

Special Called Session Board Meeting
July 27, 2021

The Gates County Board of Education met in a special called meeting on Tuesday, July 27, 2021, at Central Middle School, 362 US-158, Gatesville, NC . Chairman Ray Felton called the meeting to order at 9:06 a.m. The following board members were present: Mr. Ray Felton, Ms. Glendale Boone, Mr. Leslie Byrum, Ms. Amanda Pacitto, and Ms. Sallie Ryan.

Mr. Leslie Byrum made the motion to approve the agenda. Ms. Sallie Ryan seconded the motion. Chairman Felton called for a vote taken by roll call. Board members stated their vote and the motion was carried unanimously.

New Business

1. Community Center

Dr. Williams was asked to open the discussion concerning the possible transfer of the Community Center. He began by recapping the joint meeting with the county commissioners that was held on July 21, 2021. The boards are scheduled to meet jointly again on August 18 to further discuss the community center.

Mr. John Leidy, school board attorney, explained that currently there is work being done on a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the school board and the county commissioners. Mr. Leidy told the board nothing has been made official at this time, but the school board now has the opportunity to decide what they would like to have included in the MOU as a body concerning operational or relationship changes to management or employment for the center.

Dr. Williams invited Mr. Jonathan Hayes, principal of Gates County High School, to speak to the board with concerns about the use of the athletic fields. Mr. Hayes expressed a need to ensure that there will be clarification of who owns the land and the process of agreed usage. Mr. Hayes also mentioned that Coach Harrell has been in charge of maintaining the fields. Would that change if the center went back under the county's control? Mr. Hayes also stressed the need for understanding who would be responsible for the major repairs to the fields and courts.

Mr. Leslie Byrum stated he had done some research on the land and found there is a need to have the land in question surveyed to see who owns what. At present, it appears the schools own the fields. However, there is a need to also discuss the issues with the building. There is a need for a senior center, but there is also a need for an alternative school. Both issues, per Mr. Byrum, need to be addressed.

Ms. Sallie Ryan said that Parks and Recreation are an integral part of education for students. Since Parks and Recreation operate largely on grants, there would be a need

to also think about who has the skills to write grants since the school district can not shoulder the burden of maintenance.

Maintenance director, Mr. Johnny Green, was asked for his input on the current maintenance needs of the community center. He began by stating the current budget for repairing the building comes out of the community center budget, not the maintenance budget. Mr. Greene explained after the interim director for the community center arrived, some discoveries were made as to the extent of the damage to the building. The building was constructed in the 1970's, and over time, the damage has accumulated. For example, the roof needs repair, several windows and doors need replacing, paint has begun to peel due to issues with the walls and there is no air conditioning in the gym.

Mr. Greene focused on the issue of the roof, especially over the top of the weight room area. At some point between 2008-2010, the roof was patched and now has several seams. Those seams have become a problem and have caused leaks. Mr. Greene has had one company give an estimate for repairing the entire roof for \$42,886 or just replacing the roof over the weight room for \$23,804. When asked what the total cost to do all the repairs to the building would be, Mr. Greene said he would work to get other estimates so the board would be better informed before they make a final decision.

Following Mr. Greene's information, Mr. Felton suggested that there are both positives and negatives to the school owning the community center. One of his concerns was over the insurance requirements. He also stressed that he feels the longer the center sits without repair, the more it will cost to repair it, and that will ultimately result in a waste of taxpayer money.

Ms. Pacitto asked if the center could just be left as it is now and requested the schools have priority for scheduling and events.

Mr. Leidy interjected that the new MOU could include things that the school board deems as priority. If a joint agreement was entered, the schools' priority need for use of the athletic fields or educational facilities could receive top priority that would not be interrupted, cancelled or moved without input from a committee.

Ms. Pacitto then asked, since the current agreement goes through 2024, why there seems to be a rush to make a decision now. Ms. Boone agreed and requested the board get all the information they could before making a decision. Mr. Felton explained the discussion about the community center had arisen because of needing a new, permanent director and doing something now would help ensure a smooth transition for when the current agreement expires. Mr. Byrum suggested perhaps the top issue that can be handled now would be to hire a permanent director through the school board as a school employee.

After further discussion, Ms. Pacitto said she was not comfortable with voting on anything concerning the center without further information. Ms. Ryan agreed and stated she felt the board should have all the information regarding the cost of repairing the center in order to make an educated decision.

The motion was made by Mr. Byrum to hire a permanent director for the community center (and any other personnel as needed), to request to postpone the proposed joint meeting with the county commissioners scheduled for August 18th, get further information about the cost of repair to the building, and to hire a surveyor concerning the boundary lines of what is owned and by whom. The motion was seconded by Ms. Ryan. Mr. Felton called for a roll call vote. The board members each stated their vote and the approval of the motion was unanimous.

2. Use of Face Masks

Dr. Williams discussed the NCDHHS Toolkit that recommends staff and students in kindergarten through eighth grade continue to wear masks. Per the Toolkit, grades nine through twelve are not required to wear masks, but if the student is unvaccinated against Covid-19, it is recommended the student wears a mask. Because the language in the Toolkit says “should wear a mask,” the decision about mask wearing has been left up to local school boards.

Mr. Hayes, as principal of the high school, said he had spoken with several of his staff and based on his conversations, each staff member was in agreement to do whatever the board recommended. His only concern would be how the enforcement would be done if someone did not wear a mask and what he was allowed to ask in order to avoid legal issues.

Ms. Ryan asked if it would make it easier to recommend all staff and students wear masks to make it more uniform across the schools. When asked for guidance, Mr. Leidy said the current recommendations of the CDC still state all those that ride buses, regardless of grade level, must wear a mask. There must be exceptions made in certain cases and Mr. Leidy recommended guidance from the local health department be considered.

Ms. Pacitto made the motion that once schools are back in session, all staff and students, unless they meet the qualifications of exemption for medical purposes, be required to wear masks. Mrs. Ryans seconded the motion. Mr. Felton asked for individual votes. Each board member stated their vote and the motion was passed unanimously. Dr. Williams will send a letter to staff informing them of the board's decision.

Other Business

Dr. Williams mentioned the teachers have been vocal in their desire to return to face-to-face learning. He asked if the district would like to consider offering a virtual option for students when school begins in August. Dr. Williams stressed to the board that teachers prefer and students perform better with face to face learning, but the board would need to make a decision. It was Dr. Williams' recommendation that schools open and offer only face to face instruction.

Ms. Pacitto made the motion virtual learning not be considered as an option to everyone, but that appropriate accommodations for special circumstances be allowed. Mr. Byrum seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for individual votes. Each board member stated their vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Ryan then added the motion that the social distance of three feet still be maintained as well. Ms. Pacitto seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for individual votes. Each board member stated their vote and the motion passed unanimously.

Ms. Pacitto made the motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Boone seconded the motion. Mr. Felton called for individual votes. Each board member stated their vote, and the motion passed unanimously.

With there being no further business to discuss, Mr. Felton adjourned the meeting at 10:54 a.m.

Board Secretary

Chairman of the Board