

Hamlet, North Carolina  
January 28, 2025

The Richmond County Board of Education met in a quarterly work session on January 28, at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the Central Office in Hamlet, North Carolina.

The members present: Cory Satterfield, Chairman, Bobbie Sue Ormsby, Vice-Chairman, Jerry Ethridge, Ronald Tillman, Daryl Mason, Scotty Baldwin and Bess Shuler.

The administrators present: Dr. Joe Ferrell, Superintendent, Dr. Julian Carter, Associate Superintendent of Auxiliary Services of Operations and Athletics, Dr. Kate Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, Dr. Tesha Isler, Executive Director of Human Resources, Dawn Jordan, Executive Director of Finance, Cameron Whitley, Executive Director of Communications, Steven King, Director of Maintenance, and Eva Dubuisson, Board Attorney. Melvin Ingram, Assistant Superintendent of School Safety and Support Services was absent.

### **Meeting Commencement**

After noting that a quorum was present, Cory Satterfield, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 5:04 p.m.

### **Facility Needs Presentation**

Dr. Julian Carter presented a detailed presentation of the Richmond County Schools Facilities Study, outlining current conditions and future considerations for several schools in the district. The discussion emphasized the need for facility improvements to meet evolving educational and operational requirements.

### **Ellerbe Middle School: Closure and Consolidation with Mineral Springs to Create a Pre-K – 8 School**

Background:

Ellerbe Middle School was originally built in 1949, with subsequent additions in 1950, 1957, and 1989. The school currently employs seven core teachers, a principal, and a full range of support staff.

Current Condition:

- The school building is in good condition, with a recently installed roof.
- The grounds are well-maintained, and the athletic fields are more than adequate.
- The auditorium is one of the best maintained in the district.
- The front office and media center area are clean, neat, and in great condition.

Challenges and Considerations:

- Ellerbe Middle School currently has a declining student population of 198 students.
- The facility is aging, and eventually, the main school building will require replacement.

Proposed Development Plan:

- Utilize the existing Mineral Springs gym, media center, and cafeteria while constructing a new middle school wing.

- The proposed new wing would include 12 regular classrooms, a dedicated music room, restrooms, a janitor's closet, and a workroom, ensuring adequate space for student and staff needs.

#### Things to Consider:

1. What is the minimum number of students needed to maintain economic viability for the school?
2. How will this project be funded?
  - Potential funding source: Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. The grant requires a 5% local match.
3. What is the estimated cost of the project?
  - Approximately \$10,000,000 - \$16,000,000.
4. Current Operational Costs:
  - Annual heating and cooling costs: \$77,000
  - No significant upcoming repair or upgrade expenses anticipated.
  - High labor costs relative to student enrollment, though state funding covers the majority. Potential cost savings could be realized by eliminating redundant positions.

#### Comments, Questions & Answers:

Chairman Satterfield asked if the cafeteria at Mineral Springs Elementary School is large enough to accommodate the additional students if the school were converted to a K-8 school and Ellerbe Middle School's students were moved there.

→ Dr. Carter responded that, while some adjustments to the lunch schedules would be necessary, it could work.

### **Fairview Heights Elementary School**

#### Background:

Fairview Heights Elementary School was originally built in 1950, with an addition at the rear completed in 1969. Recent improvements include:

- A new detached gymnasium built using ESSER funds, dedicated on January 17, 2025.
- A detached media center built in 2009.
- A chiller replacement three years ago.
- Completion of the final phase of roof replacement last year.

#### Challenges and Considerations:

- The school is in good condition with no major renovations or repairs necessary in the foreseeable future.
- The original building, at 74 years old, will eventually require replacement.
- There is ample land on-site to construct a new classroom building, potentially integrating the media center and gymnasium.

#### Proposed Development Plan:

- A new classroom building could be constructed on the existing playground, incorporating the media center and gymnasium.
- Upon completion, the current building could be demolished, making space for new playgrounds, parking lots, and pickup lanes.
- The newly built gymnasium has flexibility for expansion into a gymnasium.

#### Things to Consider:

1. How will this project be funded?
  - Potential funding source: Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. The grant requires a 5% local match.
2. How many classrooms will be necessary?
  - The current building has at least 28 classrooms.
3. Should an auditorium be built, or should the gymnasium be expanded?
  - This decision will significantly affect project costs.
4. What is the estimated cost of the project?
  - Approximately \$35,000,000 - \$42,000,000.
5. How can the board justify building a new Fairview Heights Elementary School instead of LJ Bell?
  - Fairview Heights was built a few years earlier than LJ Bell.

#### Comments, Questions & Answers:

Dr. Carter noted that an architect suggested demolishing an older building on the Fairview Heights Elementary School property to make space for a new classroom building. This new building could then be constructed in a way that connects it to both the media center and the newly built gym.

Ronald Tillman asked about the location in relation to parking, drop-off, and pick-up areas for students, noting that parking, traffic flow, and accessibility for parents are already tight. He expressed concern about ensuring the safety of both students and parents.

→ Dr. Carter responded that he could not provide a definite answer until the exact placement of the new building is determined.

Scotty Baldwin asked for clarification, confirming that the \$35 to \$42 million estimate covers only new construction and does not account for any demolition.

→ Dr. Carter confirmed that the estimate is solely for new construction. Steven King added that the cost of demolition would be approximately \$350,000 to \$500,000.

### **LJ Bell Elementary School**

#### Background:

LJ Bell Elementary was originally built in 1952, with a detached Kindergarten pod added in 1976. Recent improvements include:

- The school has a relatively new all-metal roof.
- In 2011, a new gym and classroom building was constructed.
- K pod has a new roof and two new heating and air units.

#### Challenges and Considerations:

- The original 72-year-old building will require replacement in the future.
- Chiller for the main building is less than 8 years old, but:
  - Chiller pipes need replacement
  - Fan coil units in all classrooms need replacement
  - Estimated cost: \$700,000 - \$1.2 million

#### Proposed Development Plan:

- Potential construction sites include:
  - Existing playground (low area)

- Upper parking lot (would significantly disrupt school operation)
  - Current school location (requires trailers for temporary classrooms)
- New gym and Kindergarten pod could be incorporated into the design.

#### Things to Consider:

1. How will this project be funded?
  - Potential funding source: Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. The grant requires a 5% local match.
2. How many classrooms will be necessary?
  - Current building has at least 28 classrooms.
3. Should an auditorium be built or a gymnasium?
  - This decision will significantly affect the cost.
4. What is the estimated cost of the project?
  - Approximately \$35,000,000 - \$42,000,000
5. How can the board justify building a new LJ Bell instead of Fairview Heights?
  - LJ Bell has three aging mobile units and aging pipes and HVAC coils.

#### Comments, Questions & Answers:

Given the land constraints at LJ Bell Elementary School, Chairman Satterfield asked whether it would be feasible to completely gut the interior of the existing building and reconstruct it within the existing structure.

- Steven King, Director of Maintenance, responded that after discussing this possibility with an architect, several challenges arise. For example, if the school's kitchen were fully remodeled—removing all cabinets, counters, and appliances—the cast iron drain lines beneath the slab would remain an issue. These pipes corrode internally over time, and since they are embedded in the slab, they are difficult to access or replace. Additionally, even with a full interior renovation, the building would still have outdated plumbing and insufficient insulation compared to a new structure. While not impossible, King emphasized that a newly constructed facility would provide a better long-term outcome.
- Dr. Carter suggested preserving the existing sections of the school that are in good condition while demolishing and rebuilding the surrounding areas. He mentioned that an architect confirmed this approach could be a viable option.

### **Rockingham Middle School Gymnasium**

#### Background:

- The RMS gymnasium was originally constructed in 1940.
- Recent improvements include:
  - Roof remodel
  - New air conditioning system (within the last 10 years)
- No other major renovations or repairs planned for the foreseeable future.

#### Challenges and Considerations:

- The gym is 84 years old and will eventually need to be replaced.
- The school is landlocked with no additional space for a new gymnasium.
- Temporary alternative gym facilities during construction include:
  - Ninth Grade Academy
  - West Rockingham Elementary
  - Washington Street Elementary

- LJ Bell Elementary

#### Proposed Development Plan:

- New gym would be built on the existing gym grounds.
- To accommodate the physical education department, the facility should include:
  - Four classrooms
  - Two locker rooms
  - Bathrooms
  - Storage area
  - Two coaches' offices

#### Things to Consider:

1. How will this project be funded?
  - Potential funding source: Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. The grant requires a 5% local match.
2. How many classrooms will be necessary?
  - Four classrooms will need to be replicated.
3. What is the estimated cost of this project?
  - Approximately \$6,000,000 - \$12,000,000.

### **West Rockingham Pre-K Center**

#### Background:

- The RCS administration has considered the benefits of establishing a dedicated Pre-K center.
- This center would consist of at least 11 Pre-K classes, along with:
  - Pre-K Director
  - Pre-K Academic Coach
  - EC Pre-School Program
  - Testing and Play-Based Assessments Classroom

#### Challenges and Considerations:

- The state has not provided expansion funds in years, and any expansion would need approval through NC Pre-K.
- If LJ Bell undergoes a construction project, West Rockingham Elementary could be repurposed for this center.
- This change would require redistricting 330 students to LJ Bell, and East Rockingham and possibly Washington Street.
- This may require some redistricting if Washington Street is needed.
- The Pre-K classrooms at Mineral Springs will remain there because the distance to West Rockingham School is too far for students to travel.

#### Things to Consider:

1. What would it cost to relocate West Rockingham students?
  - Costs depend on the number of classrooms added to LJ Bell.
  - Increased transportation costs for buses.
2. What costs would be incurred to relocate Pre-K students to West Rockingham?
  - New playground construction.
  - Additional fencing.
  - Lowering cabinets and sinks for Pre-K accessibility.
3. How will this move affect Pre-K students and parents?

- Some families may face longer commutes.
- 4. Who would attend the Pre-K center?
  - All Pre-K students, unless distance concerns lead to a reduction to 9 classrooms.
  - If fewer students attend, the cost-effectiveness of this move may be questioned.

#### Comments, Questions & Answers:

Given these challenges, Dr. Carter emphasized that prioritizing other projects is essential and does not see a significant benefit in moving forward with this project at this time.

### **JROTC Building**

#### Background:

- JROTC at Richmond Senior High School is a valuable program that could benefit significantly from a dedicated facility.
- A dedicated JROTC building would provide:
  - Three additional classrooms, alleviating shared space concerns.
  - A state-of-the-art training facility and recruitment tool.
  - An ideal space for hosting tournaments and events.

#### Proposed Building Features:

- Dimensions: 75' x 120'
- Facilities Included:
  - Three JROTC classrooms
  - Three instructor offices
  - Twenty-lane shooting range
  - Male and female bathrooms
  - Arms room
  - Media and simulation room
  - Data room
  - Small kitchenette (for events and celebrations)

#### Things to Consider:

1. How will this project be funded?
  - Potential funding source: Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant. The grant requires a 5% local match.
2. What is the estimated cost of this project?
  - Approximately \$575,000 - \$650,000

#### Additional Comments, Questions & Answers:

Scotty Baldwin asked whether the Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant must be used for a single project or if the district could combine an elementary school project with the JROTC project.

- Dr. Carter explained that if the district is awarded the grant, the funds must be used on one campus. However, he noted that while Rockingham Middle School and LJ Bell Elementary properties touch, they are separate campuses. The district plans to seek clarification on whether they could still qualify for funding

under a single grant, potentially securing \$52 million for the middle school to build a gym and a new school on different campuses.

Though he expressed doubt that this approach would be approved, he emphasized that they will still pursue an official ruling. As it stands, multiple projects can only be funded if they are on the same campus.

→ Chairman Satterfield added that some schools have two schools on one campus.

Chairman Satterfield stated that it is clear that the district needs a new elementary school, whether it is LJ Bell or Fairview Heights. He also noted that Ellerbe Middle School is extremely old and serves only 189 students. He suggested that for \$15–16 million, the district could potentially expand Mineral Springs to create a K-8 school. Given that the district is unlikely to receive two Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grants, he proposed applying for the grant for an elementary school and then have a meeting with county commissioners to discuss if there is a possibility to secure funding for the Mineral Springs expansion.

Chairman Satterfield stated that while a decision cannot be made tonight on which elementary school to apply for the Needs-Based Public School Capital Fund Grant, the board can agree to begin the process required for the application.

- Scotty Baldwin asked what steps are necessary to apply for the grant and whether engineer drawings are required.
- Dr. Carter explained that there is some confusion on this requirement. At a grant presentation he attended 3–4 weeks ago, officials stated that a full set of architectural plans was needed. However, in a conversation with an architect earlier that day, he was told that this is not required—several applications in recent years were successfully submitted with only basic plans.
- Dr. Carter raised concerns about the process. He questioned whether the district could hire an architect for preliminary plans—even if they are not ultimately used—to establish a basic layout for the project, similar to past school construction planning.
- Eva Dubuisson, Board Attorney, provided clarification on the process. She explained that districts take different approaches:  
Some districts hire an engineer to develop full plans, but this can be costly without knowing if the project will be funded. Others hire an architect to create a conceptual plan that verifies feasibility, which is then included in the grant application. If the district receives the grant, it can then hire an architect to finalize the design. She emphasized that the application does not have to be shovel-ready, but it must outline key details such as: project location, land ownership and general building concept.  
Once the grant is awarded, construction firms may step in to refine the project. She also mentioned that some architects assist with resubmissions if the initial grant application is not successful.

Some board members expressed concerns about what would happen to students if LJ Bell or Fairview Heights had to be demolished before a new school was built.

- Dr. Carter explained that, starting next year, the Ninth Grade Academy will transition to Richmond Senior High School, leaving the Ninth Grade Academy building vacant. This facility could temporarily house elementary students while their new school is under construction.

For example, if we apply for the grant in July, it is typically awarded in September or October, depending on when the budget is passed. Once funding is confirmed, we proceed with the project.

The design phase, which ideally takes about ten months for quality planning, would follow. Although a similar design process was completed in just three months for three structures in the past, allowing a full ten months ensures a more thorough approach.

If this timeline holds, there would be approximately one year to finalize plans and prepare for construction. A commonly used approach would be to temporarily relocate LJ Bell students to the Ninth Grade Academy while their new school is being built. Once construction is complete, the students would return to the new LJ Bell building.

For Fairview Heights, the plan would be slightly different. Students from Monroe Avenue would move to the Ninth Grade Academy as originally planned, while Fairview Heights students would temporarily relocate to Monroe Avenue during construction. This transition would ensure student safety and minimize disruptions from construction activities.

Relocating students during construction allows for the original school building to be demolished and rebuilt on the same site, which is ideal.

- Steven King pointed out; the original placement of the building was chosen carefully because it was the best spot on the land.

For both Fairview Heights and LJ Bell, rebuilding in the same location would also provide the best opportunity to preserve the auditorium. The project could be planned so that everything except the auditorium is demolished, allowing it to be renovated while a new school is built around it. This approach ensures a safer, more efficient construction process with minimal disruption.

Chairman Satterfield asked whether students could remain at their current school while a new building is constructed on the same campus.

- Dr. Carter confirmed that this is absolutely possible, but the decision on the new school's placement would need to be carefully determined.

He reiterated that, as Steven King mentioned, the best-case scenario would be to relocate students off campus during construction. This would ensure student safety, prevent potential hazards, and allow the new school to be built in the optimal location. Additionally, it would give the architect full access to the space, enabling them to develop the best possible design.

Eva Dubuisson explained that the board needs to make a motion allowing Dr. Ferrell to move forward with an RFQ to bring back recommendations to the board.

On a motion made by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Ronald Tillman, the board voted unanimously to approve the superintendent to begin the process of requesting an RFQ for potential site work at Fairview Height and LJ Bell and to do whatever he might deem necessary to bring back to the board for review.



Dr. Ferrell stated that each board member now has a draft of the 2025-26 school calendar, which includes Options 1 and 2. A survey has been distributed to staff, allowing them to vote for their preferred option. While the board usually reviews the calendar in February and votes in March, this year, a final vote must be taken in February due to mandatory training in Infinite Campus.

- Staff participation in the survey has been strong, with 330 responses so far.
- High school teachers, who are most impacted by the calendar, have been consulted, and feedback has been positive.

There being no further business, on a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Bess Shuler, Chairman Satterfield adjourned the meeting at 7:10 p.m.