

**MINUTES OF THE PUBLIC SESSION  
OF THE SOUTH BEND EMPOWERMENT ZONE  
BOARD OF DIRECTORS  
3/19/24**

**MINUTES**

- Meeting time start: 6:05 pm
- Meeting called to order: Sam Centellas, Board President
- Meeting video is available on [Youtube](#)
- Meeting presentation is available on the Zone [website](#)

**LOCATION**

- SBCSC Administration Building

**QUORUM**

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

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**SUMMARY**

The primary focus of the board meeting was the consideration of a balanced calendar for the 2024-2025 school year, or the following. The board members held a robust discussion about the benefits to students in terms of learning and behavior, as well as to reducing teacher burnout, as well as about the challenges the new calendar would present to various stakeholders. Ultimately, the board voted to adopt the current calendar, which is similar to SBCSC's calendar, with minor modifications.

**AGENDA ITEMS**

**I. ADOPTION OF AGENDA**

- Motion to approve agenda: Jeff Rea

- Seconded: Duane Wilson
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously

## II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

- Motion to approve minutes of February 20, 2024: Jeff Rea
- Seconded: Duane Wilson
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously

## III. BOARD PRESIDENT REPORT

The Board Chair expressed his gratitude towards the school social workers for their hard work and dedication, as part of National School Social Worker Week. He also recognized Katherine Bailey, a Civil Rights activist, in honor of Women's History Month. Moreover, the board acknowledged the upcoming Paraprofessional Appreciation Day on April 3rd and thanked all paraprofessionals who work in schools. Additionally, the board reminded everyone that the next Walk-Thru Wednesday would take place on March 20th.

## IV. BUSINESS SERVICES REPORT

The Zone's 501(c)3 has expended 76% of its budget at this point in the school year, which is close to where it should be. The Zone has expended 74% of the "All funds" budget. Where it might appear that the Zone's expenditures are outpacing this point in the year, it is largely due to the Zone paying the \$6 million for all of shared services upfront at the start of the year.

- Motion to approve the finance report: Jeff Rea
- Seconded: Ryan Matthys
- Comments or questions: none
- Public Comments: None
- Approved: unanimously.

## V. PERSONNEL REPORT

In February, among both certified and non-certified staff, the Zone had eight hires and six departures.

## VI. FOCUS REPORTS

### ***2024-2025 SBEZ School Calendar***

Roxana Zapata presented the balanced calendar proposal for the 2024-2025 school year, and an overview of the proposal development process. In January 2024, a balanced calendar study committee was formed, consisting of 13 members representing Zone's families, teachers, staff, and partners. The committee reviewed materials provided by the Zone from the proposal in 2023, and looked at additional

research independently. The Zone team also collected new data from teachers, students, and families, which were presented to the steering committee.

The Zone's recommendation to the board was two-fold (1) Do not adopt a balanced calendar for the 2024-2025 school year, and (2) pursue the School Improvement Grant, and if received, implement a balanced calendar in 2025-2026. The 2024-2025 school year would be the grant's planning year, during which the Zone would try out elements of the balanced calendar before full implementation. The Zone recommended adopting the current calendar with small modifications, similar to the calendar for the 2023-2024 school year.

Jeff Rea shared his observations on the Balanced Calendar, highlighting its numerous benefits for education. His observations included:

- Over 3,000 schools nationwide have adopted the calendar to enhance learning outcomes for students.
- Implementing the calendar has led to improvements in student behavior, attendance and academic performance, and has resulted in reduced stress levels among teachers.
- Many other school districts have faced similar questions to those facing the South Bend Empowerment Zone today.
- By adopting the Balanced Calendar, the district has the opportunity to improve in these areas as well.

Board Questions and Comments:

- *Is there any data reflecting why some participants opposed and others agreed to the balanced calendar?*
  - Survey respondents had the opportunity to provide qualitative comments, but few did so as they were not required
- *Some participants opposed the balanced calendar due to concerns about families' existing schedules and routines, rather than academic or behavioral concerns, which makes it difficult to put into data points.*
- *It is important to listen to stakeholders' challenges to reach an agreement. Part of this process is to determine which challenges are controllable versus uncontrollable.*
- *Can you provide information on how long it would take to see the benefits from transitioning to a new calendar, considering the cost-benefit ratio?*
  - Different research sources focus on different aspects of the question about benefits. Many are based on achievement, rather than timeframe.
- *Our challenges this year will not be any different next year. But will the benefits outweigh these challenges?*

- *If the balanced calendar is approved for the upcoming school year, have we taken measures to address the issue of learning loss that may occur during the following summer break?*
- *The board will require additional information to advance this proposal.*

Dr. Lewis spoke to address several of the questions asked and comments made with additional information and perspective:

- Some of the issues we face are beyond our control, such as the fact that many of our teachers must take summer jobs to supplement their annual teacher salary. If we have a summer that does not align with the traditional model, some teachers will be unable to find work during the summer break, such as working at a summer camp or providing tutoring.
- We also have classified staff, some of whom are part-time employees. If we have intermittent breaks during the year, their hourly salary will be affected intermittently as well. While we have tried to partner with various organizations to provide employment opportunities during these intermittent breaks, some of these factors are outside of our control.
- Regarding our families and childcare: our interviews with four parents revealed that they would figure out how to overcome challenges such as childcare, if the balanced calendar was the best option for the children.
- However, we also need to take into consideration our 300 plus employees who may be affected by this decision. If we decide to adopt the balanced calendar, some employees may be precluded from continuing to work here due to the real-life issues we just mentioned. This decision could also create a new opportunity for people interested in working in a system with a balanced calendar.
- Dr. Lewis shared some of his conversations with superintendents who have adopted the balanced calendar in districts south of Indianapolis. These districts have been following this calendar for more than 12 years and experienced challenges similar to those the Zone is facing now. While they did not receive widespread support initially, people eventually embraced the change.

There was additional discussion about the various methods used and opportunities created for stakeholder feedback in the prior year, as well as the methodologies used this year. It was recognized that the board would have to make a decision after considering the information gathered, just like it was done to approve early dismissal days. There will be consequences to any decision that the Zone and all stakeholders will need to manage.

It was clarified that regardless of the vote that evening, the state requires the board to officially adopt a calendar each year. The Zone Chief strongly recommended that the board hold that vote no later than January 2025.

### Public Comment

Prior to the board vote, Angela Pedraza, address 19157 Edinburg Drive, and second grade teacher at Wilson Elementary made the following public comment:

- Ms. Pedraza highlighted her appreciation for much of what the Zone has done, including surveys of stakeholders and the increased support and respect teachers receive.
- However, she is opposed to the balanced calendar due to the misalignment with the calendar of SBCSC and neighboring districts. She highlighted the challenge of a “split community” of SBCSC and the Zone, rather than the Zone being a separate district. She referred to the challenges for families with children in Zone and non-Zone schools in terms of vacation and other time together. Additionally, most community organizations such as churches and camps are organized around the SBCSC calendar. She would be more supportive of the balanced calendar if SBCSC were to adopt it.

The board voted on two motions:

- Motion to adopt the traditional school calendar for the 2024-2025 school year:  
Sam Centellas
- Seconded: Stephanie Ball
- Discussion: none
- Approved: unanimously
- Motion to table the issue of the balanced calendar until January 2025: Ryan Matthys
- Seconded: Jeff Rea
- Discussion:
  - Duane Wilson asked whether the balanced calendar is contingent on receiving a SIG grant and if so, what is the timeline for that award. He also asked what other innovations might be included in the SIG application
    - The balanced calendar is not contingent on a SIG
    - The application for the SIG grant is due in May and the Zone would be informed in June.
    - The Zone will pursue the SIG grant regardless of the balanced calendar decision, as there are a variety of interventions the Zone could pursue to address (for example) truancy and attendance issues.
- Approved: unanimously.

### ***Innovative Pathways for Academic Enrichment***

President of Five Star Life, Seth Maust, presented a video about the innovative learning program launched with Navarre. Five Star Life’s curriculum is aligned with IDOE standards, and Navarre sixth graders had a six-week experiential learning

opportunity. This program helps students build skill sets such as setting goals, taking action, and building meaningful relationships.

Three courses were taught during this six-week program: nature education, health education, and equine education. Students acquired essential skills including basic first aid, and understanding how energy works in animals for body repair, growth, and maintaining warmth.

Overall, the program's goal is to start with sixth graders and then move into the older grades to teach more advanced skills such as blacksmithing, woodworking, and more, which will help students be more prepared to decide which high school or career center they want to attend.

Mr. Harris, the principal at Navarre, shared how the Navarre students have responded to this initiative with great enthusiasm, and how this may be the first and only time students would have an opportunity like this. It also dramatically increased sixth graders' attendance.

The Navarre Middle School secretary and parent of a sixth grader expressed to the board how excited her daughter is every Friday and how dynamic family dinner table conversations have become. She also noted that, as the attendance school secretary, she has observed how all the students are on time every Friday.

Ms. Amber Dietz, math and science teacher at Navarre, has been accompanying her students to the Five Star Life campus where she witnessed a remarkable transformation in their personalities. Some of the students who are quiet in the classroom became more open and enthusiastic. She emphasized the importance of the materials that students bring home, such as a first aid kit, and how knowledgeable they are about its contents.

Board questions:

- *Can you inform us about the number of school corporations and children that are currently being served by Five Star Life?*
  - We have worked with schools from Michigan to Florida. We work with tens of thousands of kids, but this region is our priority. We felt the call to contribute deeply in the community not only by working with schools, in this case Navarre, but also with local juvenile detention centers. Our diversion program has an 87% success rate working with youth with truancy issues.

### ***Systematic Use of Data***

Roxana Zapata discussed how the Zone utilizes data to make informed decisions and improve outcomes by collecting data, systematizing it, organizing it, reviewing it, and aligning it with other practices. The School Effectiveness Framework is an evidence-based foundation for this year's initiatives. The Framework helps the team

align their daily practices with data and will be discussed in detail at the next board meeting.

The schools use various systems to use data effectively. The School Improvement Plan is created based on the collected data and submitted to the state. Quarterly leadership data days are conducted to discuss and take informed action. MTSS data is used to identify students who need additional support.

A nationwide survey showed that 98% of students entering high school responded positively when asked if they thought they would graduate within four years. However, near the end of the ninth grade, only 60% of the same students believed they would graduate. The Early Warning System is designed to identify students needing additional support to reduce the chances of dropping out. It changes the trajectory of students who are off track regarding graduation requirements, grades, and attendance by addressing the levels and intensity of disengagement from school. By looking at the middle school academics, attendance, and performance rates, it is easier to identify which students need to be on “life support” (i.e., Promotion in Doubt).

The Zone has been deliberate about collecting specific data to develop the Early Warning System to improve attendance and academics. A crucial piece of this progress has been the building leadership teams who built the data collection system, updated it, analyzed it, and put new informed ideas into action. Their efforts have helped achieve a systemic improvement of their schools' operations.

### ***Increasing Family Engagement***

The Student Services team has been working on new ways to engage with families by starting from the ground up, and listening to parents is the primary approach. To facilitate this, a parent dashboard is being created to provide easier access to the large amount of data available to them.

Mr. Charles Jameson, a Family and Community Support Specialist (FACSS) at Coquillard, spoke about parent engagement from his perspective and noted a significant improvement. Specifically, the partnerships built within the community have facilitated conversations with parents and increased their trust in the school.

Mrs. Karla Levy, the FACSS at Harrison Elementary, discussed being the go-to person for parents to connect with services and resources and developing events for families and students, such as the Black Business Fair.

## **VII. BOARD COMMUNICATIONS**

The next board meeting will be on Tuesday, April 16th, at 6 pm at Harrison Elementary School.

## **VIII. ADJOURNMENT**

Meeting adjourned at 8:22 pm.