



## In light of not extending the teacher contract, Board passes personnel policies; hundreds of teachers and supporters urge them to reach a new collective bargaining agreement before August 6

July 6, 2012 — On July 2, the Jefferson Parish School Board voted unanimously to adopt new personnel policies issued by the Superintendent's office. Approval of these personnel policies was necessary because of the board's previous refusal to allow for an extension of the teacher contract, or collective bargaining agreement (CBA) and the passage of new legislation.

A dozen people addressed the board about items on the consent agenda, with 8 of them speaking explicitly about the value of reaching a new collective bargaining agreement and not allowing these personnel policies to take the place of a process that allows educators to have a voice. They urged the board to "end the chaos" and to treat teachers and school employees as partners.

In addition to the speakers, hundreds of teachers and supporters attended the meeting to let the School Board know that they are watching their actions and are asking the board to hold true to their word and reach a collective bargaining agreement, preferably before many return to the classroom on August 6. They held signs that echoed the message of the speakers inside, saying "Work with us" and "Let's move forward together!"

The atmosphere was substantially less heated than that of the June 6 rally, where over 600 people pleaded with the board to temporarily extend their collective bargaining agreement through the negotiation process as a sign of good faith, a request that was denied in what many saw as a decision that had been made before the meeting even began. Outside, teachers chanted, "Work with us!" and listened to the meeting on speakers provided by the JPPSS.

Inside, Board President Mark Jacobs opened with a speech, quoting from a monologue in Shakespeare's *As you Like it*. "All the world's a stage," and as teachers, "you are representing not only yourself but Jefferson Parish Public Schools" and "you will be judged on those actions," said Jacobs.

The meeting contained little debate and minimal acknowledgement of the 12 people who voiced their concerns about personnel policies, the necessity to put a timeline on the new collective bargaining agreement (teacher contract), and concerns over possible violations of Dandridge in the recent shuttering of 7 schools. Board member Mark Morgan acknowledged the comments of

several university professors and asked the Superintendent to reach out to them.

Ray St. Pierre asked if the personnel policy addressed issues that had been raised by the JFT. When he learned that the terminology of "grievance procedure" had been changed to "complaint procedure," he asked, "Why would we change a term that everyone understands?" Board Attorney Mike Fanning said, "we can always go back and change some of these items." The Board voted unanimously to pass the personnel policies as well as the remainder of the consent agenda, which included a 90-day extension of the JFT Health & Welfare Fund.

There was brief discussion about the leasing of recently closed Kate Middleton to a charter school operator, with Board member Ray St. Pierre stating that he has yet to see proof that charter schools can take "the same group of students" and get better results. Mark Morgan agreed, stating we should "compare apples to apples." However, Morgan said while he wished Middleton hadn't been closed, leasing the school would bring in money to benefit the students of JPPSS. The majority of the Board seemed to agree, and voted to support leasing the school, with St. Pierre dissenting.

Jacobs then amended the agenda to include a first reading by Larry Dale regarding an offer of individual teacher contracts. These documents, drawn up by the Superintendent and the Board attorney, will be voted on at the July 25 meeting.

How they voted to extend the JFT Health & Welfare Fund for 90 days		
	For	Against
Dale	✓	
Delesdernier	✓	
Denapolis-Bosarge	✓	
Floyd	Absent	
Jacobs	✓	
Licciardi	✓	
Morgan	✓	
St. Pierre	✓	
Tovrea	✓	
✓ = agreed with JFT position. X = opposed JFT position.		

## Personnel Policies

In light of the June 30 expiration of the teacher collective bargaining agreement, the new personnel policies are currently the rules under which the JPPSS functions. Once a new collective bargaining agreement is reached, it would supersede these personnel policies.

### ***Public comments support reaching a collective bargaining agreement by August 6***

Of the dozen people who spoke on the consent agenda, 8 of them spoke about the importance of educators having a voice and asked the board to reach a new collective bargaining agreement before teachers return to the classroom.

Meladie Munch addressed the board to let them know these personnel policies are not a suitable replacement for a collective bargaining agreement. "With a policy, the board can adopt it tonight, then you change it at the end of the month, or you can just ignore it because it's *your* policy," she said.

Reverend Jim VanderWeele of Interfaith Worker Justice and the Community Church in Lakeview, expressed concern, saying, "This School Board has not been a beacon of trust." He added that the board needs to do more than verbally praise teachers. He said they must "not only thank their

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***"This School Board has not been a beacon of trust."***

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***Rev. Jim VanderWeele, Interfaith Worker Justice***

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teachers for a job well done, you owe it to them...to work

together to build an agreement based on respect and trust."

Scott Cooper spoke as an executive officer from Unite Here, an organization that represents 250,000 workers in the hospitality industry across the US, and as the representative of "hundreds of parents of public school children," and also "the son of a retired public school teacher, a product of the public school system, and as the father of a child in public schools." "I urge you to reengage in a collective bargaining process," he said. "The collaborative process of collective bargaining will have a positive impact on teacher performance," he added.

A trio of professors from Tulane University spoke about the importance of reaching a collective bargaining agreement. Dr. Thomas Adams, a history professor, said he felt the need to speak after an advertisement in the *Times Picayune* by the Jefferson Business Council caught his eye. "It is my understanding that this is a group that endorsed 5 members of this board and raised campaign funds for some of you," he said. He took issue with information cited in the ad and offered contradicting research that shows that "a union contract enhances student achievement." He went on to say, "we've heard a lot today about modeling behavior for the community, and I'd hope that this board could also model some behavior for the community today, and that is critical thinking skills."

Becky Whorton, a retired teacher who taught in Jefferson Parish for over 30 years, seemed to catch the attention of board members when she ran through what her day looked

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***"[The personnel policy] is merely someone telling you 'what to do.'" "[A teacher contract] comes from educators 'working together' to reach an agreement."***

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***Becky Whorton, Retired JPPSS teacher***

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like before teachers in Jefferson Parish had a collective bargaining agreement. She explained that the CBA gave teachers a voice to "articulate to deci-

sion makers what was needed to make our classrooms more effective, and to enable teachers to better meet the needs of the children we have been entrusted to teach." She also took issue with replacing the CBA with personnel policies, saying the policy is "rules that come from the Superintendent's office. It is merely someone telling you 'what to do.'" In contrast, she explained that a teacher contract "comes from educators and school board representatives 'working together' to reach an agreement."

### ***Kate Middleton to be leased to New Orleans charter school operator***

Despite questions of possible violations of Dandridge by former Dandridge taskforce operator Margie Zeno, as well as concerns that the closure of schools lacked "teamwork" and "buy in from all stakeholders" by past president of the Jefferson Parish Retired Teachers Myrtis Tate, the board voted 8-1 to lease Kate Middleton to the New Orleans charter school operator Milestone SABIS, with St. Pierre voting against the measure.

### ***First reading on possibility of "individual contracts"***

Larry Dale made a first reading regarding the idea of entering into individual contracts on a one-on-one basis with each of the 3,000+ teachers in Jefferson Parish Public Schools. He stated that he felt it could offset the current "uneasiness" and to offer some guarantees "while talks are continuing toward a new agreement." The idea arose after a consulting group informed the board that according to state law, they must have some form of a contract with their teachers.

Meladie Munch addressed the board to ask for clarification that the intention of these individual contracts would not be to supplant a collective bargaining agreement that allows teachers a place at the table. Both Dale and Dr. Etta Licciardi stated that it is not their intention for these to replace the goal of reaching a new collective bargaining agreement.

Individual contracts would guarantee aspects of the salary scale, benefits, and current working conditions. In an interview about the idea, Munch says it is "a nice gesture, but not a collective bargaining agreement." The board will vote on the documents granted by the Superintendent and board attorney at the upcoming July 25 meeting.

