

**GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES  
APRIL 20, 2015**

The Gates County Board of Commissioners met in Special Session at 4:00 p.m. Monday, April 20, 2015 at the Board of Education, 205 Main Street, Gatesville for a joint meeting with the Gates County Board of Education. Commissioners Hofler, Jordan, Felton and Freeman were present. Board of Education members Glendale Boone, Leslie Byrum, Claire Whitehurst and Daniel Dickerson were present. Also present was County Manager, Natalie Rountree, Superintendent Dr. Barry Williams, Finance Officer Rube Blanchard and Finance Officer Sandy Pittman.

Chairman Hofler called the meeting to order for the Board of Commissioners.

Chairman Boone opened the meeting for the Board of Education.

Dr. Williams announced the Boards are together to discuss budget needs and opened with a letter written to the Board of Commissioners explaining the budget request that will be discussed throughout the meeting. The Superintendent shared with the Board which items are funded out of state funds and which items are funded with local funds. The amount of items funded out of local funds is having to increase due to the shifting and decreasing of state funds.

Dr. Williams shared a list of positions that have only been contracted for one year. This list consisted of three reading resource teachers, a social studies teacher, P.E. teacher, teacher assistant and a front desk receptionist. Dr. Williams shared what each of the positions do and the total amount needed to maintain the positions is \$309,244.81. In addition to these one year contracted employees the School Board feels it is necessary to add a technology assistant, technology coordinator and an instructional coach for FY 15/16 and requests \$145,200.00.

Mr. Blanchard stated there will be reductions in the state allotments for state allocations, student resource officer funding, and drivers education funding. There will be an increase in the expense in expenditures due to the retirement and health insurance increase for locally paid employees. The increase in local funds due to increase in State mandates/reductions will be around \$520,782.41.

Dr. Williams stated materials, supplies, workshops and travel expenses have been cut. The director of elementary education and director of secondary education positions have been combined into one position to offset costs. For the 2014/2015 local budget there were appropriations of \$3,092,314.99 awarded the Board of Education is requesting \$3,279,248.00 for FY 15/16, in addition to these funds the Board is planning to use \$3,622,254.00 out of their fund balance. Mr. Blanchard stated the Board of Education has set a minimum limit of 200,000 to remain in their fund balance.

Dr. Williams shared appropriation request for the community center and for capital outlay.

Mr. Blanchard summarized the appropriation requests for \$3,279,248 for general expenses, 238,500 for the Community Center and 2,575,272 for capital outlay.

Commissioner Jordan asked how much was appropriated for Capital Outlay for FY 14/15. Ms. Rountree stated 200,000 was appropriated.

Mr. Byrum explained that common core came about two years ago and now there is a bill on the table to do away with common core and this leaves a lot of uncertainty for the Board of Education. Not knowing what common core is going to do, the Board has opted to take funds out of the fund balance for exceptional children funding. Mr. Byrum expanded on the importance of the female physical education teacher due to title IX and the safety of students. The front desk receptionist needs to be filled by a professional staff member and not a student. Howard Hunter has endorsed a house bill where the Board of Education cannot sue the County for lack of appropriations but a mediator can be put into place and

it is likely the bill will pass. The instructional coach is needed to tie all schools together to create a solid system where students do not fall through the cracks, the position will also look over all IEP's when children are transitioning from one school to another. Mr. Byrum shared several other house bills that are on the table and explained that employees with the highest pay come out of State funding and the lower paid employees come out of local appropriations. State benefits are mandatory no matter what appropriations are used to pay the employee. The Board has talked with the local government commission to set the \$200,000 minimum fund balance amount. Mr. Byrum closed with reminding the Commissioners that we all have a huge responsibility to provide the best educational opportunities for all children in the County.

Chairman Hofler verified there are two female physical education teachers at the high school and stated the dilemma the Commissioners face is limited dollars that need to be dispersed to many departments and agencies.

Ms. Whitehurst explained the school system is the largest employer in the County, is one of the top school systems in the Northeast and the Board of Education hopes they will be given top priority with funding. Ms. Whitehurst asked how aggressively the County is pursuing delinquent taxes. Chairman Hofler stated the County is in the process of creating more payment plans and pursuing the foreclosure process. Ms. Rountree stated the tax office has had a lot of staff change and is now being very aggressive with collections, this year we are predicting a collection rate of about 97%.

Chairman Hofler shared the Board has been receiving education on how to finance schools and is looking more into the leasing option.

Commissioner Jordan asked about lottery funds. Ms. Rountree said lottery funding is likely to decrease another \$120,000. Commissioner Jordan asked if there is a priority list for the repairs that are needed. Dr. Williams stated Central Middle School is the major concern with Buckland Elementary being the second. The Board is working with an engineer to establish some options on ways to rebuild portions of the school without building an entirely new school. Dr. Williams shared experiences he has had out at Central Middle School while observing and inspecting the facilities.

Ms. Rountree asked for the Board of Education to put together a prioritization list like was presented last year which would prioritize all requests together. Dr. Williams stated they will provide a prioritized list as it is now but it may change once the engineers and contractors look at the roof again and provide suggestions. Dr. Williams stated they are trying everything possible to make sure Central Middle School does not have to be closed.

Chairman Hofler asked about the average daily membership. Mr. Byrum stated some years have increased and some have decreased. Chairman Hofler said there may be some children that live outside of the Gates County District attending school and not paying the tuition rates.

Chairman Hofler asked about the effect the Charter School in Elizabeth City will have. Mr. Byrum said there has been house bills for charter schools in Gates County. Should a charter school get started and children are pulled out of the school system to attend the Board of Education will have to pay for those children to go to the Charter School.

Mr. Byrum said both Boards need to work together to become more creative in how to maximize tax dollars. In the past we haven't really addressed the aging of the schools and it has quickly caught up on everyone. Both Boards need to start working to think out of the box on solutions that will work with current legislation.

Commissioner Jordan asked Ms. Pittman how close the County is to paying off the expenditures borrowed for the schools. Ms. Pittman explained the County is about ten years away from having it paid off. There really is no way to pull 2.5 million out of the fund balance and the county budget. Mr. Byrum said the lease purchase agreement is a very viable way to get new schools. It is very popular in the western part of the state and Suffolk has used it for a few new schools. Camden is using a partial lease purchase to fund a school. Chairman Hofler said Washington County is looking into it for a new school as well, we are looking to see how it goes for counties in the eastern part of the state.

Dr. Williams said everyone wants to see good things happen in Gates County and he realizes the fund balance here isn't what it is in other counties and we are limited a bit but we can't keep putting band aides on the issues, we have to start fixing issues.

Mr. Byrum explained the Gates County Commissioners have been known for being exceptional with working with the Board of Education.

Chairman Hofler said everyone on the Board has a tie to the school system whether they are a product of the system, have taught in the system, have family that work in the schools, or have their children in the system.

Commissioner Jordan requested to see the outstanding debt for the schools.

The Boards discussed the tax revaluation process and how it has affected surrounding counties.

Commissioner Jordan stated he would like to see as much grant money come in as possible to assist the schools and the teachers.

Chairman Hofler asked about text book funding. Mr. Byrum stated the funding was eliminated but now they are looking at adding some of the funding back because of the cost of paper and coping. Not every area is capable of giving students laptops and utilizing all of the technology that is needed to not have text books.

Mr. Byrum reminded the Board all five schools now have a buzz in system and it is important that we maintain the systems.

Ms. Whitehurst reminded everyone that it is important to have a vision for the school system or else things will parish. Chairman Hofler said it is important to have a vision for the school system and a vision for the County.

Commissioner Felton asked about the SRO officers for the schools. Mr. Byrum feels the officers are really needed and it would be nice to have a fulltime officer at the middle school and the high school. When the funding was available having the two full time officers was really beneficial.

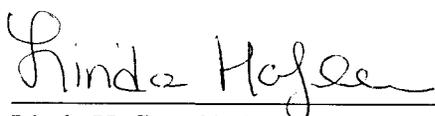
Ms. Rountree explained there are two other budget sessions to be held on May 12<sup>th</sup> at 7pm and May 14<sup>th</sup> at 2pm. During these work sessions there may be questions that come up and Ms. Rountree will contact Dr. Williams or Mr. Blanchard with concerns. Ms. Whitehurst said the Board of Education has a meeting on May 12<sup>th</sup>.

Dr. Williams asked if there is a need for the two Boards to meet more throughout the year. Chairman Hofler stated once the revaluation process starts there may be reasons to meet more and share information. Chairman Boone suggested quarterly meetings.

Chairman Boone thanked the Board of Commissioners for attending.

#### **Adjournment**

Ms. Whitehurst made a motion to adjourn. Mr. Byrum seconded the motion; motion passed unanimously.

  
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 Linda Hofler, Chairman

  
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 Melissa C. Lawrence, Clerk

GATES COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

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