

**Alpha Kappa Chapter Minutes**  
**Big Bend Coordinating Council Legislative Meeting**  
**The Delta Kappa Gamma Society International**  
**February 23, 2019**  
**Submitted by Nikki Abels**

**Call to Order** at 10:16 am by Gale Workman at the Leon County Eastside Library.

**Members Attending**

- Alpha Kappa Chapter: Gale Workman, Nikki Abels, Connie Lewis, Ruth Bickel, June Townsend, Rhonda Work and Monica Hayes.
- Alpha Lambda Chapter: Cassie Burnham, Diane Driggers and Connie Worrill.
- Beta Phi Chapter: Emily Ruddell, Andrea Notley, Sharon Simmons and Blake Simmons.
- Iota Chapter: Sandra Smith.

**Announcements**

- Mary Woodbury Scholarship Applications are due by March 1, 2019.
- Big Bend Coordinating Council Meeting and Founder's Day is May 18, 2019 from 11am-1pm.
- Alpha Kappa's next meeting will be on April 1, 2019 from 6pm-8pm at the downtown branch library. Our own Melissa Olson will be our speaker on gifted education.
- Emily Ruddell from the Beta Phi Chapter announced a spaghetti dinner sponsored by the Leon County/Wakulla Retired Teacher's Association on February 26, 2019 at the Elk's Club. The cost is \$10 and all proceeds will go to a scholarship fund.
- Gale Workman is now employed in the House Clerk's Office as a journal writer. Congrats to Gale on her new adventure.

**Program**

Our speaker today was Linda Edson. Linda is a retired Leon County 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher at Killearn Lakes Elementary. She retired after 41 years in the classroom. She decided to check out the legislature to see what was happening. And now she currently serves as a legislative volunteer and frequently assists Senator Montford. Senator Montford sends his thank you and appreciation to all teachers and is sorry he could not make the meeting himself.

Linda shared issues with the group concerning the state of education today summarized below.

Our retirement system is one of the top in the country. We had been funded at 110%. However, much of that funding was then used to pay for other things. We are now funded at about 80+%. As usual, there is a push to force teachers, especially new hires, to opt for the investment plan instead of the state retirement system. There is a concern that there is less and less flexibility to change from one to the other. For example, there is no monetary loss to an employee to go from the pension program to the investment program, but there is a heavy money buy-in to do the opposite. There is also a concern because the investment program is heavily dependent on the volatile market; it may not provide sufficient funds on which to retire.

Our current Commissioner of Education, Richard Corcoran, supported the investment program as the House Speaker and as commissioner still does and wants to do away with the pension system all together for all new hires. This issue will probably be dealt with in the next legislative session.

Commissioner Corcoran also supports the expansion of school choice including charter schools (one of which he is personally involved in), special needs scholarships, and more state school vouchers.

Linda reported that Senator Montford supports among other things:

- increased monies for mental health
- increase in student/teacher safety (This does not include arming educators)

The Senate Education Committee, headed by Manny Diaz, Jr., approved a proposal to allow teachers to be armed as determined by their local school districts. There would be a stipend of \$500 for each teacher who volunteered. However, Senator Diaz had no comment when asked about liability issues, etc. (A side note: Linda conducted a very informal survey of people about this issue and of all the people with whom she spoke, only 2 were for this proposal.)

Governor DeSantis has stated he will sign an executive order to get rid of the last of the Common Core Curriculum. At this time, there is no proposal on what should be utilized as a replacement.

Governor DeSantis' priorities:

- Expanding the school choice programs and scholarships for private schools, including religious ones.
- Recruitment/retention of teachers (The state of Florida currently has a shortage of 2000+ teachers.) His answer to this includes various types of bonuses.
- Proposed \$146.5 million for traditional public funding, labs, colleges, and universities.
- Proposed \$155 million for charter schools.
- Proposed \$140 million for School of Hope Scholarships designated for victims of bullying (very broad definition of what bullying is).
- Proposed \$147 million for Gardiner Scholarships for special needs students.
- Proposed \$155.5 million for mental health services for children.

The new legislative session begins in March. There are many issues concerning educators that may come up for voting. It was discussed that the "Legislative Day" is a good vehicle to make our concerns known. It is also very useful to try and talk individually to our representatives and senators.

Overall and most importantly, we need to be advocates for our students, teachers and all educational employees. Personal contact is a very effective way to accomplish this.

Thank you, Linda, for providing this valuable information for us.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 11:12 am.