

**MINUTES OF THE JULY 6, 2021  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

July 6, 2021

**1. Opening Items**

**1.01 CALL TO ORDER**

The special meeting of the Board of Trustees was called to order at 9:03 a.m. in the Board Room of the Central Administration Building, located at 425 East Ninth Street in Reno, Nevada.

**1.02 ROLL CALL**

President Angela Taylor and Board Members Jacqueline Calvert, Ellen Minetto, Diane Nicolet, and Kurt Thigpen were present. Board Member Jeff Church was present via video conference. Superintendent Kristen McNeill and staff were also present.

**1.03 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Trustee Kurt Thigpen led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

**2. Items for Presentation, Discussion, Information and/or Action**

**2.01 REVIEW AND DISCUSSION BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES (BOARD) REGARDING THE APPLICATIONS RECEIVED FROM APPLICANTS TO FILL THE VACANCY ON THE BOARD IN DISTRICT C CREATED BY THE RESIGNATION OF FORMER TRUSTEE ANDREW CAUDILL; AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO SELECT THOSE CANDIDATES TO BE INTERVIEWED BY THE BOARD FROM AMONG THE FOLLOWING LEGALLY-QUALIFIED APPLICANTS: CECILIA ALONSO, JENNIFER CASSADY, DENISE COVERLEY-PAXTON, ROGER EDWARDS, COURTNEY GOODBALLETT, JOHN GWALTNEY, SARAH HORNER, EDWARD KENDALL, MORGAN LIDDICK, CANDIE LORENZO, SEAN MCCAFFREY, KENJI OTTO, BRUCE PARKS, ROB PIERCE, DANILLE PRERO, VERITA BLACK PROTHRO, ERIKA REED, JOE RODRIGUEZ, KRISTIN RYAN, JAIMEE SHEPLER, CINDY SOLIS, PAMELA "ANNIE" STORY, CAROLYN SULLIVAN, MARK SUTTON, MELANIE SUTTON, ALICIA TAU, AND LORI WILSON**

President Taylor reviewed the process the Board would use to narrow the candidates down to be invited to be interviewed for the vacancy in District C. Each candidate would be provided 5 minutes to introduce themselves to the Board and community prior to the Board ranking the candidates. She noted Rob Pierce had withdrawn his name from consideration.

President Taylor disclosed she personally knew the following candidates: Denise Coverly-Paxton, Sean McCaffrey, Verita Black Prothro, Erika Reed, and Alicia Tau.

Trustee Nicolet disclosed she had worked with Dr. John Gwaltney while he was at Truckee Meadows Community College.

Trustee Calvert disclosed she knew the following candidates: Sean McCaffrey, Alicia Tau, and Verita Black Prothro.

Trustee Church disclosed he personally knew the following candidates: Mark Sutton, Melanie Sutton, Bruce Parks, Roger Edwards, and Kenji Otto.

Lori Wilson shared her mother was secretary for many administrators in the Green House when she was a child and had always felt welcomed by administrators in the District. She began working in the District's Print Shop while in high school and remained there until she received her Bachelor's degree in elementary education. She retired from full-time teaching at the end of the 2019-20 School Year, but continued to substitute and mentor younger teachers. She was interested in serving on the Board to be part of the solution regarding concerns she saw at the schools. She wanted to be a voice for the employees, parents, and students in District C.

President Taylor asked why Ms. Wilson decided to retire. Ms. Wilson mentioned she was ready for a change and wanted to apply the skills she had learned as a teacher in a different way.

Erika Reed believed her qualifications and personal character made her an ideal candidate for the vacancy in District C. She cited communication, listening, and coordination were skills she would bring to the Board if selected. She mentioned she had worked in the District as an after-school site coordinator, parent involvement facilitator, student graduation advocate, substitute teacher, and coach. She understood every family cared about student success, but were faced with variables that influenced a student's ability to be successful. She hoped to serve as a bridge between the community and the schools and believed the Board's duty was to ensure resources were in place so staff was able to do their job and every student was able to reach their full potential.

Candi Lorenzo mentioned she had been a resident of District C for 20 years and had 3 children who attended school in the District. She remarked that her work experience to create safe environments for students to learn and grow qualified her to serve on the Board. She had mentored many young people in the community through the Nevada Promise Scholarship Program and strongly believed education was the great equalizer. She had a Master's degree in management and leadership and was bi-lingual.

President Taylor wondered what made Ms. Lorenzo decide to apply for the vacant seat on the Board. Ms. Lorenzo indicated she would often volunteer at William O'Brien Middle School and had seen the challenges students and staff faced on a regular basis. She was interested in finding out the underlying causes and believed the best way to impact change in the schools was to serve them.

Courtney Goodballet stated she had lived in Northern Nevada for 15 years and had 3 children in the District. She believed a child's academic career was lifelong and life-changing. She was a coach and military spouse, who had also substituted in the District. She currently worked on a grant funded program that served children, ages 3 through 6, who were victims of crimes, free of charge. She felt those who worked with children and families were not in their positions for monetary gain, but rather because they saw a need and believed they could meet that need. She was interested in meeting the needs within the community and felt she could help the Board gain the community's trust.

Denise Coverly-Paxton commented that she had recently retired from the District after teaching for 30 years. She provided information on her experiencing teaching in District C and the changes to policies and programs she helped to implement, including being part of the District's Re-opening Task Force. While many saw the past year as a loss for students, she was able to watch students grow by learning to advocate for themselves, problem-solve, cooperate, and become more empathetic towards each other. She believed serving on the Board would provide her the opportunity to give back and serve the students and families of District C.

Danille Prero was a mother and spouse of a sheriff, who had worked in landscape construction and the casino industry. She believed she would bring the following skills to the Board if selected: communication, collaboration, and accountability. She wanted to ensure students were aware of the resources available to them and how to access them. She believed it was critical the Board and District embrace the mission to produce academically competent and socially and emotionally sound graduates.

Morgan Liddick noted he was not a native to Nevada, but had specifically selected Reno as his residence. He had worked as a United States foreign service officer and a professor of U.S. History and Western Civilization. He had seen how school systems functioned in various countries and believed the Board and District could be more

efficient in how they operated. He understood balancing the interests of students, parents, and taxpayers was difficult, but he was prepared to offer his knowledge and experience to help students gain the skills they would need to prepare them for life.

President Taylor requested clarification on what "prepare them for life" meant. Mr. Liddick explained that if a student was interested in continuing their education through college, then the District had to ensure the student was reading and writing at a college-level. If a student choose not to pursue higher education, they should be able to enter the workforce with confidence in their abilities.

Dr. John Gwaltney mentioned he had been a member of the Nevada State Board of Education for 8 years and was a prior President of Truckee Meadows Community College (TMCC). He remarked that he began his life as a welder, but decided education was a more important path than running the family business. He had served on various boards throughout his career and was impressed with many of the areas the Board and District were able to improve upon, such as increases to the graduation rate; however, he know more needed to occur, especially for students not necessarily interested in a 4-year degree. He called attention to the fact the Board of Trustees was intended to be non-partisan because the responsibility of the future of children was beyond politics.

Kenji Otto was a military Veteran and single father who had been attending several committee and government meetings over the past year, which made him very comfortable in the Board setting. He was involved in various projects throughout Washoe County and believed his experiences would help him to be an effective member of the Board.

President Taylor noted Mr. Otto had been critical of the Board in the past and she wondered if that could impact his ability to work and add value to the entire team. Mr. Otto commented that he believed it was his duty to call out those who he saw making mistakes. He was upfront and honest about what he believed needed to be done to accomplish the goals of the District. He acknowledged it would be important to ensure a friendly and business-like environment to work effectively as a team.

Carolyn Sullivan had been a member of the Reno-Sparks area for 45 years and loved the children of the community. She believed everyone in the District, including the Trustees, had a responsibility to the children since they were the future of the community. The District's goal should be to provide students with an education that allowed them to move on to a career or college after high school. She was interested in empowering the teachers to provide the best possible outcomes for children and that she wanted to see a curriculum implemented that challenged students while incorporating basic areas of study. She wanted to ensure the tax dollars were spent in a manner that honored the hardworking members of the community who paid the taxes.

Bruce Parks acknowledged he had been an outspoken critic of the Board for some time and believed his leadership skills and abilities could help fix what was wrong with the District. As a Veteran, he claimed he had led soldiers into combat and that most people would never relate to that experience or the dedication it took. He wanted to ensure the Board understood they were representatives of the community and expected to lead.

President Taylor wondered what team-building strategies Mr. Parks would employ to become part of a team that he had never indicated he wanted to become a part of in the past. Mr. Parks stated the first thing to do was to identify the problems on the Board and come up with a plan to address them. He believed complete candor was a virtue and that he would always identify problems and seek ways to fix them.

Kristin Ryan indicated she had recently left her teaching position in the District and believed she would be better able to serve the students as a member of the Board. While she was under 30, she believed her previous work in customer service and as a flight attendant provided her with the skills necessary to work with the community, schools, and other Trustees to support all students in the District.

President Taylor asked why Ms. Ryan chose to leave her position in the District. Ms. Ryan mentioned due to the difficulties that arose from teaching during the pandemic, both in-person and virtual, and the challenges in the community, she believed a change was necessary for herself and her family.

Ed Kendall had recently retired from the School Police Department after 20 years. Over his years serving the students and schools, he was able to meet many families and staff members in District C. He was interested in becoming a voice on the Board for those groups. As the former president of the Washoe School Police Officers' Association, he had an awareness of Nevada's Open Meeting Law and how to conduct public meetings. He stated he believed in compromise and viewed himself as a problem-solver who knew how to deal with difficult people and situations.

Sean McCaffrey believed, as a parent and volunteer, he would add value to the Board because of his commitment and caring to education and the District. He was currently a member of the Board of Directors for the Washoe Education Foundation and had previously served on the Board of Directors for the Education Alliance. He shared his experience working on the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Career Expo and how he believed the experience could be more equitable for all students. He was interested in meeting with principals to determine their specific needs, recruiting additional volunteers for classrooms, looking for funding opportunities for field trips, and helping students access information on career pathways.

Joe Rodriguez was a Veteran who currently worked in law enforcement for the State Fire Marshall. He shared his experiences working with people of various backgrounds in the military and how those experiences helped him learn to deal with problems. He had volunteered on numerous boards in the community, including the Reno Historical Resource Commission and the Sparks Citizen's Advisory Committee. He believed in the importance of compromise and team-building. He did not see problems in the District, but opportunities for change and betterment.

President Taylor acknowledged Mr. Rodriguez's commitment to public service and wondered why he was now interested in education. Mr. Rodriguez stated he had 3 children in the District and wanted to ensure they, and their peers, had a future in Washoe County and that numerous options were available to them when they graduated high school.

Jennifer Cassady was a former student in the District, parent of a student in the District, and had worked as a substitute. She was an outdoor educator in Washoe County and spent much of her time working as a volunteer for non-profits and as a shelter operations director. She was an ordained minister and hospice chaplain. She expressed concern over the various issues that kept children from learning safely in classrooms across the country, including racism. She did not believe allowing teachers to have discussions on race and other topics was partisan or political because she felt discussing difficult subject matter better prepared students for life after school.

President Taylor noted Ms. Cassady had received a Bachelor's in biology and then a Master's in religious studies; she inquired as to the shift in focus between the degrees. Ms. Cassidy felt her degrees complemented each other and that her love of biology did not inhibit her spiritual beliefs. She noted she had completed an internship with Saint Mary's Hospital and was highly impressed with the ability religious leaders had to support community members through difficult times.

Trustee Calvert wondered if Ms. Cassady's child had experienced racism in school and how they coped. Ms. Cassady provided information on some of her daughter's experiences with racism in school. Her daughter was doing as well as could be expected and they continued to have discussions regarding the imbalance of power and how helpers could assist.

Verita Black Prothro was a former student and current parent in the District. She was interested in serving on the Board because of how important education was to her. She spoke about the challenges her parents faced growing up and attending schools in segregated school systems. She noted there were numerous changes currently occurring in school districts across the country and more changes were on the horizon. It was critical for the Board to understand and acknowledge the changes so the children of Washoe County would not only be prepared to impact the community, but the entire

nation. She had previously worked in congressional offices, where she learned how to listen and find ways to best meet the needs of people. Through her work, she gained leadership experience and was interested in being part of the team that came up with solutions to problems.

Trustee Church noted the Board had received emails concerning Ms. Prothro's residency and her relationship with President Taylor. He wondered about Ms. Prothro's ability to remain independent. Ms. Prothro indicated she had been a resident of District C for 2 years and acknowledged she owned property elsewhere in Washoe County. She had served with President Taylor on the board for the Northern Nevada Black Cultural Awareness Society close to 20 years ago.

Roger Edwards believed there was nothing more important a citizen could do than to participate in their community as a public servant. He had served in the military for 27 years, worked with the Planning Commission, and was a member of the North Valleys Citizen's Advisory Board. He felt everyone in Washoe County was invested in the students because they were the future. The intent of the Board should be to identify problems and focus on finding solutions, not adding "ancillary nonsense" to school curriculums.

President Taylor mentioned Mr. Edwards had been a vocal critic of the current Board and she wondered how he would be able to work as a team if selected. Mr. Edwards remarked that he would be interested in sitting down with each Trustee to determine where they stood on the issues, what their strengths were, what they were interested in changing, and what their personal focus was within the District.

*President Taylor recessed the meeting for 15 minutes.*

President Taylor opened the meeting to public comment.

Valerie Fiannaca spoke in support of Bruce Parks to fill the vacancy in District C. She believed he was an honest and caring individual who was involved in various aspects of the community. She felt selecting Mr. Parks would provide an opportunity for the Board to show they were interested in being inclusive to different opinions to bring positive change in the District.

Frank Perez spoke in support of Candi Lorenzo on behalf of the Northern Nevada's Subcommittee for the Nevada Latinos Initiative. The Subcommittee believed Ms. Lorenzo had the capacity to serve all students in the District and would work well with the Trustees to build on current progress. Ms. Lorenzo would serve as a much-needed bridge to the Spanish-speaking community and add value to a diverse group.

John Eppolito acknowledged the position of a school district trustee was supposed to be non-partisan, but hoped the Board would recognize anyone filling the vacancy in District C would be replacing a conservative. He believed appointing a candidate who was not a conservative, or was a friend of President Taylor, would show disdain for all Republicans in Washoe County.

Matt True thanked the Board for their service and hoped they would give all candidates fair consideration. He spoke about his experience as the parent of children with learning disabilities and was encouraged to hear some of the applicants address the challenges and experiences of special needs students. He believed Denise Coverly-Paxton was the most qualified to deal with the issues and challenges he faced and she did not seem to be politically driven. He did not feel it was appropriate for those interested in serving the students of the community to lead with political viewpoints.

The Board held a discussion on the applicants and provided some thoughts on the candidates they were considering. They commented on the commitment to service of candidates and what qualities the individual candidates could bring if selected.

The individual Trustee rankings were as follows:

Trustee Calvert

Verita Black Prothro – 5  
Ed Kendall – 4  
Sean McCaffrey – 3  
Jennifer Cassady – 2  
Joe Rodriguez – 1

Trustee Church

John Gwaltney – 5  
Morgan Liddick – 4  
Candie Lorenzo – 3  
Sean McCaffrey – 2  
Joe Rodriguez – 1

Trustee Minetto

John Gwaltney – 5  
Sean McCaffrey – 4  
Joe Rodriguez – 3  
Ed Kendall – 2  
Lori Wilson – 1



Trustee Nicolet

Sean McCaffrey – 5  
John Gwaltney – 4  
Candie Lorenzo – 3  
Ed Kendall – 2  
Danille Prero – 1

President Taylor

Sean McCaffrey – 5  
John Gwaltney – 4  
Candie Lorenzo – 3  
Verita Black Prothro – 2  
Denise Coverly-Paxton – 1

Trustee Thigpen

John Gwaltney – 5  
Candie Lorenzo – 4  
Joe Rodriguez – 3  
Lori Wilson – 2  
Vertia Black Prothro – 1

The totals were as follows:

John Gwaltney – 23  
Sean McCaffrey – 19  
Candi Lorenzo – 13  
Vertia Black Prothro – 8  
Ed Kendall – 8  
Joe Rodriguez – 8  
Morgan Liddick – 4  
Lori Wilson – 3  
Jennifer Cassady – 2  
Denise Coverly-Paxton – 1  
Danille Prero – 1

The Board discussed if they should invite the top 3 or the top 6 candidates back to interview.

It was moved by Trustee Nicolet and seconded by Trustee Church that **the Board of Trustees selects the following six applicants to interview on July 13, 2021: John Gwaltney, Edward Kendall, Candie Lorenzo, Sean McCaffrey, Verita Black Prothro, and Joe Rodriguez.** The result of the vote was 4-2: (Yea: Jacqueline Calvert, Jeff Church, Diane Nicolet, and Angela Taylor. Nay: Ellen Minetto and Kurt Thigpen.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

### **3. Public Comment**

#### **3.01 PUBLIC COMMENT**

John Eppolito expressed concern over the use of free education technology vendors in the District because students were forced to provide information that would never be seen by parents. He believed many of the vendors had secretly created profiles on the students and no one knew how the profiles would impact students in the future. He was frustrated that student data was shared with others and could lead to children being labeled as racist before they entered the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

Janet Butcher hoped the Board would fill the vacant seat in District C with a candidate who held similar views to former Trustee Andrew Caudill. She expressed frustration over what she believed was real oppression against parents and others in the District, such as attempting to silence parents and others in the community, locking the public out of posted meetings, and providing misinformation to the community through the local, propaganda media outlets.

Bruce Parks remarked that he knew he would never seriously been considered for the vacant seat because of his views but he appreciated the opportunity to speak in front of the Board and community. He encouraged the Board to conduct town hall style meetings to begin a dialogue with the community and ensure they are receiving input from the public.

Victoria Myer agreed the Board should conduct town hall meetings with the community. She believed it was critical for the Trustees to select a replacement for the vacancy soon and work to improve the graduation rate, competency level of students, and preparedness of students to find a job after graduation.

Shannon Coley remarked the proposed social justice curriculum was based on the opinion that society was racist, which she did not believe. She felt remarks provided by Superintendent McNeill in a recent interview with KUNR were misleading, the proposed material was Critical Race Theory, and the curriculum should not be taught in the schools.

The Board received an email from Mary Ortiz.

### **4. Closing Items**

#### **4.01 ADJOURN MEETING**

There being no further business to come before the members of the Board, President Taylor declared the meeting adjourned at 12:20 p.m.

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**Angela D. Taylor, President**

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**Ellen Minetto, Clerk**