

SIRC TRUE PERSPECTIVES SEMINAR – March 8 - Schools

On March 8, new School Board President Roger Moss and School Board Member Shawn Kachmar gave an update on current issues before the Chatham County School System.

Roger Moss led off with some good items that are trending upward, with a philosophical comment offering that “the good can be the enemy of the great.”

Some high school programs are very effective, such as teaching welding to such a degree that three recent grads got immediate jobs at the JCB plant in Savannah. And the culinary course gets raves for its high quality. This does not make up for the major failures of way below par reading and math proficiency levels throughout the system.

Starting his tenure as Board Chair, he emphasized the three major functions of the School Board:

1. Budgeting
2. Setting overall Policy
3. Hiring and overseeing a new Superintendent, with the incumbent Ann Lovett announcing her retirement after serving for six years.

Shawn Kachmar elaborated on the Budgeting issue as being hampered by state rules that control 85% of the expenditures, leaving only 15% as discretionary. Furthermore, the extra ESPLOST construction revenue was specified before the news of Hyundai building an assembly plant near Savannah, with 8,100 new jobs plus another up to 2,000 for support firms. Those may require building new schools to support the new total families moving there.

The job search for new superintendent will be far reaching, with a goal of filling it by May 10. That is important as renewal commitments for the next school year are usually done by then. We have a lot to offer a candidate, as Savannah is a very attractive city, and the budget can support highly qualified candidates. (Editor's note: and we offer some challenges for a candidate to apply their expertise and experience to, e.g. only about 30% performing at grade level, and a flat overall enrollment, in areas other than near the new Hyundai plant.)

Moss finished his opening perspective with his commitment to quality and to getting maximum feedback from listening to the other elected members of the Board

Question and Answer Session

Q! On the Budgeting issues, how do you plan to address the obvious overbloated administrative staff relative to actual in class room teaching needs?

A1. One approach is to prioritize needs, with heavy input addressing the most crucial ones first. Possibly do a business like return on investment analysis. How did that last overhaul of curriculum work out? Was there accountability on the decisions that were poorly made?

Q2. On Policy issues,

- a. Is CRT taught in the public schools?
- b. Is there pornographic material in the school libraries?
- c. Has there been a forensic audit on curriculum?

A2a. Teachers, parents and superintendents have been regularly queried, and so far no such curriculum teaching topic has been detected.

A2b,c. Parents have the right to complain if that is present, with the goal of no inappropriate age material being allowed to go to those library facilities. No active search of pornographic material has been attempted by the Board or a surrogate. Care must be taken not to appear to be individually censoring books.

Q3. How do you feel about bringing back [phonics as a better method of teaching reading?

A3. Actually, Moss is a real fan of that approach. Yet there is a tradition in Georgia that precludes School Boards from being that intrusive to specifying actual techniques.

Q4. How do you deal with the horrendously high teacher turnover rate of 30% per year?

A4. ??????

Q5. Can you change the Board Meeting format where outside comments can only be made at the very end, and only those present from the start can comment?

A5. The rules now permit comments right after the subject is covered at the meeting, if the agenda listed those topics. If people at the end were not present when the topic was covered, may discover it was already handled.

Q6. Can you make sure the new superintendent hire shares your vision of what Education should be?

A6. The School Board members may have a diverse view of an appropriate vision. But the basics are for high ou

Q7. Where do you personally stand on the issue of school choice?

A7. Charter schools (which we have number of) contain elements of the advantages of school choice. Experiments that are successful can be widely exported. Full school choice creates transportation demands and costs. One alternative is to try to improve underperforming schools, rather than decimating them.