

March 16, 2021

The Board of Education of the County of Kanawha met in Special Session on Tuesday, March 16, 2021 at Cedar Grove Middle School, Cedar Grove, West Virginia. The meeting was called to order by Board President Becky J. Jordon at 6:00 p.m.

PRESENT

Becky J. Jordon

Tracy White, President Pro Tem

Ric Cavender

Jim J. Crawford, Sr.

Ryan White

Thomas E. Williams, Secretary

Debra J. Lewis, Recording Secretary

ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF

Paula Potter, Deputy Superintendent

Briana Warner, Communications Director

Lindsey McIntosh, General Counsel

Chuck Smith, Executive Director, Facilities, Planning & Management

Amon Gilliam, Assistant Superintendent, Middle & Alternative Schools

George Aulenbacher, Assistant Superintendent, High Schools, Technical & Adult Education

Mellow Lee, Assistant Superintendent, Elementary

Keith Vititoe, Executive Director, Safety & Security

ADMINISTRATION'S PRESENTATION

Dr. Williams-Before we begin this evening the first thing I want to say is the closure hearing has nothing to do about the quality of education the students are receiving or any of the teachers or staff. Unfortunately, our county is dwindling in population. The more it dwindles the more we are going to have to consolidate and close schools and that's not a good thing. I know schools are the heart of the community. If this would happen to occur here at Cedar Grove, we are pleased that we would still have the elementary part of the school open in a brand new building. We know it's not easy and that it is emotional and we appreciate the concerns that you all have. We are a business also and if we can close the school and move the kids a little further away and still continue with a good education then that's what we have to do. Saying that, I will now turn it over to Adam Krason with ZMM Architects. They are the ones who have designed what the new facility will look like and he will go through some of the closure information.

Adam Krason-We have worked with Kanawha County Schools on the 2020-2029 CEFP and we are going to present some information, kind of the data that got us to this point today and then what the school will look like if the project moves forward with some additions and renovations to the facility. The CEFP is a Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan that every county has to complete on a 10 year basis. Cedar Grove Middle School was actually identified in the previous 2010-19 CEFP. It has the 2nd lowest utilization of any of the facilities in Kanawha County. They have the 4th highest EUI in Kanawha County which means per square foot of building it uses the 4th most energy of any of the facilities. Portions of Cedar Grove Middle School are showing significant structural damage and portions of Cedar Grove Elementary School are in the 100 year flood plain. Some of the other issues are minimal parking, as well as a lack of a secure entry for the facility. Kanawha County School's enrollment is expected to decline 3,000 plus students from 2010-2029. Cedar Grove Middle has the lowest enrollment for a middle school in the county right now with 161 students. The second lowest enrollment is 315. The average enrollment is 468 students. If we combine Cedar Grove Middle and DuPont they will have 480 students which is right in line with what an average middle school is in Kanawha County. Cedar Grove Elementary had 328 students in 2010 and now they are at 174. Cedar Grove Middle School had 194 students in 2010 and now they have 161. The schools combined occupies about 101,200 square feet. If it were a combined elementary middle school it would occupy 54,000 square feet. Even the combined enrollment is oversized by two times with the current enrollment. Just to renovate this school would exceed \$20 million dollars. The strategy would be to close Cedar Grove Middle School and those students would go to DuPont Middle. We would demolish a portion of the existing facility with the exception of the 2 story classroom wing. We would fully renovate that 2 story classroom wing. We would add a

ADMINISTRATION'S PRESENTATION (continued)

3,615 square foot safe school entrance and an activity room. There is a portion that's in the flood plain that would have to be demolished. We would bring the entry up to the road to make it a safer entrance to the school. There is only one road in and out to the facility and once the gym is demolished we would bring a new road behind the building to a new parking area. We would have the separate playgrounds for the Pre-K and Kindergarten students as well as the elementary students. There would be an activity room with a stage. It's important to move forward with this project because it relocates the elementary school out of the 100 year flood plain, it demolishes the portions of the building that are showing structural damage, it provides a safe school entry, it improves bus and parent drop-off concerns, it addresses the accessibility issue and it's really the first step in addressing the facility issues in the Riverside attendance area that are identified in the CEFP. It preserves a cultural landmark by keeping the school here in Cedar Grove.

SPEAKERS WHO HAVE SIGNED UP TO ADDRESS THE BOARD

Sarah King-I teach English/Language Arts to the 8th grade students. My first experiences here was as a student. This gives me a unique perspective about this place and the proposed plans. I understand Dr. Williams presented the plans to close, consolidate and renovate to the School Building Authority yesterday morning. I cannot understand the positives gained from sending students away from their community school when the facility will remain open. A facility that has always housed both schools with no issues. I know you have experts that know more than I do and can state many reasons why the middle school should consolidate, but my biggest problem with all of this is that it's all about numbers. Our biggest concern is a matter of the heart. This school may be small in numbers but that gives us the ability to reach and involve more of the students in activities and programs of which they might not otherwise be a part. My question to you is, have we come to a point where the decisions made regarding students are just about the numbers? I think we are on the wrong track.

Jodi Ashley-I am a 6th grade Science and Social Studies teacher here at Cedar Grove Middle School. I started here years ago when we were still known as Cedar Grove Community School. I used to have to explain what a community school was and that it was not just a school but a part of a larger community. It still plays that role these many years later. This end of the county is often forgot about. There's untapped potential here and I fear that might go unseen in a larger school setting. The teachers and faculty here know every child. Over the years, the staff has worked tirelessly to turn the outside opinion of this school around. This end of the county needs this school. Please take into consideration what we have. A school and a community that need each other.

SPEAKERS WHO HAVE SIGNED UP TO ADDRESS THE BOARD (continued)

Jennifer Hudson-I have a unique perspective myself. We are not from this side of the river. We had a problem at East Bank with bullying. We found a home here. It's a community. These kids have an opportunity with these small classes. If you move all of these students to DuPont, what kind of electives are they going to have? They are offered 5 electives. A lot of these kids play sports and if you consolidate they aren't going to get opportunity to play. Where are the teachers and staff going?

Brittany Shamblin-I am a concerned parent. I've been here all through elementary and middle school. The teachers have been here to support us. I want the same thing for my daughter. If you consolidate the schools she won't get the quality time she needs. I live in a holler and it takes an hour to get her to school now on a bus, it will take 2 hours if you consolidate. Why not give the parents a choice between East Bank and DuPont? What if we have to social distance again? How can you social distance when two schools are combined? This is the best school.

Clayton Young-I went to school here and I know this is about numbers. My concern is that this will add possibly 17 minutes for the rides for these children and some could be an additional 25 miles. I know it's a tough decision. I would ask that the Board consider to do some express buses to shorten the amount of time to get them back and forth to school and for extra-curricular activities. A lot of people can't take their children to DuPont Middle School. I hope you minimize the amount of time on the bus as much as you can.

Stephanie Proctor-I have a son at Cedar Grove Middle School. This is like a family. I know when I dropped them off they were taken care of. This place is an important part of the community whether it's a death in the community or a disaster. This has been the central place to come for those families. We've celebrated the successes of our kids here. I'm afraid a lot of kids will suffer in many ways if we don't have this school here. If you are going to take them to DuPont, you will put them in a larger environment and they won't get the same opportunities because you are putting them in a bigger atmosphere. Do you know how many kids walk home? A lot of these kids won't have transportation for an away game. Don't let it just be about numbers. They get the one-on-one treatment that they deserve here. This end of the valley gets taken for granted so many times. We do have a really good school and you guys are going to take this away from us.

SPEAKERS WHO HAVE SIGNED UP TO ADDRESS THE BOARD (continued)

Chris Hudnall-I'm the Pastor at Glasgow United Methodist Church. I'm here tonight to speak for my community and my school. I went here and I am who I am because of the impact that the teachers here had on me. If you close this school you are taking away the future of this community. This decision impacts the future of this community that I don't think we even realize yet. I just ask you to think about the ramifications of this decision.

John Patrick-For the last 14 years Cedar Grove and Room 108 have been my home away from home. I began Kindergarten here in the fall of 1990 and spent the next 9 years here. I was involved in a lot of activities when I attended here and even when I began college I always found time to return to Cedar Grove. The day after I graduated from college I began subbing here and then in August, I returned to Cedar Grove as a faculty member. Many things have changed, but one thing has never wavered and that's a sense of community. This school is the true definition of community. Our staff and students have daily interactions in the hallways. Students from both schools have put on holiday performances together. So much has left this end of the county in recent years, why does our middle school have to be the next victim?

Mr. White-Dr. Williams, how is our money allocated by the State for the school aid formula based on what? Dr. Williams-It's based on student population. Mr. White-Is that the actual cost of educating in your opinion? Dr. Williams-No, it's not. Mr. White-Do other states allocate funding in different ways that would make it that we would be able to keep schools like Cedar Grove Middle open? Dr. Williams-I'm not aware of what they are doing in other states. Mr. White-It's my understanding that they do. I think that we are in a bad position here because of the way that the State has allocated our state school aid formula and it's based on per pupil and we are only one of a few states that does that and unfortunately that requires us to make tough decisions like this.

Mr. Cavender-This reminds me of when I went to Woodlawn and it closed and consolidated with Bonham. One of the big differences from that experience to this is was that there was no state-of-the-art school and additions being built at Bonham. We did reach capacity there. I know every person in this room is probably feeling the same way my parents did when they had to send me to a bigger school. Sometimes the State puts us in these positions when county boards are literally left with no choice. I wish I had more comforting things to say. We will just do the best we can.

SPEAKERS WHO HAVE SIGNED UP TO ADDRESS THE BOARD (continued)

Mr. Crawford-Over the years as a Board Member in Kanawha County we have had many tough decisions to make. This is a good community but the thing we have to look at as Board Members is financial and we can't operate a school system in the red. In 1998 when Dr. Duerring took over as Superintendent, we were \$10 million dollars in the red and he worked diligently to get us in the black. I think with the renovations of this building and the curriculum that will be put in place here, I think people will be really proud to say that they went to Cedar Grove Elementary. This is not a done deal. We have to have the funding from the SBA and if we don't get the funding this will not happen.

Mrs. White-I too grew up in Sissonville and went to Buena Vista and it was closed. This isn't an easy decision for us to make. This is your home and none of us take this decision lightly. I wish that our funding was set up differently and unfortunately these are the decisions we have to make.

Mrs. Jordon-I grew up on the West Side and none of my schools are still in existence, Robins, Wilson and Stonewall and recently we had to change the name of Stonewall. No one can take those memories away from me and no one can take away the memories that you have from Cedar Grove. Once they get here in this new elementary school, it's going to be beautiful and the kids are going to be happy. I know that it will be very emotional for all of you. We are not trying to take away your community we are trying to be fiscally responsible and we are trying to take care of the community of Cedar Grove by giving you a better elementary school.

NEW BUSINESS

A. Cedar Grove Middle School

Mrs. Tracy White moved: The Board, pending approval of appropriate funding, close Cedar Grove Middle School and merge it into DuPont Middle School. Motion was seconded by Mr. Jim J. Crawford and unanimously carried.

Dr. Williams-I want to leave you with a little reassurance about the teachers in the building. If we get the funding from the SBA, the other faculty senates in the county and the service personnel in the county will vote and they usually vote to give the teachers and staff of the school that is being moved to give them priority in hiring based on their certifications. I will leave exactly what happens in code with Mrs. Lawrence and she will be able to share that with the staff tomorrow.

ESTABLISHMENT OF MEETING DATES

- A. Tuesday, March 16, 2021, 6:00 p.m.-Special Session (Closure Hearing for Cedar Grove Middle School at Cedar Grove Middle School)
- B. Thursday, March 18, 2021, 6:00 p.m.-Regular Session
- C. Monday, April 5, 2021, 4:00 p.m.-Special Session
- D. Thursday, April 15, 2021, 6:00 p.m.-Regular Session
- E. Tuesday, April 20, 2021, 12:00 Noon-Statutory Session (Reconvening of March 16, 2021, Meeting to Enter all Levies)
- F. Monday, April 26, 2021, 6:00 p.m.-Statutory Session (Public Hearing on Proposed Budget)

NOTE: The above meetings of the Kanawha County Board of Education, unless otherwise indicated, will be held in the Board of Education Building, 200 Elizabeth Street, Charleston, WV.

ADJOURNMENT

Mrs. Tracy White moved: That the Special Session of the Board be adjourned. Motion was seconded by Mr. Jim J. Crawford and unanimously carried. The Special Session was declared adjourned by Board President Becky J. Jordon at 6:57 p.m.

President

Secretary

djl

3/23/2021