MINUTES OF
THE WILSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
WORK SESSION
DECEMBER 8, 2021

The Wilson County Board of Education held a Work Session on Wednesday, December 8, 2021, at 3:00 p.m. in the Administrative Office, 113 N. Tarboro Street. Chairman Dr. Christine Fitch called the meeting to order at 3:01 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 member Terry Karlson participated in the meeting remotely via the Zoom video conferencing platform. There were 16 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 Work Session 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 the utilization of the schools. At the last Work Session, the Board asked OREd to bring additional options and scenarios to the next meeting. Dr. Fitch thanked Mr. Dudley and his staff. She also thanked the citizens in attendance and those watching online.

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 additional 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.

OREd shared that based on a review of historic membership data over the past six years, WCS had a decline of 2000 students. Currently, WCS elementary schools are operating at an average of 60 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 previous work sessions and special meetings, OREd forecasted the utilization at 65 percent, but the percentage has changed slightly with updated enrollment data. The Board will need to consider potential solutions including facility closures and student reassignment.

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. Scenario A would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 74 percent. OREd had previously forecasted the utilization at 80 percent, but the percentage has changed slightly with updated enrollment data.

At 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. Scenario B would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 68 percent. This percentage is lower than previously stated because of the updated enrollment data. OREd had previously forecasted the utilization at 74 percent, but the percentage has changed slightly with updated enrollment data.

During the December 8, 2021 Work Session, OREd presented two additional preliminary draft scenarios to the Board (titled Scenario C: Draft 1 and Scenario D: Draft 1). Scenario C: Draft 1 suggested the closure of three elementary schools in the future – Stantonsburg, Winstead and Hearne. Scenario C would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 74 percent. Scenario D: Draft 1 suggested the closure of two elementary schools in the future – Stantonsburg and Winstead. Scenario D would bring the district's utilization of elementary schools to 68 percent. In Scenario D, a portion of Stantonsburg Elementary students would be reassigned to Barnes and Lee Woodard Elementary.

In making the recommendation of the four 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 asked ORED to cease working on scenarios until an updated forecast is done to include current housing, new subdivisions and housing starts in Stantonsburg and other areas of the city and county. ORED is currently using housing information that is

almost two years old, and the Board is concerned that there are new housing developments in the works that ORED has not included in the scenarios. The forecast will also include the projected number of students in grades K-5 in those areas.

It was the Board's consensus for Dr. Mills to connect with ORED to discuss when the new forecast will be completed. Once he has a projected completion date, the Board will schedule a work session to review the information and restart the long-range facilities planning discussion.

There being no further business at 3:57 p.m., Mr. Breen made the motion, seconded by Mr. Mercer, to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed unanimously, 7-0.

Dr. Christine L. Fitch, Chairman

Dr. Lane B. Mills, Secretary