

**SPECIAL MEETING  
NORTHAMPTON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
Monday, November 21, 2011**

Members Present: Donald Johnson, Chair; Marjorie Edwards, Vice Chair; Bill Little, Lafayette Majette, Kelvin Edwards, Rhonda Taylor, Dr. Eric Bracy, ex officio

Members Absent: Erica Smith-Ingram

Others Present: Administration, press and interested parties

The Northampton County Board of Education held a Work Session on November 21, 2011 in the Board Room of the Northampton County Schools administrative building. Chair Donald Johnson called the meeting to order at 5:10 p.m.

**Approval of Board Agenda**

On a MOTION by Mr. Little, SECONDED by Mr. K. Edwards, the Board unanimously APPROVED the Board Agenda, as recommended by the Superintendent. The motion passed by a vote of 5-0. Ms. Marjorie Edwards was not present for the vote.

**Business Before the Board for Information**

**Follow-up of the Discussion of the Consolidation**

Chair Johnson informed the Board that the item on the agenda, Follow-up of the Discussion of the Consolidation, is the only item that I have because according to our last meeting it was stated that we needed to make some kind of a decision on how we were going to move on the consolidation. We all know the three options that we have and have been discussing these options for the last two years. It is time that we move one way or the other. That was the consensus of the Board at the last meeting and this is why this meeting was called. We will discuss our options tonight and leave this meeting with a possible recommendation for December 5<sup>th</sup> of what our decision will be. I will give everyone the opportunity to say anything they would like to say regarding this issue. The three options are as follows:

- 1) Stay as we are,
- 2) Go to the eastern end of the county – one school,
- 3) Go to the western end of the county – one school.

Those are the things that we are considering tonight in the way of a discussion and a decision of what way we are going to go for Northampton County School's future.

Mr. Little: We need to decide do we merge or not merge and then we can go to where. We need to make a suggestive show of hands as to whether we agree with the merger. Would that be in order?

Chair Johnson: I have no objection to that. Let me ask if there are any more comments from anyone else before we ask for a show of hands?

Mr. Little: This is not an official vote. I would propose to merge.

Mr. K. Edwards: Chair Johnson, if I am hearing Mr. Little correctly, we are going to have a discussion? He is just asking for a show of hands of those in favor of the merger?

Chair Johnson: Yes.

Mr. K. Edwards: I wanted to say that because it sounds too much like a vote. Are we just talking about the general feeling?

Mr. Little: You are correct Mr. Edwards, just general feeling.

Chair Johnson: We can't formally vote in the Work Session. We want to get all of the questions cleared up before we go any further. Does everyone understand what Mr. Little is trying to relay to the Board as a group? Do we want to consolidate? Is that what you are saying Mr. Little?

Little: I used the term merge.

Mr. K. Edwards: Chair Johnson, when did Ms. Ingram say she would get here?

Chair Johnson: I have heard one time it would be 5:15 and then I heard it would be 5:30 p.m. Is there anything else anyone would like to say prior to the show of hands?

Ms. M. Edwards: I would love for the schools to merge, because I believe the children have received a different message. They think that they are different from the other end of the county. I feel like it would be better for the children coming along if they were in one school for their academics, band, and music, because they work together now. These are my thoughts and I have felt this way all along.

Mr. K. Edwards: Dr. Bracy, do we have the powerpoint available tonight? I know we discussed that at the last meeting. I am asking that just in case so that all minds will be clear.

Mr. Matthews: Yes, we do.

Chair Johnson: We have to figure out what we want to do. If you think that is something that will sway someone's opinion one way or the other, we can look at the powerpoint.

Mr. K. Edwards: I think we need all pertinent information.

Ms. M. Edwards: I believe Mr. Matthews shared with us the Five-Year Plan about six months ago. When you look at those numbers as they are declining, the economy is as bad as it is and we are talking about getting the best for our children academically. I think it is a win-win situation. As I look at the recent numbers we have in front of us we have 412 students at Conway Middle.

Mr. K. Edwards: Yes, we just had a Finance Meeting. These are the recent numbers and we would like to share them with everyone else.

Ms. M. Edwards: I thought about when those 412 students come out of Conway and the ones on the western end come out of middle school. It is like it is a whole separation and the kids feel that way. We are the ones separating these schools in the beginning. We need to get the best-qualified teachers and I am not saying we don't have good teachers, but when you move things together you can get more help. We are duplicating services all over the county and these services are costing more money. Dr. Bracy could utilize his time more wisely if we had one high school. Those are my thoughts.

Mr. K. Edwards: According to the latest numbers at NCHS-West for grades 9-12, they are at 207 students. At NCHS-East they have 387 students for grades 9-12. I remember when we had the forums, at NCHS-East and NCHS-West we were talking about transportation, the academics of being able to offer more Advanced Placement (AP) courses, the funding sources when it comes to the extra-curricular activities for our students, such as band and all athletics. I just wanted to bring out those pertinent points.

Ms. M. Edwards: When I attend certain events, I have spoken to Dr. Bracy about when the two schools come together to compete in the bands and how they pick at one another at the end about how many numbers they have. They have even been involved in fights and they are within the same county. We are tearing down more than we are building up and it has been going on for years and years and it is just getting a little old now. My answer has been the same as long as I have been on the Board.

Ms. Taylor: I wanted to inform the Board that Ms. Ingram has just sent me a text message that she will not be able to make the meeting. She also stated that her husband would pick up her packet from the Work Session and to please have it put at the door for her.

Chair Johnson stated, "Ms. Ingram will have the opportunity to express herself. It was Mr. Little's request for a show of hands of those who feel a merger is important. Let it be known by a show of hands at this time." The following Board Members raised their hands in support of the merger: Mr. Donald Johnson, Ms. Marjorie Edwards, Ms. Rhonda Taylor, Mr. Bill Little, Mr. Kelvin Edwards and Mr. Lafayette Majette.

Chair Johnson further stated, "Now we have to decide if the merger will be at NCHS-E or NCHS-West. I believe Ms. M. Edwards has given her feelings toward that. Usually, I don't make comments, but tonight I want to make mine first because I don't want anyone to think I am listening to everyone else and base my opinion on what other people think. I think for myself. I agree we should merge as one school in our system. We should have one school in our system and as I look at the statistics that Mr. Matthews handed out and Mr. K. Edwards has already mentioned the economical status of that and what can be offered to our children as far as on the academic side of it. I know that academics should be foremost on our minds. I know and have been trying to decide which way to go. I have spoken with Mr. Dexter Harris about this situation. I attended a workshop this weekend in Greensboro with the North Carolina High School Athletic Association (NCHSAA). Mr. Harris has been in close contact with them. Some concerns that I have, if we were to merge, one is that it leaves a vacancy within the conference. In Mr. Harris' diligence in looking ahead, he said there is another school that is going to be able to come into the slot of one of our schools so it will not leave a vacancy within the conference. In the year 2013-2014, there will be a new realignment. Our enrollment is not going to change our realignment. We will still be in the same classification that we have been and will be basically playing the same schools that we are playing now. Mr. Harris has gone as far as discussing this with both ends of the county along with the school colors and mascot. A lot of work has gone into this and it is left up to us to decide now where we are going to house the students next year. We have mandated ourselves over the last couple of years that we need to have the merger done by the 2012-2013 school year, which is next September. We can't wait until the last minute as we have done in the past and say, it is too far gone this year, we can't do it, we will have to wait until next year. We need to make a decision of which way we are going. Looking at everything that I have looked at, looking at all of the statistics and the things that we need to do for the benefit of our children."

Ms. M. Edwards: Dr. Bracy, given the fact that we know that with the numbers on the East end, it will cost more to transport them from East to the western end. We also know that East is in bad shape. We are still working on East, but there are a lot of things that still need to be done. How do you feel about that Dr. Bracy?

Dr. Bracy: Yes, it would cost more to transport 387 students to West than it would to transport 207 students to East.

Ms. M. Edwards: Also, East is not in the best shape as far as the mold, mildew and asbestos. Isn't that still a problem?

Mr. Matthews: The asbestos is in good shape.

Dr. Bracy: The asbestos is underneath the tile. You are okay as long as it is not removed.

Ms. M. Edwards: You are saying the school is in good enough shape for the children to be housed there?

Dr. Bracy: I believe Mr. Roger Ballard of DPI said it is a good school.

Ms. M. Edwards: I needed to know that so that I can make my decision as far as where. I know your also said it will cost \$12,000,000 to convert Central Elementary to a high school. What is the cost to bring East up to standard?

Dr. Bracy: It depends upon the word standard. Mr. Matthews, wouldn't a new mechanical system cost approximately \$4,000?

Mr. Matthews: Since then we have replaced the new boiler and air-conditioner at East. We spent about \$2 million at East last year to include a new roof on it that is solid now and new ceiling tile. The main thing from that report that did not get done was the heating and air conditioning units in that classroom. The company recommended a good thorough cleaning on those units. That has not yet been done, but everything else has been done.

Ms. M. Edwards: Mr. Matthews, in following you with that, those units are to be taken care of now because at our Facilities Committee Meeting we signed the contract with Allred for them to go in and keep it maintained so that we will not have that problem. They should be keeping it going for us from now on.

Mr. Matthews: You are correct Ms. Edwards.

Mr. K. Edwards: When we held the forums, we mentioned that East could hold 850 students and West could hold 500 students in their current configurations. What we are talking about is the schematics of where the location is. On one hand we have East that can hold 850 students and the current configuration is 207 and 387.

Dr. Bracy: In year 2012-2013, there will be 622 students in grades 9-12.

Mr. K. Edwards: Still that will put one of our buildings not holding the population. As far as transportation cost taken from the powerpoint, if all students go to East it is a predicted annual increase of \$85,000 and if they all go to West it is an increase of \$122,500. Is that transportation cost based upon the population figure that we currently have?

Dr. Bracy: Yes.

Mr. K. Edwards: In essence, looking at the sites would you say that because there are more students at East and that is what the \$30,000 difference is?

Dr. Bracy: Yes, I would say that because they have twice as many students in 9-12.

Ms. M. Edwards: Given the figures and this nice powerpoint Mr. Matthews has given out, it looks like we are leaning towards East.

Chair Johnson: Is there anything that anyone would like to ask Mr. Matthews or Mr. Harris before we move on?

Ms. M. Edwards: Mr. Harris, you said you have been talking with East and West students about the colors, uniforms and the mascot. How do the children feel about it?

Mr. Dexter Harris: The kids are excited basically because they do things together already anyway. Especially with the summers they are playing summer basketball together. They actually hang out together sometimes. When I brought it all up to the kids, both ends were really excited about the possibility. They actually wanted to do it this year, because they felt they would have the opportunity to really win in all those sports this year. They want to merge because they realize how things will be, not just for them, but for the entire county. They are really excited about it.

Chair Johnson: I would like to make one comment in relation to what we are discussing here. If we could think in terms of this merger now as a short-term thing with the possibility of within 4-5 years the economy may change and things increase to our benefit where we may be able to build a new school. Our getting together and making a decision will show the Commissioners

we are willing to do things until we can get some other things done. If people ask, why are you doing it, hopefully it is for the short-term.

Chair Johnson: Are there any other comments?

Ms. Taylor: I would like to see a variety of courses offered, such as dance, anatomy and physiology, etc.

Dr. Bracy: Would you like to speak to that Dr. Rumley?

Dr. Mark Rumley: I think you are wise to talk about the total school program. I have certainly heard a number of you say that the priority is on the academic piece first and how to serve kids best under one roof. You certainly have the opportunity to do that. The powerpoint does speak to that quite a bit and you have another document that shows some pluses and minuses where you gain some teaching positions and where you lose others. I think the one thing to remember is as you combine all of those services, the strength of the adults in the two buildings will come together and I think you really can serve kids well that way, provided they are going about their work in the right way. The other thing I think you gain by that is the ability to deepen the opportunities and experiences for kids. Right now, you currently have a Career Technical Education world. You have teachers at both schools who are offering the same services. What they are able to do is to offer a Level I and a Level II course, but so that they can continue to feed the program and also a place to put their kids, they are not able to teach on the upper end the III and the IV Levels. Hopefully, with the new accountability model that is coming down that is being tossed about right now, most of what school districts are going to be able to do to demonstrate is that their kids have depths of knowledge in a pathway or a completing course field of study. I think putting your resources together will allow a number of completers there. That gets kids focused and really know where they want to go, what they want to do and have some notion of what field they want to be in. Putting them together I think will serve you well in that regard. It also allows you to continue to expand a number of instructional programs, as you talked about AP courses and honors courses. Once you set a minimum of sealing for what it takes to seal the team, that is to offer a course, then you can grow those kinds of programs. You have to start small with the realization that over time you will grow those to be much larger. I think that does give you a variety of options that you don't currently have just because of the configuration and the way the state gives us teachers.

Ms. M. Edwards: Looking at these courses and even the ones we will be able to add and offer, such as home economics as they already have automotives. The children need hands-on and they need to be doing something. They like dance, the choir and they like interacting.

Mr. Little: One of the most important things in this merger is to determine the course structure. We are going to have the opportunity to do many things that we cannot do now. In addition to that, keeping in mind we are looking at probably a five-year span, then after that there will be a lot of difference in course structure within the next five years. That is one of the most important things we need to work on is course structure that will bring this merged group into a position of being able to elevate.

Dr. Mark Rumley: I think you are putting structure in place that will allow for that redesign and expansion as things change as we go.

Mr. Little: There are a lot of things that are important such as athletics that can happen. But this course structure is the ultimate thing.

Mr. Majette: We can add more courses to the courses that we have. A lot of children want to do a lot with hands-on. If you do hands-on, it will help the dropout rate, because some are interested in going into those courses. We used to call it vocational courses that you would get

credit for only if you came to class and produced a project. If you get them there to work on a project and have a night or day with the best projects showing, you will be surprised how hard they will work. I think we are going the right way and it will mean a lot to me to see our children excel in sports and we will have more participation.

Ms. Taylor: Another thing, our kids just received report cards. They are competitive in the classroom, but what I see right now is that you have a group that is up here and a group (who learns at a different pace, is down there. My child is bored. The group up here is bored, because they have to wait for the other children, they need honors classes. So, if we had those additional levels our children would not be bored. They need something else offered to them.

Chair Johnson: We have talked about the honors courses, but some children will never go to college. I know that this weekend while we were in Greensboro, I observed a class of students laying brick. I talked to one of the boys and asked him what was his job. He replied, "A helper and I start off with \$15.00 per hour as a brick layer." He said, "I can progress up to \$25.00 to \$30.00 per hour as a brick layer, but right now I have my skills here and I am planning to take welding next and then I can do either or." He is better prepared for what he enjoys doing and that is what life is all about. Do what you enjoy doing.

Mr. Majette: That is exactly what I am talking about. I have worked around brick masons and electronics. Those are the courses that move things along. The last class I worked in a few years ago there was a girl in the class. You can go all the way from Raleigh to Greensboro, our children just want to work.

Mr. K. Edwards: I think with the curriculum, Career and College Ready is the focus and the push. With North Carolina's change in standards and the Common Core coming that is the big piece where you talk about that option, but the option of being career and college ready is the focus that is being pushed.

Chair Johnson: That is what we should do, because we have a tremendous loss in mechanics. Are there any other comments from anyone?

Dr. Bracy: Dr. Rumley spoke about teacher numbers at the schools. For example, we have seven (7) English teachers. If we were to have one high school we would go from seven (7) to six (6). Instead of converting that position it would do us wise to re-invest that position in the school system. Add a possible Spanish or music to the elementary level or additional electives to the middle schools. Instead of taking it or trying to save it or converting it, let's re-invest it. I came from a place where there was science enrichment, music, and art. Those things are important. We are so cash strapped here with our resources, but we do what we have to do. If we can become one high school, those savings would be recognized. We have four JROTC teachers and if we merge we would only need maybe three. That is the way I feel.

Mr. K. Edwards: The academics piece is the true focus. I want them to win in their academics. It is the game of life.

Dr. Bracy: That would be a beautiful thing if we had music and art in all of our elementary schools.

Ms. M. Edwards: Absolutely it would.

Mr. Majette: With music and art you would be surprised at the progress they would make.

Chair Johnson: Last year, at the school I worked at for 10.5 months, they offered Chinese, Spanish, music, art and drama for grades K-9. They had a Chinese teacher and a Spanish teacher. I look at what we need and I look at what other people have and it makes me envious to see them doing the things that I would like to see done in our county. This should be putting us on the right path to do all of those things that we need to do for the betterment of our children.

Mr. Dexter Harris: When I was a student here at Northampton-East, I was able to take drama. At Willis Hare I was able to take art and at Conway I was able to take art. Those things for some students are very important as far as keeping them in line, because some of the other things don't matter to them. If you give them something to do that they are very interested in it will direct them sometimes in life, such as being able to take design and technology. In high school, being able to take French and those types of courses was important to me, because Ms. Pfeiffer was the first one to tell me, "you will use this outside of Northampton County" and I did. I know I am an athletic person, but the academic part is very, very important. Not that athletics is not important, but it gives you the opportunity in school to take drama and those different things. I took those things in high school and they were very important to me.

Dr. Bracy: I have heard many actors and actresses talk about how their high school drama class led them to theatre. I think we can all agree that there needs to be a variety of things offered.

Ms. Taylor: They don't have that outlet. When I go into some of the schools, the kids have to be quiet in class, and then they have a silent lunch so they don't have that outlet. They have band, but sometimes there are two classes in the band room.

Mr. Matthews: Art and music is math and science. It is in the application.

Mr. Majette: That is correct, because if you can read music you can work math. There is one thing we will have to remember, get the instructors or teachers to have an interest in what we want to do. Feed the children with it, teach it and don't just sit there and pass it out to them. You have to have someone in there who has it in their heart. I think we are on the right road now of pulling together.

Chair Johnson: We have to start the process here. There has to be a motion on which way we will go. I think I have heard everyone express their opinion about various things, but I have not heard anyone other than Ms. Edwards. I guess we have to start it here one way or the other. We can go in reverse or go from the top down to the bottom. We have to go to either East or West. Given the consensus that we would like to merge, now our next task is to get a consensus on which way we want to go.

Mr. Little: We also need to make sure that we have a consensus of when we will merge. Many tasks have to be done, just as we were talking about that course structure.

Chair Johnson: I have heard for the last two years that we need to start and the sooner we start would be the 2012-2013 school year.

Mr. Little: That is part of the process.

Chair Johnson: That is part of the process; that we start next year in the process of merging the two schools. The next part of that process is, will we be going East or West?

Dr. Bracy: When will the kids be under the same roof?

Chair Johnson: The 2012-2013 school year. That is what we have been talking about. If I am wrong I would like to be corrected now.

Mr. K. Edwards: That is what we said at the forums. The logistics of it will be the in the hands of the administration.

Chair Johnson: Once we make the decision of where we are going it is left up to the administration to carry it through.

Ms. M. Edwards: We have to start now.

Chair Johnson stated, "The consensus of the merger has been proven. I would like to ask for the show of hands for the consensus of going to the eastern end as the merger." There was a show of hands by Mr. Donald Johnson, Ms. Marjorie Edwards, Ms. Rhonda Taylor, Mr. Bill Little,

Mr. Kelvin Edwards and Mr. Lafayette Majette in favor of the merger on the eastern end of the county.

Chair Johnson further stated, "Of the group that is here tonight, and it is 6:30 p.m., the merger will go to East. This is a consensus, because we cannot officially make this a matter of fact until we get the full Board together and vote on it, which will be at the next meeting on December 5, 2011."

Mr. K. Edwards: Robert's Rules of Order says you can amend the agenda and vote, because you have a quorum and you are at a Work Session. I think it is left up to this Board.

Chair Johnson: That is why I knew that the first night I was selected Chair, if I have any problems with Robert's Rules of Order that I have two people to help me and the other person is not here tonight.

Mr. K. Edwards: The first I would ask is, was this an advertised meeting?

Chair Johnson: Yes, it was.

Ms. M. Edwards: Can we go back and vote and make it official?

Chair Johnson: I want to do what is right within the law.

Dr. Bracy: How was it advertised Ms. Harris?

Ms. Patricia Harris: It was advertised as a Work Session.

Dr. Bracy: I know I have heard Mr. Malone say you cannot vote in a Work Session.

Chair Johnson: We will wait to vote at the December 5, 2011 meeting on the merger and we will vote on NCHS-East.

### **Board Information**

- Next Regular Board Meeting – December 5, 2011 – Board Room – 5:30 p.m. (Closed Session) – Open Session beginning at approximately 6:30 p.m.

### **Adjournment**

On a MOTION by Mr. Little, SECONDED by Mr. Majette, the Board adjourned the meeting at 6:45 p.m.

Approved: March 5, 2012

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Dr. Eric C. Bracy, Superintendent