

DATE: May 9, 2011 PRESENT: Billy Peaden, Chair  
Jill Camnitz  
Worth Forbes  
Benjie Forrest  
Sean Kenny  
Jennifer Little  
Ralph Love, Sr. (Telephone Conference)  
TIME: 6:00 P.M. Barbara Owens  
Matthew Ward  
Christine Waters  
PLACE: Pitt County Office Building Mary Williams  
ABSENT: Marc Whichard

Chair Billy Peaden called the Board of Education to order in Called Session at 6:00 P. M.

Ms. Jennifer Little led the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

Dr. Matthew Ward then followed with a Moment of Silence asking that we remember anyone who has suffered a tragedy, sickness or loss of a loved one in our Pitt County Schools system.

Chair Peaden informed everyone that Board Member Ralph Love will be involved with the meeting through a teleconference as he recovering from surgery at home.

Chair Peaden then offered the Agenda for consideration. Mr. Benjie Forrest motioned that the Agenda be amended to add a Closed Session between Items A and B under V. Purpose of Called Meeting. Mr. Worth Forbes made a second to the motion. Ms. Jennifer Little then asked why have a Closed Session, and why did it need to be placed between Items A and B? Chair Peaden stated Board discussion was needed regarding information received this afternoon. In-House Attorney also shared that consultation with our attorney was needed to consider and give instructions concerning a potential or actual claim, administrative procedure, or judicial action. Ms. Jill Camnitz asked did the potential law suit have to do with Senate Bill 260 with the response being yes. Chair Peaden then asked for a vote from the Board members with those against amending the Agenda as follows: Ms. Jennifer Little, Mr. Sean Kenny, Ms. Jill Camnitz and Ms. Christine Waters. Those who voted for the amendment to the Agenda were: Mr. Benjie Forrest, Ms. Mary Williams, Mr. Billy Peaden, Dr. Matthew Ward, Mr. Worth Forbes, Ms. Barbara Owens and Bishop Ralph Love. Motion passed.

There were four members of the audience who wished to speak during Public Expression. The first was Chairman Dan Nichols, Pitt County Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors. Mr. Nichols stated he had appeared before the Board in late February on behalf of the Chamber requesting reductions in size of the Pitt County Board of Education, reduction in term length and reduction in the time lapse between election and being sworn-in. He stated he is here tonight re-enforcing that request and stated the Chamber is in support of proposed Senate Bill 260, which will reduce the Pitt County Board of Education size from twelve members to seven members,

with one member representing the six districts and the seventh member at large, and reduce the term length from six years to four years.

The second speaker was Ms. Kathy Herring who also spoke regarding proposed Senate Bill 260. Ms. Herring stated she has three children in Pitt County Schools and in February, had asked that a pole of the public be placed on the Pitt County Schools Website regarding the three issues being raised about the Pitt County Board of Education. That request was denied. Now, she stated, Board members are asking for a Referendum regarding these issues, which will be additional cost for tax payers. Ms. Herring stated the Board of Education had turned a deaf ear when we requested public input regarding these three criteria. She added that Senator Louis Pate listened and introduced proposed Senate Bill 260 so that the people will have a voice.

The third speaker was Pastor Tyrone Turnage stating his major concern is that after electing Board members to their present positions, other groups keep trying to control the decisions and efforts of the Board of Education. He commented that someone stated Senator Pate had contacted the citizens, but Pastor Turnage stated he's a citizen who has not been contacted. Pastor Turnage wondered at the political motivations behind this push for proposed Senate Bill 260 and is concerned about minority representation on the school board if the board is reduced. He asked what would it hurt if we waited until the electoral district lines are redrawn, then revisit the issue and put it to a vote for **all** people and not a specific group regarding changes for the Board of Education. Pastor Turnage feels we need to let the Board of Education do what members were elected to do - which is look after the best interests for **all** students and the whole community, not specific groups. He commended the school Board on the job they are trying to do and finished by asking how this issue affects other school districts and the size of their Boards.

The last speaker was Pastor Kenneth Battle who asked what is the purpose of changing the number of years served by a Board of Education member and who does it benefit. He also asked how these proposals would affect the African-American communities.

Chair Billy Peaden then informed Board members that he is going to go around the table and allow time for each Board member to speak. He asked that no motions be made until after Closed Session.

Ms. Mary Williams stated her opinion regarding the Board criteria had not changed since the Board vote on February 28, 2011 – twelve members, six-year term and time span between election and swearing in remain the same. She stated everyone was shocked upon hearing about the proposed Senate Bill 260, especially with the Board voting on these issues in February. Ms. Williams feels this issue causes dissention between Board members, and there will no longer be a minority voice if this Bill passes.

Ms. Jill Camnitz stated she is not sure what she should be commenting on with a proposed Closed Session and motion that she had not heard mentioned until now. She feels there are principals in place that all members and the Chair need to follow – all Board members receive the same information at the same time. Ms. Camnitz stated that as of last Monday night, she felt there were Board members who were knowledgeable that Senator Pate's Bill was coming and

that discussion was going on about going to a meeting in Raleigh on Tuesday – some Board members knew nothing and some did. She feels that any and all information should have been shared with the entire Board Monday night. Ms. Camnitz has heard in the community that a Referendum is being discussed that she's heard nothing about. She asked is there a Referendum to be discussed with Chair Peaden stating possibly – and it will be discussed after the Closed Session is held. Ms. Camnitz responded that she prefers to wait until after Closed Session to give her comments.

Dr. Matthew Ward stated that his stand is the same as it was in February when the Board voted. He feels if the Board is reduced to seven members, the African-American community will not have proper representation for the students in Pitt County. Dr. Ward feels the way this matter has progressed is wrong in that the twelve Board members could not iron out the issue, but someone went to the Legislature to have their majority decision changed. He feels the twelve Board members did their job when they voted on the criteria for the Board of Education in February, and that vote should be law. Dr. Ward stated all the time that is being used to address this issue is time taken away from our real responsibility – working for the students and their education. He said folks keep talking about what the community says when his community has said nothing. Dr. Ward closed by saying he is not comfortable sitting on this Board; and if the size of the Board is reduced to seven members, what goes around, comes around.

Ms. Jennifer Little voiced that she feels history is needed when discussing the Board of Education criteria. She commented that she agrees with Dr. Ward in that she too is uncomfortable on this Board. As far as special interest groups, she feels the Board has formed groups and honesty and transparency have been compromised. Ms. Little stated since November of 2009, she has been a catalyst for this issue and campaigned on it when she was running for her Board seat. But, she wants to go on record stating that she did not lobby any Legislator in Raleigh to pursue proposed Bill 260. On November 2, 2009, Mr. Benjie Forrest inquired about delaying student reassignment due to upcoming elections and new Board members being elected in time to participate in the reassignment process. Ms. Little stated she asked about the election induction date at that time with there being a large gap before these elected Board members could be sworn in and having a “lame duck” sitting Board. During the November 16, 2009 meeting, In-House Attorney Rob Sonnenberg informed the Board that the Local 1987 Legislative Act set up twelve members on the Pitt County Board of Education serving a six-year term. In 1990, the General State Law set the election of Board members at the May Primary. Ms. Little stated that when the City and County Boards of Education merged, their goal was to merge the two Boards with a reduced number of members but this never followed through. On December 7, 2009, the Board of Education discussed the three criteria with a vote taken for each factor. Members voting to shorten the term were Mr. Forrest, Ms. Williams, Chair Peaden, Ms. Little, Ms. Camnitz. Members voting to close the gap between the dates were Mr. Forrest, Ms. Williams, Chair Peaden, Ms. Little and Ms. Camnitz. Four members voted to reduce the size of the Board (three current Board members sitting at this table were in favor of reducing the size of the Board – Ms. Camnitz, Ms. Little and Mr. Forrest). On January 8, 2010, the Board met with the five Pitt County Legislators, and Chair Mary Grace Bright reviewed Board criteria with the Legislators stating that in a recent discussion with the Board with eleven members present, ten members thought a shorter term was appropriate with Bishop Ralph Love wanting the term to remain at six years. In regards to the gap between being elected

and taking office, nine wanted the time shortened with Bishop Love and Mr. Roy Peaden wanting to keep the time interval the same. Chair Bright stated there was a split among the Board as to the number of members serving on the Board of Education. Legislative delegates advised the Board that its recommendations had to be unanimous for them to be introduced into short session. Following this advice, no further discussion took place until February 7, 2011 when Ms. Little asked that a public survey be placed on the Pitt County Website regarding the three criteria involving the Board of Education – size, term length, and time span between election and being sworn in. This request was voted down by an eight to four response and now these “no” voters are trying to negotiate the referendum. Ms. Little shared that In-House Attorney Rob Sonnenberg presented data regarding the process of making changes to the Board including the U. S. Department of Justice and their requirements. She stated at the February 28, 2011 Board meeting, a vote was again taken for the three components of the Board with each one being voted down by a seven to five count. She asked why some of the present members changed the direction of their votes and feels this contributed to the present situation.

Mr. Benjie Forrest stated he will hold his comments until after Closed Session.

Bishop Ralph Love commented that he is very saddened that the Board is at this point once again. He stated that the majority of the students in Pitt County Schools are black. Bishop Love feels the Board should be working on education of the students instead of special interest groups trying to control the Board. He feels this is a move to reduce the black representation on the school board and thinks those behind this move should be ashamed of themselves. A seven member Board will have less representation from the black community and asked what is wrong with representation from across the county.

Ms. Barbara Owens stated her stance has been the same the entire time – she’s been true to her fellow Board members, to herself and to her community. In asking about Closed Session – hopefully some of this uncertainty will be cleared up. She quoted from the NC General Assembly of 1985, “the interim Board shall become the Pitt County Board of Education at which time the Pitt County Board of Education shall consist of twelve members who shall be inducted according to law and the members shall serve as provided in this Act.” Ms. Owens commented that the Board is remiss when we can’t come together which is sad, and certainly we’re not looking into the faces of the children we say we represent. She stated that twelve members can make decisions as we have in the past – merger, consolidation, integration. Ms. Owens commented that the Board members were elected by their respective communities, and stated we need to serve together to reach our goals.

Mr. Sean Kenny stated since finding out about proposed Senate Bill 260, he’s had many calls and felt mixed emotions. To him, this proposal came out of left field – as well as the Closed Session coming out of left field. He will hold his comments until Closed Session has ended.

Ms. Christine Waters stated she is going to be up front in her comments. She commented that she respects Dr. Ward a great deal and agrees that she’s not comfortable on the Board of Education. Ms. Waters feels she’s been prejudged and insulted time and time again. She resents the insinuation that she’s helping Senator Louis Pate and has had no contact with him whatsoever. Ms. Waters wants to know what “special group is trying to dictate the policies of

this Board” that everyone is talking about. She asked where did the seven member Board idea come from and resents that being promoted. Ms. Waters stated that reducing term length and time between election and being sworn in has been supported by Board members in the past.

Mr. Worth Forbes stated he feels comfortable on the Board of Education. He commented that he does not care what other Board members think about him because he represents students and parents in Pitt County. Mr. Forbes stated he has not seen a poll of public opinion regarding a reduction in the size of the Board and campaigned on a referendum that if there is a change to the Board, then the citizens county-wide should vote to make the changes. He also stated the Board and legislators have been railroaded by the driver of this train - Senator Pate’s campaign manager – meaning two individuals are making decisions for parents and students in Pitt County. Mr. Forbes also voiced that the Chamber of Commerce is not working with the school system, but against the school board. He feels the Chamber should uphold wishes of the Board, particularly during a time of redistricting and achieving unitary status. Mr. Forbes stated this is not the time to be going through changes in three criteria regarding the Board of Education.

Chair Peaden commented that he agrees with Mr. Forbes’ statements. He added that the Chamber of Commerce should be working with the School Board. He asked are they going to question the Pitt County Memorial Hospital Board with 20 members, Pitt Community College Board of Trustees with 16 members or East Carolina University Trustees with 12 members and the President of the Student Body. Why push the Pitt County Board of Education components? Chair Peaden asked if Bill 260 passes and law suits follow, is the Chamber going to pay the costs. He stated he represents District 2 – North of the River – with his partner, Ms. Mary Williams. Chair Peaden stated the county does not want a smaller Board as they want a voice on the Board. He feels a seven member Board will take control out of the county. Chair Peaden added in closing that the reason no one knew about the Closed Session and the need for discussion is that information received late this afternoon merits this action.

Ms. Barbara Owens then moved that the Board go into closed session to consult with our attorney to consider and give instructions concerning a potential or actual claim, administrative procedure, or judicial action. N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a) (3). Mr. Benjie Forrest seconded the motion. Those against the motion were Ms. Jennifer Little and Mr. Sean Kenny. Those approving the motion were: Bishop Ralph Love, Mr. Billy Peaden, Mr. Benjie Forrest, Ms. Barbara Owens, Mr. Worth Forbes, Ms. Christine Waters, Ms. Jill Camnitz, Ms. Mary Williams and Dr. Matthew Ward. Time was 6:50 P. M.

Upon returning to Open Session at 7:08 P. M., Chair Peaden then went around the table for comments from Board members.

Mr. Benjie Forrest stated he didn’t have much to say. Regarding Ms. Little’s question, he stated he did not campaign with a reduction of Board size on his platform. He added that he is in favor of reducing the size of the Board when the time is right, but now is the time for saving teacher and teacher assistant jobs. Mr. Forrest feels too much time has been spent regarding Board criteria.

Mr. Worth Forbes stated if there is public interest in Board changes, a Referendum should be held so all citizens could have input in these decisions. He feels that if the size of the Board is changed, it should correspond with the County Commissioner set up.

Ms. Jennifer Little stated yes, these are tough economical times. She feels that reducing to seven members will cut \$20,000 from our budget and we could possibly gain one position of employment. Ms. Little stated she could understand mirroring the Board of County Commissioners' size and would compromise to nine members for the Board of Education. She commented that she understands and is sensitive to the uncertainty of diversity and explained that at an earlier meeting, she had suggested different committees being formed to enlist support from community leaders throughout Pitt County.

Ms. Christine Waters stated the timing is off – our timing and the legislative timing are not together. She stated fifteen months ago, the legislators explained that certain requirements are needed to present a Bill for action during short session. Ms. Waters stated if we keep delaying these issues, we'll be presenting in short session again and there is no guarantee a unanimous vote from this Board will occur. She reminded everyone that this Board voted not to permit public expression on our website regarding these issues, but now are discussing a referendum to obtain public opinion regarding the same issues. Ms. Waters mentioned that in regards to tough economic times with the prospect of us cutting quite a few positions, we sit here smugly not reducing our Board size or costs which will weigh heavily on the public. She stated we do understand the thought of less minority representation on the Board with a reduction in size. Ms. Waters commented that she had never thought about this as a racial issue, but it must be as this keeps popping up. She added that the diversity percentage on the Board may increase as right now three of the twelve Board members are African-American equaling a 25% ratio. If the Board goes to seven members and two are African-American, the percentage will increase to 28%.

Dr. Matthew Ward stated we need to look at the issue properly and see the fairness for all of Pitt County. He stated he cannot see where minorities will be properly represented with a reduction in Board size. The timing is not right for this issue – unitary status and redistricting should be our focus. Dr. Ward feels the most disappointing thing to him is that someone went somewhere else to solve this problem.

Mr. Sean Kenny stated he had written down precise wording to discuss this issue, but after what's been said tonight, his statement needs to be edited. He's concerned about the recent events regarding the Pitt County Board of Education. Mr. Kenny mentioned serving students in Pitt County is most challenging. Collectively strong decisions have been made which will offer positive long-term opportunities for our students, i.e. alternative graduation requirements, financial recruitment incentives through the SIG grant and viable options being explored for the Third Street Center. He commented that he defends the Board regularly when speaking with the public as divided and arrogant have been used to describe the Board by outsiders. Mr. Kenny stated that the Board should have support from the public, but some say the Board is a joke. As a Board member and the parent of two students in Pitt County Schools, this is disturbing to him. Mr. Kenny closed by asking the Board to work together to obtain unitary status and do what is best for our students and faculty in Pitt County.

Ms. Jill Camnitz stated she believes everyone sitting around this table has the same motivation – working for what is best for our students. The problem is that we don't always agree on how to define that. She added that her position regarding the Board has not changed – reduction in Board size by using the Board of County Commissioners as our model as it is just as representational of the county as our current Board is. Ms. Camnitz commented that it's now time to move on – adding that she wished the Referendum had been discussed in February, stating perhaps if we had agreed on that, we wouldn't be in the position we're in right now.

Ms. Barbara Owens stated there was reasoning behind the representation plan – two representatives from each district. She commented that several districts cover a large area and fair representation is necessary. Ms. Owens voiced that money is not the issue – the \$188 she makes per month will not cover her gas costs going back and forth to meetings she attends – and she did not run for this office for money. Ms. Owens added that she believes in the Board and the system, but she does not believe in someone trying to ram this down her throat for political reasons.

Ms. Mary Williams stated what others think about her used to matter, but not anymore. She agrees with Mr. Forbes' statement. Ms. Williams feels there are two tongues being spoken and some are being hypocritical. She recalled the meeting with our legislators on County Home Road and stated she has never voted for down-sizing the Board. Ms. Williams feels the Board is not large enough as there is no Hispanic representation on the Board and our Hispanic population has grown by leaps and bounds over the last few years. At one time, Ms. Williams thought about changing the term length, but now is not sure and knows its okay to change her mind. Honesty and integrity are important and she too is uncomfortable as the only black woman on the Board. Ms. Williams commented that the backstabbing and racial overtones need to stop. If the size of the Board is reduced because some Board members didn't get what they wanted and someone went another way to get what they want, that's not an example to teach our kids. As far as reducing the Board size to seven seats, Ms. Williams asked who will choose the seats that remain and what seats will be targeted. She asked how anyone could guarantee that the at large seat will be filled by a minority. Ms. Williams asked and was told that our membership dues to be a part of the Chamber of Commerce are \$3,600. She asked if all the business members in the Chamber agree with what the Chamber is doing to reduce the size of the Pitt County Board of Education. Ms. Williams asked who of the Chamber went to Raleigh and spoke with our legislators. She commented that people need to stay off the radio calling names; and in order to get respect, you have to give respect. Ms. Williams stated that no one had canvassed all neighborhoods to get public input, and asked her constituents to let their voice be heard.

Bishop Ralph Love again stated he is saddened to see the things that are going on and does not see that Pitt County is ready for unitary status. He believes there is racial motivation and though there is a majority of black students in Pitt County Schools, there is not a majority of black members on the Board. Bishop Love feels if the Board is reduced to seven, it will be a move to reduce the minority representation of the Board. Bishop Love stated that the Pitt County Board of Education needs to drop their membership in the Pitt County Chamber of Commerce or any Board who fights against us and added that Senator Pate will hear from him and his followers at the next election.

Chair Peaden then called for a motion. Mr. Sean Kenny moved, second by Mr. Benjie Forrest, to adjourn the meeting. Motion passed unanimously at 7:33 P. M.

Respectively Submitted,

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Mr. Billy Peaden, Chair

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Dr. Beverly B. Reep, Superintendent