Mr. Charles Monroe to review expenses and

potential revenue. OIC currently has two locations, one in the Booker T area located on Dunlap and another in Richwood. They have trained so many individuals that have moved on to be productive citizens in the City of Monroe and Ouachita Parish. Executive Director, Mr. Smith, gave an overview of the OIC. He stated this is a Faith based operation. He called it Faith based because no student has ever paid tuition. Everything they do is for the students. They partner with local churches, other community organizations and everyone has one goal and objective. That is to provide job training for those who need it. Mr. Smith stated one of the problems in this community is averaging between 75 and 100 GED applications. Their job is to go around the corner to reach brothers and sisters and let them know there is another way to make a living.

Agenda Item 3 – Consent Agenda

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Mrs. Haneline to approve November 14, 2023, board meeting minutes; October 6, 2023 special board meeting minutes, October 24, 2023 special board meeting minutes, and October 30, 2023 special board meeting minutes;

Public Comment: Mrs. Bryant strongly encourages the Board to follow the investigators' directives.

Public comment: Mrs. Krutzer voiced her concerns on checks issued to Dr. Vidrine.

The motion carried on a unanimous vote.

Agenda Item 4-1 New Business (added to the agenda) Approval to Advertise Audit Services RFP

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline to approve advertising audit services RFP.

Public comment: Mrs. Lollie thanked the Board for getting the financial audit in progress. She looks forward to the findings and perhaps find another way to add, subtract, multiply or divide to make sure that the Monroe City Schools employees get more than what they deserve.

Public comment: Mrs. Krutzer asked who will be writing the RFP and will it be posted to the website.

Co-Superintendent Mrs. White stated that RFP was written by Mr. Blackwell the investigator. It was drafted by him and reviewed by the Board. It will be posted to the website. They have not moved to the other one yet.

The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 4-2 (added to the agenda) Financial Forensic Audit

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline to move forward with the forensic audit RFP.

Public comment: Mrs. Krutzer asked if Mr. Blackwell completed the RFP for the financial audit. Mr. Willson responded, no he has not but they will get it out to the public once it's completed.

Board Member Ms. Haneline stated it is imperative that they receive the full report before hiring a company.

The motion carried unanimously.

Agenda Item 4-3 (added to the agenda) Approval to distribute previous planned COVID Pay of \$1,000 to all Employees for January 12, 2024

Mr. Johnson noted the other \$1,000 will be issued in May. This will be the last year and will end September 30th.

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Mr. Sampognaro to approve the COVID Pay to be issued January 12, 2024.

The Board Attorney, Mr. Lawrence, confirmed for the record, this pay is for all persons who are employed as of now and remain employed up to the January date. Mr. Willson stated yes, from his understanding. Mr. Lawrence confirmed this is supplemental pay and not bonus. Mr. Willson stated supplemental pay is correct.

Public comment: Mrs. Lollie believes the 1,000 dollars will make a lot of employees have a happy Holiday. She thanked everyone and hopefully this will make everyone have a Merrier Christmas and a Happier Holiday.

Mr. Willson stated this was important to the School Board and the employees. He thanked the school Board, and the Interim Co-Superintendents for moving forward with this.

The motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Johnson inquired about adding an agenda item to the agenda approving travel to New Orleans for Carroll High School Band.

It was moved by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline to add an additional agenda item to new business #4. authorizing Carroll High School Band to travel to New Orleans, Louisiana in December 2023.

The motion carried unanimously.

On a motion by Ms. Haneline and seconded by Mrs. Shelling the board authorized Carroll High School to travel to New Orleans.

The motion carried on a majority vote.
Mr. Johnson recused.

Agenda Item 5A-D (out of sequence) - Reports

Mrs. White reported there have been ongoing visits from NIET Coaches, and LDOE, our State Department Coach. Recently, the great minds eureka math squared training began. This past week these coaches have been visiting every elementary and junior high school and coaching for the Literacy Coaches. Midterms are coming up for secondary schools and January for Elementary. This year the K-2 will be taking a Pilot literacy exam. Professional Development Day will be held this Friday.

Mr. Moore gave an overview summary of the financial reports that is in boardDocs. The revenues are approximately 2.5 million more than the prior year in the general fund due to the one-time stipend paid to the employees in October 2023, certified 2,000 and \$1,000 for classified. The expenses increased because of the one-time stipend but overall, the fund balance is in line with the previous year's fund balance. There are three separate sales taxes, 1968, 1994 and 2001. The 1968 sales tax revenues have an approximate increase of 16,000 more than prior year, 1994 sales tax revenues have an approximate increase of 150,000, and 2001 sales tax revenues have an approximate increase of 1.49 million due to a grant that reimbursed Monroe City Schools 1.268 million because of the purchase of 4,000 Chromebooks. The object code 500 is at 99.63% that is the insurance onetime payments. This fund is almost at 100%. Because the cost of insurance premium has increased for us more than 30% for 2023-2024. Traxler Construction contracts for the Sallie Humble projects are ready to be signed so that they can move forward. This project is funded by ESSER funds. The ESSER funds will be used for all work that is completed by September 30 2024. Mr. Moore had the pleasure of meeting with what he calls our family in the district and not employees, the transportation department, custodial staff, and cafeteria staff. Mr. Moore stated it's all about our children and we must become one. The result, student achievement. He believes we must take care of our employees if we want our employees to take care of our children.

Agenda Item 5E (out of sequence) – Report of Board Members

Mrs. Cooper reported the children's coalition of Northeast Louisiana is relaunching the youth services planning board. They want to reduce the commitment of youth to state institutions and want the provision of community responses to juvenile delinquency. They are sponsoring programs and calling leaders together to offer whatever assistance is needed. This is a state law, revised statute 46:194.18. Ouachita Parish and Morehouse Parish is involved.

Mr. Sampognaro thanked the Interim Co-Superintendents on an excellent job that they are doing. Mr. Sampognaro has heard nothing but positive input in every school he's been in. Mr. Sampognaro requested with Tonya a finance committee meeting for next week to get answers on what was proposed today by bonecrusher and OIC.

Mr. Johnson congratulated the Carroll High School Band, Director Mrs. Player and all the faculty and staff members of Carroll High School. He believes this was good exposure for Carroll High School and how great Mrs. Player is doing with the Band.

Ms. Haneline echoed Mr. Johnson congratulating Carroll High School Band. She stated sometimes the band does not receive credit in terms of the football team and wanted to congratulate them on bringing it to that team. She thanked the Farmers for recognizing the value of band and how important it is. She gave a shout out to Carroll, band leader and all the leaders around the district for supporting music and the arts. Ms. Haneline thanked the Co-Superintendents for the unity of modeling this for the district. She appreciates their hard work, diligence, and long hours. Ms. Haneline wanted to make a personal statement. She is angry about the money spent on professionals and the Board is taking this seriously and will not be swept under the rug. This is an opportunity to make some much-needed changes. She asked whoever is the next Board President, to have a board retreat preferably in January to discuss the vision for the district. She stated all the committees need to meet and do an audit for all the schools. A safety committee meeting needs to be held. There is a drafted policy that needs to go through the policy committee that requires school resource officers in all the schools. She stated kids and staff need to be protected. Happy Holidays to everyone.

Mrs. Shelling had an opportunity to attend Mr. Rankins' funeral. Mrs. Shelling wanted to thank Mr. Johnson publicly for the role he, Montreal and three other bus drivers played in driving the Grambling State University team around New Orleans. She thanked everyone for attending Mr. Rankins funeral.

Mr. Willson thanked Mrs. White and Mr. Moore for the exemplary job they both have done and the professionalism they have demonstrated along with the willingness to put the children and employees first. Mr. Willson gave an updated on the Superintendent application advertising. They are moving as quickly as possible and trying to be transparent as possible with this process. The advertising process started last week. All interested applicants must have their applications and resumes mailed to the PO Box that's been provided in the advertisement on or before no later than January 8, 2024, deadline, walk up applications will not be accepted. The PO Box number is 15138 Monroe, Louisiana 71207. Mr. Willson gave an update on the Superintendent search committee. The committee will have a total of 9 members with the Board members having community representatives, a representative for Monroe Federation of teachers and school employees, Sandie Lollie and Monroe Association of Educators, Tamra Ross. The Monroe School Board Representatives for District I, Mr. Scott Martinez, District II, Michelle Thompson District III, Mickey Traweck District IV, Marie Brown District V, Deborah Ann Smith District VI, Stephanie Smith District VII, Chris Brown

Mr. Willson reported that they have been working on follow-up recommendations from the internal auditor Mr. Brian Blackwell of Workplace Investigations of the South LLC is evidence by their actions tonight to begin with the RFP for financial forensic auditor as well as the separate policy auditor, to review the financial procedures and policies as well as a separate policy auditor to review our school board policies. The Board moved quickly once Louisiana State Legislature Auditors were not going to be able to give findings within the initial time frame approximately one month intimated in initial needs but rather probably December or January. As a result, they began vetting different investigative groups and came up with very highly recommended Workplace Investigations of the South. Mr. Brian Blackwell did an excellent job moving quickly but thoroughly on his investigations and once he discovered what he thought were significant irregularities he called Mr. Willson who called for an immediate executive session to deliberate the findings. That evening moved to place Dr. Brent Vidrine on paid administrative leave immediately. He made these statements, so the public understands that there have been some irresponsible and untrue reporting concerning these investigations and findings. There has also been false reporting on the contract with the Monroe City School Board made to and with Dr. Brent Vidrine in the early part of 2008. Mr. Willson stated for the record, the Monroe City School Board had then given Board President, Mr. Rodney McFarland the authority to negotiate Dr. Vidrine's contract in the latter part of 2017. Those negotiations were wrapped up in December of 2017 based on legal counsel advice that the Board had approved previously, Mr. McFarland negotiating the contract and the fact our Attorney drew up a contract they were able to believe they did not have to come back and vote on approval again. Mr. Willson hopes this will clear up some misinformation that has not been reported to the public domain in an appropriate manner. Mr. Willson noted that Coach Rankins served in the Monroe City School System for almost 60 years. Most of those years as the legendary dean of students at Neville High School. Mr. Willson gave a little background on Mr. Rankin. He will be missed and should never be forgotten. Mr. Willson appreciates Union Parish for reaching out to Carroll High School Band for their support.

Agenda Item 6 – Future Meetings

Board Meeting – January 23, 2024, and February 13, 2024, at 6:00 p.m.

Action Item 7 – Recess/Adjournment

There being no further business to come before the Board, on a motion by Mr. Johnson and seconded by Ms. Haneline, the meeting adjourned at 7:25pm.

William “Bill” Willson
Board President

Sam L. Moore, III
Interim Co-Superintendent

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.