

Governing Board Minutes for Emergency Board Meeting
May 12, 2023 City Hall Destin

Meeting called to order by President Fountain 1:05pm

ROLL CALL: Fountain, Silver, Palmer, LoCicero, McBride, O'Neal
Larabee, parent advocate, Cruickshank, Head of School, Leombruno, board attorney
Absent: Luttrell, Stone, Sills

Motion by PALMER point of order that meeting agenda item on Renewal of Athletic Director, Phil Dorn's contract did not constitute an emergency meeting, so call to adjourn. SILVER 2nd.

PALMER asked Principal Cruickshank to speak, and she read the following statement:

Two years... We are coming up on two years of existence as a school. It hasn't been easy, and we've made our mistakes but here we are...about to graduate the first class of Destin High School. We did it together.

We are in some challenging times. Finances are tight and we have made some mistakes, we will get through it together. There has been no misappropriation of funds. There has been no theft. There has been no illegal activity. There are a lot of rumors out in the community as people talk and post, but I can tell you, as someone who knows the truth, there is no fire here. We will get through this together.

Navigating life would be a whole lot easier if we never had conflict and conflicting personalities. You don't have to like me, and I don't have to like you. If we provide an exceptional learning environment for our amazing students, we have done our jobs. Hopefully we will like each other but regardless, we will get through this together.

To the board. You set the stage, you did the heavy lifting to fight through with a strong vision and establish the first High School in Destin's history. Nobody else believed. They said it couldn't be done, but you did it together.

To the teachers. You took the crazy ride, no students had been on campus, the campus was under construction. You took a chance on a start-up high school, and you made something truly special. Things have been difficult at times, but you did this together.

To the parents and community. You entrusted us with your students. You put your faith in the teachers and staff of Destin High School, and you placed a great responsibility with us. You have partnered with us when nobody else believed. Your students are excelling. We did this together.

To the students. You may have had other ideas about high school. You may have thought that you would have been at a different school, with different teachers, with different friends. We know that you didn't have to be here. Over the last two years you have developed new relationships, you have made lifelong impressions on the faculty and staff, you have achieved amazing academic and extracurricular results and you did this together.

We are in trying times. I believe in all of you. I know that we have done this together. I know that if we stay the course; if we fix our gaze on the future and not on the past. If we remember the deep appreciation we owe and share for one another, we can get through this. We can do this together.

MCBRIDE made a motion to keep the meeting open for discussion, ONEAL 2nd, Attorney Leombruno said MCBRIDE'S motion has to be addressed before a motion to adjourn called. Motion passed. Discussion opened.

MCBRIDE asked Cruickshank to share what steps were being taken to keep the students focused on school work and not the issues at hand. Cruickshank said she and another staff member were addressing teachers individually and students as situations arose. She mentioned that she had already handled 6 earlier in the day and was working diligently to keep the focus on school work.

CRUICKSHANK also respectfully asked for the negativity on social media from some students and parents to stop and instead focus on ways to better assist the school moving forward.

LOCICERO asked for facts on the following topics from Principal and School Financial Services to set the record straight:

Have any teachers turned in their papers of resignation as of today?

CRUICKSHANK: No

Have the staff and teachers expressed a willingness to work with you as the principal and the board to get past the stumbling blocks?

CRUICKSHANK: Yes, we're praying for that.

In your audit of the school's accounting records and the change over from our former business financial service provider have you uncovered any instances where staff of Destin High School stole money from the high school?

SCHOOL FINANCIAL SERVICES: Based off the records we've seen, No.

Have you unearthed anything during this financial oversight process that head of school has stolen any money? Have you uncovered any information that the treasurer of our board has stolen any money?

SCHOOL FINANCIAL SERVICES: No, based off the records we've seen.

Does the treasurer write checks on the Destin High School checking account? Has any other board member done anything to lead you to believe that they have access to or stolen money?

SCHOOL FINANCIAL SERVICES: No.

In your experience working with other charter schools ... is what we're experiencing a normal stepping stone ... is this normal?

SCHOOL FINANCIAL SERVICES: It's normal in a "seasoned" school to have budgetary issues for a charter school.

Have there have been any directives given or indicated to cut salaries of current teachers?

CRUICKSHANK: Absolutely not.

How does Destin High compare when it comes to compensating teachers? "Are we average, above average, where are we?"

SCHOOL FINANCIAL SERVICES: As far as salaries go, Destin High is above average, and the benefit plans are very generous.

LOCICERO: The founding board felt it was important to adequately compensate our teachers, because we wanted to attract the "best and the brightest."

VOTE on Motion: 5 in favor, 1 opposed. Motion passed.

Meeting Adjourned by President Fountain