

The Alleghany County Board of Commissioners and the Alleghany County Board of Education held a joint session on Monday, March 14, 2005, at 6:00pm in the Cafeteria of Alleghany High School, 404 Trojan Avenue, Sparta, NC.

Present: Chair Eldon Edwards, Vice-Chair Warren Taylor, Commissioner Graylen Blevins, Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon, Commissioner Ken Richardson, County Manager Don Adams, Clerk to the Board Karen Evans; Board of Education members Chair Charles Joines, Faron Atwood, Clarence Crouse, Betsy Dillon, Joel Souther and Superintendent Duane Davis.

Charles Joines called the meeting to order at 6:00pm and asked for a moment of silence.

Charles Joines explained the purpose of the meeting is to present facility options to the Board of Commissioners.

Chair Eldon Edwards called the meeting the order for the Commissioners.

Clarence Crouse made a motion to approve the agenda. Betsy Dillon seconded the motion. Vote 5:0.

Duane Davis welcomed everyone to the meeting. He reviewed the current status of the school system. He talked about population growth as well as new and expanded programs. He further talked about creating facility plans based on current needs and program expansions. He explained the process of starting to study about options to solve the space-needs situation especially at Sparta Elementary School including hiring Pinnacle Architect. He stated that the results of the study will be presented tonight by Frank Williams, Randy Baker and Dr. Julia Williams.

Dr. Julia Williams talked about reasons for these recommendations including programs mandated by the State, small population growth, Sparta Elementary School having the most severe needs concerning space and models for schools; PK-8<sup>th</sup> grade, PK-6<sup>th</sup> grade and 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade, PK-5<sup>th</sup> grade and 6<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade. She stated that she will present four options for the Boards to consider.

Dr. Julia Williams reviewed Option A which will create a Sparta Early Childhood Center at the Sara Lee site and convert the Sparta site to an intermediate center for grade 3-8 or an intermediate center for grade 3-6 and upper grade center for county-wide 7-8 grades. She stated that this option has recommended changes to Sparta Elementary School, Glade Creek Elementary School and Piney Creek Elementary School.

Frank Williams displayed a drawing about moving Charles Street and adding additional parking areas.

Dr. Julia Williams explained the rationale, recommendations, benefits, concerns and a summarization for Option A. (see attached)

Dr. Julia Williams explained Option B will expand all PK-8 schools to accommodate the existing population. She reviewed the rationale, recommendations, benefits, concerns and a summarization for Option B. (see attached)

Dr. Julia Williams explained Option C will build a new county-wide Middle School for grade 6-8 at a new site. She reviewed the rationale, recommendations, benefits, concerns and a summarization for Option C. (see attached)

Frank Williams showed a color sketch of another school that they were working on in North Carolina.

Dr. Julia Williams explained Option D will divide Sparta School into two schools (an elementary

school and a county-wide 7-8 grade school). She reviewed the rationale, recommendations, benefits, concerns and a summarization for Option D. (see attached)

Frank Williams showed drawings of the proposed Option D and explained that this option will be a two-level facility and will be like two separate schools in the same facility.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked if the lower level will be all classrooms.

Frank Williams explained the two-level concept in more detail and the number of potential classrooms.

Commissioner Warren Taylor and Dr. Williams talked about Option D providing enough space for the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade students.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked why the cost per square foot is different on the options.

Frank Williams explained that it is easier to control costs on a new building rather than making an old building look new and working to fit the needed amount of space into a certain area.

Chair Eldon Edwards asked why the 6<sup>th</sup> grade was omitted on Option D.

Dr. Williams explained that the area can't accommodate that many students.

Duane Davis stated that they had looked at different school set-ups and which way the students perform better. He stated that by splitting Sparta Elementary School into two separate schools, all of the benefits can be achieved. He further stated that the Board of Education reviewed these options and is recommending Option A, which is dependant upon the Sara Lee property, or Option D with Option D being the high interest option.

Chair Eldon Edwards talked about the 6<sup>th</sup> grade being included in Option D, overcrowding at Piney Creek Elementary School and Glade Creek Elementary School, and Option D would create more available classrooms at those schools.

Commissioner Graylen Blevins asked about the size dimensions for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade classrooms.

Dr. Julia Williams stated that 900 square feet for classrooms, 400 square feet for resource rooms and 1,200 square feet for classes like art and music is what is required.

Frank Williams pointed out that the PK classrooms must have a restroom in the classroom and another exit door.

Commissioner Graylen Blevins asked what the current enrollment is for the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade.

Dr. Julia Williams stated the numbers she has shows 249 for 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade with 101 at Glade Creek Elementary School and Piney Creek Elementary School and 148 at Sparta Elementary School. She stated that sixth grade would add around 100 more students.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon talked about being short on playground space at Sparta Elementary School if more property can't be purchased.

Frank Williams stated he wouldn't recommend putting any more children on the site without additional property. He talked about Charles Street is an accident waiting to happen where people come out of a building directly into the Street.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked about moving the road.

Frank Williams stated that if the other lot isn't purchased, then the road would be moved as far as possible from the school. He reviewed the drawing showing where the road is being considered.

Commissioner Warren Taylor asked how big the playground areas will be.

Frank Williams explained the play areas are 130x70, 120x200 and 110x230.

Randy Baker stated that the road drawing includes the optioned property.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked if more land becomes available, where the road would go.

Randy Baker explained that they would keep moving the road farther from the school.

John Farrelly explained the Charles Street dangers.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked about additional administrative costs for Option D.

Duane Davis said that the State will provide money for a new principal. He stated that they would have to look at the office area, and the separate school wouldn't have to have a total stand-alone office space. He talked about how at least a principal, assistant principal and secretary would be required and possibly an additional person in the cafeteria.

Susan Murphy talked about two additional people for the media center.

John Farrelly talked about needing a maintenance person, finance person and an office staff person.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon asked if someone could put on a number on the needed positions.

Jennifer Sturgill asked would the outlying schools lose people.

Duane Davis stated that he didn't think they would.

John Farrelly stated that he thought it would increase because adding more positions.

Faron Atwood talked about every class is pressed for gym time, computer time, et cetera. He stated that he thinks this is a win-win situation for both age groups,

Rod Bost talked about the concept of the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders attending some high school classes. He further talked about how the science department at the high school has a full schedule currently.

Sid Miller asked why a middle school isn't being considered and doesn't see how Option D is better. He further asked why more money is being spent at Glade Creek Elementary School and Piney Creek Elementary School until the water and sewer issues are fixed. He gave examples of how the gymnasium at the high school is totally inadequate. He stated that more money needs to be spent now so everyone won't be doing this again in 10-15 years.

Charles Joines asked for public comments.

Regina Rector talked about liking the idea of a middle school, never enough resources for extra help, putting all of the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders at Sparta Elementary School and the need for extra busing.

Beth Templeton Phipps spoke on behalf of the PK-2 children. She explained that there isn't enough room now, the smaller children are already exposed to 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders activities, safety issues, preschool is not adequate now, the need for a place to play and considering the option for them to have their own computer labs, library and enrichment areas.

Misty McKnight talked about more programs the schools are offering to the lower grades, have two computer labs that they can use after 24 other classes have used them, when testing is going on—all of the spaces have to be used and everyone must be extremely quiet. She talked about the PK kids don't have a gym or a multi-purpose room, no free space to reward kids with free time and lunch starts at 10:30.

Bill Caudill stated that he is here on behalf of the bus drivers in the County. He talked about how the bus drivers aren't recognized, drivers being upset about bonuses given to teachers with nothing given to the bus drivers. He stated that they want the support and recognition as being a vital part of the school system.

Tim Stamper talked about being stuck on patching space needs. He talked about the need for a 30-year plan. He stated that as a taxpayer, he is looking forward to having a building to be proud of. He talked about proposals get made and chiseled down until it is embarrassing and the need to build something to be proud of.

Mitch Franklin stated that he appreciated everyone's hard work and echoes Duane Davis's comments about being proud of the schools. He further stated that he is representing the kids that have been left out of extra activities. He talked about the performance of Ashe and Wilkes county schools and Ashe County test scores are going up each year.

Gretchen Stafford said that she has just moved here, and this community doesn't want a middle school. She talked about problems at middle schools. She stated that it means something to go to a PK-8 school. She further stated that everyone needs to do some more research on the middle-school idea.

Sherry Wagoner stated that children in Ashe and Wilkes counties are no smarter than our children. She further stated that problems happen but not just because it is a middle school.

Holly Farr asked what happens when the increased school population goes to the high school.

Charles Joines stated that nothing is on the drawing board but this has been discussed.

Donya Joines stated that she attended a middle school and a middle school is a good idea but don't forget about Piney Creek Elementary School and Glade Creek Elementary School. She asked what happened to the money with the gym burned several years ago at Piney Creek Elementary School. She talked about losing Phil Howell at Piney Creek Elementary School. She stated that the Boards need to consider the other schools including a new gym at Piney Creek Elementary School.

Charles Joines stated that everyone will miss Mr. Howell, and the Board is aware of the problems with the gym. He talked about the gym burned 37-38 years ago.

Phil Howell talked about the gym is a worthy request and students are at a big disadvantage to the other schools.

Sherry Wagoner talked about the need to unite and stop being Sparta Elementary School, Glade Creek Elementary School, and Piney Creek Elementary School. She stated that everyone needs to do what is best for all of the children.

Donna Evans addressed concerns about the length of time children must spend on the bus to come to Sparta. She talked about not wanting to lose the excellent people at Glade Creek Elementary School and Piney Creek Elementary School, and they should have the first choice of the jobs.

Mary Teague stated that one reason they moved here was to get away from the large schools. She talked about children lose 10 percentage points during transition. She said there is a lot to be said about smaller schools.

Karen Tompkins stated that as a PK teacher at Sparta Elementary School that they are experiencing space problems and the difficulty of explaining to the little children about the older children's activities.

Jennifer Sturgill stated that she isn't concerned about losing people, that her concern is losing positions and people can't do their best by doing more than one job. She reminded everyone that education and children come first.

Gary West stated that these options were quickly narrowed down. He invited both boards to come to Glade Creek Elementary School, hear from the community and listen to everyone.

Eric Thomas stated that he is only here to support the middle-school concept. He talked about two transitions is the best choice for the children.

Rod Bost talked about his concern for Option D in adding additional traffic, shared space at the upper and lower schools, can't do a lot for the accelerated students, play area, middle school sharing field space with the high school, end-of-course testing. He talked about moving too quickly at Option D. He further talked about the need to try to get the low-wealth funding.

Burr Bost asked what are the long-range growth projections in the 7<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade area.

Duane Davis stated that 100 at this time and would have to add to that.

John Farrelly talked about how hard it is to analyze future growth.

Duane Davis stated that the point is well taken and the growth factor is figured into these plans and looking at potential programs.

Stephanie Blevins talked about people talking about what they think they know. She further talked about transition doesn't have to be negative, the need for everyone to stop and listen, stop pitting schools against each other. She gave reasons she is in support of a middle-school idea. She stated that the time has come for a county middle school.

John Farrelly explained that these space needs have been being studied for 1-1½ years concerning Sparta Elementary School needs. He stated his appreciation for the passion of Glade Creek Elementary School and Piney Creek Elementary School, but Sparta Elementary School needs to expand and be two schools. He explained reasons for Option D and the need for securing more land. He talked about each school should have a cafeteria area for a total separation.

Melissa Vestal talked about being a "traveling" teacher for Spanish at the elementary schools. She further talked about the middle-school idea offers more things.

Clarence Crouse thanked everyone for coming to this meeting and wanting to do something good for the children. He explained that the Commissioners must finance any of these ideas, and they will do the best thing. He stated that these plans are fairly new to everyone and nothing is no where near concrete. He further stated that the Board of Education/Board of Commissioners hasn't even talked about these ideas. He talked about the safety issues of the children and the new programs. He stated that the Boards need to move quickly but also need to make the right decisions. He further stated that he is very proud over the last few years' accomplishments.

Joel Souther thanked everyone for coming. He stated that this is the first step in a long line of issues, and he wants to do what is best for every student in Alleghany County.

Faron Atwood stated that he wasn't going to be wishy-washy on this idea. He talked about the lower grades needing space. He charged each citizen to make sure the Board doesn't do something like the gymnasium. He stated that if more community meetings are needed, then the Boards need to have them.

Betsy Dillon stated that this is a serious responsibility and a serious need. She further stated that everyone needs to be bold and make the right decision with a lot of input from the communities.

Chair Eldon Edwards expressed his appreciation to everyone here tonight and it has been interesting to hear everyone's comments. He talked about the good education system that we have and the facilities will be in the best interest for the children. He reminded everyone that the Board of Commissioners tried to do their best with no control on the school population. He stated that there will be more meetings held on the space-needs options.

Regina Rector stated that the parents' fear needs to be put to rest. She asked that the Boards show how many teachers per student, how this will work for each school and any programs cut. She further asked that this project be done the right way not be piece-milled together.

Chair Eldon Edwards stated that the School Board can provide the information that Ms. Rector asked for, and the Board of Education will have to make a decision on their recommendation.

Charles Joines stated that these options are still new to everyone because the options were presented to the School Board last Friday.

Commissioner Warren Taylor talked about this is an important issue. He stated that regardless of which option is chosen, everyone needs to unite behind that option. He further stated that in order for this issue to pass on a bond referendum, the tax-paying people have to be sold on this issue.

Commissioner Sandy Carter Herndon stated that she agrees with Commissioner Taylor. She stated her concerns regarding where will the money come from, bond referendums must be paid back, and the County doesn't have this kind of money. She talked about everyone must work together.

Commissioner Graylen Blevins stated that he agrees with Faron Atwood about not being wishy-washy and everyone must stand together. He talked about not standing for Sparta Elementary School, Glade Creek Elementary School, Piney Creek Elementary School but stand for all of the schools. He further talked about one person can't solve all of this; it will take everyone working together. He stated that it is time to step up to the plate and face this issue together. He said that one plan hasn't been picked out and that this was the first step in the process.

Commissioner Ken Richardson stated that he didn't see any option that he likes. He talked about this meeting has raised a lot of questions that hasn't been answered. He further talked about not putting things off. He said that he wants to correct the school situation for 25 years.

County Manager Don Adams gave a brief history of how this meeting developed starting with discussions in June 2004. He stated that there will be a lot more meetings and a marketing campaign. He talked about the need to come up with ways to finance these ideas and needing everyone's assistance.

Chair Eldon Edwards reiterated the County Manager's comments. He talked about the taxpayers have to approve these projects.

Regina Rector stated that she doesn't think it will be a tough sell.

Chair Eldon Edwards stated that he hopes it is easy but it hasn't been an easy sell in the past.

Chair Eldon Edwards adjourned the meeting at 8:34pm.

Charles Joines adjourned the meeting at 8:35pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Evans  
Clerk to the Board

ATTEST:

Eldon Edwards  
Chairman