

VIRGINIA:

A FY 2014-15 Joint Budget Work Session of the Lancaster County Board of Supervisors and the Lancaster County School Board was held in the Administrative Building Board/Commission Meeting Room of said county on Tuesday, April 22, 2014.

Members Present: B. Wally Beauchamp, Chair
Jason D. Bellows, Vice Chair
F. W. Jenkins, Jr., Board Member
Ernest W. Palin, Jr., Board Member
William R. Lee, Board Member

School Board
Members Present: Dr. Robert Westbrook, Chair
Robert Smart, Vice Chair
Ella Davis, Board Member
Don McCann, Board Member
Patrick McCranie, Board Member, was absent.

Mr. Beauchamp called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m. and Mr. Smart called the meeting of his board to order at 4:00 p.m.

BUDGET CONSIDERATION

Mrs. Sandra Spears, interim School Superintendent for Lancaster County, stated that the schools need to be fully accredited and that restoring the 180-day school calendar will help towards that goal. She stated that restoring the calendar to 180 days results in an increase of \$185,000 approximately. She stated that figure does include summer school costs and that summer school will become separate from the regular school year. She stated that their nine month employees will become ten month employees, such as paraprofessionals and bus drivers. She stated that there will be an additional cost for fuel and substitutes.

Mrs. Spears stated that their VRS costs have increased as well as their technology costs and they are asking for another technology assistant to help maintain the computers and the technology in the schools. She stated that there is a 1.5% step increase for all employees located in their budget.

Mrs. Spears stated that she met with Jack Larson and they went over the school budget recently. She stated that she asked Mr. Larson to point out some areas of concern. She stated that Mr. Larson suggested that they look at trends from the last five years. She stated that after doing that, they came up with a \$65,000 savings. She stated that those savings are not reflected in the budget that everyone has in hand because it was done prior to their meeting.

Mrs. Spears stated that she thought there were some concerns that spending may have increased recently and she said she thought that was because when she first accepted her position, she froze the budget until she could see where the money was going, but now some things are getting paid and being purchased.

Mr. Beauchamp stated that he had received many phone calls from people who had said that morale at the schools had changed for the better, with the new makeup of the school board. He stated that he has heard that everyone is pleased with what has been accomplished in the first four months of this year. He stated that the boards working together is what needs to be done and he was very pleased. He stated that he appreciated Mrs. Spears' opening statement and that the County needs a sound educational program.

Mrs. Spears stated that it is important that they all come together. She stated that they need to give the kids a good education, because they will be taking care of us someday, but the taxpayers need to be considered, too.

Mr. Lee referred to the \$65,000 savings and asked what it included.

Mrs. Spears replied some of those items that they feel they can save on are tuition expenses, media subscriptions, athletic trips, driver education, home bound instruction, local special-ed funds, the gifted program and a revamped summer school program.

Mr. Lee referred to the budget summary page and asked about the \$4000 driver stipends for activity runs.

Mrs. Spears stated that was to increase the number of runs in the month of May so that the children have tutoring throughout the month. She stated that it was not for athletics, but so that the children from all three schools have extra tutoring help. She stated that it was important to have that help before the testing period.

Mr. Beauchamp asked if the school had considered privatizing the bus system. He stated that he did not know the costs associated with it, but wanted to know if it had been considered.

Dr. Westbrook replied yes and there could be a savings, but it was really hiring drivers with no benefits and if it did not work out, then there would be a tremendous cost to reestablish the school bus inventory.

Mr. Smart stated that if the hired driver option did not work out, it would be an extremely costly capital expense to start again and at the present time, they are on a bus replacement schedule, so no one year has too many bus purchases.

Mr. McCann stated that they tried the privatization route with the food service several years ago and it was a failure.

Mr. Beauchamp referred to the reduction in the school budget and asked if they would still be able to address the step increase system for the teachers.

Dr. Westbrook replied that they will be having meetings this summer and it is his hope that the school will establish a step system that is fair to all. He stated that does not mean they will have the funds to implement it at first. He stated that the requested 1.5% pay increase will be a stop gap measure for the personnel before they can implement a more formal step increase system.

Mr. Smart stated that Lancaster has fallen out of sync with surrounding counties concerning teacher pay. He stated that the starting salaries are generally lower, which hinders the hiring process.

Mr. Bellows stated that it has been a bad management practice to freeze the pay scale and has put the County behind compared to neighboring localities. He stated that the step system should be built into the budget.

Mr. Lee stated that the starting salaries for teachers is what bothers him the most and asked what can be done about that.

Dr. Westbrook replied that he would like to establish this summer what is fair for everyone and then implement it as soon as they can. He stated that the step system has not been budgeted in the proposed budget for the upcoming fiscal year, so it would not be next year. He stated that the year after next would be the first reasonable time to expect the step system to be implemented.

Mr. Bellows stated that considerations have to be made about what is involved in the steps and the costs. He stated that a new step scale would need to be created and cost of living percentages included routinely as well.

Dr. Westbrook stated that the step system would need to be personalized for each employee based on performance, personal education, etc.

Mrs. Spears stated that it will take some time and effort with input from the teachers and looking at other school systems. She stated that the process needs to be started soon.

Mr. Jenkins stated that it needs to be done with discipline. He stated that this would be the fifth major salary step rehaul that he has experienced in twenty years. He stated that they have not seemed to hold up very long.

Dr. Westbrook agreed and stated that it seemed like a hollow document.

Mr. Smart stated that he thought that whatever they came up with should be based on degree qualifications and on longevity.

Mr. Bellows added that the system, after it is implemented, should hardly ever need to be changed except for cost of living increases.

Mrs. Davis asked about teacher performance with the step system.

Mr. Bellows suggested that the steps be determined by the teacher's evaluation.

Dr. Westbrook stated that there is also a process for mentoring teachers to try to improve their performance.

Mr. Smart stated that there should probably be a formalized performance improvement plan to document progress of a teacher.

Mr. Beauchamp asked if there were any further comments or questions.

Mr. Jenkins asked Mrs. Spears if the Board of Supervisors could get a list of her budget reductions.

Mrs. Spears replied yes.

Mr. Beauchamp asked Mrs. Spears what the school's projected budget figure was for the upcoming fiscal year.

Mrs. Spears replied that the figure was \$281,788 over last year's figure.

Mr. Lee referred to the budget figure and asked how the money helps in moving the schools towards full accreditation. He stated that he knows that it is a tough question to answer, but wants to know if the extra money really makes the difference.

Mrs. Spears replied yes and no. She stated that what the school system was asking for was reasonable and they have tried not to be extravagant and money won't fix all of the issues. She stated that the solution depends on leadership, the quality of the teachers and parental support. She stated that she thought that going with the 180-day school calendar was important because Lancaster was one of seven schools in the state that shortened the number of days of instruction and she thought that they needed to get the children in school as much as possible.

Mr. Lee stated that accreditation should be the top priority and it is an embarrassment. He stated that he agreed with Mrs. Spears in the fact that the solution is both people and money.

Mrs. Spears stated that the school system, to be successful, has to have good leadership, good discipline and consistency.

Mr. Smart stated that dollars applied to the school system do not necessarily buy better education, it is how well the money is applied to the things that are critical.

Mr. Beauchamp stated that lack of parental support and involvement is a big problem, too.

Mr. Bellows stated that he thought there were a lot of great teachers and administrators at the school, but that testing is a problem. He stated that the testing standards are continually changed.

Mrs. Spears stated that one test should not determine where a school is as far as accreditation.

Mrs. Spears stated that she wanted to clarify what she had said earlier. She stated that they have some wonderful teachers and good students and parents.

Dr. Westbrook stated that he would like to think that the mentoring program that they will implement will involve the community and he hoped that would change some of the attitudes of the parents.

Mr. Smart stated that there is a committee forming and they are looking for volunteers to help with the mentoring program. He stated that changing students' attitudes is key in helping the school to succeed and if they are not getting positive reinforcement at home, they need to get it from somewhere, such as a mentoring program.

Mr. Smart stated that they would like to bring the alternative school back to the County. He stated that they thought the school could get a better handle on discipline, if it was here.

Dr. Westbrook added that they would like to insure a better quality of education at the alternative school, not just discipline.

Mr. Bellows agreed that there needed to be a better level of education and better time management at the alternative school.

Mr. McCann stated that he thought everyone agreed that the students needed to be in class more. He stated that needing more time for students translated into needing more money.

Mr. Lee stated that everyone wants to see a good educational value for the dollars spent.

Mrs. Davis stated that if money is not spent for the school system, it will be spent in the future on prisons.

Mr. Beauchamp stated that he thought the boards should get together again for the exchange of ideas. He stated that both boards have the best interest of the County's children in mind.

Dr. Westbrook stated that he realized that the Board of Supervisors has a tough job in trying to meet the needs of the community at large, but that does not lessen the school system's needs. He stated that as far as education goes, everyone wants value for their dollars.

Mr. Smart read an excerpt from the budget manual for Virginia school boards, which stated "a good working relationship between the local school board and the local appropriating body is a great asset when it comes to funding education and helps with public support for the schools." He stated that they have had superintendents in the past who did not understand that statement.

Mrs. Spears stated that there is tremendous public support for the schools now. She stated that, within the school system, there are a lot of good things going on and she hoped things would continue getting better throughout the rest of the school year. She mentioned Mrs. Tara Booth and stated that she is one of the school's improvement coaches.

There was discussion about the technical center in Warsaw and the new programs that were being offered there.

Dr. Westbrook stated that he would like to see the composite index changed to be more fair to communities such as Lancaster County. He stated that there are ninety school divisions with a free or reduced lunch percentage greater than the state average. He stated that if it could be changed, then instead of the County's index being 77 percent, it could be 41 percent and that would be huge.

Mr. Jenkins stated that how the composite index works now, it is to the benefit of urban areas and those areas are represented by more members in the General Assembly.

Mr. McCann stated that he agreed with Mr. Jenkins. He stated that a JLARC (Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission) study would be beneficial.

Mr. Jenkins stated that the composite index was supposed to "level the field" and it does not.

Mr. McCann stated that a JLARC study is unbiased and the commission holds a lot of weight. He stated that Delegate Margaret Ransone should be consulted on the issue.

Mr. Beauchamp stated that he appreciated everyone's input.

Mrs. Spears stated that she appreciated the Board of Supervisors' consideration.

Dr. Westbrook asked what the next step was in the budget process.

Mr. Pleva stated that another work session could be held or a public hearing scheduled after the revised numbers come in for the budget.

Mr. Jenkins stated that he would like to see the updated school budget and then set a work session time and date at Thursday's regular board meeting.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Mr. Bellows to adjourn the meeting to the regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, April 24th at 7:00 p.m.

VOTE:	B. Wally Beauchamp	Aye
	Jason D. Bellows	Aye
	F. W. Jenkins, Jr.	Aye
	Ernest W. Palin, Jr.	Aye
	William R. Lee	Aye

Motion was made by Mr. McCann to adjourn the school board meeting. Dr. Westbrook seconded the motion.

VOTE:	Robert Westbrook	Aye
	Robert Smart	Aye
	Ella Davis	Aye
	Don McCann	Aye