

JULY 20, 2010 - Board of Education meeting

Tensions again ran high at a school board meeting--press reports state that 19 people were arrested after separate protests, and the board voted 5-4 to permanently change their meeting schedule, suspending the work of all standing committees and instead having only one action meeting each month (with public comment) and one work session a month (to take the place of committee work). The result will be less public input and less public scrutiny of the Board's work. Board member Debra Goldman called some of her fellow board members "disingenuous" for changing their minds on the final vote, although Board member Anne McLaurin was open about her ultimate objection, citing her concern that the change would lessen public input. Chair Ron Margiotta at one point responded to Dr. McLaurin's concerns by stating he would not favor more public input "in a million years."

The crowds came back out for today's Board meeting and the school district's security folks were ready for them. At least 20 Raleigh police officers were there, two on horseback, and police were in the parking lot and in the building, and there were two "inmate transfer" buses parked outside before the start of the 3 pm meeting, presumably to cart away those arrested, as if that were an expectation from the day's events. Rev. William Barber and Pastor Nancy Petty were arrested for stepping onto the WCPSS property, a public property--they had been warned in a letter signed by Security chief Russ Smith that they would be arrested if they came to the site. At least ten audience members were arrested when one speaker began chanting and refused to give up the podium.

The Board went into recess when that speaker, who wore a hat emblazoned with the NAACP logo, began chanting, "Backwards Never, Forward Forever" and after she chastised the Board for turning the clock back by eliminating the diversity policy from its student assignment policies. (It was almost Orwellian how the screen on WRAL went blank after the speaker and others started chanting--you can watch it on [WRAL](#), about 1 hour and 50 minutes into the 3 pm Board meeting.) The Board was in recess for more than 25 minutes.

From the WRAL blog: 5 p.m. -- *Police carried protesters from the Wake County Board of Education meeting Tuesday as others sang "We Shall Overcome" and chanted "Segregation Never."*
It appeared for a few moments that board member Keith Sutton was going to be arrested when he was in the midst of the protesters at the speaker's podium. Raleigh police had Sutton's hands behind him and looked as if he would be handcuffed in the confusion. Shortly after, however, he was led from a side door after officers realized he was a board member, not a protester. A protest went on for several minutes before Chair Ron Margiotta ordered Raleigh police to begin arresting people who had disrupted the board's public

comment session about 45 minutes after it began. The meeting, which is the only one scheduled for July, brought out more crowds than those in April and May, and many who attended an earlier NAACP-sponsored rally downtown in support of diverse schools later came to the Wake Board meeting.

At the full meeting, the Board voted to permanently change their meeting schedule to only two meetings a month, with no standing committees. Earlier at the Committee of the Whole, Chair Margiotta proposed a three-month trial that would suspend all [standing committees](#)--Student Achievement, Facilities, Human Resources, and Finance--and have one Board meeting a month for action items (the first Tuesday of the month) and one full Board work session per month (third Tuesday of the month) that will be designed to complete work previously done by the standing committees. Some Board members, who had not seen the proposal prior to today's meeting, voiced concerns about transparency and the efficient use of time--Member Keith Sutton said he was concerned that the volume of work conducted by the Board may well require several standing committees. The proposal for a three-month trial was approved to go forward for a vote to the full Board as an action item. The next meetings of the Board will be August 3 and August 10 (the second Tuesday). The change to August 10 was made in order to pass the budget for the year.

At the later meeting, member Anne McLaurin raised a concern that by moving to only one action meeting, it will limit public hearings to once a month, however, chair Ron Margiotta said he would not support adding more public comment. After the waiver of the policy change was defeated, as it required a 2/3rds vote, the Board majority then voted to permanently make the change, which it can do with a simple majority vote, although it requires two readings, and it cannot go into affect until a second reading in August. So for now, there will be no standing committee work by the Board. Many of those meetings have been cancelled due to the work and personal schedules of committee chairs. For example, the Student Achievement Committee has only met four times since the new majority took office in December.

Earlier, in the COW meeting, the Board also heard enrollment projections from Asst. Superintendent Don Haydon. He went over projections that pointed to potential severe overcrowding in the 2012-13 school year, when 17,000 additional students are expected to have enrolled in Wake County schools--he said that two school sites are available, one each in the northern and west south portions of the county, two of the worst regions with potential overcrowding. He asked that the Board consider using left-over bond money to begin building schools on those sites--millions are available due to cost savings (much of it from lower bids received for work completed under the last bond's construction plan). He said beginning now will help anticipate the projected growth, and he added that an additional bond will be needed to

build more facilities to accommodate growth. Enough money is available only to build two elementary schools, although additional high schools and other facilities will also be needed in the coming years.

Board member Debra Goldman objected to the funds being used to build new schools, given some renovations had not been completed at existing schools, such as Cary High, which she cited several times. She passed notes to Chair Margiotta after voicing her objections. The proposal is set to go to the August 3 meeting. In the meantime, the Facilities Committee--formerly chaired by Member Chris Malone, who had gone over the preliminary plans presented by Mr. Haydon--will not be meeting to finalize details, given all committee meetings have been suspended.

At the 3 pm meeting, the Board also voted to cap enrollment at Cedar Fork Elementary School, in the fastest growing section of the county. As of today, any student moving into the base nodes of that school will not be able to attend the school--those students will instead be assigned to Weatherstone Elementary, which has seats available. (As noted by one speaker, earlier this year, this Board, in 5-4 votes, converted Mills Park Elementary from a four-track year-round calendar school to a traditional school, eliminating several hundred seats in that section of the county. The Board also reassigned students from Alston Ridge, a new year-round school that is now underenrolled.)

Changes to Policy 2110, regarding the job description of the Superintendent, was passed on first reading, although further changes may be implemented during a scheduled work session August 10.

For Policy 2100, the Board voted to drop the requirement of having an education background for the Superintendent, on a 5-4 vote, with Margiotta, John Tedesco, Chris Malone, Deborah Prickett and Debra Goldman voting in favor of eliminating the requirement. A motion to table the policy change until after the \$82,500 search firm completes its public comment surveys was defeated. The Board also voted 5-4 against giving internal candidates preference in the hiring of a Superintendent.

They also approved, by the same 5-4 vote, a change to policy that allows the Board to name schools after people.

Earlier, the public comment also brought comments from local Tea Party leader Dallas Woodhouse and other Republicans, who came out to thank the board, a few saying that the Board had "saved \$25 million from the budget" that has not affected the classroom. Many of the reductions were forced to the Board from state budget cuts, and some of purported "savings" are anticipated revenues through selling the Wake Forest Road administrative

site, which has not yet been sold and indeed is still being used by the School District and Board. However, the school [Board has spent more than \\$20 million](#)--much of it by cancelling a planned High School site on Forestville Road and purchasing a site closer in Rolesville, a site further removed from the high growth Wakefield and Bedford neighborhoods. Other extra expenses approved by the Board in recent months include \$82,500 plus unspecified expenses to hire a Chicago-based search firm to find the next superintendent (the search firm was the highest bidder for the contract); \$14,000 on extra security since December; \$75,000 for an outside attorney to audit the legal expenses (who concluded that the district was getting a good value for its legal expenses).