

MARCH 23, 2010 - BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

Last night, five of nine of the Wake County Board of Education voted against taking steps to assure that segregation does not reoccur in our public schools. It is a sad day for 140,000 public school students in Wake County. The Board majority voted to approve the [Directive for Community-Based Assignment](#). About 40 speakers--including noted Civil Rights attorney Julius Chambers--spoke against the directive as proposed by the majority, citing decades of research, moral necessity and student achievement. Only 10 spoke in favor, most stating a desire for "neighborhood schools" and parent convenience. But the Board majority, on 5-4 votes, turned back amendments that would lessen the chance that school assignment would result in racially and economically segregated schools in our future. The Board majority also voted 5-4 against considering the financial implications of the directive and voted 5-4 against having public hearings on the directive as it was being developed. There will be public hearings "before the plan is finalized," but members Keith Sutton and Carolyn Morrison pushed unsuccessfully for having hearings before diversity was formally taken out of the new policy.

The only amendment approved restated words from the N.C. Constitution that read: "A plan that provides all students at all schools with an equal opportunity to a sound and basic education." With the approval, member Deborah Prickett stated she was proud to support words from the U.S. Constitution, but was quickly reminded that the words come from the North Carolina Constitution.

The Board majority also turned back a substitute resolution from Mr. Sutton that focused on Student Achievement and elements of the achievement gap. One speaker gave the Board a two-foot stack of research that confirms the one resounding conclusion of educational research from the past forty years--that heterogeneously mixed schools--

racially, socio-economically diverse schools--lift student achievement for all students. Many speakers were educational and research professionals who asked the Board to incorporate and consider this resounding conclusion of the importance of socio-economic diversity on students.

There are lots of detailed press reports, including on [WRAL](#) and on [the News and Observer](#), which for today features a photo of Chair Margiotta facing the student protesters. You can watch the whole meeting on the WRAL site. It was about the only way to see into the Committee of the Whole meeting. Only six members of the public were allowed into the COW due to what the Board and WCPSS staff said were "safety" concerns and space limitations. In the past, at least 12 to 15 members of the public had been allowed into this public meeting and on March 2, the COW was held in the larger Boardroom. But yesterday, admission was restricted with security at the door, although the media were given open admission. It was nearly impossible to hear the COW being fed into the larger Boardroom, and on two occasions the feed was interrupted. WRAL and the News and Observer offered to pay to move the meeting to a larger venue (which the media is allowed to do), but Chairman Margiotta said it was too late to change. The Board Chair also received a letter from Civil Rights attorneys asking him to relocate to a larger venue, which can be read [on the WRAL site](#).

The entire day reflected restrictions on public participation in the meeting. Tickets were required to enter the Boardroom and were handed out at 10 am for the 3 pm meeting. Initially, ticket holders were told that they would need to remain in the building for the entire time--leaving would mean surrendering your tickets. Many chose to leave rather than wait, yet at 12:30 pm that policy was reversed and the public was told they could leave with their tickets. One had to show one's ticket when re-entering the public meeting, and many were left in the hallway. Chairman Margiotta said it

was done for safety reasons.

There also was an increased police and security presence--at least four Raleigh police officers and numerous security officials were visibly present throughout the meeting. There was a student protest that ended in some arrests after students chanted against the omission of diversity from the assignment directive. Board of Education members have stepped up security increasingly with each Board meeting.

Node changes to the 3-year Student Assignment plan were also discussed, and some were approved. It was mostly done in the COW work session, and discussions will continue next week at a work session scheduled for March 31 (during Spring Break) at 6 pm. [WRAL has an updated copy of the node changes](#), with notes on which it says were approved. The big winners in the node decisions were folks in the Briar Creek Country Club neighborhood, where member Deborah Prickett lives--their bid not to be reassigned to Broughton and to stay at Panther Creek was approved, as well as their request to go to Mills Park Middle School, not Daniels. MS Neighborhood members made their protests in large numbers during the Panther Creek public hearing, which was held to hear parent concerns about calendar choice. Umstead Ridge parents seeking to stay at Leesville High instead of going to Broughton were denied.

The Board also voted openly to place Supt. Del Burns on administrative leave until June 30, again along a 5-4 vote--voting for sanctioning Supt. Burns were Chair Margiotta, John Tedesco, Debra Goldman, Chris Malone, and Ms. Prickett. There was no discussion on the personnel matter, but when a speaker spoke against Dr. Burns, he was not cut off by Chair Margiotta, who, stating it was a "personnel matter," has in the past interrupted speakers who spoke in favor of keeping Dr. Burns on board. Donna Hargens, interim Superintendent, sat with the Board during the Board meeting. The Board also approved forming a 4-member search

committee for the new Superintendent who will succeed Burns on July 1.

The Board deferred action on the proposed Bell Schedule, which proposed having elementary schools start at 9:30 am. Some Board members raised concerns about that late start time. They will take that up at the April 6 meeting and asked staff to rework the schedule to have elementary schools starting earlier. The Transportation staff had developed the proposed schedule based on the 08-09 schedule with extra time between the tiers due to the opening of four new schools and the fact that there is no money to purchase new buses. The WCPSS transportation system has a 100 percent efficiency rating from the state, which funds most of the transportation costs for the county, and it will need to be even more efficient in the coming year.

During the COW, it was noted that the Magnet office will seek a no-cost extension of its magnet grants for Garner High School, Southeast Raleigh High School and East Garner Middle School, as well as Brentwood and Smith Elementary Schools. However, without voluntary desegregation in place, the School district may lose that federal magnet money. Ending racial isolation among students is a goal and requirement under the federal magnet grant program. In the past, WCPSS has received more than \$36 million in magnet grant money from the Federal Government.

The [Great Schools in Wake Coalition](#) will continue to speak before the Board and work toward securing that all children in Wake County, regardless of income, race, ethnicity, or residence, will receive the highest quality public education possible. The [presentations given at last Saturday's forum](#) from Great Schools are now online, including resources on school diversity by Benita Jones as well as other information on the importance of diverse schools. The diversity research presented at the meeting will also soon be on the Great Schools website.

Keep watching and getting information! These developments are hardly over. Over the next nine to 15 months, the Board of Education will develop details to this "Community-Based Assignment" plan. Parents and residents across the county need to continue to make their voices heard.