MINUTES OF
THE WILSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
SPECIAL MEETING
OCTOBER 28, 2021

The Wilson County Board of Education held a Special Meeting on Thursday, October 28, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. in the Administrative Office, 113 N. Tarboro Street. Chairman Dr. Christine Fitch called the meeting to order at 1:06 p.m. with the following members present:

Dr. Christine L. Fitch, Chairman
Henry E. Mercer, Vice-Chairman
Velma Barnes
Beverly Boyette
Blake Boykin
Rhyan Breen
Dr. Lane B. Mills, Secretary

The meeting was livestreamed through the Wilson County Schools (WCS) YouTube Channel. The public could also view the meeting through links on the WCS Facebook, Instagram and Twitter pages and the WCS website.

Chairman Fitch announced that face coverings are required to be worn during the Board meeting. Face masks were available for those who did not have one.

Others present were Associate Superintendent Dr. Cheryl Wilson, Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Dr. Norris Parker, Assistant Director of Maintenance Greg Woodard, Director of Public Relations Amber Lynch, Operations Research and Education Laboratory (OREd) Program Manager Thomas Dudley, OREd Research Associate Waugh Wright, Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent and Board Clerk Linda Horrison, as well as Board Attorney Katie Cornetto and *The Wilson Times* Reporter Olivia Neeley. OREd team members Terry Karlson and Joy Davis participated in the meeting remotely via the Zoom video conferencing platform.

After calling the meeting to order, Dr. Fitch asked for approval of the agenda. Mr. Mercer asked to amend the agenda to examine the school calendar and how November 12 is categorized. Many districts in the state are adding a mental health day to the calendar in November. The Board was advised by Ms. Cornetto not to discuss this item today since the public is not aware of it in advance being that it was not on the agenda. She suggested the Board call another special meeting to discuss the school calendar. Dr. Fitch polled the Board members and Ms. Boyette and Dr. Fitch were not interested in having a special called meeting to discuss the school calendar; Ms. Barnes, Mr. Boykin, Mr. Mercer and Mr. Breen were all in agreement to meet. The item will be placed discussed at a future meeting.

Ms. Powell joined the meeting at 1:11 p.m.

Mr. Mercer made the motion, seconded by Mr. Breen, that the Board approve the agenda as presented for this Special Board Meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Dr. Fitch led the Pledge of Allegiance, followed by a moment of silence.

Under Chairman's Comments, Dr. Fitch welcomed The Wilson Times Reporter Olivia Neeley to the Board meeting. Ms. Neeley attended the September Board meeting and will attend future meetings replacing Drew Wilson. Mr. Wilson and Ms. Neeley have swapped reporting beats at *The Wilson Times*. Mr. Wilson will now be covering the crime beat.

Dr. Fitch shared that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss long-range facilities planning for WCS. She commented that this item should be taken very seriously as the Board discusses utilization of our facilities. Dr. Fitch shared that the Wilson County Commissioners have asked the Board of Education to examine our facilities due to declining enrollment.

Under Long-Range Facilities Planning for WCS, the Board has begun the process of determining the long-term facility needs and priorities for WCS. The Operations Research and Education Lab (OREd), which is a company through North Carolina State University, completed an Integrated Planning for School and Community (IPSAC) Study for WCS and shared the report with the Board of Education in September 2020. The district has been working with OREd to conduct research on facility usage and projected enrollment. The purpose of today's discussion was for OREd to present draft scenarios and recommendations regarding the district's facility needs and usage based on the forecast and utilization which could involve assignment changes and consolidation. The recommendations are preliminary and a starting point for discussion.

Mr. Dudley shared information with the Board that included the following:

- Integrated Planning for School and Community (IPSAC) – a data-focused membership and utilization forecast study for WCS. OREd Services:
    - Land Use Studies / GIS Analysis
    - Membership Forecasts
    - Out-of-Capacity Analysis
    - School Site Optimization
    - Attendance Zone Optimization
- Membership Overview – Average Daily Membership
    - 2016-17: 12015
    - 2017-18: 11493
    - 2018-19: 11111
    - 2019-20: 10896
    - 2020-21: 10264
    - 2021-22: 10197
- Membership Overview: Elementary Utilization Map
- Potential Solutions for the Board of Education
    - Consider potential solutions including facility closure and student reassignment
    - Review exploratory assignment scenario
    - Weigh assignment priorities, for example:
        - Balancing utilization
        - Maximizing student proximity to schools
        - Demographic balancing
        - Maintaining feeder patterns
        - Respecting neighborhoods
        - Minimizing reassignment impact

        - Busing efficiency
        - Facility age and condition
- Current Elementary Attendance Zones
    - 14 elementary schools
    - Utilization at the elementary level is roughly 65%
- Preliminary Elementary Scenario: Draft 1
    - Closure of three elementary schools: Stantonsburg, Winstead and Vick
    - Utilization system-wide becomes 80%
    - Scenarios should be considered draft until a comprehensive review by WCS transportation staff for accessibility, student safety, and other logistical concerns

Currently, WCS elementary schools are operating at an average of 65 percent utilization, which means there are schools serving far fewer students than they were built to serve. Underutilization contributes to staffing and funding challenges. The preliminary draft suggested the closure of three schools in the future – Stantonsburg Elementary, Vick Elementary and Winstead Elementary. In that scenario, students at Stantonsburg Elementary would attend Barnes Elementary; students at Vick Elementary would attend Hearne Elementary; and students at Winstead Elementary would attend Vinson-Bynum Elementary. There would also be situations where students from these three schools might attend another elementary school depending on where they lived. The preliminary draft scenario would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 80 percent. In making the recommendation, OREd weighed several assignment priorities.

The Board members had numerous questions and concerns with the preliminary draft, such as how long the students at those three schools would be on buses to travel to their new school. The Board asked OREd to create another option for comparison to present at a future meeting in November. Community engagement is also important in the long-range facilities planning process. Once the Board agrees on several viable options for increasing utilization, the options will be presented to the public, which will most likely occur in January.

There being no further business at 2:35 p.m., Mr. Breen made the motion, seconded by Mr. Mercer, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously.

Christine L. Fitch

Dr. Christine L. Fitch, Chairman

Dr. Lane B. Mills, Secretary