



Observer Reporting Form

Feature Evaluated	Yes	No	Comments
Meeting started on time?	x		
All members present?	x		
Members attentive?	x		
Did members appear to have done their "homework?"	x		
Were members courteous to each other and the public?	x		
Agenda sent/posted 72 hours before?	x		
Agenda items clearly described what was to be discussed?	x		
Adequate opportunity for public input?	x		
Was there an appearance that some action items were discussed in closed rather than open session?		x	
Was background information available to the public?	x		online
Facilities adequate? (room size, lighting, ventilation, speakers audible, accessible to handicapped)	x		Handicap access is available, but not obvious. There is a security guard who could direct people. Need to take separate elevator from the general public.

Were any issues on the agenda relevant to LWV positions or programs?

Budget & textbook discussion, see attached notes.

Do you recommend League action on any of these issues? No

Other Concerns:

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Observer: Stephanie Matheny Meeting: Knox County Board of Education Date: 5/3/10

Please submit completed forms to Observer Corps Committee Chair

## NOTES:

- 1) **6 applications were submitted for the new student representative on the Board. Ms. Hester Lamb, a rising senior at Hardin Valley Academy, has been selected.**
- 2) **Carter Elementary is the 7th highest performing elementary school in the state for value added education. Shannondale Elementary was 9th and Norwood Elementary was 10th.**
- 3) **Jordon Haney, a 5th grade teacher at Rocky Hill Elementary, won a \$25,000 grant for a classroom technology makeover from Oak Ridge Consortium of Universities.**
- 4) **The schools will have added security awareness during Election Day for polling places at public schools.**
- 5) **Budget**
  - a) The KCEA (teacher's union) rejected the proposal to eliminate the step increase in pay for all teachers. This had been proposed in order to avoid and/or reduce layoffs.
  - b) Also, will get less money from state for Basic Education Program funding. Knox Schools had expected a \$1.2 million increase, but it will only be a \$600,000 increase.
  - c) The total expenditure is proposed to be \$378.70.
  - d) The proposed budget includes a net reduction of 70 positions district-wide, including 30 classroom teacher positions, 10 instructional aide positions, 13 maintenance positions, and 6 central office positions. It includes a one-day unpaid furlough day for central office staff (255-day contract). It reduces athletic coaching supplements by 2%, in part because this is the only type of salary reduction that does not require ratification by the KCEA (per a recent TN Atty. General opinion). It will increase fees for external use of school facilities. It will discontinue parking subsidies for central office and further decrease spending on temporary employees and contractors and student transportation.
  - e) Dr. Murphy suggested cuts to board stipends and parking subsidies and may make a motion on this on Wednesday, though he acknowledges that this will be mostly symbolic. Ms. Buttrees and Ms. Kincannon agreed. Mr. Stooksbury said that his committee is going to recommend further reductions in parking subsidies.
  - f) Mr. Stooksbury expressed grave concern about actual layoffs as opposed to voluntary reductions. Dr. McIntyre said the schools do try to place those teachers in other positions if they are qualified.
  - g) Mr. Deakins expressed his frustration that the County budget is disproportionately affecting the schools and that the rest of the County is not taking its share of layoffs. Other members agreed that the Board needs to communicate with Commission that the schools have taken severe cuts and to request more funding. Dr. McIntyre suggested that the Board include a discussion of what it would do with additional funding.
  - h) Private funds for teaching positions
    - i) Ms. Buttrees asked whether if a community could fund-raise to pay for a position, the school district would be open to allowing it. Dr. McIntyre said yes. Ms. Buttrees noted that Dr. McIntyre had previously told to the community regarding the Karns Middle School orchestra.

- ii) Mr. Bratton expressed great concern about the inequities inherent in allowing private fundraising for teaching positions. He said that playgrounds are already unequal in different parts of town due to parental fundraising.
  - iii) Dr. Murphy pointed out that federal funding is also unequal, and is directed towards schools with higher poverty indicators.
  - iv) Dr. McIntyre responded that the school district has changed its budget allocation methodology to acknowledge that it will direct additional resources to schools with high concentrations of kids in poverty. He thinks it is therefore fair to allow other schools to raise money as a different source of subsidy to supplement basic education.
  - v) Ms. Carson expressed concerns that private citizens who raise funds for positions think that they control that position. But, external grants would be okay. She does not want to get to the point that parents in more affluent areas are expected to raise money to pay for teachers.
  - vi) Ms. Kincannon is also very concerned about going down the path to private funding for teachers. She would like to see these parents instead channel that discontent to getting an increased budget for public schools.
- i) Ms. Kincannon expressed concern about the Trustee's Commission and has discussed the issue with Mr. Duncan who is the likely future Trustee. The Commission for next year is \$3.76 million. Ms. Buttrees asked if this was legally required, because other counties don't pay it. Ms. McCampbell, the Board's attorney, responded that Tenn. Code Ann. § 8-11-110 defines the payment, but also provides that the Trustee may negotiate the fee if he or she so chooses.
  - j) Mr. Bratton expressed concern about the decision not to notify the maintenance personnel about layoffs until the time when required by law to do so. He felt that the school district should notify them as soon as it knows who will be laid off so that they can start looking for other jobs.
  - k) Mr. Richmond asked about the special programs the Board has recently approved, and why we are implementing them when we are reducing teachers. Dr. McIntyre responded that the Leadership Academy is not being paid for out of the general fund budget. The school at the mall has only about \$75,000 from the next budget year. Dr. McIntyre said that the Race to the Top funds cannot be used for regular budget items, and can only be used for supplemental programming.
  - l) Dr. McIntyre pointed out that just the increase in pension funding is 2% of this year's budget, and that this is a significant cost.

## **6) Race to the Top Scope of Work**

- a) The Race to the Top federal grant will provide \$13.3 million over four years for Knox County Schools.
- b) Dr. McIntyre recommended two changes to the proposal
  - i) The revised proposal includes about \$100,000 per year for the distinguished professionals program.
  - ii) The student mobility rate (i.e., the percent of student turnover from year to year), is very high, especially in the inner city. Dr. McIntyre recommends a mobility study.

- c) The top budget items are Strategic Compensation (\$1.7 m), the Leadership Academy (\$735,000), Teacher Advancement Program (\$450,000), Formative Assessment (\$425,000).

## 7) Textbook Review

- a) Background: The parent of a student at Farragut High School objected to the school about language in the Honors Biology textbook that called Creationism a biblical “myth.” He filed an appeal with the school, which formed a committee, and suggested retaining the book. The Board of Education is hearing the appeal from this committee’s decision. The Board held a hearing last month, and Ms. Buttrees made a motion to ban the book. That motion was seconded, and then Ms. Kincannon invoked personal privilege to continue the discussion to this Wednesday’s Board meeting.
- b) The Board’s review regards only the issues that were raised originally and reviewed by the committee. If there are other concerns, then they need to be properly raised through the same procedures. However, anyone can speak at the Public Forum regarding any concerns that he or she has.
- c) Ms. Kincannon asked for a member of the textbook review committee to describe their process. Ms. Paulson, Farragut High School Assistant Principal (and former science teacher) spoke. The review process started with the parent’s complaint. The other review committee members included the principal, an honors biology teacher, a parent representative, and a student representative. The consensus was that the word “myth” was not the best choice, but that based on definitions of the word they found, the committee believes that the word was not meant to be demeaning to the Christian faith. The book as a whole is a good and valuable teaching tool for biology. The committee felt that the book was appropriate for the age level of the student, and for the course, and that the unfortunate wording of one sentence was not a sufficient basis to ban the use of the book.
- d) Becky Ashe, Director of Curriculum Instruction (and a former science teacher), spoke regarding the textbook adoption process.
  - i) Another biology textbook has been adopted, but not yet purchased. It does not use the word “myth” but does mention other “beliefs,” including Creationism.
  - ii) The textbook selection process begins at the state level – request for work bids are sent out to textbook publishers. The publishers individualize textbooks to state standards. The state reviews potential textbooks through a committee of teachers that is convened from around the state and from different types of school districts. This includes a strict bias review by policy experts, as well as subject-matter review by experts in the particular fields. That results in a list of books recommended for adoption by local school districts.
  - iii) Then Knox County convenes a local committee of teachers to review the books from the state list. Knox County had three biology textbooks to choose from when this book was adopted in 2002. The textbook is divided among different teachers, who each address particular subject areas. The top priorities are the readability of the text and how well it fits with the curriculum. Then there is an open preview process with a comment box for teachers. The textbook review is also open to parents and the public and it is made known that the public can participate.

- iv) Once a book is adopted, then there is an issue of budget. The schools then have to prioritize which new books to purchase based on which area of the curriculum has changed the most.
  - v) This textbook was adopted in 2002, and was in the classroom starting in August 2003. There were no prior complaints about this textbook.
  - vi) The practice in Knox County is for teachers to encourage students who have questions about the text, and how it relates to their religious teaching, to discuss it with their parents and religious leaders. Teachers are encouraged to send power points or other class notes to any parents who request them. If a parent objects, teachers are instructed to provide alternative assignments with the understanding of parents that their child is being denied access to a part of the curriculum that will be tested. Alternative assignments can include different reading material or temporary assignment to a different class.
  - vii) The policy of Knox County is to follow the state curriculum for biology, which is about 1/6 evolution.
  - viii) Ms. Carson asked about the process for when an error is found in a textbook. Ms. Ashe responded that there are inaccuracies in textbooks – she noted errors in math and chemistry texts. Knox County practice is to allow the publishers to know (and they correct online), and the schools also send out an email to teachers to make a correction in their notes. The schools could follow a similar process to avoid controversial portions of the textbook. In this case, the questioned text was not part of the required reading in the class.
- e) Ms. Carson asked whether it is within the legal authority of the Board of Education to ban a book, because this was the motion that was raised at the last Board meeting. Ms. McCampbell responded that, legally, the board does not have the power to “ban” the book. Ms. Buttrees agreed to withdraw her substituted motion, but said that she might suggest a similar motion on Wednesday. Ms. Buttrees indicated that she was concerned that the book singles out the Christian religion.
  - f) Ms. Kincannon proposed an addendum to the original motion to approve the committee’s recommendation. The addendum suggests that the board express regret at the use of the word “myth,” direct Dr. McIntyre to purchase the new textbook when the budget allows, tell the textbook publisher about its concerns, and address other items.
  - g) The cost to purchase the new textbook is in the \$100,000s, so the schools are unlikely to be able to buy this in the next year or two. Mr. Bratton suggested that the community could fundraise to purchase a new textbook. Dr. Murphy disagreed vigorously with this proposal.
  - h) There was discussion that the process for reviewing and hearing these appeals should be improved, particularly with respect to what happens after the committee makes a recommendation.

## 8) Public Forum

- a) **Robert Gentry** – He says that “myth” means “imaginary” and is hence a slam on the biblical story of creation. He says that there is scientific literature and proof that supports Creationism and that “Evolutionists” refuse to acknowledge this evidence. In April 2008 he paid for a full-page advertisement in the Knoxville News Sentinel. He challenges Evolutionists, including those at UT, to debate the issue with him on TV.

- b) **Julie Gotroe** – She is a Farragut parent and a Roman Catholic. She hopes the School Board will not remove a book based on one word. She says Creationism is a biblical parable. She was surprised and concerned by the willingness of the Board to consider the banning of a book at great cost. She thinks this objection is really about the teaching of evolution and not about the word “myth.”
- c) **Melissa Glover** – She is speaking on the budget as part of a group of teachers. Some of their students are here tonight. Teachers do not go into this field for the money. Teachers put in lots of extra hours without being paid. Teachers do not understand the lack of support from political leaders for their work. The burden of balancing the budget should not be placed on the backs of teachers. Teachers genuinely care about their students.
- d) **Kristan Backsa** – She urges the Board to keep the textbook issue in perspective. Her perspective is that the book was carefully chosen, was used for 7 years without prior complaints, and that the book is written at a level to challenge honors students. She is a science teacher. Her job is to teach science to the state and county curriculum. If public schools are required to consider religious doctrine when choosing textbooks, “where will it end?”
- e) **Mike Nabb** – he is a high school biology teacher and a Christian. He is really troubled that the Board is considering banning a textbook based on one supposedly objectionable word. There is quite a range of meanings of the word “myth.” He cited the definitions in the Oxford English Dictionary, some of which might be objectionable and some not. He asked that the Board set a precedent that protects the integrity of vigorous science teaching.