

Board Highlights
Joint Meeting with Gates County Commissioners
April 20, 2015

The Gates County Board of Education met in a special called session on Monday, April 20, 2015 at the Gates County Board of Education Office. Madam Chair Glendale Boone called the meeting to order at 4:04 p.m. The following board members were present: Leslie Byrum, Glendale Boone, Claire Whitehurst, and Daniel Dickerson. Also present were County Commissioners Linda Hofler, Billy F. Felton, J. Ray Freeman and Henry Jordan, Natalie M. Rountree, County Manager, Sandy Pittman, Financial Services Director and Melissa C. Lawrence, Assistant to the County Manager and Clerk to the Board of Commissioners. Rube Blanchard, Finance Officer, and Cathy Riddick, Assistant to the Superintendent and Clerk to the Board of Education, were present also.

Dr. Williams provided handouts outlining the proposed budget requests for the upcoming 2015-2016 fiscal year.

He spoke about the need to keep Reading Resource Teacher positions that are currently one year positions. The Read To Achieve Program requirements have necessitated the need for these positions. He feels it is important to keep the female P.E. teacher position at Gates County High School, to better provide for our female student population. There is also a need for a front desk receptionist at the high school. It has been proposed to use students in this position, as has been done in the past. However, with the confidential nature and the safety aspect, it is felt that this position needs to be filled with an adult.

There is need for a technology position at Central Middle School, since that school is currently the only school that does not have one. We also need additional funds to keep our technology updated, to better serve our students.

Mr. Blanchard stated that we try to fund as many employees through the State Fund as possible, rather than through the local fund, due to Workman's Compensation cost. He also stated there is a possibility that we may lose the State Grant that helps to fund the cost of the SRO officers. There will most likely be increases to retirement and health insurance costs, and also loss of Driver's Education funding from the state. These factors will increase the cost to local funds by an estimated \$520,782.41.

Dr. Williams stated that we have cut costs by cutting one director position from our Curriculum Department and reducing expenditures by \$100,373.20.

Mr. Blanchard further explained that in addition to the \$2,708,000.00 appropriated from the county for 2014-2015, we need \$571,248.00 for the 2015-2016 budget year. We have \$851,321.00 in the Local Fund Balance and are required to maintain a minimum balance of \$200,000.00. The amount appropriated for 2014-2015 is \$326,315.00, leaving a balance of \$325,006.00, which can be used to offset. Mr. Blanchard summarized the Appropriation Request, as shown on the last page of the

handout, as \$3,279,248.00 Local General Expense County Appropriation Request, \$238,500.00 Community Center County Appropriation Request and \$2,575,272.00 Capital Outlay County Appropriation Request.

Dr. Williams commented that Central Middle School has major structural problems. The roof is in terrible shape. We cannot continue to just do the minimum repairs. He has recently received an e-mail from a teacher regarding the possibility of mold in her classroom. Mr. John Farkas with JKF Architecture has been approved to provide an assessment of Central Middle School, and make recommendations for improvements.

Mr. Byrum reiterated the need for funds, citing the importance of keeping the female PE teacher at the high school due to Title 9, and also to provide adequately for our female students. He feels there is great need for our reading resource teachers, with cuts in state funds, thereby requiring our Fund Balance to provide for these positions. He agrees there is a need for the added receptionist position at the high school, since there have been public complaints in the past, regarding the use of students in this position. It is also needed to provide adequate coverage during lunch times. He feels that the school system is doing their part by trying to pay the highest paid employees out of state funds. He commented briefly concerning House Bill 726, sponsored by our representative, Howard Hunter, III, which would eliminate school boards' ability to legally challenge the sufficiency of local public education appropriations from county commissioners. He feels this bill will more than likely pass.

The county commissioners requested an itemized list of priorities, as given in the past, to help them better assess our needs. They also questioned the county finance officer concerning the balance owed, and years remaining on the loan used for school improvements in the past.

There was discussion regarding needs for our schools and the possibility of using a Lease Purchase Agreement as a viable option for new school buildings. Other North Carolina counties have used this program and have been successful, but we would need to investigate this further, to see if this is workable for Gates County.

The Board of Education members and the county commissioners all agreed on the importance of having a vision for our county, and the importance of working together to achieve the goal of providing the best education for our students. The commissioners stressed the lack of funds that Gates County has to work with, and there are other divisions that require funds also. There are hard decisions that have to be made and the choices are limited due to the lack of revenue that Gates County has to work with. It may come down to choosing to have more teachers or new schools. Board members questioned the significant amount of delinquent taxes in our county, and the commissioners commented that measures are in place to collect these funds. There has been great improvement, but due to legalities, it is a long process. The commissioners also want the school system to make sure that out-of-state students are not attending our schools without paying tuition.

Board members commented that we have a great school system and we want to keep it that way. The Board members and the commissioners all agreed they want the best for Gates County Schools, and will work together to see that our students succeed.

Madam Chair Boone adjourned the meeting at 5:25 p.m.