



ANGEL R. SABLAN
Chair

GUAM EDUCATION BOARD

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MARY A.Y. OKADA, Ed.D.
Vice Chair

**GUAM EDUCATION BOARD
SPECIAL BOARD MEETING
Thursday, November 6, 2025
2 pm
Gallery, GDOE Building B
MINUTES**

VOTING MEMBERS

Angel R. Sablan, Chair
Mary A.Y. Okada, EdD, Vice-Chair
Peter Alecxis D. Ada
Felicitas B. Angel
Christine W. Baleto
Judith Guthertz, Dr. PA
Maria A. Gutierrez
Ron L. McNinch, PhD

EX-OFFICIO MEMBERS

Kohen Diego
IBOGS Representative

Timothy Fedenko
GFT Representative

Mayor Brian Jess Terlaje
MCOG Representative

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY

K. Erik Swanson, Ph.D.
GDOE Superintendent

I. MEETING CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Sablan, Chair, called the meeting to order at 2:12 p.m.

II. ROLL CALL OF MEMBERS

Dr. K. Erik Swanson, Superintendent and Executive Secretary, took the roll call. The following members were **present** for the meeting:

Voting Members:

Okada, Dr. Mary A.Y. – Chairwoman
Sablan, Angel R. – Vice-Chair
Ada, Peter Alecxis D.
Angel, Felicitas B.
Baleto, Christine W. (via Zoom)
Borja, Karlyn RCG
Gutierrez, Maria A.
McNinch, Dr. Ron L.

Non-Voting Members:

Fedenko, Timothy

Legal Counsel:

Nasis, Jesse
Rudolph, Gloria

Absent:

Non-Voting Members:

Terlaje, Brian Jess. – MCOG Representative
Deigo, Kohen - IBOSG Representative

The Superintendent announced that seven (7) members of the Board were present in person, one (1) present via Zoom, constituting a quorum.

Mr. Sablan said the meeting was dedicated to choosing the superintendent and that they would go into executive session if needed. He noted that it was a difficult day and that the decision was not an enviable task for any Board member. He also recognized Mrs. Gutierrez for completing her duties as head of the search committee.

Mrs. Gutierrez expressed gratitude to Dr. McNinch for his guidance, Mrs. Angel for her participation, Dr. Guthertz for joining the screening, and Dr. Okada for her questions. She also thanked HR Administrator Mrs. Katherine Ada for her professionalism and support in assisting the Board, especially in managing early morning emails and responding to questions. She clarified that the process was not delayed by the committee and followed the same procedure as the previous search committee, led by Dr. Okada. She assured her colleagues that they were on track. She thanked the applicants for their courage in applying and the media for their patience. She concluded by wishing the best candidate success in leading the department forward, emphasizing the need for progress rather than going backward.

Dr. Guthertz expressed gratitude to GDOE employees for their cooperation, support, and respect for the Board throughout the process. She thanked all the candidates and the people of Guam, noting that she alone is responsible for making the final decision. She emphasized that no one has attempted to influence her and that this independence helps ensure the choice is made in the best interest of students, families, the community, and the department. She closed by again thanking everyone for their cooperation.

Dr. McNinch thanked Mrs. Gutierrez, Dr. Guthertz, Mr. Sablan, and the Board for their hard work, also acknowledging GDOE employees' efforts. To ensure transparency, he motioned to move the superintendent selection up for a preliminary vote. He suggested members write down their choice and go around the room tallying votes until six are reached, ending with off-site member Ms. Baleto, noting this approach would make the process very transparent.

Mr. Sablan said to amend his motion, they will roll call, and then follow his motion.

Dr. McNinch motioned, seconded by Dr. Guthertz, to move the selection of the superintendent up on the agenda, hold a preliminary vote, and if they don't have 6 votes, to go into executive session, after roll call is done. The Board voted by voice with a vote of 8-0. The motion passed.

III. Executive Session

IV. Selection of Superintendent

Dr. McNinch asked to have Ms. Baleto vote last because she's off-site.

Before voting, Mr. Sablan addressed an email sent by applicant Ms. Erika Cruz, raising a concern from the last meeting. He explained he had not responded because the Board had not discussed it collectively. He assured Ms. Cruz that, for him, the concern will not influence his vote. He also said he would ask each Board member if the email affects their decision, to provide Ms. Cruz with assurance that it does not impact the selection.

All Board members—Mr. Ada, Mrs. Angel, Ms. Baleto, Dr. Guthertz, Mrs. Gutierrez, Dr. McNinch, Dr. Okada, and Mr. Sablan stated that Ms. Cruz's concern had no impact on their decision.

Mr. Sablan stated that, instead of responding to Ms. Cruz by email, the Board's official record will show that her concern does not affect any member's decision in selecting the superintendent. He then asked Dr. McNinch to proceed.

Dr. McNinch voted for Dr. Won Pat.

Mr. Sablan reminded his colleagues that Dr. McNinch recommended they write their choice on the card.

Mr. Ada disclosed that one candidate is his vice president in an organization he leads, and another is his godchild through marriage, leaving it to the Board to decide if he should vote. He also explained that he requested to participate in the interviews because he will need to work with the selected candidate.

Mr. Sablan reminded Board members that before voting, they will be asked to show their selection. He instructed them to write the name of their chosen superintendent on their card and display it publicly when called.

Mrs. Gutierrez asked Dr. McNinch to clarify the instructions.

Dr. McNinch said members should write the name on their card so they can show their vote when it's their turn.

Mr. Sablan stated that, by law, votes cannot be secret and everyone must publicly declare their choice.

Mr. Ada voted for Dr. Adamos.

Mrs. Angel voted for Deputy Joseph Sanchez.

Dr. Guthertz voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Mrs. Gutierrez voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Dr. McNinch voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Dr. Okada voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Mr. Sablan voted for Deputy Joseph Sanchez.

Ms. Baleto disclosed personal and professional connections with several candidates, including a close familial tie with Dr. Judith Won Pat, a long friendship with Deputy Sanchez, prior work with Ms. Erika Cruz, and that Dr. Adamos' son works for her. She noted minor conflicts with others except Mr. Kenneth Perez. She added that abstaining from voting does not change the legal requirement of six votes and that her vote alone would not achieve it.

Mr. Sablan said that's correct. They currently have five (5) votes for Dr. Won Pat.

Ms. Baleto asked if they had five (5) votes for Dr. Won Pat currently.

Board members replied that there were four (4).

Mr. Sablan said that her request for recusal has to be approved by the Board.

Ms. Baleto acknowledged.

Mrs. Gutierrez motioned, seconded by Dr. Guthertz, to deny Ms. Christine Baleto's request for recusal. The Board voted by voice with a vote of 7-1. The motion passed.

Dr. Guthertz praised GDOE staff and noted that, despite personal connections some Board members may have, they are mature and understand the school system's needs. She expressed support for the motion, encouraging full Board participation, and specifically asked Mr. Ada to vote, trusting him to make a fair, non-partisan decision.

Ms. Baleto stated that she and Mr. Ada wanted to ethically disclose any personal relationships for the Board's awareness. She said she can make an independent decision if the Board wishes her to participate, but felt it was her ethical duty to disclose these connections.

Mr. Sablan stated that he ethically disclosed his professional relationship with Dr. Won Pat, as they are both cabinet members in the same administration, and clarified that this relationship does not influence him to favor either candidate.

Dr. McNinch thanked Ms. Baleto and Mr. Ada for sharing their concerns and said that while transparency is important, voting is the most transparent action Board members can take. He emphasized that the Board's primary responsibility is selecting the superintendent. He expressed respect for Board member Christine's professionalism and high standards but asked her, collegially, to vote with the majority. He added that the Board should not pressure her but hoped she would consider their consensus and possibly reconsider her position.

Mr. Sablan stated that, to make the decision official, the Board members must agree on whether she is permitted to recuse herself or not.

The Board voted.

Mr. Sablan told Ms. Baleto that she is required to vote.

Ms. Baleto voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Mr. Sablan asked Mr. Ada if his selection stands. He said his selection stands. He asked Dr. Okada to state what the results were.

Dr. Okada stated that there were five (5) votes for Dr. Judith Won Pat, two (2) votes for Joseph Sanchez, and one (1) vote for Dr. Barbara Adamos.

Mr. Sablan noted that they still did not have a superintendent because six affirmative votes are required. He then asked his colleagues whether they wanted to proceed with another voting round.

Dr. McNinch stated that open votes rarely reach immediate consensus and that the Board must deliberate—either publicly or in executive session—to reconcile differences and make a decision. He compared the Board to a jury, emphasizing their duty to decide. He noted that with only eight members, rather than the former nine, the process is different. He said they should make a second attempt at a vote and openly or privately discuss Board member Christine's views to work toward a consensus.

Mrs. Gutierrez suggested discussing votes openly as they go around to see if anyone changes their choice.

Mr. Sablan asked if anyone planned to change their vote to avoid prolonging the process.

Mr. Ada said yes, he is changing his vote.

Mr. Sablan asked Mrs. Angel if she was changing her vote.

Mrs. Angel noted that there are already five votes for Dr. Judith Won Pat, with Dr. Adamos receiving one vote and Mr. Sanchez two. She said they simply need to identify a candidate who can secure six votes.

Mr. Sablan said he assumes Ms. Baleto's vote remains.

Ms. Baleto said she stands firm.

Dr. Guthertz's vote remains.

Mrs. Gutierrez's vote remains.

Dr. McNinch's vote remains.

Dr. Okada's vote remains.

Mr. Sablan's vote remains. He then mentioned that Mr. Ada will change his vote.

Mr. Ada voted for Dr. Judith Won Pat.

Mr. Sablan said for record purposes, there are now six (6) votes for Dr. Won Pat. He asked Dr. Okada if that was correct.

Dr. Okada said that was correct.

Mr. Sablan said there was no need for an executive session to extend the meeting. He thanked Mrs. Angel and himself for upholding their commitment, appreciated his colleagues' participation in the selection process, and congratulated Dr. Won Pat as the next superintendent of the Guam Department of Education.

Mrs. Gutierrez asked Dr. Won Pat to come forward to let them know if she accepts the selection.

Dr. Won Pat thanked the Board for their support.

Mr. Sablan noted that they happened to be wearing the same colors today, but it wasn't because they're in the same cabinet.

Dr. Won Pat acknowledged that the decision was difficult, especially being made openly rather than by written vote. She thanked the Board for standing by their convictions and respectfully accepted the outcome. She said she will work closely with the Board and do everything possible to move the department forward.

Mrs. Gutierrez informed Mr. Sablan that the search committee's work wasn't complete, then congratulated Dr. Won Pat and inquired about her availability to begin contract negotiations.

Dr. Won Pat said she will let them know the dates as soon as possible.

Mr. Sablan explained that Mrs. Gutierrez and Dr. Okada will work with Dr. Won Pat to finalize her superintendent contract, which must be approved by the Attorney General and then sent to the governor. He said the goal is to have her installed by January 1, 2026. He also requested the Board's agreement to establish a transition period between Dr. Swanson and Dr. Won Pat, noting the irony that the same two individuals were involved in the previous superintendent change. He emphasized the need for a smooth transition and noted that with Dr. Swanson's term ending December 31—along with the coterminous deputy

superintendent positions—it will be up to Dr. Won Pat to choose her leadership team. He encouraged her to review the current staff and, if they are serving the department well, consider asking them to support her. He emphasized that the decision is hers to make.

Dr. McNinch congratulated Dr. Won Pat, assuring her of the Board's full support and enthusiasm in her new role. He thanked Dr. Swanson for his hard work and contributions to the department. He also acknowledged the four other strong candidates who applied for superintendent, appreciating their courage and commitment to public service.

Mr. Sablan acknowledged that selecting a superintendent was not easy, noting the candidates' knowledge and qualifications. He emphasized moving forward by working with Dr. Won Pat, Dr. Swanson, and her team to continue the initiatives Dr. Swanson and his deputies had already begun.

Ms. Baleto acknowledged Dr. McNinch's remarks, praising the many qualified candidates who have dedicated their careers to the department. She thanked them for their courage in applying, noting that while only one could be chosen, it does not diminish their contributions or potential. She then congratulated Dr. Won Pat.

Dr. Guthertz congratulated Dr. Won Pat and agreed that GDOE's many dedicated employees often go unrecognized, despite keeping 24,000 students across 39 schools running each day. She praised Dr. Swanson for stepping in during a difficult time and noted that GDOE constantly faces unexpected challenges due to external conditions. She warned that competition for local funding is increasing, with priority shifting to the hospital and other agencies, meaning GDOE will need strong advocacy as federal funds decline. She emphasized the crucial role of employees in helping the department manage these pressures. She also commended all superintendent applicants and shared her own experience of once being selected but unable to serve due to former laws affecting foreign graduates. She respected the law, did not challenge it, and noted it was later changed. She assured the public that Board members made their decision carefully, considering candidates' backgrounds and the department's needs. She stressed that GDOE now requires leadership capable of handling both internal operations and external demands, with strong networking skills, assertiveness, and the ability to maintain positive relationships.

Mrs. Angel thanked all superintendent applicants and acknowledged the difficulty of the Board's responsibility in selecting a leader. She congratulated Dr. Won Pat and welcomed her to the role.

Dr. Okada expressed deep appreciation to Dr. Swanson for his leadership and hard work in guiding the department and encouraging staff to step up, including applying for the superintendent position. She praised the passion shown by superintendent applicants and acknowledged Dr. Swanson's commitment to students and GDOE. She welcomed Dr. Won Pat, expressing confidence in her ability to handle the work ahead, and urged colleagues to support both Dr. Swanson and Dr. Won Pat. She emphasized that GDOE's progress—financial stability and meeting student needs—requires collaboration among the Board, staff, and partners like Senator Vince Borja. She looks forward to working together to move the department forward.

Mr. Sablan said the Board's decision lifted a heavy burden from him, noting he had prayed for guidance. He emphasized that the matter is settled, and now the focus should be on working together for the children. He acknowledged Dr. Won Pat's commitment to putting students first and assured her that, as chair for the next two months, because there is another election of new officers in January, he and the Board will support a smooth transition with Dr. Swanson. He also expressed eagerness to continue the initiatives started by Dr. Swanson, whom Dr. Won Pat is succeeding.

Dr. McNinch motioned, seconded by Dr. Guthertz, to move the Guam Education Board Regular Meeting to Tuesday, November 25, 2025, 4 pm. The Board voted by voice with a vote of 8-0. The motion passed.

V. Announcements & Adjournment

Mr. Sablan noted that the next Board meeting is scheduled for November 18 but proposed moving it to November 25, 2025, due to some members' off-island trips or scheduling conflicts, and asked if the Board agreed.

Dr. McNinch said he was going off-island, but he can attend through Zoom.

Mr. Sablan acknowledged. He asked Ms. Baleto if she could join through Zoom.

Ms. Baleto said she could.

Dr. McNinch motioned, seconded by Dr. Guthertz, to move the Guam Education Board Regular Meeting to Tuesday, November 25, 2025, 4 pm. The Board voted by voice with a vote of 8-0. The motion passed.

The Board adjourned at 2:54 pm.

MINUTES SUBMITTED BY:


KATHLEEN LAMORENA
Administrative Officer


Date: 11/28/2025

MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 6, 2025, SPECIAL BOARD MEETING:

- ☒ Approved as submitted
() Approved subject to corrections
() Other: _____


ANGEL R. SABLAN
GEB Chair

Date: 12/16/25


K. ERIK SWANSON, Ph.D.
Executive Secretary/GDOE Superintendent

Date: 12/16/25