



The Newport Board of Education held a work session on May 8, 2024 at 6:30 PM. The meeting was held in the board room located at 30 W. 8th Street, Newport.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Ramona Malone called the meeting to order and asked for a roll call. The following were present: Ramona Malone, Sylvia Covington, Aaron Sutherland, Tim Curl, and Ed Davis.

Ms. Malone asked everyone to stand and recite the Pledge of Allegiance and to pause for a moment of reflection.

RE-NEWPORT EDUCATION TASK FORCE

The task force was in attendance to present their third report on the district's performance using data to analyze strengths and weaknesses in the operations and outcomes of the district. Their aim is to help the district become a top performing district that attracts and successfully educates students from all populations in Newport. The 2024 report draws data from academic achievement, working conditions in schools, and the superintendent evaluation process. Their findings include:

- NISD continues to rank among the lowest performing districts in KY. Efforts to increase academic performance have not been met with significant improvement.
- Working conditions have improved from two years ago, but still rank lower than state average.
- Low kindergarten readiness scores are impacting the proficiency of early learners.
- Academic results of continuously enrolled students are outpacing the results of mobile (transient) students.

The task force recommends the following actions:

- Elevating student performance must remain a top priority. Develop a comprehensive kindergarten readiness program.
- Create a positive working environment that will enable positive change.
- Use a measurable scorecard to gauge performance as a process for evaluating the superintendent.

Summary of the report:

- There has been some improvement on internal measures such as school climate, administrative spending, collaboration with the task force, increased enrollment, and some academic improvement at the elementary and middle school level.
- The anticipated turnaround has not happened and the district continues to rank among the lowest performing districts in KY while being well-funded.
- Working climate has improved but remains behind the state average.
- Low kindergarten readiness scores are impacting the proficiency of early learners.
- Academic results of continuously enrolled students are outpacing the results of mobile students.
- The superintendent evaluation process needs to be more data-driven and objective.

Conclusions from the report:

- While there have been some positive changes over the past 2 years, expecting new and different results with only minor changes is unrealistic.
- The district needs to be innovative; creating dramatic, creative, and significant solutions.
- In 2020, the task force stated if results were not realized by 2025, they would recommend more significant change, this needs to be explored.

Before district leaders presented their report, Mr. Watts reminded the board and task force of the impact of Covid on student learning. A video was shared on learning loss nation-wide because of the pandemic especially in high poverty districts. He also reported that Newport's teacher salaries are not the lowest in the region; the district falls about mid-way among the surrounding 13 districts. Tax rates are currently the lowest since he has been superintendent. They have fallen from 101.7 to 96.4 making Newport #6 among the area independent schools.

Darla Payne, Jennifer Stewart, and Lisa Swanson presented the district's report. Their report covered:

- 2021-2025 Strategic Plan
- 2021-2022 brief history report, challenges faced, and vision for improvement
 - Critical priorities
 - Strategies implemented
 - Academic progress
- Special Education Services
- 2022-2023 brief history, challenges faced, and vision for improvement
 - Critical priorities
 - Strategies implemented
 - Academic progress

During this part of the presentation, an audience member raised a question regarding the meeting's primary objective. Despite being allocated a designated timeframe of 15 minutes for the task force's presentation, the district's presentation had extended well beyond an hour. The attendee arrived with the expectation of engaging in a discussion pertaining to the current state of the district and strategies for improvement. Expressing disappointment over the perceived lack of progress since the 2022 report, she voiced concern regarding the transparency of the district's finances; i.e., understanding how tax money is being spent. She emphasized the absence of clear evidence showcasing necessary academic improvement, comparing the presentation to a "dog and pony show." She suggested at some point there may be a need for individuals to reassess their suitability for their respective roles. She wanted the board to focus on the task force's suggestions and have a useful conversation.

Ms. Malone stated that the purpose of the meeting was for the task force to present their report and highlight the district's efforts towards enhancing academic success for our students.

Another attendee inquired about the timeline for achieving success, expressing frustration over the district's lack of significant improvement in recent years. Ms. Malone responded by saying, yesterday was her timeline, but acknowledged the small strides made and emphasized the district's commitment to continuing to advance student outcomes with the plans in place.

Discussion items included non-resident students, the impact of improving behavior in the classroom, a successful preschool program, kindergarten readiness, and educating transient or mobile students.

Mr. Sutherland said Newport has a very high transient population. At a recent meeting he learned that every time a student moves from one school district to another, that student experiences six months of learning loss. He feels like this is an issue that should be discussed with state legislators since this affects every school district who has a transient problem.

He also asked for Ms. Stewart to explain the process for placing transient students when they enroll in Newport schools.

Mr. Sutherland pointed out that board members are required to receive a minimum of 12 hours of training annually in order to remain on the board. Some required trainings include several hours of finance and superintendent evaluation training.

Ms. Malone concluded the discussion and thanked the task force for attending and presenting this evening. Ms. Schaber thanked the board for the opportunity but did indicate they do not feel listened to. Mr. Sutherland expressed gratitude for their suggestions and assured them there would be ongoing discussions with the community to improve Pre-K programs.

MENTAL HEALTH THERAPISTS

Mr. Watts invited the mental health therapists to attend and shed light on their crucial roles in schools, emphasizing the significance of their daily support for students.

- Same-day crisis appointments
- Mental health assessments
- Identify and intervene in mental health challenges
- Promote mental wellness
- Recognize students at risk
- Improve academic outcomes
- Collaboration with students and families
- Consultation with teachers and administration

The district currently has a mental health therapist at NPS, NIS, and NHS; each has a full case load and a waiting list. Mr. Watts conveyed that if the board opts to retain these positions, one individual's salary will be covered through special education funding, while the district will assume the costs for the other two, totaling approximately \$86,000. Furthermore, should a grant application prove successful, a portion of the salaries could be supported through that source, with additional potential funding through service billing.

Mr. Grayson said he feels the position is indispensable. Counselors cannot possibly get to everyone with underlying problems. Mr. Atkins supports the team approach and says it is very effective. Their input on behavior strategies and helping with social and emotional needs only helps to improve academics.

There being no further business the meeting ended at 8:50 PM.

Chairman

Secretary