5 Reasonable People – Supt. Comments for BOE Meeting 6/6/11

Thank you Mr. DeBerry, members of the Board. I told you last month that the budget was getting serious and I felt I needed to type my comments rather than shoot from the hip. You can tell it is even more serious this month as I not only have typed my comments but I have given it a title. I am calling my comments this week "5 Reasonable People". I know some of you may have read about or seen the movie 12 Angry Men. It is about a jury that looks beyond the obvious, really digs into the facts and makes the best decision, the right decision in the end. Well, that is where we are with the NC budget. We need to identify 5 reasonable people in the NC state legislature. I'll get back to that in just a moment.

The bottom line is something has just got to be done about this proposed budget. The General Assembly is getting ready to take the riskiest gamble ever perpetrated on the citizens of North Carolina with this budget. I did not choose the word perpetrated lightly. I chose it specifically. What's getting ready to happen should be a crime. So this is my shot at doing something. You might ask what one young Superintendent from little old Montgomery County can do. You may notice that Mr. Whitley is here taping my comments tonight. We are going to post it on the web and email a copy to our County Commissioners, every House rep and Senator in the state, the governor, and we might even send a copy to President Obama if we can find his email address. That's been a tough one to get. But we think everybody in the world needs to know what the state of North Carolina is getting ready to do to its children. Some might find what I have to say is inappropriate, but the time has come to take the gloves off. I feel I will be saying what needs to be said. If I offend anyone, I apologize beforehand.

The basic premise behind this budget is that it is a business model. Part of the rhetoric behind this sham of a budget is that it will allow the state government to operate as a business. The General Assembly is comprised of more business people than educators so I guess they think us poor education folk don't understand how business works. Now, some of you might not know this because I do have a doctorate in education, but I do not have a master's degree in education. I got my Master's degree in Business Administration. Now, when I was getting my MBA I

learned all I needed to about business and I want to teach you all you need to know for a business degree in 15 seconds. If your business is operating at a loss, much like the state is with the projected deficit, there are two things you can do to remedy that situation. The first, you can cut costs. I think every business in the country can attest to this fact with having to cut costs, which usually means people. We have seen that in education over the last few years as well. The second way you can remedy the deficit situation is to raise revenue. I think we have all seen this in the business world with the higher prices we have to pay for gas and groceries and such. In the government, revenue is raised through taxes. I think we all agree here that raising taxes is not the best way to get through this current deficit. So, I think everyone has been expecting that we were going to have to cut costs and we as a school system have been preparing for that for some months. You all now qualify for a business degree. If it ain't going well you cut costs or raise revenue. It took me two years of hard, hard study to learn that concept. Well, this new business model currently being developed by the General Assembly is that we are going to cut costs AND cut revenue. They are cutting revenue through the elimination of one cent on the sales tax. In the face of the worst deficit in state history, they want to cut revenue and make the cuts worse. They are referring to this as operating the state like a business. If your business was a billion dollars in the hole and you were facing massive layoffs, would you say you wanted to cut revenue just so you could shed a few more thousand people? I think not. Yet, that is what is being sold to North Carolinians as a sound business model. That is a business model that leads to bankruptcy. The unfortunate recipient of this bankruptcy is the education system and our most vulnerable population…our children.

Here is where we need 5 reasonable people. Last week the media was reporting that the legislature was bragging that they now have a "veto-proof" budget by 5 votes. It seems they would prefer to brag about "beating" the governor than providing for our children. I have met the governor a couple of times and she is a nice lady, but I do not agree with everything she says and does as I am sure if she knew my work at that level that she would not agree with how I approach everything. But, I do agree with her intense focus on education. She believes education is the key to job creation in our state. I believe the same thing in Montgomery County as you all have heard me say on numerous occasions.

Everyone wants more jobs but it takes a significant investment in education to make that happen. The Governor has vowed to veto this budget and I encourage her to do so. Our General Assembly has been more worried about accumulating a "veto-proof" majority on the budget rather than if they were doing the right thing for our children. I hear them saying they are protecting the classroom while passing down discretionary cuts that will require this Board to cut more teachers than they claim to be "gifting" us with. They continue to think, quite arrogantly I think, that educators are stupid, that we can't see past what they are trying to do. I even saw an email from the Senate attacking teachers, attacking the NCAE. I can only tell them that they are poking a bear when they do that and they can keep on poking it because next November that bear's probably gonna poke back.

SO, we need to know, in the entire General Assembly of the State of North Carolina, are there 5 reasonable people among you in the whole bunch. Are there 5 among you that will actually read the budget bill and say this is wrong for NC, wrong for our children. Is it unreasonable to allow one cent in sales tax to remain in place until after this recession, say when the state might have a surplus, and cut it then. Would that not make more sense?

Here on the screen is a picture of one of the precious children we have here in Montgomery County. I want everyone in the audience to repeat after me while you look at this picture…"You are not worth a penny." Come on louder. "You are not worth a penny." I have trouble saying that to a picture of a child, much less to the actual child. Yet, that is what the state legislature is doing. Here's another picture and another. Is that child not worth a penny. Or that one. Or that one. Right over there is Montgomery County's penny jar. As you can see, it is several pennies short to begin with. This budget will cut 36 positions from our staff. I'm not willing to gamble with a child's future over a penny, are any of you?

We need 5 state legislators to step across the aisle, join your colleagues who have already voted against this budget, and support the Governor's veto. Are there 5 among you that are reasonable enough to dig into the facts and do what's right for this state and our children. I guess we are fixin' to find out.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.