

DECEMBER 1, 2009 – Board of Education Meeting

Kevin Hill Out, Ron Margiotta in. Friends, tonight's school board meeting showed the new board members and Ron Margiotta coming out swinging. They elected a new Chair, Mr. Margiotta, they indicated they would eliminate the reassignment policy's clause on diversity, and they voted in a block of Five to support policies that had previously not been publicly discussed. I think you'll see more details tomorrow in the paper (or go online at <http://www.newsobserver.com/news/education/>) but here is a blow by blow summary:

After their swearing in, they by consensus elected Debra Goldman, District 9 (Cary) as Vice Chair. They then signed a code of ethics. Then five board members (hereafter referred to as "The Five")--Margiotta (District 8), John Tedesco (District 2), Deborah Prickett (District 7), Chris Malone (District 1), and Goldman amended the agenda to include eight items, previously not published or revealed to the public or even shared with the other four board members or staff. The items were as follows and I'll try to summarize the outcomes:

1--Elect a new Board chair. When Carolyn Morrison (District 6) asked "Why?", Mr. Margiotta replied, "Whatever." The Five then voted to declare this an organizational meeting (usually done in June) and elect a new Chair and they then chose Mr. Margiotta. There was no public comment on this item.

After this, the Board allowed public comment on the remaining items. Many teachers, students, and parents spoke, almost all in favor of the current policies. (One high school student, who said he was from Cary High and a proud member of the Young Republicans, spoke opposed to Wake Wednesday's early releases.)

After a closed session on personnel items, they proceeded with the

remaining items.

2--The Five approved a resolution to appoint interim special legal counsel and named that counsel--Thomas A. Farr, a partner with Ogletree, Deakins, Nash, Smoak and Stewart. Lawyers of this firm have reportedly given campaign contributions to Mr. Malone. This resolution was offered by Mr. Tedesco. No dollar amounts were discussed or revealed for this proposal. Mr. Farr is to work with the current staff and attorneys, including Tharrington Smith, who have represented WCPSS for 30 years and represents about 20 other school boards/districts across NC, to assess legal representation used by the district.

3--Ms. Goldman presented a resolution to change student assignment. The draft revision of Policy 6200 eliminates "Creating and maintaining a diverse student body" as a goal. It replaces "Maintaining diverse student populations" with "Maintaining stable populations that consider proximity to home" as the priority. There are other rewrites that essentially emphasize "community" and "neighborhood" schools as the goal. After much discussion, the board voted unanimously to send it to the Policy Committee, which is typical Board procedures. No dollar amounts were revealed for this proposal.

4--Ms. Prickett presented a resolution to "ensure parental choice regarding year-round schools" to the committee. This resolution initially asked that staff cease opening any new schools or convert existing schools to year-round and end mandatory year round. No dollar amounts were discussed as to what that would cost, and no provisions in the resolution initially were made to discuss capacity in regard to these changes. In the end, after discussion, it was decided to survey "all parents actively enrolled in WCPSS schools" as to their desire for year-round. The Superintendent and staff will conduct the survey and report back to the Board.

5--Mr. Malone offered a resolution to cease all expenditures on H-6 high school site in his area that has been controversial and to seek alternative sites, working with local municipalities and officials. No dollar amounts were discussed as to the costs. The resolution passed. Mr. Malone says his district, where this high school will be located, is ready to face the consequences of further delays. He said he is okay with sites outside the attendance area of the high school. (To me, it seems he supports it not being a neighborhood school, but I won't put words in his mouth-he said he doesn't like when people do that.) He said he believes the WCPSS staff is capable of finding the seats needed for the growth in high school students in his district, even with this site being eliminated.

6--Ms. Goldman offered a resolution to save costs and expenses. In the end, they all agreed that Supt. Burns will present greater clarity on the \$21 million on cuts he announced earlier last week. Initially, there was more details of a hiring freeze of "noncritical staff" and other discussions that were termed by Keith Sutton (District 4) as "micromanaging." 7--Mr. Tedesco offered a resolution ending Early Release Wednesdays (the 1-hour early release) after the 09-10 school year, and reassessing the effectiveness of PLTs. Dr. Burns noted that the board would need to set the bell schedule in April, before test data from the schools would be available to evaluate the Wake Wednesdays. PLTs are geared to increase student achievement, which won't be measured until the end of the school year. The Five passed the resolution.

8--In a most revealing vote, the Board all voted to have the previously-canceled Dec. 15 rescheduled. Mr. Hill wanted to make clear that his previous call to cancel the meeting was not unilateral. He said he called each of the members individually and asked them if they wanted to cancel the meeting, as had been done in the past, given the holidays. Every one of the nine told him they would be in favor of canceling. Mr. Hill said when

he previously spoke with Mr. Malone specifically, Mr. Malone said he would take the time to travel to Texas to spend time with family and thus would be out of town on Dec. 15. Then in tonight's meeting, the Five had the meeting as an agenda item. They were disingenuous, and Mr. Hill called them out, rightfully so.

There was a lot of groaning, shouting, and protest at this meeting. The Five were determined to do what they had planned in their previous get-togethers before being sworn in. It was a meeting of political theater.

Next steps: While they reinstated the December 15th meeting (please try to go!), the Board at this time will have no committee meetings in December. Committee assignments have been made, although they will now need to be tweaked as Mr. Hill is no longer the chair. Mr. Margiotta as chair now will serve as ex officio on all committees. See the current assignments at <http://www.wcpss.net/Board/committees.html>.

The Board members email addresses are all now operational, so please let your voice be heard. They are going forward fast and furious on their issues. Make sure you let them know what your vision for the future of our schools should be. Let's hope they listen.