



# Board refuses to extend teachers contract beyond June 30, leaving benefits and working conditions in limbo; hundreds of teachers and supporters object

June 7, 2012 — In a decision many saw as pre-determined, the Jefferson Parish School Board approved a motion that the existing teachers contract “not be extended beyond June 30, 2012 and not be in effect after June 30, 2012.”

The motion was approved by a 5-3 vote, with the typical alliance of Larry Dale, Pat Tovrea, Sandy Denapolis-Bosarge, Mike Delesdernier, and Mark Jacobs (who authored the motion) voting against the extension despite the testimony of more than 20 speakers from a broad cross-section of the community. Numerous speakers cautioned the board against voting for the motion, saying it would exacerbate the “chaos” and “turmoil” already enveloping the district.

In addition to the speakers, hundreds of teachers and supporters attended the meeting to demonstrate their support for extending the teachers contract. Security guards acting under constant supervision kept anyone from entering the board room after it reached its capacity of approximately 150 persons. Hundreds of teachers packed the lawn outside the board room, and hundreds more watched the proceedings via video in the Bonnabel High School cafeteria. In addition to tightly controlling traffic, the guards quickly shut the doors to the board room every time someone exited to keep the school board from hearing the teachers outside.

But most of the commotion that disrupted the meeting was the result of board members disagreeing. At one point, Board President Jacobs suddenly called for a recess when Cedric Floyd said that a reordering of the agenda to place Jacobs’s motion first amounted to “trickery”. At another point, Mike Delesdernier repeatedly shouted “point of order, point of order” to prevent Floyd from speaking. Soon after, Ray St. Pierre left his chair and sat in the audience in displeasure of a motion by Delesdernier to censure Floyd. Etta Licciardi exited the dais as well. The only outburst from the audience occurred after the final vote on the contract when someone shouted to the board members, “How many of your children go to public schools?” Jacobs ejected the woman from the meeting, but she was already on her way out.

In other action, the board approved a preliminary budget for 2012-13 that includes \$26 million in cuts, including teacher positions; authorized another new charter school; and received a report showing that students’ academic performance increased last year and over the last five years.

## TEACHERS CONTRACT

The board’s vote means the existing contract will expire on June 30. Despite attempts to reassure teachers that pay and benefits will not be cut once the contract expires, the action leaves teachers without the legal basis for claiming a right to specific pay provisions or benefits.

Perhaps more significantly, the action eliminates, after June 30, any of the stipulations in the contract that govern working conditions or rules that govern fair treatment of teachers. JFT President Meladie Munch, along with a number of other speakers, tried to get across to the board the concept that good working conditions for teachers equal good learning conditions for students. However, none of the five members who voted for the motion addressed this concern. The other three, Etta Licciardi, Cedric Floyd, and Ray St. Pierre all made references to the security the contract provides teachers. Ray St. Pierre said that teachers needed a union contract. “I know, I’ve been there,” said the former teacher and union member. Etta Licciardi expressed the concern that good teachers might leave for other jobs if they couldn’t be sure of the conditions, rules, pay, and benefits they would return to next school year.

### Public comments overwhelmingly supported teachers

Of the 22 members of the public who signed cards to speak about the teachers contract, 20 spoke against Jacobs’s motion – 14 community members supporting teachers, four active JPPSS teachers, and two JFT leaders (Munch and Laura Harper). The two who spoke for Jacobs’s motion were BESE

How they voted on the motion to not extend the current contract		
	For	Against
Dale	X	
Delesdernier	X	
Denapolis-Bosarge	X	
Floyd		✓
Jacobs	X	
Licciardi		✓
Morgan	Absent	
St. Pierre		✓
Tovrea	X	
✓ = agreed with JFT position. X = opposed JFT position.		

member and Metairie lawyer James Garvey, and David Andignac, a bank executive and the Executive Director of the Jefferson Business Council.

Terry Verigan, a businessman and former JPSB member, said he is worried that pending negotiations are “pre-determined to be destroyed.”

**“‘Starting from scratch’ ... is a euphemism for union busting.”**

*Terry Verigan, former JPSB member*

He advised the board that the contract negotiations should “be seen as an opportunity for you to partner with your people,” and called Jacobs’s call for “starting from scratch” (Jacobs’s phrase) “a euphemism for union busting.”

Karen Reese, a real estate agent and a former teacher for five years, said she couldn’t understand the “attacks” on teachers. Comparing her real estate career to teaching, she said “I have more dignity and respect now, more money, and less work. Let [teachers’] energy be spent in the classroom” rather than fighting for a contract. She mentioned teachers’ desire for small class sizes and to not have to “teach to the test,” two topics that could be dealt with through contract negotiations.

Samuel Cook, a career development executive, said, “It’s a sin and a shame that you’re attacking and demonizing” teachers. In the same vein, Dr. Emmett Burnett, who identified himself as a “voter, property owner, long time resident of Jefferson Parish” as well as a former educator for over 40 years, told the board, “You cannot improve students’ scores by intimidating your teachers.”

**“You cannot improve students’ scores by intimidating your teachers.”**

*Dr. Emmett Burnett, JP resident*

Nicole Meariman, a 2012 honors graduate of East Jefferson High School who will attend Nichols State this fall, told the board “my goal is to be a teacher in the school system I attended and love. But I only want to work in a school system that values and respects their teachers. The decision you are making today will make it very hard for me to consider working in this school system.”

#### **JFT President to Board:**

#### **You have the chance to make a good decision**

JFT President Meladie Munch admonished the board for “pulling the rug out from under” teachers. She pointedly reminded the board that teachers have done everything the district has asked of them, including raising test scores and supporting the board in its sales tax and millage renewal referendums.

She rejected Jacobs’s repeated argument that the current contract cannot be extended because of changes to state law by pointing out that the contract specifically says that provisions conflicting with state law shall not be enforced. (She was referring to Article 19 of the contract.)

After stating that some board members have acknowledged to her that they have never read the contract, Munch

**“You compliment teachers at the end of every meeting. You brag about the test scores. Now you want to pull the rug out from under them. Don’t do this to your teachers”**

*Meladie Munch, JFT President*

summed up that a mutually agreed upon contract “is harmless. It outlines rules and regulations that the Board will agree to provide for their teachers and what the teachers agree to do for their students.” She gave examples of some of the rules agreed to in the current contract, including one that guarantees teachers access to the school before the first workday so they can prepare their classrooms. (This rule simply allows teachers to go in on their own -- unpaid -- time. Before this rule was negotiated, access was prohibited by some principals when such decisions were left solely to them.)

#### **After vote, directive to appoint negotiation team**

Before the final vote, Cedric Floyd directed the superintendent to appoint a negotiation team to meet with JFT about a new contract. (JFT was informed the next day of the appointments, and an initial meeting is scheduled for the coming week.)

Ray St. Pierre noted that the motion did not indicate that there would be any further negotiations, and called it “too final” as written. When told that the proponents’ intention was not to stay away from negotiations, he showed his exasperation with the board majority, asking “Why did we create all this turmoil? Is this some kind of monkeyshine we’re playing here?” He said he thought the board was not acting in good faith.

After three hours of discussion, the Board voted 5-3 for Jacobs’s motion to not extend the contract.

### **CHARTER SCHOOL**

The board approved another new charter school, the Kenner Discovery Health Sciences Academy. The school will begin in 2013 with Pre-K to 8th grade on the East Bank and in 2014 on the West Bank. It plans to add a high school by 2016.

The charter school is sponsored by a group that includes real estate developers, a contractor, a banker, and an insurance agent. No location has been identified for the school.

### **2012-13 BUDGET PROPOSAL**

Supt. Meza asked the board to adopt a preliminary budget for 2012-2013, even though public hearings have not been held on the proposal. The proposed budget calls for cuts of approximately \$26 million compared to this year, including eliminating 25 itinerant P.E. positions.