

MEDIA RELEASE

May 20, 2023

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE



Vice President Powell's Statement Regarding The School Board's Most Recent Announcements

Under previous administrations, the East Baton Rouge Parish School Board received the upcoming year's budget projections as early as February annually, which allows board members the opportunity to gain insight into the district's future financial stability. However, after many informal requests from current board members, a school board budget projection for the upcoming school year (2023-2024) was not presented until Monday, May 15, 2023. School board members were verbally promised by Superintendent Sito Narcisse and School Board Member Mike Gaudet that there would not be a deficit, but that "we are in a good place" financially; meanwhile, members of the East Baton Rouge Parish School System's Finance Department, continually and verbally stated concerns regarding the upcoming budget.

Additionally, school board members and district personnel were promised and frequently reminded that there would be a sustainable pay raise for teachers at a rate of 8% in the 2023-24 school year with an additional 2% increase given during the 2024-25 school year, and an additional 2% increase given during the 2025-26 school year - totaling 12% over a three-year period.

On Monday, May 15, 2023, Superintendent Narcisse and his cabinet began sharing with board members that there would be a projected budget deficit of 31.8 million dollars with a fund balance of 111 million dollars; and, that there was a possibility of a one-time stipend for teachers but no funds available for a sustainable pay raise for teachers. After a few heated and emotional debates between the Superintendent, his cabinet, board leadership, and one other board member Monday, over the unfilled promises to board members and teachers, a newly proposed and completely balanced budget was discussed with board members Wednesday, and made available electronically to the public Thursday, May 18, 2023. It is important to note that the new proposed budget still does not present a sustainable pay raise for teachers and district staff.

Communication with the district's financial team confirmed with board members that emergency and crisis situations such as the 2016 flood and hurricanes have required the use of up to 90 million dollars to repair school sites and other system buildings. The school system is still awaiting federal reimbursements; therefore, the fund balance (essentially the school system's savings account) of 111 million dollars should be reserved for such emergencies.

As of Thursday morning, May 18, 2023, around 11AM, Superintendent Narcisse began sharing with board members and the public that he has applied for a superintendency position in Broward County (Fort Lauderdale), Florida. After a level of research, it has been determined that Superintendent Narcisse completed his application for the noted vacancy Saturday, May 13, 2023, just prior to engaging with the board about the proposed budget deficit.

In conjunction with the Superintendent's media release, School Board Member Mike Gaudet and representatives of Stand for Children of Louisiana are attempting to apply bullying and pressuring tactics on board leadership and board members to force the presentation of a superintendent's contract negotiation prior to the official public hearing and approval of the proposed 2023-24 school system budget.

As Vice President of the Board, I want to communicate that I do not agree with the messaging and tactics used in this situation. I have shared with Mr. Gaudet and Dr. Narcisse that if there is no sustainable teacher pay raise built in the proposed budget for the upcoming school year and beyond, I will not be able to conscientiously consider a contract extension or pay raise for Dr. Narcisse. I believe that it would be "a slap in the face" to our teachers if we offer such an opportunity to Dr. Narcisse without confirmation of financially sustaining our teachers and the promises that have been made to them.

I understand that Dr. Narcisse may be seeking other opportunities to better meet the needs of his family. However, the fact still remains that our students, their families, and the people on the frontline (teachers and school staff) should be a priority considering that promises have been made to them. I am very concerned that those who are encouraging a rapid contract negotiation of the superintendent, have no vested interest in the East Baton Rouge Parish School System, as they have never been fully employed by the district nor do they have children who attend East Baton Rouge Parish Schools.

Further, I believe that the budget process and sustainable teacher pay raises should be solidified prior to engaging in the superintendent's contract negotiation. Dr. Narcisse's contract does not expire for another year. The Board is not required to start this conversation until six months prior to the expiration of his current contract - which would take place around November or December.

Please know that I am publishing this statement to clarify and provide transparency to the community as we work through the vital budget process and secure the futures of our students, teachers, and families.