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Pine Bluff School Board votes to close Greenville

By Michael S. Lee

Of The Commercial Staff

The Pine Bluff School Board voted unanimously Tuesday night to close Greenville Elementary School at the end of the 2012-2013 school year citing a continuing decline in district enrollment and a consequent decrease in revenue.

"It does sadden us that we need to do this," board member Phyllis A. Wilkins said after the vote. "We don't like to close a school and we do not do this easily."

The vote came after a series of public meetings hosted by Superintendent Linda Watson and her administrative staff over the past month in which the administration laid out the reasons behind its recommendation to close Greenville.

"The district needs to operate more efficiently to remain fiscally sound," Watson said in explaining the rationale to the board. "In order for the district to operate more efficiently, it needs to close at least one school for the next school year. The district has determined that Greenville is the most logical school to close in light of repairs and renovations that are needed and the fact that a smaller number of students, teachers and staff will be affected by closing this school versus others in the district."

In a related move, the board voted to adjust the attendance zones in the district to reflect the Greenville closing.

"The administration has reviewed and revised the current elementary school attendance zones so that no one school would be burdened with an excessive number of students," Watson said.

Superintendent contract

In other business the board voted unanimously to give Watson a new two year employment contract that will be effective until June 30, 2015.

"An employment contract for Superintendent Watson has been presented to the board for its review," board president Piccola Washington said prior to the vote. "Several changes and corrections were inserted into the contract which extends her current contract for two more years."

Math

The board voted to approve the adoption of new mathematics textbooks for the 2013-2014 school year for grades K-12.

"Did the math teachers get to talk to you and provide their input?" Wilkins asked Assistant Superintendent for Learning Services Beverly Ruthven.

"The math coaches spearheaded the effort to review the textbooks and the teachers got to vote on which books would be adopted," Ruthven said.

First readings

The board approved a series of board policies for the first reading that include school district legal status; general organization of the local board of education; school board meetings; board officers; unexpired term fulfillment/vacancies; school board member code of conduct; board member removal from office; and board powers and responsibilities.

"Periodically, policies need to be revised to meet legal requirements and district needs," Watson said. "The administration is in the process of revising and developing the Board policies."

The board approved a series of classified personnel policies for the first reading that include classified employee sick leave; classified personnel grievances; classified personnel level two grievance form; classified personnel computer use policy; classified personnel acceptable use and internet safety policy; classified personnel internet use agreement; workplace injury/disability and reasonable accommodations policy; school bus driver's use of cell phone; classified personnel cell phone use; and classified reduction in force.

The board also approved a series of certified personnel policies for the first reading.

Personnel

The board voted to re-hire certified and classified employees as well as administrators and principals for the 2013-2014 school year.

"The Pine Bluff School District requires that district personnel be rehired in March every year in order to plan adequately for the upcoming school year," Watson said. "State law requires that certified employees be rehired by May 1 and that classified staff be rehired by June 1."

Finances

District director of business and finance Pam Winkler presented the financial report for the month of February.

"For the month ending Feb. 28 the district had a beginning balance of \$13,391,509; current month receipts of \$2,532,658; current month expenses of \$3,108,676; an amount available for operating of \$15,710,336; and a total balance for all funds of \$19,774,751," Winkler said.

Pen or Pencil

Rev. Jesse C. Turner, program director of Pen or Pencil, spoke to the board about the work done by the program for district students.

"Pen or Pencil promotes education and the reduction of delinquency using effective mentoring and positive youth development practices," Turner said. "The idea is to shift a student's trajectory away from the penitentiary and instead towards the pencil and an education. The program uses civil and human rights to educate students. Attorney General Eric Holder is concerned about gun violence and he has invited young people from our program to come to a regional gun violence summit that will be held in Little Rock this summer. We have programs at Robert F. Morehead Middle School in the Dollarway School District as well as Jack Robey Junior High here in the Pine Bluff School District."

Turner thanked the district for allowing the program to work with district students.

Note: Article reprinted courtesy of the Pine Bluff Commercial

