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CLINTON — Much of the way members of the East Feliciana Parish School Board voted at Tuesday’s meeting seemed to be motivated by the race of the individual members, although black members said race was not a factor.

The first apparently racially divided issue the board voted on was whether to fund for one month the salary of a school bus driver to shuttle local college students to Southern University.

White board member Gerry Nettles complained that in light of the board’s half million dollar deficit, the board could not afford to take on any responsibility other than to provide for the education of children grades K-12.

“I’m not against this bus; I just don’t see how we can afford it,” Nettles said.

Jefferson said students are dropping out of Southern “because they don’t have a way there.” Jefferson made a motion calling for the board to pay the driver’s salary for one month.

After lengthy argument on both sides, Jefferson’s motion passed with all six black members voting for the motion and five white members voting against it. White board member Vice President Stafford Marcantel abstained.

Later in the meeting the voting apparently again was divided on racial lines as the board debated a list of 16 teacher appointments recommended by Superintendent Sherley Poole.

Although some black board members voted for some of the white teachers and against black teachers, the vote was again, predominantly, on racial lines. The board first voted 6 blacks against 6 whites on a motion to approve the entire list. But because of the tie, the vote failed.

Board members then voted on each appointee and approved more than half. But Supervisor of Instruction Frances Hunt, who made the recommendations to Poole, made an impassioned speech to the board and urged members to reconsider the nomination since the parish has few state certified teachers from which to choose.

“We do not have certified teachers who want to teach in this parish.” Hunt said. “I have to deal in law. . . . The law says I have to hire teachers with certificates and if I don’t get enough, I have to advertise and hire those without certificates.

“I know you think I am a racist, but you’re dead wrong about that,” Hunt said. “I’m talking to three more teachers now who are black.” He said the list of resignations the board approved earlier in the meeting were all white.

“I’m trying to maintain a ratio that’s at least half and half (black and white)” Hunt said. He said that 67 percent of the teachers in the parish are black.

The board then voted to hire the entire list of appointees.

Black board member David Robertson, who earlier in the discussion urged the board to go into executive session to discuss the matter, said he would vote for the entire list of teachers. “This is not a black-white issue,” Robertson said. “I voted against these teachers because we couldn’t go into executive session, so I couldn’t say why.”

“I voted against black just the same as I voted against white,” Jefferson said.

Black board president Robert King said he voted against the complete list because “somewhere down the road we’re going to have to be better informed” about recommendations for teachers. “I don’t care about color.”

In other action the board voted to hold a special meeting on Sept. 11 to discuss adoption of a proposed budget submitted by Poole. Poole’s budget shows a total deficit of about $600,000.