

Board of Education Meeting, September 6, 2011

Several new proposals came to the Board yesterday during their work session, including transportation for magnets, feeder patterns, student assignment, new facilities, and plans for single gender academies for the 2012-13 school year and a possible science academy.

The proposed academies would be funded by cost savings from the last construction bond. The goal is to provide smaller high school/middle school settings for students who would like that choice. The Board viewed a report from a Guilford County all-male academy, which had 96 students last year and is partnered with NC A&T University.

WCPSS staff members propose two 400 to 500 student academies, grades 6 to 12, one for male students at Longview School and one for female students at another downtown location, possibly the former home of Raleigh Charter High School in Pilot Mill. Board member Anne McLaurin raised a concern that the district make certain the female academy had course offerings as rigorous as in other schools—a lack of rigor has been a past shortcoming of some same-sex schools for young women, she said.

The Board also heard an update on a proposal to convert Hilburn Drive Elementary to a K-8 school—some concerns were whether middle school students at the school would be able to participate in athletics or have full elective offerings as at other middle schools.

Also in the work session, Supt. Tata asked for more capacity analysis regarding feeder patterns proposed under the new [Student Assignment plan](#), to determine how space and capacity will be used. Revised feeder patterns are online at <http://assignment.wcpss.net/next/feeder-patterns-handout-revised.pdf>.

The Student Assignment task force will hold three more information sessions in the coming week for parents and residents to learn more about the plan. These sessions will run from 6:30 to 8 pm:

- Tonight, September 7, at Apex High
- Thursday, September 8 at Southeast Raleigh High
- Tuesday, September 13 at Broughton High
- Thursday, September 15 at East Wake High

During a presentation on buses and transportation, Board member John Tedesco asked about having express busing for all magnet schools. This would require parents to drop off and pick up their children at a specific bus stop so that the student can have transportation to a magnet school. It was not clear that express busing would save any money. Another significant concern was raised that parents may not be able to participate in magnet programs if express busing were the only choice for transportation. Working parents have found it difficult to be at a specific remote bus stop at a specific time to enable express busing to be safe for all students. Transportation data from WCPSS showed that the average bus ride in Wake County was 16 minutes, down from 17 minutes last year (the state average is 23 minutes), and that cost per student also is declining, although ridership is up. Bob Snidemiller said the school system is making bus routes far more efficient. In 2010-11, 73,069 students took a yellow bus to school, with an average cost of \$681 per student. For this year, only a few weeks into the traditional school year, less than 1 percent of routes are longer than 90 minutes, and all

but one of those 23 long routes is by choice to a magnet school. According to the data, about 66 percent of all routes are 30 minutes or less in duration, from the first stop to the last stop.

The Board heard an update on advanced math placement, a seemingly logical step that has become divisive. The [Economically Disadvantaged Student Performance](#) task force has found that many students of color and many with disabilities have not been placed high enough in middle school math, leading them to miss out on taking Algebra 1 in 8th grade. Successfully passing Algebra 1 in 8th grade places students on track to take higher-level science courses in high school, which is important for college-bound students. During the action meeting, during public comment, one middle school math teacher came to support higher math placement, but voiced concern that the policy would set some students up to fail. Although it was supposed to be an information item only, Chairman Margiotta moved the draft policy from information to action, although some Board members had requested more data on student outcomes from the more aggressive placements this past year. One finding showed that 49 percent of the 98 students who were between 70 and 79 percent probability deciles for success in Algebra 1 according to EVAAS did not pass the End of Course tests. Almost all (about 96.5 percent) of the other students placed passed the EOC. However, proficiency fell for African American, Economically Disadvantaged, and Limited English Language students, probably due to higher numbers of those students taking Algebra this year, some of whom may not have taken Pre-Algebra. Schools that placed students in Algebra without the Pre-Algebra course were more likely to have lower proficiency rates. Schools that provided more resources to students and teachers had higher proficiency rates.

In a 5-4 vote, with Mr. Margiotta breaking the tie, the Board approved a draft policy for first reading, with Mr. Tedesco, Debra Goldman, Deborah Prickett and Chris Malone voting for the draft policy. Board member Keith Sutton had asked for consensus and offered a compromise to set the EVAAS score at 80 percent, with teachers and parents being able to elevate students from the 70-79 percentile range into Algebra 1 if they felt the student should be placed there. Kevin Hill and other board members expressed support for properly placing students in math, though many wanted more details that were not available from staff. The policy still may undergo changes upon second reading.

To contact Board members on any topic, email them at:

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