



Louisiana Commission for the Deaf
SFY 23 Regular Commission Meeting
Special Meeting Minutes of October 26, 2022
9:00 am- 1:00 pm

- I. Call to order 9:08 am by Vicechair, Jay Isch
 - A. Roll Call: Secretary, Dr. Ashley Argrave
 - 1. Commissioners Present: Dr. Ashley Argrave, Melissa Bayham, Brad Wellons, Sajata Varner, Jimmy Gore, Jason Isch, Davondra Brown, Cammy Gaspar, Megan Wimberly, Bambi Polotzola, Proxy for Senator Hewitt: Senator Foil, Proxy for SSD: Ty Manairi, Proxy for LDOE Rep.Kathy Edmonston
 - 2. Commissioners Not Present: Senator Hewitt, Rep. McKnight, Dr.Natalie Delgado, Marissa Ramos, Denise Crochet
- II. Approval of Agenda: (Ashley Argrave, Bambi Polotzola) none opposed, motion carries
- III. Public Comments
 - A. Dan Arabie: graduate from LSD. LSDVI is the only school for Deaf and DeafBlind students. There is only 1 school. Request the Board to support to keep the Deaf school there.
 - B. Norma Zeringe: I am here to express my concerns with how LSD is being run. I feel that the acting superintendent is acting with more financial gain than the best for students. I would like to see Katherine Granier leave LSD and be replaced with someone with expertise in the field of Deaf education.
 - C. Ari Latino: I attended LSD since I was 3 years old. I have some concerns about 2 Deaf leaders who have been dismissed. I have seen many Deaf teachers leave. There are many concerns because the school is important for the Deaf culture, language, etc. This school has had a huge impact on my life and it is unique school experience.
 - D. Dustin Cutrer: I am an LSD alumni. I have many concerns over the last couple of weeks. We need to make sure we keep LSD open.
 - E. Karen Harris: parent of a LSVI graduate. There was previously an evaluation of SSD, LSD, LSVI, and LSAC. 12 issues were noted. Not one recommendation has been implemented. The person who runs SSD needs to have an experience in education.
 - F. Chad Cormier: LSD graduate. He values the purpose and existence of LSD. Deaf Education is important and the current events are going against it. Concerns SSD

will take away from Deaf Culture and force children to use other forms of communication instead of ASL. We need to focus on enrollment because it has dropped over the years. We need to cherish the school that we built with open communication and transparency.

1. Bambi Polotzola: response to Chad Cormier. For the public information, Louisiana has a very large DeafBlind population. LSDVI needs to be the model for Deaf and Blind education.
2. Megan Wimberly: There are 380 Deafblind people registered in Louisiana but that is not the entire population. Deafness is the only disability that is a linguistic minority. This means that specialized education is needed to be able to educate these students. Least Restrictive Environment is often thought of as a child with a disability in the regular classroom, but this isn't the case for many Deaf or Blind students due to lack of accessibility to language and incidental learning.
3. Cammy Gaspar: I attended 6 different mainstream schools with so many barriers. When I moved to LSD, I finally had access to language. The fact the leadership at SSD mentioned he is not fluent or at the conversational level of ASL is the problem itself.

G. Lumeka Young: HH with Deaf and hearing children, LSD is not just important as an education institution but it is important to teach life skills. We need leaders who are competent in Deaf education. ASL needs to be a requirement not an option for staff members.

IV. Item of Business

A. Consideration of Actions by the La Commission for the Deaf (LCD) Board of Commissioners to Elevate Community Concerns to the Special School District (SSD) Board of Directors.

1. Bambi Polotzola: Executive Director for Governor's Affairs. LCD states we shall advocate and support the Deaf community. This meeting is aligned with that. Understands the importance of appropriate education by qualified educators. I want the community to understand that we hear you and support you.
 - a) Also want to stress the lack of qualified for Deaf Education professionals. There is currently no certification program in our state.
2. Jay Isch (acting chair): LAD/Deaf Focus has been an advocate for LSDVI. We have had growing concerns as more and more Deaf people have been leaving or have been fired from LSD. Our Deaf children have the right to FAPE and LSD should be a model of Deaf education statewide. Our goal is inform and advise LSD on best practices. List of concerns:
 - a) SSD Acting Supt and Board did not respond to multiple meeting requests by concerned members of the Deaf community.

- b) Numerous Louisiana School for the Deaf and Visually Impaired (LSDVI) and SSD staff have resigned, and some have filed formal grievances against the current SSD administration, but the SSD Board has not acted possibly in violation of their own policies. Most recently, Dr. Heather Laine was terminated after filing two grievances directly to the Special School District Board of Directors, which also has reportedly yet to be resolved.
- c) SSD administrators have shown up to meetings or discussions without interpreters or have attempted to use "signing" employees rather than the LSD staff interpreters to facilitate dialogue with LSD staff and students which is in direct violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).
- d) Positions at the school level are being eliminated and or changed significantly by SSD administration without inclusion of LSD or LSVI administrators.
- e) Positions are being filled by SSD administration with those who are without knowledge or experience working with Deaf/visually impaired children or special education. experience, especially Deaf Education.
- f) Reports of positions being filled while the hiring period were still open.
- g) Students may not be receiving services mandated on their Individual Education Plans (IEP) due to staff shortages; While it is widely recognized the difficulty in finding individuals with the appropriate credentials to fill these roles, unused Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) funds exist that could be used to provide these mandated services at LSDVI, per review of public records. However, SSD administration has not provided any strategies for ensuring sufficient IEP services are being provided.
- h) Reports of SSD administration mandating staff to serve additional students which may be in violation of caseload limits as described Louisiana Administrative Code.
- i) SSD administration has demoted, made title changes, and/or terminated staff without a formal evaluation or Performance Improvement Plan.
- j) Access to the grievance form for unclassified employees has been removed from SSD internal staff website.
- k) Concerns with SSD using a local Consulting firm with no knowledge or expertise in Deaf education in their search for new SSD Superintendent. This consulting firm may have

not met one of their contractual obligations in gathering input by stakeholders regarding the criteria of qualifications for this important position.

(1) Rep. Edmonston: previously served on BESE. There is no reason it should not be a model of Deaf education for the state.

(2) Ty Manieri: SSD appreciated public concerns. Can not comment on specific staff or students, but we are following the law.

(a) Response to Dustin: one of the lights of the football field is rotting and risk of collapse, we have had an engineer to look at them. We made time accommodations in regards to the lights but are continuing to support the football field.

(b) Response Language use: ASL is used to teach students and within the dorms as well as around campus. We are committed to keep ASL in use at LSD.

(c) We would like to thank Rep.Hewitt and Rep. McKnight

(d) We would like to invite everyone to the next SSD Board Meeting November 1, 2022 at 9:00am.

3. Letters from Parents:

a) Kelly Hill: parents of a Deaf daughter who uses ASL

b) Miranda Dunham: parent of Deaf child: Our family moved to BR from NO in hope to be closer to resources for our Deaf child. We have many concerns with the recent administration of SSD.

c) Jeri Pilk: parent of a Deaf child. I do not support oralism or Katherine Granier and anyone who supports her initiatives.

d) Haley Duckworth: parent of a Deaf child. Concerns with Deaf leaders who have lost their positions. SSD needs competent leadership.

e) Rachel: shared her experiences meeting her first Deaf person and learning ASL.

f) Brynn Millet: Social Emotional Specialist/Counselor, recounts her experience working for LSD/SSD and has concerns that we do not put children first and that LSD is severely understaffed.

4. Jimmy Gore: Concerns with people with expertise in Deaf education who are being fired or resigning out of fear of being fired. Request that professionals come and evaluate the school.

BREAK 10:03 am

5. Brad Wellons: very important to keep the focus on the children. As a HH person myself, these decisions need to be done with the best interest of the child.

MOTION: (Gore, Argrave) to draft a letter to the SSD on behalf of the community concerns related to the Special School District board

Amendment to the MOTION: (Polotzola, Gore) to draft and send a letter to the SSD including the 11 points of concerns as mentioned by Jay Isch (Polotzola, Wimberly)

Vote: 8 yes, 4 abstained, motion carries

-Ty Maneri: requested a draft of the letter

-Jana Broussard: allow Kim Sullivan the attorney for the Dept. of Health to respond. Kim: The letter was being discussed within attorney client privilege and will not be shared outside the department. This is due to recent statute changes which separates the board from the program. LDH represents the program only.

MOTION: to change the amendment : (Maneri) To request a joint meeting between the LCD board and SSD Board instead of a letter.

Board discussion: Board members felt the written letter was still important, but welcomed the idea of a mutual meeting between both boards. Amendment to existing motion did not carry.

MOTION: (Wellons, Wimberly) request for a joint meeting between SSD board and LCD board

Vote: 9 yes, 3 abstained, motion carries

V. Announcements: none

VI. Adjourn: 12:29

Draft of minutes prepared 1/03/2023 by Ashley Argrave, Secretary

Minutes corrected/approved on _____ by _____