



Alabaster City School District officially starting July 1, separate from Shelby County

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ALABASTER, Alabama -- In a vote approaching two years in the making, the Alabaster Board of Education unanimously approved an agreement tonight to officially separate from the Shelby County School District.

The action that came with no audible reaction from the couple dozen people attending tonight's meeting means the Alabaster City School District will begin operation as a new system in Shelby County effective July 1.

The move comes after the Alabaster City Council in October 2011 voted to approve a 1 percent sales tax for education and start the process to create a school board and ultimately a new district separate from Shelby County.

"This is a fair agreement for all the children in the county and the city, and I think both sides put the best interests of students first," Board of Education President Adam Moseley said tonight before the vote.

The schools in the new Alabaster district include Creek View Elementary, Meadow View Elementary, Thompson Intermediate, Thompson Sixth Grade Center, Thompson Middle and Thompson High.

Negotiations have been ongoing between Shelby County and Alabaster educational leaders on the separation agreement, which includes a plan for students not residing in the city's district to phase into the county schools.

Although the board and Shelby County earlier this year agreed to keep students in their normal schools during the upcoming 2013-'14 academic calendar regardless of where they live, the following year will begin to see some students who do not reside in the city district to begin attending county schools.

The schedule of the gradual change will not affect sixth-graders who next year are going to school in Alabaster and living in the county district. "If you are a sixth-grader in Alabaster in the '13-'14 school year, you will be able to go all the way through the 12th grade. That is a major part of the agreement," Interim Superintendent Phil Hammonds said tonight.

The transition for other students who live in the county district but attend Alabaster schools means a slow process to move them to their appropriate schools depending on their home's location.

The change will begin in the 2014-'15 year when kindergarteners and sixth-graders residing outside the city's district and attending Alabaster schools will transfer to the county schools.

In the 2015-'16 year, the transfer list includes kindergarten, first, sixth and seventh grades transferring from the city to the county. The 2016-'17 year sees the list grow to include kindergarten, first, second, sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

In the 2017-'18 academic year, the list will add third and ninth grades. In 2018-'19, fourth and 10th grades are added. The list continues to grow in 2019-'20 to include all grades except 12th.

So starting with the academic year in fall 2020, students who do not reside in Alabaster's city limits will attend schools in Shelby County's district.

"We are looking at a six-year transitional period of students going to the schools in which they are zoned," Hammonds said. "I know this will be a major question of parents, but it does provide time for those arrangements to be made with a definite ending period for children to attend schools where they are zoned."

The Linda Nolen Learning Center in Pelham will continue to allow students residing in Alabaster who attend the facility and receive attention to their various disabilities or autism through the 2019-'20 school year. The agreement also permits students who need to go to the Learning Center "as their Least Restrictive Environment" to attend through the same time.

Alabaster students in kindergarten through eighth grades with "emotional disabilities" and a determination that the Linda Nolen Learning Center is their Least Restrictive Environment can attend there through the 2014-'15 school year, according to the agreement.

At the Shelby County School of Technology in Columbiana, Alabaster students in the program for the 2013-'14 academic year can remain until they graduate. The school's Career Academy Program, known as CAPs, and the Success Program will continue to allow Alabaster students currently enrolled in the programs for one more year.

The 24-page agreement between Alabaster and Shelby County covers other issues pertaining to the separation, including a point of contention between the two entities concerning the Shelby County Instructional Services Center located in the city.

Each entity wants to claim the sprawling facility located off Interstate 65 along Highway 31, so they will let Alabama Superintendent of Education Tommy Bice's office decide the matter.

"I think from all parties it has been publicly acknowledged in respectful ways that is one item that could not be agreed upon for the two boards," Hammonds said.

Shelby County School District employees working in Alabaster schools who have not already been transferred elsewhere will be assigned to the city district. Hammonds said employees will continue to receive their payment once a month and the district is aiming for direct deposit.

Board member Ty Quarles did not attend tonight's meeting, but the other leaders voiced their support of the action.

"I'd like to first compliment Dr. Hammonds, (school district attorney) Mr. Whit Colvin for their fine work on this separation agreement," board member John Myrick said.

"I don't think it's unusual for you to come to the end and have one issue that has to be resolved by the state department. I think this is an excellent separation agreement for the city," Myrick added. "I'm very pleased with the work that has been done."

Board member Linda Church echoed the compliments for Colvin and Hammonds, both of whom "have put in countless hours."

"It's really been comforting to know you two were in charge," Church said.

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