

Board of Education Work Session, Tuesday, October 19, 2010

Public meetings issues arose several times during the Board of Education's work session Tuesday. Board Attorney Ann Majestic said that any committee appointed by the Board would be required to meet in open session. In the past, a parent committee gave Growth and Planning staff feedback on student assignment plans and met in private with staff to give input. Board member Debra Goldman suggested having the Student Assignment representatives meet behind closed doors. But Ms. Majestic said any committee appointed by the board and district needs to meet in open session. Next steps for the current three-year Student Assignment plan will be presented at the next Board action meeting, as a presentation on Tuesday, November 9th. The proposed changes will include reassignments to relieve crowding issues and fill a new elementary school, Walnut Creek Elementary, which will open for the 2011-12 school year.

Ms. Majestic also told Board members that texting or passing notes on substantive Board business during public board meeting should be avoided. Communication during meetings on substantive issues should be open and transparent, she said. Any "simultaneous" communication between a quorum of members, five or more, either by instant messaging or in person, also is not allowed and would be an open meetings law violation, Ms. Majestic said. Communicating by emails is allowed, as emails are not simultaneous communication, but polling of members to discern a vote or making a decision prior to a meeting is not allowed.

The Superintendent Search also falls under open meeting laws in certain stages, Ms. Majestic said, although some of the hiring process falls under personnel discussions that can be held in private. Heidrick & Struggles, a consulting firm hired by the board to help them choose the next Superintendent, has been interviewing candidates, and H&S staff met with the committee last week. The firm will vet candidates, conduct background checks on candidates, and then will present five to ten candidates to the Search Committee. Then the Committee will reduce the number to three to five candidates to present to the Board, which will conduct an interview process. No candidate names have been made public.

Now that the Zone-based student assignment plan being developed by the Board's committee has been abandoned, board member Kevin Hill passed out a suggested process for working out the next multi-year Student Assignment plan. He said the process should be inclusive and should result in a plan developed by consensus, not 5-4 votes. He urged Board members to set a vision and framework for the work, before looking at addresses and neighborhoods. Cost should be an important factor in the plan, Mr. Hill said, adding that he had a concern that they may develop a plan that their budget will not afford. He also suggested defining proximity and equity, as well as examining capacity and student achievement. The board voiced unanimous agreement to discuss developing a consensus-building process at the next action meeting. When Member Anne McLaurin noted it was a 9-0 vote, member Chris Malone replied "Don't get carried away with yourself, now."

The Board also heard more details on how Interim Supt. Donna Hargens and staff plan to use the \$10.2 million available to Wake County under the Race to the Top grant awarded to North Carolina by the federal Department of Education. More than half the overall \$400 million in grant money will be used by the State Department of Public Instruction to augment state resources, such as technology and information systems, that can in the end benefit Wake and other counties and save money by consolidating and allowing for the outsourcing of services. Dr. Hargens noted that she and staff will recommend using county-based funds to augment services at the four schools performing at less than 60 percent proficiency on consolidated end of grade tests--Barwell Road, Creech Road, Brentwood and Wilburn elementary schools. Board member John Tedesco raised the issue of using the money for schools performing below 70 percent, which equals about 26 schools, and staff had considered that, Dr. Hargens said. But they feel targeting the four schools and testing new innovations in what they are calling a "renaissance" model, including rehiring teachers (allowing some to leave while inducing others to come to a school using transfer bonuses); boosting school technology; giving schools greater flexibility, such as extending the school day or the school year; and providing salary bonuses for teachers based on student performance growth. The State DPI must approve any plan for the funds.

In addition, the Board heard an update on the state's application for Disadvantaged Student Supplement funds from the state, which should be about \$3.7 million this year. Administrator Dawn Dawson noted that the WCPSS Board Chair and the Superintendent will sign an assurance that the policies and financing of the school district "did not result in increased segregation" of students by race or socio-economic status. This letter of assurance will be included in the district's application and plan for the funding, filed this week with the State DPI.

Chief of Facilities Don Haydon presented the Board with details in starting the next capital plan, asking Board members to consider parameters, such as size of schools, calendar, size of campuses, and other framework issues. Haydon said the school system has used enrollment projections that last year were within one-tenth of 1 percent of actual numbers. Chair Ron Margiotta suggested that during the next joint meeting of the Board of Education and the County Commissioners that the two boards should begin talking about a future bond issue. There was no discussion of how the next Student Assignment plan will fit into the capital plan.

Growth and Planning administrator Laura Evans went over student reassignment changes needed to open Walnut Creek Elementary, which is opening next year, as well as other "tweaking" to the three-year plan to address overcrowding issues at some schools. Member John Tedesco expressed concern that the moves to begin filling Walnut Creek will leave affected schools in Garner and District 2 under enrolled. He said he will suggest not moving nodes from his district into Walnut Creek but moving other nodes into the school when it opens next year as a four-track year round school.

The Board heard details on proposals for long-term suspensions. Administrator Marvin Connelly said the district is piloting having alternative programs and placements in

evening programs in existing schools.