THE SCHOOL BOARD OF ST. LUCIE COUNTY

Workshop Meeting – April 22, 2003

MINUTES

The School Board of St. Lucie County held a workshop in the School Board Room on April 22, 2003 at approximately 4:35 p.m.

PRESENT: MS. CAROL A. HILSON, Vice Chairman

Member Residing in District No. 2

MRS. KATHRYN HENSLEY

Member Residing in District No. 4

DR. SAMUEL S. GAINES

Member Residing in District NO. 5

(arrived at approximately 5:10 p.m.)

DR. JUDI MILLER

Member Residing in District No. 1

ABSENT: DR. JOHN CARVELLI, Chairman

Member Residing in District No. 3

ALSO PRESENT: DR. WILLIAM VOGEL, Executive Officer/

Superintendent of Schools

WORKSHOP ON ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION

Ms. Hilson opened the meeting and Ms. Ellen Harden, teacher on special assignment, proceeded to describe the development of the district’s Alternative Education Task Force that was formed approximately 2 ½ years ago to look at existing programs and determine needs. The task force had developed a shared vision of what alternative education programs should be, developed a Mission, Beliefs, and Quality Assurance Standards, established requirement for progress monitoring, and would evaluate program effectiveness annually.

Ms. Harden had provided the Board with a written description of program standards as they related to students, staff, parents and community, support services and planning and evaluation (see supplemental minutes packet). It was brought out that the public must be educated as to the educational alternatives offered in the district. The goals were to put students back into the regular program and to change the community’s perspective on what alternative education meant, both of which would take some time.

Current programs included:

1)Performance Based Diploma Program at Fort Pierce Central High School & Aegis Learn and Earn Academy, one of the district’s best practices. Students work at their own pace to complete Sunshine State Standards coursework;

2) Sunrise Academy (grades K – 5), an elementary alternative with behavioral and academic support, 0% recidivism rate, and a placement review process;

3) Anglewood Center/Lucie Adolescent Parenting Program (LAPP) where approximately 40 teen parents and 40 children can be served by attending comprehensive campus and LAPP concurrently. to allow students to graduate with their peers via credit retrieval/PB opportunities;

4) Excel Alternative, Inc.,

5) Patch;

6) ROCK – north and south programs;

7) Department of Juvenile Justice;

8) PACE..

Ms. Harden recommended that all programs remain the same but acknowledged that future housing was a concern. Other concerns mentioned were lack of funding for DJJ program and retention of 3rd grade students, which would leave the district with more students needing alternative education options. She and Mr. Marty Sanders, Executive Director of Facilities and Maintenance, had looked everywhere in the district to find possible locations to house alternative programs. Mr. Sanders reported that the district did not have anything vacant—everything was being used. Some spaces that were looked at were not large enough to handle a total program or were not in the right location to put high intensity students. Some relocatables could be moved but that was felt to be a short-term option. The current district office facility and/or ESE office (both soon to be emptied once staff moved to new administrative office) would meet the needs. The district office facility could be divided to house low and high intensity students (200-250 students), however, the need would be greater in looking to the future.

When asked by Ms. Hilson, Ms. Harden confirmed that there was space at Sunrise Academy to add a 6th grade. Dr. Miller cautioned before moving ahead too far with architectural plans that the Board have further discussion about program needs. Ms. Harden confirmed that would be the plan. Once vacated, the old district office could be under contract by November 2003 to be renovated and ready for students by the fall of 2004. Mr. Sanders indicated it would be an aggressive schedule but not necessarily problematic. Ms. Harden agreed that a program should be in place and she would not want to start in the middle of the year at a new location. District staff would probably recommend approving a contract with Excel Alternatives, Inc. for another year. Excel people were committed to addressing more needs of students they serve. Ms. Harden told the Board she was monitoring progress at Excel and they were addressing a diverse population. Mrs. Sandra Wolfe, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, informed board members that a small sub committee had discussed some changes for next year at Excel that would require some additional monitoring of the program by staff next year. The Board would be updated about the changes before approval of the program was requested for next year.

Dr. Miller mentioned her concern that students recommended for expulsion that come before the Board had long discipline referral lists and asked how big was that problem. Ms. Barbara Slaga, Executive Director for Student Services and ESE, responded she was not seeing as many as she used to. Schools were having a problem with the volume—there were too many of them and it was difficult to get all interventions listed on the record. The time it takes to go through the process to make it meaningful is difficult. There are lots of students having problems and schools and staff spend more time on the prevention side. This year Ms. Slaga had seen first time offenders that were more violent. Dr. Vogel asked that Ms. Slaga look at how many chronic offenders were in Level I. Mrs. Hensley had a concern that 25% of gifted kids drop out and it was a different set of criteria why that happened. The reading issue was extremely problematic.

Ms. Hilson thanked Ms. Harden and Mr. Thornton for the wonderful job they have done with students at risk at Sunrise Academy.

Dr. Gaines thanked Ms. Harden and the task force. For almost 25 years, he had repeatedly stressed the need for alternative programs to try to reach kids before problems started and finally everyone saw the need. There were many naysayers regarding Sunrise Academy but it had been proven the need was there, every child can learn but everyone has to adopt that attitude and thanks to Ms. Harden and the task force, they were doing it. Dr. Gaines stated it was frustrating to see kids come to the Board for expulsion. Many times the root of the problem is in the home—it was not the child. This had been a long time dream of having different types of alternative programs. Dr. Gaines did not know how to find housing for the programs but believed it was necessary to do whatever could be done to find room for the programs.

Dr. Vogel informed the Board that Ms. Harden had worked on developing a credit retrieval program (extended day) however, it was hard to get parents to buy into the time frame. They did not want their child home during the school day. Ms. Harden was still considering the program for the future and stated lots of students have big academic needs all over the place.

Discussion ended and Vice Chairman Hilson adjourned the April 22, 2003 workshop at approximately 5:45 p.m.