

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SESSION
OF THE SOUTH BEND EMPOWERMENT ZONE
BOARD OF DIRECTORS
2/20/24**

MINUTES

- Meeting Time Start: 6:05 pm
- Meeting Called to Order: Jeff Rea
- Meeting video is available on [Youtube](#)
- Meeting presentation is available on the Zone [website](#)

LOCATION

- Wilson Elementary School

QUORUM

- Attendees
 - Sam Centellas, Board President (virtual)
 - Rosa Hiestand, Board Secretary
 - Stephanie Ball
 - Jeff Rea
 - Leslie Wesley
- Absent:
 - Ryan Matthys, Board Treasurer
 - Kareemah Fowler
 - Sonya Watkins
 - Duane Wilson
- Quorum Established (Y/N): Yes

SUMMARY

The board meeting included reports on three topics: Zone's participation in the ILEARN Checkpoints program; Wilson Elementary's emphasis on partnerships among teachers, families, and students; and the Zone's investment in teachers. Based on the Zone's participation in ILEARN Checkpoints, the board voted to discontinue the use of iREADY at the end of the 2023-2024 school year. Also shared was the Zone's video, "[Inspire](#)," featuring heart-to-heart conversations between educators and students.

AGENDA ITEMS

I. ADOPTION OF AGENDA

- Motion to approve agenda: Stephanie Ball
- Seconded: Leslie Wesley
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously

II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Motion to approve minutes of January 16, 2023: Leslie Wesley
- Seconded: Stephanie Ball
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously

III. BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

The board president held a moment of silence for the Smith children who died in a recent house fire, which included a student from Navarre Middle School.

The Zone team was commended for their hard work and dedication in organizing the Black History Month Showcase. Finally, he highlighted the Walk-Thru-Wednesdays program and encouraged families and board members to sign up for it.

IV. Wilson Elementary: K-2 Gardening Enrichment

Wilson Elementary's Principal, Samantha Smith, first-grade teacher, Mrs. Williams, and three students spoke about this program. Mrs. Williams explained that the idea was born from the desire to have naturally grown fruits and vegetables and, eventually, create a community garden. The students have planted sage, strawberries, oregano, and other plants. The students showed enthusiasm for learning the fundamentals of soil and gardening and appreciation for their growing plants.

V. BUSINESS SERVICES REPORT

Dr. Lewis gave a briefing about the priorities of the Zone's Improvement Plan for SY 2023-2024 and explained the alignment of the topics of the meeting's agenda aligns with those.

Ronda Ross, Executive Director of Business Services, presented the Zone's Financial Report for January 2024. The 501(c)3 has expended 63% of its budget for the school year, which is close to where it should be at this point in time. The Zone has expended 69% of the "All funds" budget; however, there will be a recalibration of that balance that will affect that figure.

- Motion to approve the finance report: Stephanie Ball
- Seconded: Lesley Wesley
- Discussion: none
- Public comment: none

- Approved: unanimously.

VI. PERSONNEL REPORT

January Hires: six (certified and non-certified). January departures: 10. The Zone is currently 93% staffed and the Intent to Return rate has increased to 92% from prior years.

VII. FOCUS REPORTS

ILEARN Checkpoints

The IDOE's new ILEARN Checkpoints program has three checkpoints during the school year. These beginning, middle, and end of year testing windows are similar to the iReady testing windows, which is a cause for concern about overtesting.

The Zone has opted into the ILEARN Checkpoints pilot for the 2024-2025 school year. ILEARN Checkpoints will be mandatory for all schools in Indiana in the 2025-2026 school year. The Executive Director of Teaching and Learning recommended that the Zone will stop the use of iREADY at the end of the 2023-2024 school year.

In the pilot year, the Zone will not have a historical comparison for the ILEARN Checkpoints assessment. However, the Zone uses a variety of other assessment tools throughout the year, including: DIBELS, curriculum-specific assessments, fluency probes, and common formative assessments.

- Motion to approve: Lesley Wesley
- Seconded: Rosa Hiestand
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously.

Partnerships in Learning at Wilson Elementary

The Principal, Samantha Smith, Dean of Academics, Leah Killingbeck, and Second Grade teacher, Carrie Smith, shared how the Literacy Coach, teachers, families, and students partner to support student achievement. Leah Killingbeck stood in for Wilson's Literacy Coach Emilia Garcia, who was unable to attend.

The specific approaches discussed included:

- Literacy coaches working with teachers to use data to inform instruction and how they support both the class and individual students
- Teachers and students using a data wall to encourage healthy competition and student planning to achieve their individual goals
- Teachers partnering with families and students in the quarterly conferences to discuss student progress

Mrs. Smith shared the K12 Lift data from her class at the beginning of year to the middle of year. At the beginning of the year, approximately 60% of her students were on track to learn a year's material in a year's time, and 27% of students were on track to learn quickly enough to catch up. By the middle of the year, 92% of students were learning quickly enough to catch up. (Note: students learning quickly enough to catch up are also counted as being on track to learn a year's material in a year's time.)

Family-teacher quarterly conferences have improved relationships with the families and the children's households. Over the course of the year, these conferences will be led by teachers, then by families, and then by students. The goal of this approach is to help families and students develop greater agency over the students' education.

Lastly, Principal Smith invited the board, families, and the community to visit Wilson during the new Walk-Thru-Wednesday program.

Teacher Voice and Investment

The Executive Director of Talent Development shared the key takeaways from the recently conducted stay interviews with 44 of the licensed instructional staff (approximately 49%). During these interviews, staff shared both highlights and challenges in their roles at the Zone. The Executive Director also shared recommendations for continued investment in teachers, based on the findings from the stay interviews. These include:

- Student behavior management training
- Increased professional learning opportunities, including for mentoring and career advancement
- Improved communication with and recognition of teachers
- More staff wellness programs
- Increased support for teacher community-building and collaboration

In the near-term, the expanded teacher wellness initiative will promote positive self-care with stress management and self-reflection resources. Planning for additional investments to support teachers is in progress.

Board Questions:

- *The recommendations appear to be broad concepts. What are the specific solutions that the Zone can provide teachers after the stay interviews?*
 - These are not individual programs, but a place to start their development.
- *Teachers may have felt unheard for a while. What are the strategies you have implemented to receive this ongoing feedback?*
 - Increasing personal availability as the Executive Director of Talent Development, and being prepared to provide accurate and quality resources for those with questions or concerns.

The Zone's video, "[Inspire](#)," was played, which highlighted the strong bond between Zone educators and their students. The video depicted educators having one-on-one conversations with students and sharing how the student has inspired them personally. The board members expressed that they were deeply touched by the heartfelt interactions and commended the teachers for their hard work and dedication to creating a positive learning environment.

VIII. PUBLIC COMMENT

- Mrs. Kaitlyn Solari, a 6th-grade teacher at Navarre, made the following comments about the Five Star Life Program:

"Starting in February, Navarre's students have been going on field trips every Friday for six weeks. As a result, they are losing 330 minutes of instruction on each subject, which totals to 1980 minutes per week. Typically, students should receive 90 minutes of instruction every day. However, due to these field trips, they are only receiving 200 minutes of instruction per week.

The field trips have also caused an increase in behavioral issues, with 13 students being suspended, compared to the usual average of zero to two per week. The staff has expressed their concerns about these field trips not being in the best interest of the students. However, the response given was that "a contract had already been signed" with 5 Star Life."

- Mr. Larry Davidson, Dean of Students at Wilson Elementary, shared his appreciation for the Zone's investment in teachers. He also expressed gratitude for how the Zone leadership team understands and appreciates the hard work of the teachers and the students.

IX. BOARD COMMUNICATIONS

The next board meeting will be on Tuesday, March 19th, at 6 pm at the SBCSC administration building.

X. ADJOURNMENT

Meeting adjourned at 7:55 pm.