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People petition to retain CKS principal

By Jeff M. Hardison © May 12, 2018 at 4:28 p.m.

BRONSON – Sue Colson, a member of the Cedar Key City Council, used the very limited time allowed by the Levy County School Board of Tuesday night (May 8) to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

In fact, she used her whole five minutes to speak about one issue. Colson believes Levy County Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison plans to remove Cedar Key School Principal Joshua Slemph from CKS to put him at another school.

Colson arrived Tuesday night armed with 162 letters of support; however, just before entering the School Board District office at 480 Marshburn Drive in Bronson, she was greeted by a person who gave her another 30 letters that are attempting to show Superintendent of Schools Edison that the people want to keep the principal at that school.

Some of the letters were form letters, Colson said, however all of the letters show the school district administrator that the people have well-founded thought out, logical reasons for keeping this principal at this school. Among the concerns Colson expressed after the meeting are that there are several significant projects which started during the Slemph administration and the parents in Cedar Key are concerned that the next principal – if it is someone other than Slemph – will not keep the momentum of these projects going.

On Monday (May 7), Edison spoke on the telephone about the potential of Colson making a public statement to support keeping Slemph as the CKS principal next year, after Edison was contacted by *HardisonInk.com* about this issue.

Superintendent Edison explained that it is his job to make personnel decisions regarding all of the 900 employees of the Levy County School District.

Between now and June 1, the school superintendent said he intends to have decided placement for the various principals in Levy County. As for whether Principal Slemph will remain at CKS, Edison was non-committal. He mentioned, too, that he sees the schools' staff members as being "family."

Using the family metaphor, Edison said he intends to inform various members of the "family" about any changes regarding personnel, before those announcements are placed "on Facebook" or in the press or anywhere else for the general public.

In his process of deciding which administrators are to serve at which institutions within the school district, Edison said he takes a holistic approach, where he considers and evaluates every aspect of the district to arrive at what he believes is best for the whole district.

Sometimes people leave the school district, he said. As far as him deciding all of the principals' placements by June 1, Edison added, that is not a hard and fast date, but it is normally the time when the decisions are completed.

Colson, on Friday (May 11), shared a breakdown of some of the people who provided letters for their support of keeping Principal Slemph at CKS.

Colson said that Mayor Heath Davis and City Councilwoman Susan Rosenthal were among the people who supported keeping Principal Slemph. Cedar Key Police Chief Virgil Sandlin and Cedar Key Fire Chief Robert Robinson provided letters as well, Colson said.

As a partial breakdown, Colson noted that at least 71 parents of CKS students, and at least 28 grandparents provided those letters of support. There were at least 105 registered Levy County voters who sent those letters, Colson said. Agencies, clubs and 46 individuals with vested interests sent letters of support as well.

Colson said she shared a thought with Superintendent Edison and the four School Board members present that night. School Board Chairman Cameron Asbell was absent. Present were

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School Board Vice Chairman Brad Etheridge, and School Board members Paige Brookins, Chris Cowart and Rick Turner.

The School Board members are not the people who determine personnel matters. The School Board primarily deals with policy and budget matters.

In conversations with School Board members, Colson said, she has heard that sometimes it takes a new school superintendent a year to be properly versed in what all he or she must do. The elected term of the school superintendent is for four years, she added.

Why not then allow a principal that first year to get his or her feet on the ground, and then let him or her have a four-year term as principal at a school?

Colson said neither Edison nor any of the four School Board members present commented about her presentation other than to thank her for her input.

CKS Principal Slemp is one of the 900 employees who may serve in the same capacity next fall as he served this past school year, and of course, he may be somewhere else.

As for Colson and the 100 or so people who provided input on this matter to Superintendent Edison, the people have that right (and other rights) as guaranteed by the *United States Constitution* and its amendments. This right is part of *The First Amendment*, which notes “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.”

While some freedom-oriented thinkers may think the five-minute, or three-minute limit to address government bodies is a rule that infringes on this freedom “to petition the government for a redress of grievances,” apparently time limits have been upheld before, because federal, state, regional, county, and city government leaders cut off the public after the speakers hit the time limit quite often. The City Council in St. Petersburg had, and may still have, a countdown clock facing the audience and it began, and may still begin, its countdown to zero starting at the second a person starts speaking at the podium.

Williston City Council President Nancy Wininger said she intends to hold speakers to the limit when they address that august municipal body.

The person who called “Time!” on Colson on Tuesday night was School Board Attorney David Delaney of Gainesville, she said. Colson added in her interview with *HardisonInk.com* Friday that she asked if she could speak a few more minutes, perhaps by using some minutes from people who had come with her with the purpose in mind being to create a public record of the people of Cedar Key approaching the school superintendent to allow CKS to retain the principal who was serving there now.