

WILLOW RUN COMMUNITY SCHOOLS
Ypsilanti, Michigan

Executive Session - Open

December 3, 2009

The meeting opened at 5:45 PM at the Administrative Conference room of the Willow Run High School, 235 Spencer Lane, Ypsilanti, Michigan.

Those present were:

Sheri Washington, President
Mark Wilde, Secretary
Dorothy Stewart, Treasurer
Anglesia Brown, Trustee
Don Garrett
Joi Jenson, Trustee
Clifford Smith, Trustee

Others Present Included:

Dr. Doris Hope-Jackson, Superintendent
Diane Carr, Attorney
Laura Lisiscki, Acting Superintendent
Cecilia Queener, Human Resources Coordinator

Ms. Sheri Washington, President, called the meeting to review the progress by the Superintendent toward board goals to order at 5:46 p.m. Ms. Washington expressed her intention to run the meeting in a timely fashion, first addressing the review; second, Dr. Jackson's absence and asked if Dr. Jackson had the document to be considered.

Dr. Doris Hope-Jackson answered affirmatively and expressed her dismay at the meeting given her contract calls for goals to be made collaboratively. Further, the contract does not call for a midyear evaluation, the instrument was not shared with Dr. Jackson prior to the use; the review comments cover time certain board members were not yet in service to Willow Run; the process was not conducted fairly; no basis or proof to the evaluative comments have been provided.

Ms. Carr, Dr. Doris Hope-Jackson's attorney introduced herself to the members and clarified that there is no term "executive session" in the Open Meetings act. Ms. Carr referred to the unscheduled meeting of October 14, 2009 for which Dr. Jackson took notes and during which the intention seems to have been a mid-year evaluation and there is no such provision in the contract.

Mr. Clifford Smith stated that this is not an evaluation, but a review of Board goals.

Dr. Jackson responded that it is the Board, not the Superintendent, who must achieve the Board's goals. Further, that she was not informed that an evaluation was being conducted, not informed of the goals, and the goals had not been adopted by Board action and attached as an addendum to the contract.

Ms. Anglesia Brown stated that the contract and policy calls for periodic discussion of progress toward board goals.

Mr. Clifford Smith stated that the October 14 meeting the members were “only there to discuss the instrument used.”

Ms. Sheri Washington then stated “pursuant to clause 10” semi-annual evaluation of goals and summarized the assessment. Ms. Sheri Washington read each goal from page 3:

- Improved Student Achievement
- Effective Board Governance
- Increase Student Enrollment
- Increase Community Involvement

Ms. Diane Carr asked when the goals were established with Dr. Jackson.

Dr. Doris Hope-Jackson noted that the template included additional goals not included when hired, yet they appear and are used in this evaluation.

Ms. Washington stated the board goals are from 2007.

Ms. Sheri Washington then read board comments –not associating them with the board member - and the subsequent score.

(get copy of review – none given recorder).

Dr. Hope-Jackson was offered the opportunity to give a rebuttal regarding the information just presented:

- Failure to attend the ISD meetings – false; attended and involved.
- Failure to engage parents – there exists a documented national trend of parents not engaging in their students school
- No plan to restructure the High School for better achievement – false: there is a plan in effect and that plan was approved by the State and the board of ed.
- Diversity of staff – changes in staff at buildings was at the direction of MITap reviewer and about which the board was well informed.
- Declining graduation rate – the graduation rate at Willow Run has been steadily declining over the past several years. 2011 would be the first group under Dr. Hope-Jackson’s direct charge and for which accountability could be assigned.
- District image – For two (2) years Ms. Washington has led the charge battering Dr. Hope-Jackson and the district in the press and media.
- Many of these evaluative comments are without basis or proof:
 - The relationship with ISD and partners has been supportive and growing
 - “Flyer Pride” – was not a condition of employment
 - Work ethics – Dr. Hope-Jackson referred the members to the sign in log for on-site work hours.

Regarding Willow Run Saturday events – all have been attended with the exception of the Ashford and Simpson concert, and Dr. Hope-Jackson stated that she made certain what was needed for the concert was accomplished.

The Deficit Elimination Plan is under the auspices of the Business Office and is board approved.

Regarding poor leadership, taking the brunt

Not forward thinking –

Work ethic – for two (2) years I've had perfect attendance.

Would never have agreed to promise progress on enrollment – there are too many variables.

Teamwork – branch out

Visibility in the district, again, Dr. Hope-Jackson urged the members to check the work log – where it is documented that she can be found on the Willow Run site six to seven days a week. She acknowledged that the community may not see her at times on some weekends when she returns to Illinois to visit her family.

Publicity – she reminded the members that while surrounding districts have dedicated marketing/publicity departments, advertising at Willow Run is done by Dr. Hope-Jackson, Ms. Borton and Ms. Plumley all in between their many other job duties.

Regarding compensatory time: for 2-1/2 years Dr. Hope-Jackson stated that she has been performing the duties of Director of Academic Services, Director of Human Resources and supervising Technology in collaboration with the staff - all without adjustment in pay.

Dr. Hope-Jackson asked the board to look honestly at the charge of lack of commitment to Willow Run given the hours; further, that the last evaluative rating of all zeros was not realistic. Instead, those results and this evening leads Dr. Hope-Jackson's to the conclusion that it is not about furthering the state of the district, but about 2-1/2 years of anger and vengeance on behalf of certain board members.

Grievances – Dr. Hope-Jackson stated that grievances are filed unrelated to whether or not the bargaining agreement is followed to the letter. She called on Mr. Clifford Smith to attest to the fact that an email was sent by the teachers' union directing members to file a grievance 'no matter how small'. For those cases that proceeded to arbitration in all but 2 Willow Run was victorious – which supports the fact that the CBAs are being followed. Dr. Hope-Jackson reminded the members that she asked the board directly if they wanted to fight grievances or submit. The board unanimously directed her to fight.

There are six bargaining units – the relationships with the other five are promising. Dr. Hope-Jackson noted, however, that she began to be 'called to task' when the fight involved someone to whom a board member was connected.

Each Board member was then given a chance to share their most pressing concern.

Mr. Clifford Smith stated that the additional goals were discussed in the last annual superintendent evaluation. He proceeded to say the loss of 300 students in one enrollment year was the main issue for him.

Dr. Hope-Jackson interjected that losses of students have been occurring for the past ten (10) years.

Mr. Clifford Smith stated not when there was a superintendent that knew how to market the district and made reference to Dr. Benit.

Mr. Mark Wilde's primary concerns were student enrollment and AYP.

Ms. Joi Jenson gave her "parental perspective" stating that the community and parents feel the teachers are the "heartbeat" of Willow Run. "If you don't get along with the teachers, you don't belong here." Additionally, the hostile relationship between Dr. Hope-Jackson and Sheri Washington, the 'board's leader', affects the board. Ms. Joi Jenson stated that she does not see the passion for Willow Run in Dr. Hope-Jackson.

Ms. Dorothy Stewart expressed her feeling concerning the importance of the district and the desire of the community to have a superintendent live in the district. ~~Ms. Stewart stated that Dr. Hope-Jackson had committed to living in the district.~~ Ms. Stewart stated that during her interview, Dr. Jackson stated very eloquently that she strongly believed that a superintendent should live in the school district and be a taxpayer in the district. For this reason, the Board did not expect her to commute from Illinois. – minutes approved by BoE 12/17/2009 with this statement as submitted by Mrs. Stewart.
Dr. Doris Hope-Jackson reminded Ms. Stewart that she had stated she would consider it, but had not committed.

Ms. Anglesia Brown stated that Dr. Hope-Jackson's perception was not the reality of the district.

Mr. Garrett Brown introduced himself as the new board member and stated that he has been a 20 year resident of the district and a 1990 graduate. He stated that yes, there was spilled milk, but the expectation was that Dr. Hope-Jackson would clean up the spilled milk. Mr. Garrett referred to his daughter, a 2008 graduate of Willow Run, and stated the information he received from her teachers and other students disturbed him. He also expressed concern over dropping the grade point average of athletes.
Dr. Hope-Jackson reminded Mr. Garrett that the board approved the temporary lowering of the grade point average for athletes to play sports.

Ms. Washington began by referring to Dr. Jackson's remarks about receiving all zeros from her at the last evaluation. She explained the scoring scale – developed by Mr. Wilde - used at that time, where zero was neutral, +1 and -1. The commentary was meant to be professional. Ms. Sheri Washington acknowledged the strained working relationship between herself and Dr. Hope-Jackson, but stated that the district marches to the leader.

Ms. Washington concluded the review portion of the meeting.

Ms. Washington stated that 'on several occasions' Dr. Hope-Jackson had been requested to submit the paperwork for Family Medical Leave Act time off and asked what prevented Dr. Hope-Jackson in complying.

Dr. Hope-Jackson explained that while she did receive a request, FMLA is an option and as she had more than enough sick and vacation days she did not see a need to apply.

Ms. Sheri Washington stated that as a result of Dr. Hope-Jackson's failure to apply for the leave, or return the paperwork, "the rumor mill gets going"... and "you know the rumor mill at Willow Run".

Ms. Carr interjected and inquired what would support rumors as emails were sent regularly by Ms. Plumley apprising the board of the situation.

Ms. Jenson and Ms. Stewart both replied that Dr. Hope-Jackson does not report to Ms. Plumley; that there is an employee / boss relationship between Dr. Hope-Jackson and the board president. She should have contacted the Board President personally.

Dr. Jackson responded that she used the procedure that has often been used and that she had tried to reach Ms. Washington without success.

Ms. Jenson replied that Dr. Jackson should have contacted Board members- any board member...emphasizing that "we're your bosses."

Mr. Garrett offered that he worked for the University of Michigan and when he can't come to work, he must contact his boss; if he is gone for three days without contact he is fired.

Mr. Wilde stated in addition to no one board member having direct contact, an email was sent by Dr. Hope-Jackson that she did not use her personal email for work and an auto reply returned with a message that 'no email would be returned' on the Willow Run email account.

Dr. Hope-Jackson began to correct Mr. Wilde regarding the auto-reply message when he offered – 'it was something like that' and stated that the message gave the indication that she was unreachable.

Ms. Joi Jenson asked about 'some restrictions' on her return.

Dr. Hope-Jackson replied that her physician stated that there may be days on which her condition would only permit _ days and the board should be aware ... that this week, she has been able to work full days.

Ms. Carr asked the board what status they have given Dr. Hope-Jackson, as they now have a superintendent on-site and an acting superintendent.

Ms. Washington replied that the board's action to appoint an acting superintendent remains in effect until the board takes action otherwise.

Ms. Carr asked for clarification – is Dr. Hope-Jackson still the superintendent?

Ms. Washington replied affirmatively.

Ms. Carr – is Dr. Hope-Jackson being termination.

Ms. Washington – ‘no’.

Ms. Carr asked for clarification of her duties, given the acting superintendent and the confusion that the two roles bring.

Ms. Washington restated that the duties assigned to acting superintendent remains in effect until the board takes action otherwise.

Ms. Carr asked if she and Dr. Hope-Jackson need remain for the Board meeting.

Ms. Washington stated no.

President Washington adjourned the audience to the forum room for the work/study meeting.