

Minutes
State Board of Education
Telephone Conference Call
Friday, July 25, 2003

The State Board of Education met via telephone conference call on Friday, July 25, 2003. The session originated in the Auditorium of the State Education Building. JoNell Caldwell, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Dr. Charles D. Watson called the roll and assured that a quorum was present.

Members reporting present: JoNell Caldwell, Chairman; Shelby Hillman, Vice-Chairman; Luke Gordy; Robert Hackler; Dr. Calvin King; Randy Lawson; MaryJane Rebick; Diane Tatum; Dr. Jeanna Westmoreland.

No members were absent.

Mr. Gordy stated that there were continuing discussions and concerns following the Board's action at the last meeting to deny Greenland School District the option to incur additional debt. He stated that the purpose of that request was to secure matching funds that would provide for the construction of a "safe room" at the Greenland School campus. This facility would be an asset to the school in the case of severe storms or national disasters as well as for a multipurpose facility that could be used by the total school campus. With the proposed \$80,000 local district debt, the school could qualify for significant federal matching funds. He moved that the Board add this item to the agenda for this session for further discussion and reconsideration of the earlier action. Mr. Gordy further stated that there is a deadline for securing matching fund commitment and that may expire before the next scheduled Board meeting. Dr. King seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Appointment of Professional Education Development, Licensure, and Assessment Board

Mr. Simon was recognized to present this item. This year's legislative session included passage of Act 1811 of 2003, which creates a Professional Education Development, Licensure and Assessment Board to advise the Department concerning teacher training, licensure and other matters. The Act requires the State Board to appoint this Board with nominations emanating from various organizations and professional associations. The recommendations for membership on that Board were distributed. Mr. Simon did indicate that a late nomination for Dr. Mary Gunter had been received. It was noted that the work of this Board will initially be facilitated by the Department. He also stated that care was taken to balance the Board geographically, racially and considering other demographics of the state. The Act requires that the State Board of Education appoint this Board prior to August 1, 2003.

Ms. Tatum inquired if the nominees were informed of their pending appointment and if they had agreed to serve. Mr. Simon responded that he was not sure if the organizations that nominated individuals had secured their permission. The Department has not officially contacted any of the nominees at this point.

Ms. Hillman moved approval of the slate as proposed. Mr. Lawson seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Reconsideration of Greenland request to issue construction bonds.

Patricia Martin was present to respond to questions concerning this issue.

Mr. Gordy stated that Board members were correct in requesting information about the indebtedness of Greenland or any other district so designated in fiscal distress. He continued that this is an unusual case in that the opportunity for a relatively small investment (\$80,000) on the part of the district would generate in excess of \$240,000 in federal revenue to construct this "safe room" on the Greenland campus. Additionally, the amount of annual savings from restructuring of existing debt will almost cover the district's investment. Mr. Gordy vowed his support of reconsideration and approval of the proposal.

Ms. Rebick supports the action that lowers the district's interest rate and the savings that result. She asked if there was an estimate of savings. Ms. Martin responded that the savings in interest would be approximately \$55,00 annually, which would be put back into the district's operating fund. She also inquired as to how these actions would impact the overall district annual fiscal balances for 2004 and 2005. Ms. Martin projected an increase in ending balance in both of those years.

Mr. Gordy noted that this proposal seems to be a "win-win" situation for the district. Ms. Rebick responded that it looks good if it is affordable.

Ms. Hillman asked for more information about the matching funding. Ms. Martin stated that the \$80,000 represents approximately 12.5% of to total cost of the construction. Another 12.5% of the cost will be assumed by the state with the final 75% coming from federal funds specifically earmarked for such construction projects.

Mr. Simon stated that the Board's original decision to disapprove such a request when a district does not have funds is appropriate. That message has been sent. He does believe this total package should be considered due to the advantages for leveraging funds that can be used in this case.

Mr. Gordy moved approval of the Greenland proposal for incurring additional debt pursuant to conditions as discussed. Mr. Hackler seconded the motion. The motion was adopted. (Vote 8 yes, 1 no – Rebick voted no.)

Other Business

Benchmark Test Results

Mr. Simon informed the Board that the announcement about the 2003 Benchmark test results emanated from the Little Rock School District's release of their scores. He reported that the Department is planning for an official release of scores on Wednesday (July 30, 2003). This gives schools an opportunity to review scores and report any incorrect coding or reporting that is evident in a school's scores. He did state that the results are very good. Scores are up in every area. Of particular note are scores for Grade 4 where 67% of the students in literacy and 69% in mathematics are at or above proficient. These and other increases are evidence that teachers, students and schools are committed to improving performance and the professional development for teachers – Smart Start and Smart Step – are working.

Jacksonville Detachment

Scott Smith reported that the Department received notice that the Pulaski County Special School District filed suit to stop the detachment election for the Jacksonville area. He informed Board members that they might be served with papers related to this action. Mr. Smith requested that when, or if, Board members are served with those papers, they should contact his office to get help with a proper response.

The meeting adjourned at 9:15 a.m.

The minutes were recorded and reported by Dr. Charles D. Watson.