

The Effingham County Board of Education met in special session on January 18, 2018 at 6:00 p.m. at South Effingham Middle School with the following members present: F. Lamar Allen, Beth Helmly, Vickie Decker, Robert Grant and Troy K. Alford.

The purpose of this meeting was to discuss upcoming redistricting plans

Board Chair F. Lamar Allen called the meeting to order.

Superintendent Randy Shearouse opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and advised that the final decision on the redistricting plan would be voted on at the February 7, 2018 board meeting.

Dr. Shearouse discussed the rapid growth in the school system over the last few years and how this has impacted school enrollment.

Dr. Shearouse also explained School Choice and how this would be made available to those impacted by the district changes. He stated that all of the schools will be open for School Choice next year.

The Superintendent introduced Assistant Transportation Coordinator Eric Harris who presented a PowerPoint Presentation explaining the rationale of the district changes. Mr. Harris and Dr. Shearouse answered questions from the audience.

Superintendent Shearouse asked for comments from the audience.

Ms. Latasha Triplet asked if there had been any considerations to children being moved when they had been in the same school since Pre-K and now in third grade to only be snatched up and sent to another school. Dr. Shearouse explained that the rapid growth in the county, and especially in the south end of the county, pushed South Effingham Middle School's enrollment to go considerably higher than the other two middle schools. He added that in order for the three middle schools to have even enrollment, and still leave room for new students, redistricting was necessary.

A gentleman asked how the board planned to handle the bus situation, especially when a subdivision is divided so that there could be 3 different buses running a route that should only take two. He stressed that there would be more fuel and he didn't feel that was the wisest choice to spend tax payer's money. Dr. Shearouse explained that the hope is not to redistrict again for five years. He then stated that there is no way to predict which areas would be affected by growth, but currently the south end of the county is having the fastest growth in the system. He then asked if transportation would be provided for any school choice students. Dr. Shearouse stated that normally we do not provide transportation.

Mr. Scott Fields wanted to know the number of kids moving from South Effingham Middle. He stated that this move will really put him in a bind, as a single parent, having to purchase new uniforms. Dr. Shearouse reiterated that school choice would be available. Mr. Fields also stated he doesn't have the option of school choice due to the fact that he has to leave for work too early and works 10-hour days.

Ms. Forbes stated that she moved to the area so that her children would attend South Effingham Elementary, South Middle and South High schools. Moving her children would cause them to travel 18 miles to school instead of the 11 they currently travel. She stated that the extra bus travel would cost more due to using more fuel.

Mr. Yi Ji stated he was very concerned about his children moving to another school. His children felt comfortable in their current school with knowing their friends, teachers, etc. He felt this would hurt the students.

Ms. Kim Kilborn stated that as a single parent she relied on the support system of her neighbors and depended on them to allow her children to be involved in school activities. She stated she didn't think any of the schools in Effingham were "bad schools". The problem with dividing a neighborhood into two schools would not allow this support system to continue. Ms. Kilborn also asked if the system was prepared for the building trends going on right now in the county, and had any preparations been made so that redistricting would not be required again in a year or so. Dr. Shearouse stated that we do keep up with areas that are growing, but there is no way to have an exact number of growth possibilities. The board feels confident that we will not have to do this again for about five years.

Ms. Ashley Brown stated that her child was moved in the last redistricting and ended up being on the bus two hours a day.

Ms. Elizabeth Grant stated that her oldest daughter has transitional issues and she was very concerned how this would affect her. Dr. Shearouse stated that she could still apply for school choice.

Ms. Lorraine Alicea asked the board to consider moving the redistricting line to the second railroad crossing instead of the first one on Goshen Road. She also asked if exceptions could be made so that if there is a middle school and high school student they would not be separated. Dr. Shearouse reiterated the need to balance enrollments.

Mr. Nathan Coffee asked about future redistricting. He also said that if there is a SEMS and a SEHS student is in the same family, if they should be exempted from the redistricting.

Another parent stated that he has a special needs student that attends the Learning Tree House and redistricting him/her would cause major problems for them when trying to find somewhere

else to place this student after school. Dr. Shearouse asked this parent to give his information to Eric Harris after the meeting.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Board Chair F. Lamar Allen thanked everyone for coming and stated that the regularly scheduled board meeting would begin in 5 minutes. He invited anyone that would like to stay.

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F. Lamar Allen, Chairman

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Dr. Randy Shearouse, Superintendent