

Report on the Maury County School Board Work Session & Special Called Meeting – July 20, 2020

These two important meetings of the Board began at 6:00 pm and concluded at 10:15 pm. I will get quickly to the two most important decisions I think most of you would be interested in. They were the two last items discussed and decided in the evening meetings.

The 2020-2021 school calendar revised was passed after some brief discussion. The link to that calendar is here: <https://meeting.boeconnect.net/Public/Agenda/567?meeting=347976>. The calendar calls for schools to begin on August 10, 2020, which is a week later than earlier planned. This will allow additional time for preparation for teachers and others for the challenges and changes this new school year presents.

After much discussion and exploration of many ideas, the Board also passed the Continuing Learning Plan for the new school year. This plan must be filed with the Tennessee Department of Education by July 24 of this year. As you would expect, there were those on the Board who emphasized the perceived community desired opening of the school in the traditional in-classroom instruction by teachers. And there were those on the Board who emphasized more the guarantee of the safety of every child possible. I believe these were more matters of emphasis as all the Board members were obviously interested in, as best as possible, working to make the operation of the schools as safely as possible and yet opening the schools offering school room, teacher directed instruction as well. I cannot provide verbatim statements by Board members but can give you my impressions of some of the discussions concerning this “plan.” Board member, Kristin Parker, shared her concern that she was negative toward the lack of guarantee of the safety of the children in the “plan.” Member, Natasha Hopkins, indicated she echoed Mrs. Parker’s concerns and stated she thought the Board should “nail down every possibility” of danger to the students. Board members David Moore and Nathan Adkison expressed their appreciation for the plan and their questions to Interim Assistant Superintendent of Instruction, Scott Gaines, focused more on contingencies likely to come up and the strategies and plans to address those contingencies. Board Member, Michael Fulbright, expressed his concern for communicating this Plan to the parents in order for them to have time to make an informed decision on the different options offered to them under the plan. After much discussion, member Kristin Parker indicated that she liked the “A-B option” that had been discussed but was not offered in the Plan being discussed for approval. (Briefly, the A-B option would have students whose parent(s) chose to send their children two days for in-classroom instruction by teachers [either Monday/Tuesday or Thursday/Friday] and the other three days of the week would be by remote virtual instruction by Maury County teachers.) After discussion about whether to ask the staff to study amending the Plan and the willingness expressed by Mr. Gaines to go back and study and provide an additional “A-B option” to the Plan, Members Moore and Adkison indicated they had “no interest” in exploring adding the “A-B option” to the Plan. School Superintendent, Michael Hickman, and Mr. Gaines shared how, in talking with the State Department representative about filing our Plan, they were told that the State was aware of the likelihood that filed Plans would have to be adjusted and amended to address contingencies likely to develop in that district’s opening of their schools and the issues the “pandemic” could create. After Moderator, Bettye Kinser indicated that she wanted to “pass a Plan tonight” to be sent to the State, the question was called. The vote was six in favor of the Plan with two voting no (Parker and Fulbright).

If you have any questions about this, I might be able to answer some questions if there is time at our meeting on July 27.

In other matters, the Board, after extended exploration of three purchase plans passed a motion to purchase \$2,075,000 worth of books for English Language instruction, books and on-line resources for K-5 grades and sets for grades 6 through 12, and an on-line program from the

provider Quaver for grades K through 5. There was an additional purchase approved for \$67,700 for Career and Technical Education blended on-line curriculum.

At the work session, three public delegations from the Maury County Education Association, Mr. Paco Havard of the Maury County NAACP, and Pastor Gregory Givens of the Mount Lebanon Missionary Baptist Church expressed their concerns to the Board about protection of all the students and teachers when school reopens soon.

Briefly, I noted a few matters discussed during this work session:

- * that the Hewlett Spencer/Bell & Associates were well on their way of completing the sports facilities at the Battle Creek School and anticipate being able to return \$50K saved back to the School Board budget;

- * the Board expressed no problem with the granting of a small easement request from General Motors to install a water booster pump station on the corner that adjoins the school property;

- * received an extended (and informative) presentation by Bureau Veritas concerning their work to present the Board with a capital needs forecast for the present and future. Projected work and costs for the next twenty years were reported;

- * an extended discussion concerning the future of the McDowell Elementary school and facility was held. Major work and costly replacements/repairs are needed at McDowell, for a “chiller” and likely a replacement “boiler.” Discussion focused on the plans whether to make major fund commitments to the facility to bring it up or whether it is more wise/economical to plan for a new building for McDowell. Mr. Eric Perryman of the Operations department presented many of the details of what was involved to upgrade versus the building of a new facility. The discussion entailed “operational” concerns vis a vis the historical and emotional investments of the community. The Board was assured that the facility would be operational for the 2020-2021 year, but that a decision was needed from the Board on the direction to be pursued for McDowell. Member Parker asked Mr. Perryman for a time when “operations” needed to have a decision on the school’s future. He indicated that from a “transportation” viewpoint, they need to know by Christmas; he also indicated that from an “operational” viewpoint they need to know much sooner. Member Moore asked Mr. Perryman to give the Board a timeline for the next work session if it was possible for him. Mr. Perryman indicated he could do so.

- * there was a discussion led by Mr. Chris Poynter concerning the need for additional nurses at the Maury County schools. He provided a handout with two possible proposals for the Board to decide on and the projected costs for each option. The system presently has 13 nurses and 3 part time; one proposal would be to add an additional three full time nurses. The other option entailed adding additional part time nurses to assure that each school has some nursing available. Additional discussion followed that involved the needs of some schools needing more nursing than other schools and the particular needs being addressed looking to the future of having adequate nursing provided going forward.

I want to conclude by briefly commenting that I saw sincere Board members and staff who had been and were working hard to address the very difficult issues the Covid-19 presents. And we all are aware that they cannot open the schools in such a way that everyone will be happy with what is done. They know that they will be met with harsh criticism no matter their decisions. As a pastor, I commend to you who are Christians to pray earnestly for the Board, the staff and for the community affected by the reopening of all our schools.

Respectfully submitted,

Buddy Roberts