

## **JANUARY 19, 2010 - Board of Education meeting**

Today's 7-hour meeting had a lots of back and forth, and after admitting that she was struggling with some proposed amendments on the Year Round calendar question, Board member Debra Goldman voted with a different block for the first time, voting with a 5-3 majority to support a revised amendment offered by Board member Keith Sutton to rewrite a resolution on mandatory year round schools. Board member Chris Malone, in voting against the revised resolution, said the revision changed the original motion from policy to a goal.

The vote followed discussion both in the Committee of the Whole meeting and the Board meeting regarding exactly how the Board would be able to accommodate all families seeking changes in the school calendar for their children. Capacity issues have in the past restricted the Board and district being able to accommodate all families with their choice of school calendar. For example, last year, 884 students who applied for Year Round calendar were denied admission to year round schools, while 143 students who sought to leave a Year Round school for a traditional schedule were denied and not accommodated. With this amendment, the Board agreed to make every effort to accommodate families but without giving a guarantee that all requests will be accommodated. The new resolution now reads:

We strongly oppose the mandatory assignments of students to year-round calendar schools and support calendar choice for all families. Beginning with the 2010-2011 school year, every effort will be made to eliminate mandatory year-round assignments and to accommodate families into the calendar of their choice. This applies to year-round or traditional options, at a school within proximity of their residence. We will no longer deny calendar applications based on socio-economic status. We will use each and every seat efficiently.

Mr. Sutton's amendment took out the phrase "there will be no mandatory year-round assignments"--Kevin Hill had made a similar amendment, seconded by Mr. Sutton, earlier in the meeting, but that was voted down. With Mr. Sutton's rewrite, the revised resolution passed 5-3, with Mr. Sutton, Mr. Hill, Dr. Anne McLaurin, Dr. Carolyn Morrison, and Ms. Goldman voting in favor, and John Tedesco, Chris Malone, and Deborah Prickett voting against. As it was not a tie, Mr. Margiotta did not vote on the revised amendment.

On the contract for attorney Thomas Farr, at one point, Ms. Goldman voted with four others to limit his contract to conducting only a review of legal services paid for by WCPSS, but that vote was reconsidered, and in the end, the contract for Mr. Farr was approved for a legal review as well as for other unspecified legal services. Mr. Farr, at a rate of \$250 an hour, will provide a review of legal services, capped at \$50,000, and he also will provide "legal advice or legal representation on other matters that may be requested" by Board Chair Ron Margiotta. Two amendments were made to cap those "other" fees at \$25,000 unless the Board votes otherwise as well as to set the hourly fee at \$250 an hour. In the end, after the amendments and extended discussion, Kevin Hill was the lone dissenter, with all other seven voting in favor of the amended motion to hire Mr. Farr. In the past, some Board members have spoken openly about using Mr. Farr to defend the Board against a threatened lawsuit by the NAACP if the Board resegregates the county's public schools.

The Board also voted to re-instate the Community Relations Committee to improve communications between the Board and the community. The Chairs of each Board Advisory Council as well as two parents from each district will serve on the Committee, Mr. Margiotta said.

The Committee of the Whole included discussion of the ongoing survey of parents regarding calendar preferences. Ms. Goldman suggested

surveying teachers and staff and that was approved by the Board members and will be conducted soon. The WCPSS staff will analyze data from parents and the community and present findings to the Board of Education at its February 2 meeting.

Public comment included many speakers supporting the district's current assignment policy that includes diversity as a factor. I was not able to stay for much of the public comment. The following is from the News and Observer:

While turnout was smaller than at recent past meetings, critics of the new school board majority continued to outnumber supporters during today's public comment section. Most of the 19 speakers urged the board to keep the diversity policy and not back away from mandatory year-round schools.

"Whether we like it or not, we as a society haven't made it a choice to have the infrastructure so that everyone can have a choice," said Jim Martin, a Raleigh parent and professor at N.C. State University. "It's a choice we made several years ago and have to live with it."

Matthew Brown of the Coalition of Concerned Citizens for African American Children, an advocacy group critical of the new board, warned that Wake could become "national villains" for ending the diversity policy. "This new board will be known nationally as the new face of segregation in America," Brown said.

But some speakers praised the new board majority and urged members to stand fast despite the complaints.

"I want you to continue to fight for the parents of Cary," said Cindy Sinkez, a Cary parent. "I want you to continue to fight for the parents of Wake County. I thank you."