



Eyes on the BOARD

Board rejects teachers' pleas for a negotiated contract; reasons show intention is long-term commitment to individual contracts

May 22, 2013 — Evidence that the district may have never been committed to good-faith negotiations over a teachers' contract emerged in two revealing arguments presented during an intense, two-hour discussion last night that ended up with the School Board rejecting a motion to approve the agreement that had been negotiated during more than 20 bargaining sessions over six months between the JFT negotiating team and the one appointed by Supt. Meza under a directive by the School Board.

The five newest members of the Board — **Messrs. Dale, Delesdernier, Jacobs, Tovrea and Ms. Denapolis-Bosarge**, who together make up a majority and who have voted as a unified bloc on all but two motions since taking office in January 2011, **voted against the motion**. Etta Licciardi, Ray St. Pierre, and Mark Morgan voted for the motion. Cedric Floyd abstained, presumably for a strategic reason, as he had joined the three supporters in presenting extremely thorough, well-reasoned arguments in favor of the negotiated contract.

Jacobs, Meza give indications of lack of good faith

In his comments opposing the motion, Mr. Jacobs said that he was the one who pushed for the minimal, non-negotiated individual contracts teachers were required to sign as a pre-condition of remaining employed at the start of this school year. Jacobs went on to argue, in his opposition, that the individual contracts have only been in place a year,

"The union in Jefferson Parish has always been a good thing."

Board Member Mark Morgan

not yet enough time for teachers to have made up their mind whether

they like them, and he wants more time to be allowed. Coincidentally or not, this was the same line of reasoning given by at least one of a parade of high-powered anti-union business, political, and political group leaders who spoke against the motion.

Perhaps a more revealing indication of whether the district ever had good-faith intentions to negotiate a contract came from Dr. Meza. In response to a line of questioning from Cedric Floyd about how long it would take the superintendent to put together a set of proposals "from this day forward," Meza evasively responded, "the Board hasn't told me whether they want to vote for collective bargaining or not." Floyd reminded him that the Board gave him a directive, to which Meza replied, "No they didn't. They said 'negotiate.'"

The distinction he was trying to make was not clear, except if taken together with the fact during months of negotiations the district's negotiation team presented not one single proposal on behalf of the superintendent or the Board. Even in the seven weeks since Licciardi and St. Pierre's motion was made on April 2, which specifically allowed for late mutually agreed upon changes since teachers ratified the tentative contract in March, the district refused to submit any proposals.

Licciardi twice referred to the lack of good faith, at one point saying, "If the Board is bargaining in good faith, where's the good faith?" and later, "I don't think this Board had proceeded honestly."

Ray St. Pierre, who with Licciardi co-authored the motion to accept the contract, questioned the superintendent's committed

leadership in pursuit of a contract. "I thought the superintendent should be the leader of the type of contract he wanted. Why did they [the district's negotiations team] not act in that direction?" St. Pierre also referred to allegations of micro-management made of him in the past (which he said were not true), before saying that the current school board's leadership is not micro-managing, "it's totally managing."

"If the Board is bargaining in good faith, where's the good faith?"

"I don't think this Board has proceeded honestly."
Board Member Etta Licciardi

"Our [recent] success is not due to the lack of a contract."

Board Member Ray St. Pierre

When it was his turn to speak, Board member Mark Morgan said that his new colleagues (the five elected in October 2010), simply "got it wrong."

"Some statements [by opponents of collective bargaining] are just not the facts," Morgan said, adding,

"I've never heard

"My constituents like what we're doing."

Board Member Mark Jacobs

what was wrong with the contract, just 'we don't like unions'."

"The union in Jefferson Parish has always been a good thing," Morgan said.

Jefferson business leaders flock to meeting to speak in opposition

An unprecedented parade of business and political leaders, most of who have never been seen at a school board meeting, addressed the Board in opposition to collective bargaining.

Most cited the progress made over the last two years as a reason to reject a collective bargaining contract, without noting that it has been less than one year since the Board ended the teachers' previous collective agreement and ignoring the fact that Jefferson was one of the state's top performing districts for decades when a strong collective bargaining con-

How they voted on the motion to approve the teachers' contract

	For	Against
Dale		X
Delesdernier		X
Denapolis-Bosarge		X
Floyd	abstained	
Jacobs		X
Licciardi	✓	
Morgan	✓	
St. Pierre	✓	
Tovrea		X

✓ = agreed with JFT position. X = opposed JFT position.

tract was in place.
Among the business and political leaders speaking against the contract were

- **Gary Jones**, a member of State Superintendent of Education John White’s executive staff. His title is Policy Liaison with Local Superintendents.
- **Kevin Kane**, founder and President of Pelican Institute for Public Policy (a Libertarian organization), a Board member of three New Orleans charter schools, and an ardent opponent of collective bargaining.
- **Tony Ligi**, Executive Director of the Jefferson Business Council and a former Republican state legislator
- **Michael Hollis**, owner of a group of companies that provides employee benefits such as dental, vision, life, disability, and accidental death and dismemberment insurances. Hollis said he wants principals to have the sole right to hire and fire teachers.
- **Todd Murphy**, President of the Jefferson Chamber of Commerce, who told the Board to “stay the course” of keeping teachers from having a contract
- **Jim Garvey**, Commissioner with JEDCO (Jefferson Parish Economic Development Foundation) and the elected BESE representative from Jefferson
- **Laurie Soileau** of the Harvey Canal Industrial Association
- **Rayne Martin** Executive Director of Stand With Children Louisiana, and a former official with the State Dept. of Education and the Recovery School District. According to her biographical statement, she “developed ... Act 54, one of the nation’s most aggressive laws to include student growth in educator evaluation.”

The only teacher speaking against the proposal was **Kilie Sullivan**, a teacher at the International School of Louisiana (ISL), who said she is pleased to have a strong “leadership team” at the school “to tell teachers they can do better.” The proposed contract would not cover teachers at ISL, a Type 2 charter school in Jefferson Parish.

A number of JPPSS teachers who would be covered by the contract also addressed the Board

- **Betty Bordelon**, a JPPSS librarian, who pointed out that a contract could save the district litigation costs, as it did when she was assaulted by a principal and decided to pursue a grievance under the then-existing contract rather than file a lawsuit as advised by a personal attorney whose advice she sought.
- **Leo Laventhal**, a teacher at Patrick Taylor High School, who said, that among other variables, teachers need respect to succeed and teach at their peak, and good way to show respect is to give teachers a voice, and the contract would give teachers an outlet to constructively channel their ideas and concerns.
- **David Prentice**, a science teacher at Haynes High School, who also urged the board to approve the contract as a sign of respect for teachers and to preserve stability in the school system.
- **Cathy Sullivan**, a teaching nurse, who cast doubt on the promise by some board members that teachers would lose nothing without a contract by comparing the individual contract the district is offering to the collective bargaining agreement teachers ratified unanimously. “We’re your employees,” she said. “Protect us. Give us back our voice.”
- **Rob Wyman**, who said that a contract could serve as an inducement to attract teachers. Wyman said that he came to JPPSS specifically because it had a collective bargaining agreement, which his previous school in Orleans didn’t have. Wyman was accompanied by his wife, **Cynthia Simporios**, also a JPPSS teacher and whose daughter recently graduated as valedictorian from Helen Cox High School.

Community members and JFT employees and leaders who spoke in support of the contract included

- **Tiger Hammond**, president of the GNO AFL-CIO central body, who informed the board that in the building trades, management has discovered that a contract is a win-win, with both employees and employers reaping benefits.
- **Thomas Adams**, a history professor at Tulane University, who, among other points he made, connected the Board’s refusal to engage JFT as a partner as the cause of the unprecedented rejection of the recent millage renewal.
- **Susan Meariman**, a graduate of East Jefferson HS, the parent of two students who graduated with honors from JPPSS, and a JFT secretary, who said she is “sick and tired” of disparaging remarks made against union leaders and members. She compared their level of commitment to the school board members’.
“We actually have a stake in this school system, besides for just sitting on some Board waiting for bigger and better things to come along,” she said. “You see, this school system is “OUR school system” it’s “OUR lives”.
- **Joe DeRose**, a former teacher and a JFT representative, who said that if the Board really wanted to show respect for teachers, it would not have frozen teachers’ salaries two years ago, and it would allow them to negotiate a contract just as it allowed the superintendent to.
- **Cathy Johnson**, a former JPPSS special ed teacher for over 25 years and now JFT Middle Schools Vice-President and staff representative, who recounted that the bargaining team appointed by Supt. Meza met with JFT’s team more than 20 times officially, with many other phone conversations and informal meetings between JFT’s president and the head of the district’s team.
- **Meladie Munch**, JFT President, who responded to all three objections Mr. Dale gave as reasons for opposing the motion and indicating how JFT tried to resolve them. Munch also responded to district leaders’ cries that JFT did not address its concerns by pointing out that the district had not presented any bargaining proposals expressing those concerns. She also addressed Dr. Meza’s vociferous claim that he had not even seen the contract until after teachers voted on it. She said that at every bargaining session, she gave copies with Meza’s name on them to the district’s chief negotiator.

Dale calls for respect among opponents, but ignores Meza’s disrespectful outburst

Board President Larry Dale led off the meeting with a call for respect between people with opposing opinions. Later in the meeting, when Dr. Meza responded to a question from Mr. Floyd, by shouting angrily in the direction of people in the audience for more than three straight minutes while looking at the audience, Dale admonished those in the audience who mildly expressed their displeasure with the tirade.

Upcoming JPSB Meetings		
Tuesday, June 4	6:00 p.m.	Bonnabel High School
Tuesday, July 9	6:00 p.m.	Administration Bldg. 501 Manhattan Blvd.