

DATE: February 8, 2010 PRESENT: Mary Grace Bright, Chair
Jill Camnitz
Michael Dixon
Jennifer Little
Ralph Love, Sr.
TIME: 10:15 A.M. Roy Peaden
Marcy Romary
Dick Tolmie
Mary Williams

Rep. Marian McLawhorn
Rep. Edith Warren
Rep. Arthur Williams
Sen. Clark Jenkins
Sen. Don Davis

PLACE: Community Schools & Recreation Building ABSENT: Benjie Forrest
Barbara Owens
Billy Peaden

Chair Mary Grace Bright called the meeting between the Pitt County Board of Education and the Pitt County Legislative Delegates to order at 10:15 A.M.

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

Superintendent Beverly Reep welcomed the legislative delegates and thanked them for their guidance and honesty during a difficult economic period preparing the 2009-10 school budget. Because of their being up front regarding the budget outlook, Pitt County Schools Administration prepared for the worst case scenario and made difficult decision, but today is in a much better position than most school districts because of planning for probable budget cuts.

Assistant Superintendent Michael Cowin shared with the delegates priorities for Pitt County Schools' 2010-11 budget. He stated with discretionary reductions totally \$3.5 million in 2009-10 and rumors of \$4.8 million in 2010-11, it is difficult to maintain resources for the classroom. A direct impact for 2010-11 will be keeping the Low Wealth Funding in place. 100% of this money goes to the classrooms in salaries for regular education, exceptional children and occupational teachers. 122 positions were funded with Low Wealth dollars the during 2009-10 school year in Pitt County Schools.

Funding is also needed for NC Virtual Public Schools, dual enrollment and on-line programs. This allotment allows many students to earn credits for graduation and helps prevent dropout rates from rising further.

Mr. Cowin also stated flexibility in spending to cover budget shortfalls when they occur is a priority for all school districts.

The calendar impacts budget decisions throughout the year.

Mr. Cowin informed the delegates that we are already considering “down the road” budget issues for the 2011-12 school year. Examples of future concerns are: State funding was reduced as stimulus money was received by school districts. This Stimulus funding is for two years, but will the State reinstate this funding when Federal physical stabilization funds expire? Pitt County Schools used the Stimulus money for 180 classified positions – clerical and custodial support.

Mr. Cowin also asked that the corporate income tax be reinstated in school budgets. With removal of Capital funding totally approximately \$1 million per year, we lose \$10 million worth of borrowing power which depletes funding for construction projects.

Representative McLawhorn asked what guidelines were in place for allocation of the “Race to the Top” funding should it materialize? Superintendent Reep stated these dollars would be used for programmatic and instructional needs. She commented that 50% of these funds were to be transferred to LEAs. Pitt County Schools would obtain approximately \$940,000 times four years. Limitations have not been clearly defined to her knowledge. Representative McLawhorn asked could these monies be used to replace Federal stimulus funding for the 180 classified positions discussed by Mr. Cowin? Dr. Reep stated “Race to the Top” funding would be used for staff development, instructional coaches, technology, innovative high school settings, etc. She did not think support staff salaries and benefits could be paid from this source.

Superintendent Reep shared with the delegates Pitt County Schools Dropout Prevention programs in place. She stated DSSF Funding kept our middle schools Fast Track Program in place with our fourth cohort being implemented. Dr. Reep stated these students were in self-contained classrooms with top notch teachers in place. She informed the delegates that 75 students were recently promoted from the seventh grade to freshmen in high school. These students will be followed and supported throughout high school. Superintendent Reep stated that 73% of the students who started Fast Track in the sixth grade are now in the tenth grade in high school.

Dr. Reep also discussed a dropout grant program, Link Crew, which is held in all six high schools. She invited everyone to attend a Link Crew Conference which will be held at South Central High School February 27 from 9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. This program has reached a large number of students with freshmen being adopted by upper classroom helping them with their schedules, exam preparation and high school adjustment.

Senator Davis stated he appreciates all the work Pitt County Schools has done to support dropout prevention. He commented that LTC Jesse Hinton shared monthly updates with him in this regards.

Ms. Jill Camnitz asked regarding opening dates for the school calendar. Mr. Dick Tolmie stated one of his biggest parent complaints was for students having to wait one and one-half to two weeks before taking first semester exams. He knew the answer was the August 25 start date for schools.

Representative Edith Warren stated we were “singing to the choir”. She feels the bill to have more flexibility in the school calendar will pass if we continue to discuss the issue with other legislators.

Representative McLawhorn stated she had heard from lots of parents and teachers that August 25 was a good start date for school. She commented that many stated schools started earlier and earlier with summer vacation getting shorter and shorter. If there were a set number of days to open earlier, such as two or three, she feels more legislators would vote for flexibility in the calendar.

Representative Warren stated in small towns with community colleges, high school schedules could be similar to the community college as students were dual enrolled.

Mr. Roy Peaden commented that if school started earlier, exams could be taken before Christmas break and scores would increase.

Ms. Jennifer Little felt in elementary and middle schools, the later date to open was not a problem. But in high school with exams pending until after winter break, the start date should be earlier.

Representative Arthur Williams asked how did the County Commissioners stand regarding this issue?

Chair Bright stated no discussion regarding this issue had been held with the County Commissioners.

Representative McLawhorn stated before dates were set for the school calendar, she would like to speak with Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources Delilah Harris regarding the calendar.

Mr. Dick Tolmie suggested that a specific date, i.e. no school before August 15, could be set as an absolute. He stated there had to be a known start date that would allow students to begin and finish with exams before Christmas break.

Representative McLawhorn explained to the Board that before January 2011, a Resolution with a specified date could be presented to legislators before the legislative long session begins.

Chair Bright commented that a public forum could be held for input regarding the 2011-12 start of school date.

Ms. Mary Williams also discussed the fact that having exams after the holidays presented problems with GPAs being available when applying to colleges or for scholarships in January. She also stated that the Student Services Handbook provided needed information in this regard.

Ms. Jill Camnitz stated that the Virtual Learning, Dual Enrollment and On-line Programs helped students to earn credits for graduation and also helped the dropout rate.

Superintendent Reep asked was someone or some department in charge of getting these separate issues under one umbrella to better understand what is best for students?

Representative McLawhorn stated “no”, but lack of funding is being discussed and House discussion will formally begin next week. Budget shortfalls involving community colleges for legislators include: tightened funding, retaining and working with adults to further their education and dual enrolled high school students. As high school students were not listed as a top priority, many parents contacted the legislators and focus has returned to high school students. Michael Cowin commented that it would be beneficial to keep the virtual program.

Senator Clark Jenkins stated the budget was decreased by approximately \$400 million. Legislators do not want to raise taxes. Twice weekly meetings will be held where the Senate will tweak the budget and send it to the House. Capital needs for community colleges and universities are being discussed. He explained an idea of having freshmen and sophomores possibly attend a community college the first two years of higher education followed by two years at a university to complete a student’s degree.

Superintendent Reep shared with the legislators that Pitt County Schools is the only school system in North Carolina with a “Second Life Program” which is a virtual learning program in conjunction with East Carolina University involving juniors and seniors in our six high schools. The seniors who completed the pilot program, which began in 2008-09, graduated with 18 credits from East Carolina University. These seniors who completed their Senior Projects for first semester did them on-line without any extra cost for themselves, their parents or the school. In speaking with DPI, we are told that this program doesn’t “fit anywhere”. Representative McLawhorn asked we present “Second Life” information to the delegates and they will present the program to the full session. Dr. Reep explained the program was cost effective and East Carolina University was leading the project. Representative McLawhorn stated she didn’t know how the funding would continue, but Senator Jenkins stated there could be more funding when legislators could see how the overhead would better benefit children.

Senator Jenkins asked what is the percentage rate of revenue for construction? Associate Superintendent Aaron Beaulieu stated it took \$800,000 to be able to borrow \$10 million in revenue. Senator Jenkins stated the State Treasurer’s view of funding was similar to that of 1950 with larger systems getting more dollars. He suggests smaller systems bundle together to obtain more dollars and attract a better percentage rate for construction.

Superintendent Reep stated the support of the quarter cent sales tax helped with our funding. She also stated that the cost of our new elementary school is less than it would have been two and a half years ago. Mr. Dick Tolmie also stated that working with the County Commissioners and Melonie Bryan on the total bond package had been a positive experience.

Chair Bright then presented three issues being considered by the Board of Education:

1. Length of term (now six years)
2. Gap between election and taking office (now May to December)
3. Number of members serving on the Board (now twelve)

She stated in recent discussions by the Board with eleven members present, ten thought a shorter term was appropriate, one wanted the term length to remain at six

years. In regards to the gap between being elected and taking office, nine wanted the time shortened with two choosing 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.

Representative McLawhorn stated in short session, nothing controversial would be presented. She stated a unanimous Resolution by the Board would need to be submitted to a legislative delegate by May 19 at 4:00 p.m. When the House and Senate meet May 26, certification approved by each member of the Pitt County legislative delegate must accompany the Resolution. If any of these steps are not followed, an ethical violation may be rendered.

Representative McLawhorn then commented that if the Board waits until January 2011, these guidelines do not have to be followed as legislation will be in long session.

Mr. Michael Dixon stated none of the issues had unanimous support. Ms. Jill Camnitz stated our legislators should not make the decisions for the Resolution, the Pitt County Board of Education should decide and follow up with the Resolution. Representative Arthur Williams stated if there were issues in Beaufort County, he would contact Senator Basnight and work out a Resolution.

Ms. Jennifer Little presented the thoughts of her constituents in regards to the three issues presented regarding the Board of Education. She had researched different areas and had data supporting her proposals for a shorter term, a shorter time frame between election and taking office and a smaller Board representation. She discussed a smaller Board could be helped at committee meetings by establishing a Community Council for representation. Again, Representative McLawhorn stated it would be best to wait until January 2011 as nothing controversial would be heard in short session. At that time, our Board should be prepared with Resolutions in place.

Senator Donald Davis asked regarding the term and gap period the Board had discussed. Ms. Little stated we had discussed a four year term and a month wait between election and taking office – whether it is May and June or November and December. She commented that if we choose May and June, it would better fit the school year. If we choose November and December, it would probably be a better turn out of voters.

Representative Williams asked did Board members have staggered terms with the answer being “yes”.

Mr. Michael Dixon stated our Board needs to decide what is best for Pitt County. He felt we should not compare our decisions to what other counties chose. Mr. Dixon wants us to think what is best for the children and be slower in making that decision.

Representative Warren commented in considering our issues, we should ask who will benefit – the children, the Board members, etc.? She stated as a past principal in Pitt County Schools who was present during the merger of Pitt County and Greenville City Schools, it was decided that all areas of Pitt County should be represented.

Representative Warren also stated that six years is a long time to serve on a Board and asked what newly elected Board members do from May until December?

Representative McLawhorn suggested the Board use the NCSBA for background information or history in other areas.

Ms. Mary Williams stated she wanted to be sure to voice her concerns in the right way. She commented that the members had been elected for a six year term and should serve six years. She felt a Community Council could be making decisions regarding Pitt County Schools and these folks had not been elected by the community. She discussed African American and Hispanic representation on the Board stating Board members need to represent **all** students in the district. Ms. Williams felt the Board would never have a unanimous decision.

Dr. Ralph Love commented that he is the senior member of the Board with 18 years of service and size, term, nor gap had anything to do with the education of children. He stated that some parents in many districts did not feel comfortable going to their district representatives and would talk to a Board member outside that district.

Chair Bright then surmised that a Resolution would not be presented to our legislative delegates for short session, with Representative McLawhorn stating not unless a unanimous decision was confirmed. Chair Bright stated the Board would seek public input and carry forward in 2011.

Superintendent Reep thanked the delegates for their open-minded communication. She stated how much their discussion last spring helped in preparing for the 2009-10 school year and asked that they continue letting us know information regarding the budget for 2010-11. Dr. Reep thanked the legislators for their help regarding the quarter cent sales tax which helped us carry out construction in schools and providing jobs in our community. She presented each delegate with two copies of the book, T is for Tar Heel – A North Carolina Alphabet, one for their personal library and one for a school library of their choosing.

Dr. Reep asked the delegates to give us a sense of what's out there with Representative McLawhorn commenting that there would be no tax increase and be conservative in any budget items discussed.

Chair Mary Grace Bright thanked the delegates for their time and the support that had given the students of Pitt County Schools.

Mr. Michael Dixon moved, second by Ms. Jennifer Little, that the meeting be adjourned. Motion carried unanimously.

Respectively Submitted,

Ms. Mary Grace Bright, Chair

Dr. Beverly B. Reep, Superintendent

