

**MINUTES OF THE JULY 26, 2021  
SPECIAL MEETING OF THE  
WASHOE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT  
BOARD OF TRUSTEES**

July 26, 2021

**1. Opening Items**

**1.01 CALL TO ORDER**

The special meeting of the Board of Trustees was called to order at 9:00 a.m. in the Board Room of the Central Administration Building, located at 425 East Ninth Street; Reno, Nevada.

**1.02 ROLL CALL**

President Angela Taylor and Board Members Jacqueline Calvert, Jeff Church, Ellen Minetto, Diane Nicolet, and Joe Rodriguez were present. Superintendent Kristen McNeill and staff were also present.

**1.03 PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE**

Pablo Nava Duran led the meeting in the Pledge of Allegiance.

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

**2.01 INTERVIEWS BY THE BOARD OF TRUSTEES (BOARD) OF THE FOLLOWING LEGALLY-QUALIFIED APPLICANTS TO FILL THE VACANCY ON THE BOARD IN DISTRICT D WHO WERE SELECTED FOR SUCH INTERVIEWS AT THE JULY 20, 2021 SPECIAL MEETING: HAWAH AHMED, SERENA ROBB, TYLER ROGERS, ANN SILVER, AND ELIZABETH "BETH" SMITH; DISCUSSION AND POSSIBLE ACTION TO APPOINT ONE OF THE INTERVIEWED APPLICANTS TO FILL THE VACANCY**

President Taylor reviewed the interview process the Board would use for the finalists for the vacancy in District D. Candidates would be allowed 30 minutes to provide an opening statement, respond to questions submitted by the Trustees, and provide any closing remarks.

Hawah Ahmad provided an opening comment. She believed the key to Nevada's future economic development and diversification would be based on the alignment of the K-12 education system with post-secondary education opportunities and workforce partner training programs. She was interested in finding ways to strategically utilize and invest

federal relief funds to ensure students were put first. She wanted to identify opportunities for the District to provide mental health resources to students to help them address issues that had arisen due to the pandemic.

Trustee Church asked what Ms. Ahmad believed were the major budget and spending issues faced by the District and how they could be fixed. Ms. Ahmad indicated the budgetary challenges had changed for school districts with the implementation of the new Pupil Centered Funding Plan (PCFP). She felt it was important the Board determine how best to utilize the funds to provide necessary services, while at the same time providing supports for students with different needs, since the money would no longer be part of different funding categories, but all part of the same pot. She expressed concern that the PCFP did not adequately address the rising costs of inflation. It was also important to look at infrastructure costs and ensure the District was receiving the best value for the money spent.

Trustee Church followed up and wondered how the Board might address the increases to the costs of goods and inflation on construction. Ms. Ahmad remarked that a needs assessment should be conducted to determine the most appropriate areas for new schools. Schools should be constructed in areas where they would achieve a balance and meet the needs of the students they would serve.

Trustee Church asked if Ms. Ahmad had an opinion on the two statewide ballot questions for 2022 related to education funding. Ms. Ahmad believed the ballot initiatives had been removed as part of a deal made during the 2021 Nevada Legislative Session related to mining taxes.

Trustee Rodriguez wondered if Ms. Ahmad could support a decision made by the Board of Trustees that she did not vote in favor of, why or why not. Ms. Ahmad stated the successes and failures of an organization were up to the organization's governing body. She indicated that if the Board approved an action that she had voted against, that would be the will of the governing body and she would be obligated to follow the final decision.

President Taylor asked what specific experiences Ms. Ahmad had had that would help lend stability and increase community confidence in a Board that had experienced increased scrutiny over the past several years. Ms. Ahmad mentioned her ability to communicate with a variety of different groups would lend stability and community confidence. Education should not be partisan and the Board needed to ensure open communication and transparency to show the community what was occurring in the schools. She did not believe voting on specific issues was based on her personal opinion, but based on the facts presented. It was important to find common ground with those who disagreed with you and build from there to improve fractured relationships.

Trustee Calvert wondered what Ms. Ahmad believed were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Washoe County School District. Ms. Ahmad indicated the economic growth in the area was one of the District's largest strengths since the businesses coming to the region needed an educated workforce. She would like to see the District leverage that strength more to ensure students were able to make a smooth transition to either the workforce or higher education. She believed the current distrust in the community was the District's greatest weakness. It was important for the Board and District to find common ground with the community and remain student-centered and student-focused.

Trustee Nicolet noted the Board of Trustees employed a balanced governance approach to conducting business. She asked what Ms. Ahmad's understanding of balanced governance was. Ms. Ahmad explained balanced governance was focused on working for a common goal and ensuring any outcome moved the Board forward in any situation, while at the same time not micromanaging. It was important every stakeholder had the ability and opportunity to provide their opinions, which was also one of the strengths of an elected board.

Trustee Minetto wondered what efforts Ms. Ahmad would put forth to "stay out of the weeds." Ms. Ahmad indicated it was important for her to understand the procedures and that those procedures supported the District and goals of the Board.

Ms. Ahmad provided a closing statement for the Board. She stated the pandemic had exacerbated many issues school districts had been facing for years, such as the technological divide, and it was critical for those issues to be addressed. She believed it was important for the Board to utilize federal relief funds in a targeted manner to support the students. It was imperative the Board review the science when making decisions related to the pandemic, such as masks or vaccines, so they could help stop the spread and keep schools open. She supported any curriculum that was content-based and respect-based because it was important for students to have the ability to understand people from different cultures on a national and international scale. She acknowledged there were concerns regarding her employment with the Clark County Education Association and had spoken with the Washoe Education Association to assure them she would adhere to any ruling from the Nevada Commission on Ethics.

Elizabeth (Beth) Smith provided a brief opening statement for the Board and community in which she spoke about her experience volunteering on the District's Zoning Advisory Committee. She felt her work as chair of the committee had shown her commitment to open conversations with the community and how to respectfully consider various opinions.

Trustee Church asked what Ms. Smith believed were the major budget and spending issues faced by the District and how they could be fixed. Ms. Smith believed the change to the new funding formula was the District's largest challenge. While the PCFP made the budget easier to understand for the majority of the community, the amount of money the District received per pupil was much lower than the national per-pupil average. She appreciated the intent that the money was supposed to follow the individual student and that should provide additional opportunities for students no matter the school they attended; however, the costs of mandated programs, priorities, and required standards could make budgeting a difficult balancing act.

Trustee Church asked if Ms. Smith had an opinion on the two statewide ballot questions for 2022 related to education funding. Ms. Smith indicated she was not familiar with the questions. It would be important for everyone to review the language in the questions to ensure they understood what they would be supporting if they voted in favor of the questions. If the funds would be spent directly on supporting students, she could tentatively support them.

Trustee Minetto wondered what efforts Ms. Smith would put forth to "stay out of the weeds." Ms. Smith remarked that there were times when it was necessary to look deeper into issues to understand the different aspects or nuances to situations; however, the duty of the Board was to monitor the larger view. She stated the District employed a phenomenal staff who were highly trained and highly educated in their respective areas, so it was important for the Trustees to trust staff. An effective member of any board was to ask questions and determine if there were appropriate alternatives that were not considered.

Trustee Rodriguez wondered if Ms. Smith could support a decision made by the Board of Trustees that she did not vote in favor of, why or why not. Ms. Smith stated she would have no problem supporting the will of the Board. The individual Trustees needed to work to establish a partnership in which compromise was supported. Part of compromising was understanding there could be numerous "right" answers to a single question and while someone might not agree with what you consider the right answer, it was important they acknowledge a different view was not wrong.

President Taylor asked what specific experiences Ms. Smith had had that would help lend stability and increase community confidence in a Board that had experienced increased scrutiny over the past several years. Ms. Smith highlighted her work on the Zoning Advisory Committee. Zoning was a polarizing aspect in most school districts; however, the Zoning Advisory Committee had established a set of guiding principles that allowed the community to feel confident their views were respected, and their voices heard as part of the process. As a Trustee, she would work to show respect, be transparent, and keep an open mind on the issues so that the community would understand why a decision was made, even if they did not agree with that decision.

Trustee Calvert wondered what Ms. Smith believed were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Washoe County School District. Ms. Smith felt the quality of the staff was the District's biggest strength. Additionally, the commitment and involvement of families was a strength the District should capitalize on. She did not view the challenges the District faced as weaknesses, but as opportunities for improvement. For example, the recent influx of charter schools in the area should provide an opportunity for the District to look at the types of programs they were providing in the schools and if changes should be made.

Trustee Nicolet noted the Board of Trustees employed a balanced governance approach to conducting business. She asked what Ms. Smith's understanding of balanced governance was. Ms. Smith indicated balanced governance was a new approach to her, but she believed it aligned closely with the concept of servant leadership. Based on the information she received during a recent informational session conducted by President Taylor, balanced governance emphasized the importance of being respectful and understanding so the body could reach the best possible outcome, even if the individuals did not agree.

Ms. Smith provided a closing statement. She shared she was passionate about education and had committed herself, both personally and professionally through volunteer work, to support students and teachers in the District. She always strove to be a collaborative and mission-driven colleague in all she did.

Ann Silver presented an opening statement for the Board and community. She believed she would be a bold and innovative choice if selected to serve on the Board of Trustees. She had no children in the District, nor was she related to anyone employed by the District. She stated the youth of Washoe County should be the priority of the Board and that students needed critical course studies, exposure to emotional intelligence, observe negotiation and compromise, and shown respect and admiration in order to receive a well-rounded education. The economic infrastructure of Washoe County was dependent on the graduates the District produced, whether they moved on to technical training programs, community college, university, or directly into employment. She would bring strong leadership, negotiation skills, and conflict management to the Board and pledged to actively listen and provide meaningful participation for the community.

Trustee Church asked what Ms. Silver believed were the major budget and spending issues faced by the District and how they could be fixed. Ms. Silver indicated there was not one simple fix for budget issues facing school districts. It was important for the Board to ensure funds were spent on students' education and that they continued to advocate with the state on the importance of placing the funding of education first. The Board needed to show the community their commitment to priority budgeting on the students.

Trustee Minetto wondered what efforts Ms. Silver would put forth to “stay out of the weeds.” Ms. Silver stated the job of the Board was to remain focused on the overall policy and not the practical implementation of policy. Day to day operations rested with the Superintendent, who would then guide the professionals who had studied and been educated on issues surrounding education and education administration.

Trustee Rodriguez wondered if Ms. Silver could support a decision made by the Board of Trustees that she did not vote in favor of, why or why not. Ms. Silver felt the duty of anyone serving on any board was to deliberately negotiate, work collaboratively, and be candid in their opinions and responses; however, once a decision was made, all those on the board must be fully supportive of the final outcome. Any criticism or disagreement in a decision should not occur after a vote.

President Taylor asked what specific experiences Ms. Silver had had that would help lend stability and increase community confidence in a Board that had experienced increased scrutiny over the past several years. Ms. Silver remarked she had never been one to avoid or address conflict if that was what the situation required. She believed her measured thinking, legal background, objectivity, ability to actively listen, and appreciation for different points of view would add value to the Board and help increase confidence. Her hope would be that the community would move from a critical view of the Board to one of a group of dedicated individuals who were doing their very best to lead and guide education for the children of Washoe County. She would bring the perspective of the business community and actively listen to the concerns of parents to ensure their voices were heard.

Trustee Calvert wondered what Ms. Silver believed were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Washoe County School District. Ms. Silver mentioned she did not see weaknesses, only strengths and opportunities for development. She praised the commitment of Superintendent McNeill and her work with the business community. She was impressed with the commitment of teachers and their willingness to come up with innovative techniques and quickly respond to challenges due to the pandemic. An opportunity for development would be to increase the connections between the District and the community at large who were dependent on graduates to sustain local commerce. Additionally, she was interested in seeing ways the Board could work together to show how the different voices and perspectives on the Board were heard.

Trustee Calvert requested additional information on how a member of the Board could improve the education pipeline from K through 12 to the workforce, as outlined in her application packet. Ms. Silver indicated it was critical for every student to understand the importance of finishing school because that provided opportunities for them in the workforce. The pipeline began in kindergarten, when children were exposed to interacting with others, the introduction of social and emotional skills, negotiation,

compromise, and learning. The social and emotional learning was just as important as the academics since employers needed a workforce that understood how to interact with others and become self-sufficient.

Trustee Nicolet noted the Board of Trustees employed a balanced governance approach to conducting business. She asked what Ms. Silver's understanding of balanced governance was. Ms. Silver remarked that her understanding of balanced governance was similar to the differences between the role of a Trustee versus school administration. Balanced governance meant the Board worked to fulfill their duties and school administrators worked to fulfill theirs. It was important for the Trustees to include the public as part of the process because that was who they represented.

Ms. Silver provided a closing statement. She would be interested in developing a better understanding of how to be a better board member, who was willing to work with others to find solutions to issues everyone was struggling with. She believed the Board should take a bold and innovative approach to selecting a new Trustee and that she would bring the perspective of both the business community and community at large.

*President Taylor recessed the meeting for 10 minutes.*

Tyler Rogers provided an opening statement. He stated his intention was to focus on community engagement and that he had a strong ability to build relationships, which included listening to others. The community needed to know they had direct access to the Trustees so they could provide their input on issues. He noted his wife was a teacher and he would work with legal counsel to ensure he did not vote on items where a conflict of interest could occur.

Trustee Church asked what Mr. Rogers believed were the major budget and spending issues faced by the District and how they could be fixed. Mr. Rogers expressed the importance of the District having a long-term balanced budget. He believed the influx of federal relief funds had provided an opportunity in the short-term for the District, but the long-term funding was a concern.

Trustee Minetto wondered what efforts Mr. Rogers would put forth to "stay out of the weeds." Mr. Rogers remarked that it was important for the Board to trust the decisions of the Superintendent and the professionals employed by the District.

Trustee Rodriguez wondered if Mr. Rogers could support a decision made by the Board of Trustees that he did not vote in favor of, why or why not. Mr. Rogers believed compromise was part of the duty of all members of the Board because they were a team. There would be times when there would be disagreement, but the way in which the Trustees handled disagreements, how they acted around each other, and their commitment to the process was what would be remembered and reflected within the

community. If the Board acted as a team, even after a split vote, then the community would understand the importance of working together for an agreeable solution.

President Taylor asked what specific experiences Mr. Rogers had had that would help lend stability and increase community confidence in a Board that had experienced increased scrutiny over the past several years. Mr. Rogers stated community engagement was the key to improving community confidence. COVID had limited the Board's ability to really interact with the community, so it would be helpful to bring back different ways for the public to interact with the Trustees on an individual basis.

President Taylor inquired as to if the community engagement should be conducted in-person or virtually. Mr. Rogers mentioned it would be important for the Trustees to determine the most effective manner in which they would be able to reach out to the most people. Many in the community remained uncomfortable congregating with a lot of people so the Trustees needed to determine how to include them in events so they were heard, just as those who came to in-person meetings were heard.

Trustee Calvert wondered what Mr. Rogers believed were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Washoe County School District. Mr. Rogers remarked that, while the per pupil amount received from the state was below the national average, many of the individual District metrics were at or above the national averages. The District had been able to do a lot with limited resources. In terms of weaknesses, the Board seemed to become easily distracted by some of the "noise" in the community. He believed creating additional community engagement opportunities would get ride of a lot of that "noise."

Trustee Nicolet noted the Board of Trustees employed a balanced governance approach to conducting business. She asked what Mr. Rogers' understanding of balanced governance was. Mr. Rogers mentioned it was important for the Board to find a balance between the management and oversight of the District.

Mr. Rogers presented closing comments. He was impressed with the prior transparency of the Board and was interested in continuing that commitment. He believed he could help the Board and District accomplish great things by taking small steps together.

Serena Robb provided an opening statement to the Board and community. She spoke about her family and work in the District. Her children had attended school in the District and now her grandchildren were students. She had worked in various positions at several schools in the District throughout her career and knew the importance of the Board, as the governing body since they set the policies. She understood how the work of the Board, through their policies, impacted the schools. She believed, based on her experience, she could provide a bridge between the District and the community and the schools.



Trustee Church asked what Ms. Robb believed were the major budget and spending issues faced by the District and how they could be fixed. Ms. Robb believed the federal funds the District had received had to be spent accordingly and focused on bringing students back into the schools so challenges the students faced since schools were first shut down were able to be addressed. She noted there would always be two schools of thought in terms of budget: that schools would never receive enough money or that schools spent money frivolously.

Trustee Minetto wondered what efforts Ms. Robb would put forth to “stay out of the weeds.” Ms. Robb noted it would be challenging for her personally to stay out of the weeds because she did have a tendency to want to fix concerns from the ground up. However, she knew the job of a Trustee was to oversee the programs and not focus on implementation. She believed it was also important to understand there was a difference between the Board asking questions in order to better understand a program and micromanagement.

Trustee Rodriguez wondered if Ms. Robb could support a decision made by the Board of Trustees that she did not vote in favor of, why or why not. Ms. Robb felt a well-informed person could support a decision they did not necessarily agree with since they would understand why the majority approved the decision.

President Taylor asked what specific experiences Ms. Robb had had that would help lend stability and increase community confidence in a Board that had experienced increased scrutiny over the past several years. Ms. Robb stated she had been employed by the District since 1971 and believed her experience in working with thousands of students over the years was something few others would have. She indicated her reputation for scrutiny would lend stability and increase confidence in the decisions made by the Board.

Trustee Calvert wondered what Ms. Robb believed were the major strengths and weaknesses of the Washoe County School District. Ms. Robb commented that the District needed to be better about promoting themselves and the work occurring in the schools. She would often hear “I’m only a teacher” and never understood why those expressing that opinion were not of the opinion that being a teacher was one of the most honorable professions a person could go into. Teachers were extremely influential on the youth of a community and essential to a community’s growth and success.

Trustee Nicolet noted the Board of Trustees employed a balanced governance approach to conducting business. She asked what Ms. Robb’s understanding of balanced governance was. Ms. Robb stated balanced governance was fairness, being informed, and looking at various options before reaching a consensus.

Ms. Robb provided a closing statement, in which she thanked the Board for the opportunity. If selected, she would be thrilled to continue and grow the mission of her professional life by continuing her service to the children of Washoe County.

President Taylor opened the meeting to public comment.

John Eppolito, Protect Nevada Children, believed at least three of the candidates were activists and part of "the far-left." He expressed concern over how the candidates would vote and if they were actually interested in listening to the parents and community or just supporting whatever they wanted. He remarked if the Board wanted to continue to divide the community, then they should select one of the activist candidates, but if they were really interested in working with the community, they should select one of the other two.

Shannon Coley found it interesting the Board asked the candidates about the Balanced Governance Model since the Board continually ignored the community, which was one of the key components of Balanced Governance according to Dr. Alsbury. She agreed with Mr. Eppolito that the Board should not select any candidate who had been an activist for anyone.

Pablo Nava Duran provided comments related to each candidate. He believed Ms. Smith would be the most appropriate candidate to fill the vacancy because of her work on the Zoning Advisory Committee.

The Board received emails from the following members of the community:

- Brandon Siri
- Beth Martin
- Charlotte Stewart
- Janet Butcher
- Dr. Shaina Richardson
- Katherine Hoffman
- Kristen DeHaan
- Sarah Ferguson and Jay Karpen

The Board conducted a discussion on their top preferences and ranked their top three candidates. The Trustees provided comments on the individual candidates and who they believed would add the most value to the current makeup of the Board.

The individual Trustee rankings were as follows:

- Trustee Calvert
  - Beth Smith – 3
  - Ann Silver – 2
  - Serena Robb – 1

Trustee Church

Ann Silver – 3  
Tyler Rogers – 2  
Serena Robb – 1

Trustee Minetto

Tyler Rogers – 3  
Beth Smith – 2  
Serena Robb – 1

Trustee Nicolet

Ann Silver – 3  
Beth Smith – 2  
Tyler Rogers – 1

Trustee Rodriguez

Beth Smith – 3  
Tyler Rogers – 2  
Serena Robb – 1

President Taylor

Beth Smith – 3  
Tyler Rogers – 2  
Ann Silver – 1

The totals were as follows:

Beth Smith – 13  
Tyler Rogers – 10  
Ann Silver – 9  
Serena Robb – 4

Trustee Church moved that the Board of Trustees conducts a second round of rank voting with the top 2 candidates. The motion died for lack of a second.

It was moved by Trustee Nicolet and seconded by Trustee Calvert that **the Board of Trustees approves Consent Agenda Items Pursuant to Nevada Revised Statute (NRS) 386.270, the Board of Trustees appoints Elizabeth Smith to fill the vacancy on the Board of Trustees in District D to serve in the position until January 2, 2023 at midnight.** The result of the vote was 4-2: (Yea: Jacqueline Calvert, Diane Nicolet, Joe Rodriguez, and Angela Taylor. Nay: Jeff Church and Ellen Minetto.) Final Resolution: Motion Carries.

President Taylor issued the Oath of Office to Beth Smith and she was seated as the Trustee representing District D.

### **3. Closing Items**

#### **3.01 PUBLIC COMMENT**

John Eppolito spoke about a recent op-ed piece in the *Reno Gazette-Journal* from President Taylor regarding why the initial public comment period was removed from Board agendas. He stated he intended to submit a response because he did not believe she was being transparent as to the reasons why it was removed. He believed the public comment had been removed to prevent members of the public from coming to meetings to speak out against the Board and the District. He expressed concern over the recent arrest of a counselor on child pornography charges because of the access the counselor had to information on students.

Pablo Nava Duran congratulated Trustee Smith on her appointment. He indicated he was interested in meeting with her soon to discuss some of the issues. He expressed concern over rising inflation and increased costs to building new schools.

The Board received an email from Joe Morabito.

#### **3.02 ADJOURN MEETING**

There being no further business to come before the members of the Board, President Taylor declared the meeting adjourned at 12:01 p.m.

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**Angela D. Taylor, President**

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**Ellen Minetto, Clerk**