



Louisiana Special School District

Louisiana Special School District Board of Directors Board Meeting March 18, 2025 at 9:00AM

Louisiana Schools for the Deaf and Visually Impaired
2888 Brightside Dr., Baton Rouge, LA 70820
Student Activity Center, Room 196

Meeting Minutes

I. Call to Order:

The March 18, 2025, meeting of the Special School District Board of Directors was called to order at 9:02 a.m. by Ms. Kristy Flynn, Board President. Members present at the meeting include: Ms. Maria Annis, Ms. Sherry Crosby, Mr. Kenny Davis, Mr. Jamar Ennis, Ms. Kristy Flynn, Ms. Vickie Smith, Ms. Jessica White, and Ms. Katherine Presley - arrived late (exact time not recorded). Members not in attendance: Mr. Ronnie Morris, Dr. Rachel Granier, and Ms. Nicole Poencot.

Motion by: Mr. Ennis to move the Superintendent's Report to the end of the agenda. Motion seconded by Ms. Smith and was unanimously approved.

Motion By: Mr. Ennis moved to postpone the Executive Session, agenda item IV grievance policy hearing, be moved to May 13, 2025 meeting, as it was incorrectly noticed as a hearing, though it is not a hearing. The motion was seconded by Ms. Crosby and was unanimously approved.

II. Old Business

a. Superintendent's Review Adoption of Quantitative Measures

Dr. David Martin explained the quantitative measures for the evaluation would be similar to those used by the State Superintendent in his review. He noted that Mr. Morris had provided the board with the relevant rubric at some point, but new members may not have access. The quantitative measures include LEAP testing, ACT scores, and graduation rates, which form the core of the evaluation. Mr. André Bourgeois, board counsel, proposed continuing the use of the rubric from last year for the qualitative portion. This rubric was sent to various stakeholders, including school staff, district staff, community members, and parents, with over 50 rubrics returned. Each board member would complete their rubric, and the rubrics from stakeholders would be averaged and counted as one additional board member vote. If 12 stakeholder rubrics are returned, there would be a total of 13 rubrics, including the board members' rubrics. The qualitative measure would be calculated based on this. Mr. Bourgeois suggested maintaining the weighting of the qualitative measure at 75% and the quantitative measure at 25%, with the quantitative piece focusing on ACT scores, graduation rates, and LEAP testing. Ms. Flynn confirmed the rubric would be sent out before the next meeting by email, all responses will remain anonymous. Mr. Bourgeois confirmed and Ms. Flynn confirmed that the rubric would be sent out by email before the next board meeting, and that all responses would remain anonymous. Mr. Bourgeois confirmed that Mr. Bourgeois and Dr. Martin will meet to establish preliminary parameters for the 2025/2026 performance evaluation.

Motion by: Ms. Crosby moved to accept the Superintendent's Quantitative Measures. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ennis and Mr. Davis and was unanimously approved.

III. New Business

a. Approval of the November 12, 2024 Meeting Minutes

Motion by: Mr. Davis moved to approve the November 12, 2024, Minutes. The motion was seconded by Ms. Smith and was unanimously approved.

b. Consideration of Expansion of the Board's Legal Counsel Contract

Dr. Martin addressed the need for a resolution to expand the current budget for legal services. He explained that unforeseen litigation costs had exceeded the budget, and therefore, an additional \$60,000 was required to cover legal services through the end of the year. The expansion would be a "not to exceed" amount. Mr. Davis asked for confirmation that the \$60,000 extension would be the maximum amount allowed. Ms. Flynn confirmed that the extension was based on Dr. Martin's recommendation which allows flexibility if more funds are required due to unforeseen costs.

Motion by: Ms. Crosby moved to expand the current board legal counsel contract by \$60,000. The motion was seconded by Ms. White and was unanimously approved.

Legal Services Contract for 2025-2026 School Year:

Dr. Martin informed the board that contracts need to be submitted by April 4, 2025, and proposed that the board approve a \$150,000 contract for 2025-2026 school year to cover legal services. Ms. Flynn confirmed the \$150,000 amount and emphasized the need for a resolution to meet the April 4, 2025 deadline.

Motion by: Ms. Crosby moved to begin FY25-26 board's legal counsel contract not to exceed \$150,000. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously approved.

c. Policies

Policy Clarification:

Ms. Crosby asked if the Probational to Permanent Status policy was new, as she had not seen it before. Ms. Mary Gloston, Human Resources Director, clarified that the policy is not new and had been previously communicated via email. It is a requirement of the State Civil Service Commission and delineates the probationary period for employees within the Special School District, after which they achieve permanent status. Dr. Martin further clarified that the probationary period is one year at SSD. After that, a decision is made about whether the employee stays or is let go. But this policy applies to all classified employees as it is a Civil Service rule requiring the policy to be in place.

Motion by: Ms. White moved to adopt all four SSD policies. The motion was seconded by Mr. Davis and was unanimously approved.

- i. Americans with Disabilities Act
- ii. Conditional Offer of Employment
- iii. Extraordinary Qualifications/Credentials
- iv. Probational to Permanent Status

d. Personnel and Finance

Ms. Delvikeo Picou, Executive Director of Business Services, provided updates on job appointments, separations and transfers. In addition to sabbatical, extended sick leave and FMLA. Provided date of April 9, 2025, to appear before the House Appropriations Committee to testify about the upcoming budget year.

e. Reports

Superintendent's Report

Budget Update

The Governor's executive budget has been released with proposed cuts including the elimination of 19 open positions. The district currently has around 54 vacancies, some of which are unfunded. Superintendent Martin met with Commissioner Taylor Barras and the Office of Planning and Budget regarding the proposed cuts. The district's current staffing levels were based on previous student enrollment numbers, but enrollment has been increasing in some areas due to success with new leadership. Dr. Martin emphasized the need for a strategic approach in managing positions and resources. The district will continue to assess open positions and ensure it can meet operational needs with the available resources, which equates to approximately \$2.8M. The district is renegotiating services with Renaissance Home for Youth due to a decrease in student count. The detention side, which primarily involves Rapides Parish, will be impacted. Superintendent Martin expressed confidence in managing the current 5% budget cut and believes the district will be able to maintain operations efficiently. Dr. Martin will testify at the Senate Finance Committee on April 8, 2025, and at the House of Appropriations Committee on April 9, 2025.

Climate and Culture Survey Update

Dr. Martin reported a decline in survey participation from 190 to 48 respondents, though all categories showed improvement.

Strengths:

- Supervisor responsiveness improved from a score of 3.2 to 3.7.
- Positive coworker relationships foster a family-oriented atmosphere.

Areas for Improvement:

- Feeling Valued: Scores remain between a 3.0–3.1; alternative strategies will be explored.
- Policy Administration: Plans to centralize and revamp policies for better access.
- Resource Allocation: Increased efforts to educate staff on resource distribution.

Next Steps:

A follow-up survey will be conducted in late fall to encourage broader participation and feedback.

- Ms. White questioned if OJJ employees participated in the survey. Dr. Martin replied yes, the SSD employees on OJJ sites received the survey.

School Improvement Plans

Dr. Martin highlighted the importance of effectively sharing the district's story, emphasizing that while the district is held to the same accountability measures as other districts. He noted that the district's score is significantly impacted by our small student population, yet this year, the Louisiana School for the Deaf saw a remarkable 27.4-point increase—the second-highest in the state—removing it from the F-list for the first time in 20 years, despite its accountability label.

Dr. Martin stressed the need for a formalized school improvement process across all SSD district sites. He directed Dr. Lewis to collaborate with OJJ to align improvement efforts. Each site will have specific goals for reading and math, following Louisiana's Back to Basics initiative, and will use the Louisiana Department of

Education (LDOE) template for schools requiring additional support. The district office will coordinate these plans with Executive Directors to ensure the goals meet each site's unique needs.

- Ms. Crosby raised a concern regarding accommodations for ASL users at the LSD, noting that ASL is not the same as English and inquiring whether accommodations are made for reading and math for students using ASL. Dr. Martin responded that accommodations are made for students during state testing, including extra time and speech-to-text assistance. However, he clarified that state tests are not administered in ASL. He shared ongoing conversations with LDOE about language deprivation among Deaf and Hard of Hearing students, acknowledging that the district will continue to advocate for better support for these students.
- Ms. Crosby asked if SSD was able to contact other states that were successful, what resources they use, and if those resources fit our needs. School leaders at each school site reached out to other states. Dr. Martin provided LDOE with a list of fifteen states that have accountability measures in place, but his suggestions were not accepted by LDOE.

Dr. Martin expressed excitement about the collaboration between District-Wide Supports and federal programs in developing these plans, which will be finalized by May 2025 and published on the district's website. A grant for funding strategic planning facilitation has been submitted; the planning process is set to begin in summer, with the goal of completion by year-end. The plan will focus on staff excellence, student excellence, and operational excellence.

- Mr. Ennis inquired about the role of consultants and sought clarification on how the strategic planning process will begin.
- **LA School for the Visually Impaired (LSVI)** - Ms. Susan Covington, Executive Director of LSVI, provided updates on LSVI school events, student test scores, testing dates, and dual enrollment.
- **LA School for the Deaf (LSD)** - Dr. Natalie Delgado, Executive Director of LSD, provided updates on LSD school events and test scores, Mason Dixon, NRSC SeaPerch Training, hiring for fall 2025, teacher observations, and coaching ongoing.
- **Special Schools Programs (SSP)** - Dr. Shirley Lewis, Executive Director of SSP, provided updates for SSP on student test scores, milestones on the high number of enrollments, upcoming events, and professional development events for new AI technology.
- **Statewide Services and Supports (SWSS)** – Dr. Kathy Segers, Executive Director of SWSS, provided updates on LIMC, outreach positions, Federal Quota, and technical assistance provided to parishes.
- **District Wide Supports (DWS)** - Ms. Nancy Rawls, Executive Director of DWS presented updates on Speech therapist, Adaptive PE position, audits, and dual master schedules.
- **Operations** – Mr. Jeff Jacobs, Executive Director of Operations, provided updates on ADA compliant doors, installation 22 air handlers LSD Dorms, emergency notification system, inventory, and positions.

Superintendent Martin announced that a board manual ("board book") is being created for new board members. It will include an introduction, board responsibilities, La. R.S. 17:1945, legal authority, open meeting laws, Robert's Rules of Order, and board bylaws. The manual will be available online with printed Braille copies. Dr. Martin encouraged board members to suggest any additional content for inclusion and will share an outline in his weekly email for further input.

IV. Executive Session

- a. Grievance Policy Hearing
- b. Grievance/Governance Policy change

Public Comment: Mr. Jay Isch, Executive Director of the Louisiana Association of the Deaf, commented on policies and board positions, acknowledging that regional requirements make the process complicated. While Dr. Rachel Granier is an excellent representative for deaf education, it was suggested that a more appropriate representative would be someone who is deaf themselves.

Board President Flynn acknowledged Mr. Isch's comment and clarified that the boards and commissions office select representatives based on location and encouraged Mr. Isch to reach out directly to the boards and commissions office to address his concern.

V. Adjournment

With no further business, Mr. Ennis made the motion to adjourn the meeting at 11:11 a.m. Ms. Crosby seconded the motion and it was unanimously approved.