

## Minutes of Mississippi Board of Education Meeting

August 3, 2021

The members of the Mississippi Board of Education met in a Special-Called Teleconference meeting at 10:00 a.m. on Tuesday, August 3, 2021 via teleconference and audio means pursuant to Miss. Code Ann. § 25-41-5 for the purpose of determining if an extreme emergency situation exists that jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the Holmes County School District. The location of the meeting available to the public was the 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor Auditorium at the Central High School Building, 359 North West Street, Jackson, Mississippi and via livestream. Board members present in the Senator Grey Ferris Board Room on the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor of the Central High School Building, 359 North West Street, Jackson, Mississippi included: Ms. Rosemary G. Aultman, Dr. Wendi Barrett, Dr. Angela Bass, Mr. Glen V. East, Dr. Karen J. Elam, Mr. Bill Jacobs, Dr. Ronnie L. McGehee (Madison, Mississippi), Mr. Matt Miller, and Ms. Mary Werner. Student Representatives absent: Ms. Amy Zhang and Ms. Micah Hill. Dr. Carey M. Wright, State Superintendent, was present in the 4<sup>th</sup> Floor Boardroom of the Central High School Building, 359 North West Street, Jackson, Mississippi.

Ms. Aultman noted that the meeting of the Board of Education was being held via teleconference and audio means pursuant to Miss. Code § 25-41-5 and that the notice of this meeting included the date, time, place, and purpose of the meeting and identified the location of the meeting available to the public. Ms. Aultman announced that a quorum of the board exists at the locations stated for the purpose of conducting a meeting through teleconference means.

- I. Ms. Rosemary G. Aultman called the Special-Called teleconference meeting to order at 10:01 a.m.

Dr. Wendi Barrett led the Pledge of Allegiance and Dr. Angela Bass gave the Innovation.

- II. Dr. Carey M. Wright, State Superintendent, did not have any comments.
- III. On a motion by Mr. Bill Jacobs, seconded by Dr. Karen J. Elam, the Board unanimously approved the agenda.
- IV. Discussion and/or Approval of Board Item
  01. Information: Report from the Commission on School Accreditation concerning the Commission's determination that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in this District and that this emergency situation is related to serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation

standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources, inappropriate standards of governance, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan]  
(Paula Vanderford)

Dr. Paula Vanderford reported from the Commission on School Accreditation concerning the Commission's determination that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County School District which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in this District and that this emergency situation is related to serious violations of accreditation standards, federal and state law, inappropriate standards of governance, and a pattern of poor academic performance.

Dr. Vanderford reported that an investigative audit conducted in the Holmes County School District on April 27, 2021, through July 23, 2021, revealed that the Holmes County School District failed to comply with 26 of the 32 process standards evaluated in the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2020* and that these violations jeopardize the safety and security of the students in the school district. Dr. Vanderford further provided evidence that these violations were related to serious violations of accreditation standards, federal and state law, inappropriate standards of governance, and a pattern of poor academic performance. Dr. Vanderford stated that the Holmes County School District is in violation of nine (9) of the nine (9) provisions of the Accreditation Policy 2.5 of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2020* that outline areas for an immediate downgrade to PROBATION or WITHDRAWN, which are considered the most serious violations of the process standards. Dr. Vanderford stated to keep in mind that the MDE was NOT recommending the withdrawal of the District's accreditation status at this time; however, a district's accreditation MAY be withdrawn for a violation of only one (1) of these nine areas.

Dr. Vanderford summarized the final report that was given to the Holmes County School District as:

- The District is in violation of nine (9) of eight (9) process standards that allow the Commission on School Accreditation to withdraw a District's accreditation status;
  - Reporting false information (Accreditation Policy 2.1);
  - Failure to implement appropriate standards of governance (Process Standards 1, 1.1, and 1.3);
  - Failure to comply with local school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations (Process Standards 1 and 1.2);
  - Failure to comply with financial accountability requirements of a serious nature (Process Standards 4 and 5);

- Failure to comply with graduation requirements (Process Standard 14, 14.1, 14.2, and 14.5);
- Failure to comply with test security requirements required by the Mississippi Statewide Assessment System outlined in Appendix F, numbers 8 and 9 (Process Standard 16 and Appendix F);
- Failure to comply with federal programs whose regulations call for strong sanctions for a continued pattern of noncompliance (Process Standards 17, 17.4, 17.5, and 17.6);
- Failure to comply with instructional practices (Process Standard 20); and,
- Failure to comply with standards that pose life-threatening conditions for students and staff (Process Standards 29, 30, and 31).

Ms. Aultman recognized Ms. Louise Winters, Board President of Holmes County Consolidated School District and she addressed the Board. Ms. Aultman recognized Dr. Debra Powell, Superintendent of Holmes County Consolidated School District, and she addressed the Board. The Holmes County Consolidated School District submitted a binder to the Board as part of their presentation, which the Board accepted. The Board then heard closing statements from attorneys for the Office of Accreditation and the Holmes County Consolidated School District. The Board then asked questions of both the Office of Accreditation and representatives from the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

#### Consideration of Executive Session

Mr. Glen V. East moved that the Board consider making a closed determination of the need to go into Executive Session. Mr. Matt Miller seconded the motion. The motion passed on a vote of 8 to 0.

In closed session, Mr. Glen V. East moved that the Board go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussion and/or deliberations with respect to investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct or violations of law in accordance with Mississippi Code Annotated § 25-41-7(4)(d). Specifically, regarding whether the Board finds there is sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District. Mr. Ronnie L. McGehee seconded the motion, which passed on a vote of 8 to 0.

#### **Minutes of the Executive Session**

Ms. Erin Meyer informed the public of the Board's decision to go into Executive Session for the purpose of discussion and/or deliberations with respect to investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct or violations of law in accordance with Mississippi Code Annotated § 25-41-7(4)(d). Specifically, regarding whether the Board finds there is sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in

the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

During Executive Session, the Board discussed and/or deliberated with respect to investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct or violations of law in accordance with Mississippi Code Annotated § 25-41-7(4)(d). Specifically, regarding whether the Board finds there is sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

On a motion by Mr. Glen V. East and seconded by Ms. Mary Werner, the Board moved to come out of Executive Session on a vote of 8 to 0.

The public returned to the meeting and Ms. Rosemary G. Aultman reported on the actions taken during the Executive Session. Ms. Aultman read the Resolution adopted by the Board (copy attached).

02. Action: Determination by the State Board of Education that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in this District and that this emergency situation is related to serious violations of federal and state law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources, inappropriate standards of governance, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate [Goals 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6 – MBE Strategic Plan] (Paula Vanderford)

On a motion by Mr. Glen V. East, seconded by Ms. Mary Werner, the Board unanimously approved the determination by the State Board of Education that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Holmes County Consolidated School District which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in this District and that this emergency situation is related to serious violations of state and federal law and accreditation standards, serious concerns regarding financial resources and the lack of internal controls, inappropriate standards of governance, inappropriate oversight by the local board, a continued pattern of poor academic performance, and the failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

- 2.a. Approval of request to the Governor that a state of emergency be declared in the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

On a motion by Dr. Karen J. Elam, seconded by Mr. Bill Jacobs, the Board unanimously approved the request to the Governor that a state of emergency be declared in the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

- 2.b. Determination by the State Board of Education to officially abolish the Holmes County Consolidated School District, existing school board and superintendent, contingent upon a declaration of state of emergency in the District by the Governor

On a motion by Mr. Bill Jacobs, seconded by Dr. Karen J. Elam, the Board unanimously approved the determination by the State Board of Education to officially abolish the Holmes County Consolidated School District, existing school board and superintendent, contingent upon a declaration of a state of emergency in the District by the Governor.

- 2.c. Approval of appointment of Interim Superintendent for the Holmes County Consolidated School District contingent upon a declaration of a state of emergency in the District by the Governor

On a motion by Dr. Karen J. Elam, seconded by Dr. Angela Bass, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Dr. Jennifer Wilson as the Interim Superintendent for the Holmes County Consolidated School District contingent upon a declaration of a state of emergency in the District by the Governor.

- 2.d. Approval of employment agreement for the Interim Superintendent for the Holmes County Consolidated School District contingent upon a declaration of a state of emergency in the District by the Governor

On a motion by Dr. Karen J. Elam, seconded by Mr. Bill Jacobs, the Board unanimously approved the employment for Dr. Jennifer Wilson as the Interim Superintendent for the Holmes County Consolidated School District.

IV. Adjournment

On a motion by Dr. Karen J. Elam, seconded by Dr. Angela Bass, the Board unanimously approved to adjourn the meeting at 2:34 p.m.

Approved:



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Rosemary G. Aultman, Chair  
Mississippi Board of Education



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Carey M. Wright  
Executive Secretary  
Mississippi Board of Education