

April 20, 2010 – Board of Education Meeting

The Board of Education passed its final version of a desegregation plan and eliminated 68 jobs in the Central Office as the result of a tightening budget year.

At the Board's Committee of the Whole meeting, in setting next year's start and end times for schools, the Board decided to revert to the 2008-09 bell schedule (they have eliminated the Wake Wednesday early release for Professional Learning Team meetings), after considering options that would have been budget neutral. The Board now must find \$750,000 in the tight budget to fund the new buses and drivers needed to meet that schedule while also opening four new schools this fall. The budget neutral version had many elementary schools starting at 9:30 am. The 2010-11 budget, which was a main focus of the meeting, was officially approved. About 68 staff members from Central Office will lose their jobs as a result of the Reduction in Force approved by the Board. In addition, 57 vacant positions will be eliminated.

Also at the main Board meeting at 3 pm, the Voluntary Desegregation Plan, drafted by Board members John Tedesco, Debra Goldman and Keith Sutton over a four-hour period a few weekends ago, was approved 5-4 on its second reading. This plan was drafted to meet the requirements of the federal magnet grant.

Board member Carolyn Morrison suggested an amendment that would state that in the Community-Based Assignment plan "every effort shall be made to avoid minority group isolation of students." Dr. Morrison related her experiences working in a low wealth school and how difficult it was to raise student achievement and recruit teachers to the school. She said she

wanted to avoid resegregating the schools. Members Chris Malone and Debra Goldman called the language "redundant," and Mr. Tedesco said Dr. Morrison's clarifying language would "water down" the directive. Member Kevin Hill said Dr. Morrison's amendment spells out the intent of the Board, that avoiding "minority group isolation of students" would be the ideal.

The Board vote 4-5 to defeat the amendment. The unamended Voluntary Desegregation Plan was passed 5-4. Both votes were split, with the five majority members being Chair Margiotta, Ms. Goldman, Mr. Tedesco, Deborah Prickett, and Chris Malone. The four minority votes in both cases were Mr. Sutton, Dr. Morrison, Dr. Anne McLaurin and Mr. Kevin Hill.

Ms. Prickett said she has heard Dr. Morrison say she is against resegregation of schools, and Ms. Prickett said she would not be "put in a box" in support of segregation--she said that was not the Board's intent.

There were 22 speakers during the public comment, still limited to 2 minutes each (instead of the previous 3 minute limit that was in place prior to February). Several media specialists from throughout the system came to oppose the proposed cuts in 40 media positions that will take effect if the budget situation worsens. For now, those media jobs are safe--non-school-based jobs were eliminated in the RIF approved yesterday.

Two speakers expressed concern over BoE member John Tedesco's speech at the Tea Party rally last week, both questioning whether Mr. Tedesco violated the BoE Code of Ethics policy that bars Board members from being influenced by special political interests. One speaker called Mr. Tedesco "Palin-esque" and said he should be "embarrassed" for speaking

to a radical group that advocates violence.

The COW work session was filled with about 20 members of the public yesterday, but the main Board meeting was moderately attended--only about 50 tickets or "seat vouchers" (the new term from WCPSS) were given out.

There were four uniformed Raleigh Police Officers providing security as well as several WCPSS security officials. If you've been wanting to see this Board in action, the crowds have lessened. Whether this has occurred because of the Board's tighter restrictions on public participation and input or a lack of interest is uncertain. In addition, many of the public may be watching the meetings online on WRAL.com.