MINUTES OF
THE WILSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORK SESSION
NOVEMBER 22, 2021

The Wilson County Board of Education held a Work Session on Monday, November 22, 2021, at 1:00 p.m. in the Administrative Office, 113 N. Tarboro Street. Chairman Dr. Christine Fitch called the meeting to order at 1:02 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
Debora Powell
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, Director of Maintenance Mark Letchworth, Director of Public Relations Amber Lynch, Assistant Director of Transportation Danny Williams, Assistant Director of Maintenance Greg Woodard, 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. There were 8 citizens in attendance.

After calling the meeting to order, Dr. Fitch asked for approval of the agenda. Ms. Powell made the motion, seconded by Mr. Mercer, that the agenda be approved. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

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

Under Chairman's Comments, 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.

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 research will assist the Board in planning for the future, which could include the consolidation and closure of schools. The purpose of today's discussion was for OREd to present draft scenarios and recommendations regarding the district's facility needs and usage. The information presented by OREd is preliminary at this time and no final decisions have been made.

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.

At the October 28, 2021 Special Board Meeting, OREd presented one preliminary draft scenario to the Board (titled Scenario A: Draft 1), which suggested the closure of three elementary schools in the future - Stantonsburg, Vick and Winstead. 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 may be assigned to attend another elementary school depending on where they lived. Scenario A would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 80 percent. The schools absorbing additional students – Barnes Elementary, Hearne Elementary and Vinson-Bynum Elementary - would be at 90 percent capacity and still have room for growth.

During the November 22, 2021 Work Session, OREd presented a second preliminary draft scenario to the Board (titled Scenario B: Draft 1), which suggested the closure of two elementary schools in the future - Stantonsburg and Winstead. In that scenario, students at Stantonsburg Elementary would attend Barnes Elementary, and students at Winstead Elementary would attend Vinson-Bynum Elementary. Scenario B would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 74 percent. The schools absorbing additional students - Barnes Elementary and Vinson-Bynum Elementary - would be at 90 percent capacity and still have room for growth.

In making the recommendation of the two scenarios, OREd weighed several assignment priorities - balancing utilization and demographics; maximizing student proximity to schools, maintaining feeder patterns, respecting neighborhoods; and facility age and condition. The Board members discussed the two scenarios and asked OREd and the Administration to work on the following information to be brought back to the Board during the next scheduled Work Session:

- Bus transportation information for students whose school would close, which includes how long they would be on the bus to their new school, the distance the buses would travel and how the changes would affect bus efficiency scores.
- Housing development information for the city and county to see where future growth is expected. Mr. Boykin mentioned several developments planned for Stantonsburg. OREd received information from the county planning office earlier in the day but did not have time to go through the information prior to the Work Session. Mr. Breen also wanted to see how the current student population density map compared with the housing development information.

- Ms. Boyette advised that she would like to see a third scenario with the closure of three elementary schools - Stantonsburg Elementary, Hearne Elementary and Winstead Elementary.

The Board indicated that a joint meeting with the Wilson County Board of Commissioners may be beneficial to learn what plans the Commissioners have for the county as far as growth and development once this information is presented at the next Work Session.

Dr. Mills shared the following information:

- It is difficult to put a timeframe on the process of consolidating or closing schools. He shared that he did not foresee any school consolidations or closings during the remainder of this school year or the 2022-2023 school year.
- By factoring in attrition and vacancies, he shared that we should not lose staff if schools are consolidated or closed - though positions may shift.
- Community engagement is important in the long-range facilities planning process and once the Board agrees on multiple scenarios for increasing utilization, the options will be presented to the public. It was originally indicated that a public forum would be held in January, but the timeframe of the meeting depends on when the Board decides on the multiple scenarios.

There being no further business at 2:09 p.m., Mr. Breen made the motion, seconded by Mr. Mercer, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

The next Work Session is scheduled for December 8, 2021 at 3 p.m.

Christine L. Fitch

Dr. Christine L. Fitch, Chairman

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Dr. Lane B. Mills, Secretary