

Board of Education Meeting – June 1, 2010

Diversity had a brief—but short-lived—victory at the June 1 Board of Education meeting. The Board voted 4-3 to change Policy 6203, the Transfer of Student Assignment policy, striking from the policy the granting of transfer requests that contribute to “greater socioeconomic and achievement diversity.” However, because transfer request hearings are scheduled to begin June 2, the Board had to vote on waiving the second reading of the policy change. That vote, which was 5-4, required a 2/3rds vote, because it was a suspension of policy. So the Board was faced with a dilemma—Chair Ron Margiotta called a recess and when they returned, Kevin Hill and Keith Sutton voted with the majority to waive the second hearing, given the time constraints of the transfer hearings. Mr. Hill stated he did not agree with the policy change but in the interests of holding the request hearings in a timely manner, he voted for waiving the second reading. Thus, the hearing panels will not grant requests that support diversity.

Board members Dr. Anne McLaurin and Dr. Carolyn Morrison both spoke against the changed policy and voted against waiving the second reading. Factors maintained in the transfer policy include approving transfers in support of improving greater utilization of school capacity, before- or after-school care, courses of study in the high schools, health conditions, parent employment in the school, change of domicile during the school year, and calendar options. For the first time this year, WCPSS staff will join Board of Education members as hearing officers for the transfer requests. In the past, Board of Education members solely served to make final decisions on appeals.

The Board also retroactively voted to approve an unspecified amount of funds to pay attorney and former Raleigh City Councilman Kieran Shanahan to help defend the School district in the recent Open Government lawsuit. It was revealed that Mr. Shanahan was unilaterally hired by Chair Margiotta, who consulted with Board attorney Ann Majestic and other staff, but not with any other Board members. The contract was approved 6 to 1, with Kevin Hill voting against and Dr. Morrison removing herself from the vote due to a personal conflict—a close friendship with a partner in Mr. Shanahan’s law firm. Mr. Shanahan contributed \$250 to Board member Chris Malone’s campaign last fall, and Mr. Malone voted in support of the contract with Mr. Shanahan.

The Board also voted to hire a search firm to help the Superintendent Search Committee find a new superintendent for the School System, and they voted to use up to \$125,000 from the undesignated fund balance to pay the search firm fees. Debra Goldman, chair of the search committee, said it is not their intention to spend “anywhere near” the full amount, but she wanted to have that amount available to the committee. Dr. Morrison stated a concern about spending the full amount.

The Board also heard from staff regarding the \$6.3 million spent with various agencies for students with developmental and other special needs. Contracts with various providers, including some residential providers, were approved at the meeting.

There also was a recognition of awards presented to [14 WCPSS magnet schools](#) from the national Magnet Schools of America organization. Wake County had the most award winners of any district in the nation. Seven magnet schools received the 2010 National Magnet School of Excellence award, and seven received the National Magnet School of Distinction award. After the recognition, Chair Margiotta read a prepared statement that supported magnet schools, saying they "enhanced the standard course of study" for WCPSS.