

Minutes
State Board of Education
Telephone Conference Call, May 1, 2003

The State Board of Education met via telephone conference call on Thursday, May 1, 2003. The call originated from the Auditorium of the Department of Education. Shelby Hillman, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m. and requested that Dr. Charles Watson sound the roll.

The following Board members responded present: Shelby Hillman, Chairman; JoNell Caldwell, Vice-Chairman; Luke Gordy; Robert Hackler; Dr. Calvin King; and MaryJane Rebick.

The following Board members were not attending: Peggy Jeffries; Lewis Thompson, Jr.; and Dr. Jeanna Westmoreland.

Amendment to the Public School Fund Budget FY 2003

Mr. Simon reported that legislation was completed during the session that allows the Department more flexibility in allocating revenue by removing the restrictions on Equalization Aid. By exercising those options, it is proposed to reduce this budget category and restore some cuts that were adopted in the last budget revision.

Dr. King asked about changes in transportation aid.

Ms. Rebick inquired information about the Pygmalion Commission. Mr. Simon explained that group had been formed for many years and was linked to programs operational in local districts that serve alternative learning environments. He noted that they do not have an office, but the "Commission" meets on a regular basis and has some support staff. Among the services provided by this group are professional development opportunities for teachers of alternative learning environments. At this point he indicated that most of the funds earmarked for the Commission probably would not be spent this fiscal year, but would be available for carry-over into the new fiscal year.

John Kunkel explained that \$112,000 Additional Base Funding that was not needed to meet the budget requirements for this year can be reallocated for use in other areas of the budget.

Ms. Rebick moved approval of the budget revisions as presented by staff. Mr. Hackler seconded the motion. The motion was adopted unanimously.

Waiver of Student-Teacher Interaction Days

Dr. King noted that there were some requests that appeared on the agenda at the regular Board meeting that are not found here. Specifically, some requesting that Memorial Day be counted as a day of school are not on the current list. Mr. Simon explained that current statute gives the Department the option of approving the use of Memorial Day as a regular school day under certain conditions – one of which is extreme weather where a school would miss six or more days. With the extreme weather this year, the Department has the flexibility to approve those requests without

Board action. Those only asking for Memorial Day have been cleared and already approved.

Ms. Hillman asked for the opinion of the Board as to how to proceed with review and action on these requests. It was the consensus that each request should be considered independently and should be approved or denied on its own merit and the effort made by the district to make up days missed.

Ms. Rebick asked if the Department had sent information to districts suggesting that the school calendar include snow days. Annette Barnes indicated that the communication to districts had been suggestions as to how days could be made up, but no policy had been framed that would require snow days in the school calendar.

Mr. Gordy suggested that districts should not be approved for waiver days unless the district had made extra effort to make up any missed days. For example, a district should have snow days in the school calendar and those days should have been used. He also suggested that before a waiver could be approved spring break days should be cancelled and be used for school days, Memorial Day should be scheduled as a school day, and the school year should be extended. He implied that these conditions should be applied consistently across the requests.

Ms. Caldwell also noted how important it is that all requests be considered fairly and equitably.

School	Motion	Motion by	Seconded by	Vote
Alread	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Beebe	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Deer	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Farmington	Approve Request	Gordy	Caldwell	Unanimous
Green County Tech				Unanimous
Highland	Approve Request	Gordy	Caldwell	Yes – 5 No – 1 (Rebick)
Omaha	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Quitman	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Randolph Cnty	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
River Valley ¹	Deny Request	Gordy	Rebick	Unanimous
Rural Special	Approve Request	Gordy	Caldwell	Yes – 5 No – 1 (Rebick) ²
St. Paul	Approve Request			Yes – 5 No – 1 (Rebick)

¹ Mr. Gordy questioned what happened to staff development days when those days were used as make-up days? Ms. Barnes indicated that those staff-development days were added to the end of the year or the time was added in another way.

² Ms. Rebick inquired if the Board was being consistent by not requiring Memorial Day as a school day.

Valley Springs	Motion to allow two (2) waiver days as opposed to the number requested.	Gordy	Caldwell	Yes – 5 No – 1 (Rebick)
----------------	---	-------	----------	----------------------------

Ms. Hillman asked Annette Barnes to prepare letters to notify schools of the action taken by the Board and to explain the rationale behind the votes taken. Mr. Hackler noted that several of these were unwilling or chose not to propose to extend the school year, yet they took scheduled spring breaks and other days missed. He suggested that the Department and the Board must convey to the schools that in the future it will be more difficult to get any waivers passed.

Mr. Gordy suggested that some very clear directions be prepared and sent to schools concerning inclusion of snow days in the school calendar and scheduling adequate time for student teacher interaction days.

Ms. Rebick stated that it was the State’s responsibility to see that students get an education and allowing schools to miss days and not make them up is not a good precedent to set. There should be a more clear policy concerning snow days and making up days missed.

Ms. Hillman asked that an item be added to the May 12 Board Agenda to further discuss this issue.

Mr. Gordy commended Mr. Simon and the Department for the approval of the State Accountability Plan by the U.S. Office of Education and the announcement by President Bush. He stressed it was a real expression of confidence for Arkansas that Mr. Simon was invited to the White House and that Arkansas was 14th in the nation to have the plan approved.

The call ended at 9:40 a.m.

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

Raymond Simon, Director

Shelby Hillman, Chair