



**Minutes of the  
Commission on School Accreditation  
Special-called Meeting  
Central High School Building  
Fourth Floor, Board Room  
359 North West Street  
Jackson, Mississippi  
July 18, 2018  
1:00 p.m.**

The special-called meeting of the Commission on School Accreditation (CSA or Commission) took place at 1:00 p.m. on Wednesday, July 18, 2018. The Commission members present in the Fourth Floor Board Room of the Central High School Building, 359 North West Street, Jackson, Mississippi included:

Heather Westerfield, Chair  
Kelle Barfield  
Sarah Foster  
Roy Gill  
Dr. Valencia Martin  
Michael Miller  
Anthony Montgomery

Attending via teleconference:

Sean Brewer, Madison, MS  
Brian Harvey, Oxford, MS  
Ann Jones, Jackson, MS  
Eddie Prather, Tupelo, MS<sup>1</sup>  
Rob Tyner, Sumner, MS

The following members did not attend:

Kenny Bush  
Ann Jones  
Michael Lindsey  
John Mistilis

Ricky Luke, Special Assistant Attorney General, served as legal counsel to the Commission.

The Mississippi Department of Education (MDE), Office of Accreditation staff members/representatives present included:

Dr. Paula Vanderford, Chief, Division of Accountability/Executive Secretary  
Erin Meyer, Special Assistant Attorney General  
Dr. Jo Ann Malone, Executive Director, Office of Accreditation

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<sup>1</sup> Mr. Eddie Prather joined the teleconference at 1:21 p.m.

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John Cartwright, Office of Accreditation  
Teresa Jones, Office of Accreditation  
Michael Martin, Office of Accreditation  
Katrina McDowell, Office of Accreditation  
Ken Stamps, Office of Accreditation

Dr. Felicia Gavin, Chief Operating Officer, also attended.

**I. Announcement of Quorum and Call to Order**

Heather Westerfield, Chair of the CSA, opened the Commission meeting and conducted a roll-call of the Commission members.

Heather Westerfield, Chair  
Kelle Barfield  
Sarah Foster  
Roy Gill  
Dr. Valencia Martin  
Michael Miller  
Anthony Montgomery

Attending via teleconference:

Sean Brewer, Madison, MS  
Brian Harvey, Oxford, MS  
Ann Jones, Jackson, MS  
Eddie Prather, Tupelo, MS  
Rob Tyner, Sumner, MS

The following members did not attend:

Kenny Bush  
Ann Jones  
Michael Lindsey  
John Mistilis

Ms. Westerfield announced that a quorum of the Commission existed.

Ms. Westerfield called the meeting to order at 1:17 p.m.

Sarah Foster gave the invocation.

**II. Adoption of Agenda**

Ms. Westerfield asked the Commission members to review the agenda they received previously. On a motion by Anthony Montgomery seconded by Michael Miller, the Commission unanimously approved the agenda.

**III. Report on the existence of an extreme emergency situation regarding the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the Noxubee County School District**

Dr. Paula Vanderford reported to the Commission concerning the existence of an extreme emergency situation in the Noxubee County School District which jeopardizes the safety, security, and educational interests of the children enrolled in the schools in this District.

Dr. Vanderford reported that on June 12, 2018, Dr. Felicia Gavin, Chief Operating Officer, received a letter from the Superintendent of Noxubee County School District expressing the need for financial assistance for cash flow purposes. Upon receipt, Dr. Wright, State Superintendent of Education, called for a full investigative audit of the Noxubee County School District and in accordance with Accreditation Policy 5.0 of the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards, 2018*. This audit began on June 25, 2018. Prior to this audit, the MDE conducted a limited legislative audit in February, 2013. The limited audit evaluated 29 of the 37 process standards that existed in 2013. The District was noncompliant with 18 of the 29 process standards. Since 2015, the District has continually failed to comply with Process Standard 4.0 for failing to submit an audit for the respective fiscal years.

The MDE provided the District with the *On-Site Investigative Audit Report* on July 13, 2018. The report revealed that the Noxubee County School District was noncompliant with twenty-six (26) of the thirty-two (32) process standards. Dr. Vanderford pointed out that there is significant overlap between the noncompliance currently found and the noncompliance that existed in 2013.

Accreditation Policy 2.5 outlines the eight (8) areas for an immediate downgrade to PROBATION or WITHDRAWN, which are considered the most serious violations of process standards. The District is in violation of seven (7) of these eight (8) areas:

- Reporting false information;
- Failure to implement appropriate standards of governance;
- Failure to comply with school board policies that meet state and federal statutes, rules, and regulations;
- Failure to comply with financial accountability requirements;
- Failure to comply with graduation requirements;
- Failure to comply with state/federal regulations; and
- Failure to comply with standards that sustain a safe school climate.

Dr. Gavin reported that based on communication with the District, the District's cash flow statement, and the most recent report from the Office of the State Auditor, there are serious concerns related to financial resources and failure to comply with financial accountability requirements (Process Standards 4 and 5).

Dr. Vanderford explained that the District failed to implement a coherent, cohesive, high quality Instructional Management System that clearly defines the academic goals necessary for improving student achievement, has more than 50 percent of the schools in the District designed as an "F", and the District has met the State Board of Education's definition of a Failing School

District for two (2) consecutive years, as evidenced by a continued pattern of poor academic performance.

Dr. Vanderford stated, based on Miss. Code Ann. § 37-17-6(12)(b), the Commission on School Accreditation must determine if an extreme emergency exists in the Noxubee County School District that jeopardizes the safety, security, or educational interest of the children enrolled in that District.

Ms. Westerfield recognized Mr. Roger Liddell, Superintendent of Noxubee County School District. Dr. Liddell, along with Mr. Anderson, President of the Noxubee County School Board, Rev. Earl Stewart, Board Member, and Pam Norris, Business Manager, addressed the Commission.

The Commission asked questions of both Dr. Vanderford and Dr. Gavin and the representatives from the Noxubee County School District and Noxubee County School Board.

The Commission took a short break at 2:37 p.m.

The Commission resumed business at 2:48 p.m.

The Commission heard closing arguments from Mr. Bennie Jones, legal representative for Noxubee County School District and Erin Meyer, Special Assistant Attorney General, Counsel to the Mississippi Department of Education/Office of Accreditation.

**IV. Discussion and action request for the need to declare a state of emergency in the Noxubee County School District.**

Dr. Valencia Martin moved that the Commission make a closed determination to consider going into Executive Session for discussion and/or deliberations with respect to investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct or violations of law in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 25-41-7 (4)(d). Specifically, regarding whether the Commission finds there is sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Noxubee County Public School District. Michael Miller seconded the motion. The Motion passed unanimously and only Commission members and counsel, Ricky Luke remained in the meeting.

Anthony Montgomery moved that the Commission go into Executive Session for discussion and/or deliberation with respect to investigative proceedings regarding allegations of misconduct or violations of law in accordance with Miss. Code Ann. § 25-41-7 (4)(d). Specifically, regarding whether the Commission finds there is sufficient cause to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Noxubee County School District. Roy Gill seconded the motion. The Motion passed unanimously and only commission members and counsel, Ricky Luke remained in Executive Session.

During the Executive Session, the Commission discussed whether there is sufficient caused to believe that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Noxubee County School District.

On a Motion by Anthony Montgomery, seconded by Sarah Foster, the Commission unanimously

voted to come out of Executive Session.

On a motion by Anthony Montgomery, seconded by Roy Gill, the Commission voted unanimously to adopt the resolution discussed and drafted in Executive Session, approving the determination that an extreme emergency situation exists in the Noxubee 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 and state law, and to petition the State Board of Education to declare a state of emergency in the Noxubee County School District. Heather Westerfield read the resolution into the record.

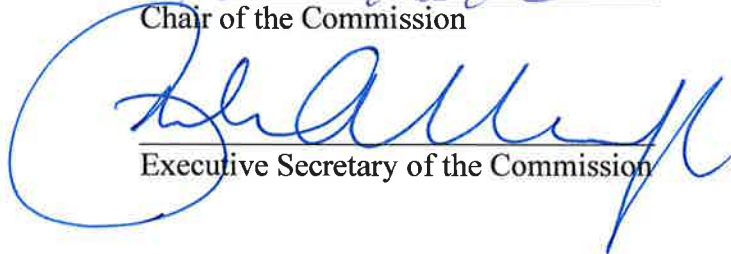
**V. Adjournment**

On a motion by Anthony Montgomery, seconded by Michael Miller, the Commission unanimously voted to adjourn the meeting at 4:37 p.m.

APPROVED BY THE COMMISSION:

9                      18                      2018  
(Month)                      (Day)                      (Year)

  
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Chair of the Commission

  
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Executive Secretary of the Commission