

**SAUSALITO MARIN CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD MEETING MINUTES  
February 2, 2016**

**ATTENDANCE**

Board Members Present: Caroline Van Alst, William Ziegler, Thomas Newmeyer, Joshua Barrow, Ida Times

Interim Superintendent: Bob Ferguson

The meeting was called to order at 5:36 p.m.

Trustee Van Alst introduced Bob Ferguson as the interim superintendent. Mr. Ferguson introduced Principal designee Melinda Wallace, who thanked the community for being at the meeting. She said that she was looking forward to developing relationships with all stakeholders and building trust. She continued: I spent the day meeting with various groups, as well as with Principal Newton and Vice Principal Thornton. Enchilada Tuesday in the cafeteria was wonderful; I talked to a few parents and I observed students eating and interacting with their teachers – they were very respectful. I also met with Head of School Royce Conner and Assistant Head of School Tara Seekins at Willow Creek Academy. I was introduced to Jonathan Logan Jr, the general manager of the Marin City Community Services District and ended the day meeting with Jeff McNaughton, the representative of classified employees and Markey Lees of California School Employees Association. In putting together my notes, I noticed a recurring theme: everyone wants to close the achievement gap and support the children socially and emotionally. I have been part of a team that was known for turning around a low performing school by building relationships with all staff. There is a lot of potential here and I am excited to be a part of it.

Community member Marilyn Mackel said she was a bit befuddled, because her understanding from the last meeting was that the decision to hire a principal had not been finalized. She continued: I would like to address the issue of avoiding the appearance of impropriety, a standard which all boards should respect. I therefore request that the board reset the hire of the principal/associate superintendent or in the alternate, I ask that Ms. Wallace withdraw and resubmit her candidacy for the following reasons:

1. The entire board did not participate in the initial screening of applicants or the interview process.
2. Mr. Van Zant was the sole decision maker – thus there is no rational, equitable or ethical way that this can be termed a board hire.
3. The one community member who was called received a text message two days before the interviews, without a time or date for the meetings. This shows a lack of respect for this community.
4. There was no local participation or input in Ms. Wallace's hire as principal and little board participation – not even the current/retiring members of the administration were consulted. This hire is the sole work of Mr. Van Zant, whose character has been impugned and who may be deemed felonious by the courts. The board should not sanction this hire.

I am at the school every week as a volunteer. I can tell you that your choice for principal must be someone experienced in dealing with culturally diverse and economically depressed communities. The hire you are currently contemplating is not such a person. The district she comes from, Indio is not comparable to Marin County or Marin City. The fact that we have Latino immigrants in Marin City does not make our population remotely akin to the immigrant population in Indio. Ms. Wallace may have the knowledge and skills to be successful here. I am asking you to allow the community to have a say in the matter.

I would also like to encourage Trustee Ziegler to avoid the appearance of superiority by making statements such as "I have too much education to be an educator". Lastly, the members of this board have the time to go to Willow Creek to observe a leaking pipe. I would like to request that you spend some time coming to activities at Bayside MLK and the larger community. This can only make you a more capable servant of your constituents, she concluded.

Michael Tabb, a community member, addressed Ms. Wallace and thanked her for coming to the meeting. He said: this discussion is not about your credentials or capability; it is about the process. You said we should be concerned about the social and emotional well-being of the community. I want you to know that the community is very upset about the way your hiring was handled. I feel sad that you were put in this position. Black folks are feeling disempowered and yet we live in a community with so many resources. When you look at your children, think about ours. They are no different. In this district, we speak a good game but this is not reflected in our actions. Something is missing and it's not intellect or resources. This is not a good foundation for the future. You are hearing us but do you really understand what we are saying? If you really care about our children, listen to our community. We are not pleased with this process.

Julius Holtzclaw said: I was the California School Employees Association chapter president in the past and it saddens me that we can't overcome these difficulties. Whoever we bring in should be set up to succeed. We have a lot of issues that must be resolved first. I recall that there was a letter from the community asking that the hiring process for a principal be halted until there is more input. I want the board to really hear us and put on the brakes until the community has had a chance to have its say.

At 6:09 Trustee Van Alst said that the meeting would go into closed session and enumerated the topics to be discussed, asking for comments.

Marilyn Mackel said that the district must review its operational structure to achieve its stated goal of making this a high achieving school. The school has come a long way in the last one and a half years in dealing with those negative behaviors of our children and their parents that impact their ability to learn. Unfortunately supportive resources have been cut and academics have been made more challenging because the upper classes are now combined.

Principal Newton and Dr. Thornton have brought together parents and community stakeholders to participate in the day-to-day work of the school. This board said last month that they did not know how poorly the children were doing academically. We have gone from 60 students late or absent on a regular basis to almost none. Any decision to maintain the hire of Ms. Wallace will be tainted and thus impact her ability to make any real progress. We must do the right thing and set the right example.

Bettie Hodges said: At the last board meeting we presented a petition signed by 80 people who agreed with you that this is a community school. The community feels outraged that the district would choose a principal without consulting it. In the past, many community members have been ignored and because you ignored them, you don't have their trust. We were not able to put in our voice in choosing the selection criteria. You are missing an opportunity to right the mistrust that you yourselves instigated. For once listen to the community. When there was a selection process for a principal at Willow Creek, there were several community meetings.

Michael Tabb said: Once our current principal and an assistant principal leave, our administration will not reflect our community at all. We know this is important. This is a human rights issue. I want the white people here to stand up and speak up.

Pamela Dake said, in reference to the item "public employee dismissal": One of my concerns is that there have not been monies available to the school for so many programs, among them music. The programs that could have made the children enthusiastic about school have been cut. The art program is raising money for itself. This is shameful in this area and this district. Now it appears that we have money to pay the former superintendent, an interim superintendent and the principal designee. Where is this money coming from, when there was so little available for educational programs?

Barbara Killey, a volunteer tutor, said: I saw the effects of the budget cuts at Bayside MLK Jr. Academy when I started to volunteer last year. I assumed that the district did not have money. I was shocked to see that

\$138,200 was apportioned for a topographical study. Additionally, a November 2015 MOU between the District and Willow Creek Academy provides many additional services to WCA. The last straw was the request for paid leave by the former superintendent. Yet there are no funds for PE, arts, or an equitable education. I quote from your equity policy: "Equity focuses on outcomes. Educational equity means raising the achievement of all students while narrowing the gap between the lowest and highest performing students. The concept of educational equity goes beyond formal equality – where all students are treated the same – to fostering a barrier-free environment where all students, regardless of their race or socioeconomic circumstances, have the opportunity to benefit equally." The problem is that your budgeting decisions have made a mockery of your equity policy. You can't look at the resources available to each of the two schools and justify your budgeting decisions.

Rocio Novoa, a parent, addressed the issue of the hiring process. As a parent and member of community I find it sad that the district has had to go through so many superintendents and principals in the last 4-5 years, she said. This shows that something is wrong. You have to be held accountable for that. Our children are paying for these constant changes and it is not right. This shows the lack of respect you have for our children. Our children are at a disadvantage because they are of color. You have to start doing the right thing and show love for the kids instead of that blank look on your faces. We repeat the same cycle over and over again. Show us that you know what you are doing.

#### **CLOSED SESSION**

The Board and Superintendent convened closed session at 6.31 p.m.

#### **RECONVENE TO OPEN SESSION**

Open session reconvened at 7:43 p.m.

#### **REPORT OUT OF CLOSED SESSION**

Trustee Van Alst said that Mr. Van Zant remains on leave. In light of the serious allegations against him, we expect this leave to end shortly. The district has received a copy of the complaint and the alleged acts that occurred; none of these are alleged to have taken place in our district.

The board looks forward to working closely with Mr. Ferguson and the staff at the Marin County Office of Education to conduct the business of the district.

Mr. Ferguson added that by law, Mr. Van Zant has been suspended with pay. The feeling is that this matter will be resolved very quickly.

#### **PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Trustee Newmeyer led the Pledge of Allegiance.

#### **AGENDA ORDER**

Trustee Van Alst asked that the Principal's Report be moved to the top of the agenda to allow teachers to make their report in a timely manner.

**Barrow/Zeigler/All to approve the change in the agenda order.**

#### **PRINCIPAL'S REPORT**

Emily Matto, the second grade teacher, said that the lower grades have started using the Wonders program in language arts. She then shared some of her classroom materials with the board. A higher percentage of students are now performing at the proficient level and we have one-on-one volunteer support for those who are lagging behind. We do have some challenges, she said. I was notified that the classroom aide will no longer be available in my classroom after the third week of February. Another challenge is our desire to have more collaboration with the other teachers. We now have students at Bayside MLK and Willow Creek writing to each other. This is very useful for the students. She said that she is excited about having Ms. Wallace as a principal. Over 53% of

the Kindergarten class is made up of English Language Learners, so English language development is very necessary in this district. We also need help with getting the kids access to technology, she concluded.

#### **INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT**

Trustee Van Alst thanked Mr. Ferguson for coming on board.

Mr. Ferguson said that he retired from the Tamalpais Unified School District in 2008. He is happy to be here and plans to see that our problems are properly addressed, he told the board.

#### **Barrow/Ziegler/All to Approve the Interim Superintendent Contract**

#### **BAYSIDE/ MLK JR. ACADEMY PRINCIPAL/ASSOCIATE SUPERINTENDENT**

Ms. Wallace asked to address the board. She said: I want to come forward and say that I really listened to the community and that I hear your passion for your students and I also understand that my hiring process was flawed, therefore I am withdrawing my candidacy for the position. The board will move forward. I want you to know that it has been great getting to know all of you. I will re-apply for the position and hope that the community will have the input that it deserves.

Mr. Ferguson said this has been a difficult situation. There is no doubt that the process was flawed. I want to commend Ms. Wallace for her professionalism and class. It takes a courageous person to take this step. The process was not fair to her or to you. This time we will do it right. Every board member feels that we cannot move forward with the process as it is.

Gail Henrickson said: Last night we submitted an open letter requesting that you consider a delay in the hiring of a new Principal. You have demonstrated that you are more than talk. I want to extend kudos to Ms. Wallace for recognizing the severity of the situation and thank the board members for making the right decision.

Hersh Markusfeld said: The superintendent was being paid \$120K for working 2 days a week. He asked: what would the average full-time superintendent get paid where he is responsible for just one school? What are the trade-offs in dollars? That kind of money could be paying for school aides, teachers.

Mr. Ferguson said that each board has responsibility to set the terms of the contract for the superintendent. In a small district, the superintendent wears many hats and has the responsibility for personnel, budget, LCAP, everything. Right now, we are looking at a structure that will answer the needs of this district. I will stay as long as it takes to get the process going, he said.

Gail Henrickson said: In a meeting with Bettie Hodges of the Hannah Project and Mary Jane Burke, the County Superintendent, the community asked for assistance in drawing up a new blueprint for governance of the district. Superintendent Burke said anything is possible. When you begin the task of restructuring, please consider inviting community input. There are a lot of people here who really care. And who want to get the money back to the kids, so that they have what they need to learn.

Marilyn Mackel said: I want to thank Ms. Wallace for doing the right thing and look forward to her re-application. She then addressed the board, and asked them to consider whether the title of principal/associate superintendent is an appropriate one for this district. This latter consideration is wide and deep, and vital to the success of our goal of a high-achieving school. Another important issue to consider is whether the teachers in this district understand the impact of history on our children. These children have a different history. I am looking forward to the day when our students achieve at a high rate in this district.

Fran Nelson said that she has never seen a job description for the new position of principal/associate Superintendent. What are the expectations for this position and is it expected that they will eventually become superintendent, she asked.

Mr. Ferguson said that these issues were discussed in closed session. There has to be a plan for transitional governance. There will not be an assistant and a superintendent; this district is too small. We will draw up a plan and bring it to the community as soon as possible, he said.

#### **BOARD COMMUNICATIONS**

Trustee Barrow reported that the Marin Promise organization and its Partnership Council are looking at ways to be more involved in Marin City.

Trustee Van Alst said that she is continuing to meet with staff at the Marin County Office of Education and looking for ways in which MCOE can further help the district.

#### **CSEA REPORT**

Julius Holtzclaw, the new Vice President of the California School Employees Association, said that he will be reporting regularly on CSEA activities in the future.

#### **SUPERINTENDENT REPORT**

Mr. Ferguson said that there has been a breakdown of trust in this community. I am not worried about my contract or my future, so I can do what is right and have an honest conversation. If I make decisions that are in the best interest of the children, I feel good. Some of the issues here are also issues at Willow Creek Academy. The question of equity is not specific to this community, it is a nationwide issue. To tackle these problems, we have to think outside the box. I have talked to teachers and staff and they are frustrated. I will be here long enough to right the ship, hire the right personnel, and work as a partner with the stakeholders. I want teachers to feel supported in the classroom. I don't expect you to trust me right away. We need to rebuild a relationship with the community. We will get through this and make this the best district that we can, because we can't afford to fail.

Trustee Barrow said that he felt reinvigorated after hearing the report. I am excited about the future, he told Mr. Ferguson.

#### **WCA REPORT**

Head of School Royce Conner said that Mr. Ferguson is the third superintendent to take the helm since he has been here. It is clear to me that you are ready to help us all tackle our problems around the achievement gap and professional development. I also feel invigorated and happy to work with lucky number 3, he said.

#### **ORAL COMMUNICATIONS**

Judi Shils of Conscious Kitchen announced that it is partnering with the Marin City Wellness Center to have seniors come in to the cafeteria for lunch. These are seniors who might benefit by having the healthy meals we serve in the school cafeteria, and it will also be an opportunity to bring two generations together over lunch, she told the board. Conscious Kitchen will also start a dinner program at the Marin City community center, with a kickoff later in February.

#### **CONSENT AGENDA**

**Roll Call/Ziegler/Newmeyer/5 Ayes, 0 Nos, to approve the following consent agenda items:**

Minutes of the January 12, 14 and 24 Board Meetings

Payment of Warrants – Batches 28-29

Field Trips

## **COMMITTEE FORMATION AND APPOINTMENTS**

Trustee Van Alst said we currently have four standing committees and one ad hoc bond committee. The board is considering the continued viability of these committees. She then asked Superintendent Ferguson to speak about the formation of a Superintendent's Education Task Force.

Superintendent Ferguson said that he would like to focus on engaging with the entire community, but that at some point in time, he would want to form a committee that brings together the district, Willow Creek Academy and the community. For now, I would like to listen as much as possible and come back to the board with a plan for an action oriented committee that generates meaningful dialog among all the stakeholders.

**Barrow/ Times/All to Disband the Standing Education Committee in Anticipation of Forming a Superintendent's Education Task Force**

### **Finance Committee**

Trustee Ziegler said we don't need to have a committee for the sake of having one, but the Finance Committee is necessary so that the Board can continue to be informed about the budget. Trustee Van Alst said that what she is hearing from the community is that they want more transparency, particularly on the subject of allocation of funds to various categories, such as special education or Willow Creek Academy. It might be worthwhile to have an ad hoc budget committee, she suggested.

**Barrow/Newmeyer/All to Disband the Standing Finance Committee and Form an Ad Hoc Finance Committee**

Trustee Ziegler said that he does not see how the Finance Committee can be ad hoc, with a limited term.

Trustee Van Alst agreed and added that no committee is needed if board members wish to discuss finance. The purpose of the ad hoc committee was to address the issues of transparency and communication with the public regarding the budget. Trustee Ziegler pointed out that since ad hoc committees meet without giving notice, the transparency issue would not be addressed. Board members agreed that they would discuss the budget outside the structure of a committee and address transparency during community engagement meetings.

**Van Alst/Ziegler/All to Disband the Newly Formed Ad Hoc Finance Committee**

### **Facilities Committee**

Trustee Van Alst said that the Facilities Committee faces the same challenges as the Finance Committee. Other trustees agreed that this committee had outlived its usefulness.

**Newmeyer/Ziegler /All to Disband the Facilities Committee**

### **Communications Committee**

Trustee Barrow said that he would like to see the standing committee disbanded and replaced with a more agile ad hoc version that is renamed the community engagement committee. Trustee Ziegler said that he sees communications and community engagement as two separate functions. Trustee Barrow said that the district needs an overarching 94965 strategy that includes both engagement and communication.

**Barrow/Newmeyer/All to Disband the Standing Communications Committee and Form an Ad Hoc Community Engagement Committee**

### **Ad Hoc Community Engagement Committee**

Trustee Barrow said the purpose of this committee should be to build an effective strategy for community engagement on the issues of leadership hires, the Local Control and Accountability Plan and community education, and its term should expire at the end of the fiscal year.

## **Van Alst/Ziegler/All to Appoint Trustees Barrow and Times to Serve as Members of the Ad Hoc Community Engagement Committee**

### **Ad Hoc Bond Committee**

Trustee Van Alst said that she would like to continue working on the committee. Trustee Ziegler said that he was also willing to continue as a member.

### **Newmeyer/ Barrow/All to Keep Trustees Van Alst and Ziegler as Members of the Ad Hoc Bond Committee**

### **Early Retirement Program**

Trustee Ferguson said that he would like to talk to union representatives for both classified and certificated employees before coming to the board with a proposal

### **Local Control and Accountability Plan**

Trustee Barrow said this warrants a lot of discussion and may have to be postponed to a later meeting when we have more time to address the issues.

Julius Holtzclaw said: What I have heard so far gives me a glimmer of hope. When the Local Control and Accountability Plan was first introduced, we were supposed to convene a committee with union members, but I was never asked. Why have the business manager and superintendent been allowed to set up the budget without community input? Superintendent Ferguson replied that we have not done a good job regarding the LCAP. There was very little input from anyone. I will reach out to the county and ask for help to get that process going. Bettie Hodges said Dr. Monica Green, who specializes in working with LCAP and engaging with the community, is available to work with the district. She added that the community group Saving a Generation is very interested in working on the LCAP and wants to have its members trained locally. I hope you will see to it that the district sets aside some money for training us, she told the Board.

### **Community Engagement Process**

Bettie Hodges said a lot of dialog has been created around the idea of community engagement. She continued: I am heartened by the actions that you are prepared to take and I am very pleased that Trustees Barrow and Times took on the responsibility to make this item happen.

Trustee Barrow said that the Board we would like to ask for Ms. Hodges's help. You are able to engage the community, he told her.

## **FINANCIAL & BUSINESS**

Resolution 724 - Authorization to Sign on Behalf of the Governing Board

**Ziegler/Barrow/ All to approve Resolution 724 - Authorization to Sign on Behalf of the Governing Board**

**Annual Adjustment to Bid Threshold for Contracts Awarded to School Districts**

**Annual Adjustment to Liability Limit of Parent or Guardian for Willful Pupil Misconduct**

The Board heard that these are routine adjustments to the bid and liability thresholds in the district.

## **POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

The following policies were brought to the board for approval:

**Board Policy 200 - Philosophy, Goals, Objectives and Comprehensive Plans – Goals for the School District**

Trustee Barrow said that he found this policy light on parent engagement and community education.  
**The Board decided to table action on Policy 200**

**Board Policy and Administrative Regulation 3260 – Fees and Charges**

Ziegler I don't like that we can charge team members for insurance. This district is weak in athletic activities; if we start to charge for participation, it would be a bad policy.

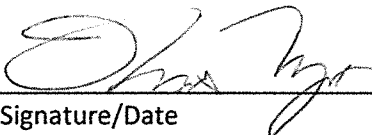
**Barrow/Times/All to discard Board Policy and Administrative Regulation 3260 – Fees and Charges**

**Administrative Regulation 3460 - Business and Noninstructional Operations - Financial Reports and Accountability**

**The Board decided to table action on Administrative Regulation 3460**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**Newmeyer/Barrow/All to adjourn the meeting at 9:50 p.m.**

 3/8/2015  
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Signature/Date  
  
Trustee  
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Title