

Joint Education Committee

November 5, 2020

3:00 p.m.

Minutes

Attendees:

Committee Members:

Mr. John F. Axelle III, Chairman, School Board

Ms. Sue Dibble, Board of Supervisors

Ms. Ola Hawkins, School Board

Mr. F. Michael Herzberg, IV, (Alternate), Board of Supervisors

Mrs. Angela Kelly-Wiecek, Board of Supervisors

Ms. Faye Prichard, Board of Supervisors

Other Board Members:

Mr. Sterling Daniel, School Board

Mr. Sean Davis, Board of Supervisors (arrived at 4:05 p.m.)

Mr. W. Canova Peterson, Board of Supervisors

Mr. George Sutton, School Board

Staff:

Mr. John Budesky, County Administrator

Dr. Michael Gill, School Superintendent

Ms. Jen Greif, Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Stephen Castle, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

Ms. Terri Hechler, Director of Technology

Ms. Kathy Seay, Deputy County Administrator

Ms. Lisa Seward, Deputy County Attorney

Ms. Terry Stone, Assistant Superintendent

Mr. Chris Whitley, Schools Public Information Officer

Opening Remarks

Mr. John Budesky, County Administrator, and Dr. Michael Gill, Superintendent, opened the meeting at 3:04 p.m. and welcomed the attendees.

Online School & Technology Update

Dr. Gill provided an update of the online school and described ongoing efforts to refine the online learning environment.

Ms. Terri Hechler, Director of Technology, came forward and reported on the acceleration and expansion of technology offerings. Infrastructure upgrades are complete in all schools.

Dr. Stephen G. Castle, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, came forward and described the summer learning move from face-to-face to virtual learning and the “blended beach weeks”, the distance learning playbook, online instructional design, course content. He reported on the changes for teachers and students. He shared statistics from Schoology and described all the newly added virtual features being utilized.

Ms. Hechler gave an update on the delivery of Chromebooks. Committee members had questions about a number of items. She explained the hard drive and storage space of the Chromebooks and clarified that the Chromebooks recently delivered to students in virtual learning did not have touch screens but were not of a lower quality than those that were distributed to the face-to-face learning students. The main problem is that the data streams are large and it often causes connectivity and speed issues. Guidelines for parents have been made available. She offered clarification on what caused many of the initial service tickets that were received and steps taken to resolve the issues. Dr. Castle described the amount of IT support staff available for teachers and for on-call technical support. An evening parent support program is being planned. Everyone who has requested a MiFi (hotspot) device has received it.

Committee members had comments on the feedback they are receiving from parents about the problems with technology and connectivity. It was suggested that more information being shared with parents about steps being taken to address issues might ease some of the frustration parents are experiencing.

Ms. Jen Greif, Assistant Superintendent, came forward and gave further details on steps being taken to improve issues. Incremental changes/improvements haven been undertaken and are ongoing.

Mr. Peterson suggested looking into putting more of the older students in online learning and opening some of the middle and high school space for elementary age students. Dr. Gill and Ms. Greif provided further clarification on steps taken to address issues being seen with elementary aged students and plans being made for an increased number of face-to-face elementary students. Ms. Grief explained resources that are available for teachers. Dr. Gill reported that more staff is needed to completely address all of the issues.

CARES Act Funding Status

Ms. Terry Stone, Assistant Superintendent, Business & Operations, came forward and reported that the schools are on target to have all of the CARES funds spent by the deadline.

FY22 Budget Challenges

Ms. Stone reported on status of the FY21 budget expenditures to date. The schools are looking at the county's five-year plan assumptions in starting to develop the FY22 proposed budget. She described the Capital Improvement Plan, Technology Plan and upcoming renovation projects. She answered attendees' questions on projected dates for renovation and construction.

Committee members had comments and questions. Ms. Stone offered clarification on the schools scheduled for renovation or replacement.

Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m.