

THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
and
DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA
Joint Meeting Minutes
Monday, March 22, 1999

Place: Commissioners' Room, Second Floor, Durham County Government Administrative Complex, 200 E. Main Street, Durham, North Carolina

Present: Chairman MaryAnn E. Black and Commissioners William V. Bell, Joe W. Bowser, Becky M. Heron and Ellen W. Reckhow

Chairman Kathryn Meyers and Board of Education Members Regina George-Bowden, Philip Cousin, Gail Heath, Phillis Scott and Arnold Spell

Absent: Commissioner Bill Bell arrived late

Presider: Chairman Black

Welcome

Chairman Black welcomed everyone to the meeting. Chairman Black reported that the Superintendent requested pulling the Vocational Education Study from the original agenda since the report had not been presented to the Board of Education. Commissioner Becky Heron expressed disappointment that the report was delayed. Superintendent Denlinger agreed to send the complete study to the commissioners as soon as the Board of Education received and discussed the report.

The agenda for the meeting was as follows:

1. Dropout Prevention and Suspension Rates
2. Update on Raising Compulsory Attendance Age to 18

Dropout Prevention and Suspension Rates

The Superintendent provided opening remarks. Dr. Denlinger said student dropouts and suspensions, and the Exceptional Children's Program were two areas of great concern to school administration. The recent restructuring of administrative staff promoted Dr. Nancy Dominick to Assistant Superintendent

of the Exceptional Children Program. This change allows Ms. Donna Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Student Services, to focus her attention on the issues related to students leaving school. Ms. Smith will provide a very clear definition on the information and data needed to assess the condition of the students in our community and the appropriate steps to take to assist the young people. An evaluation component will be a critical part of each and every dropout prevention program. This will enable the school system to measure the effectiveness of the program at the end of each year and make adjustments on an annual basis. The community group working on the dropout problem agreed if the dropout problem was to be solved, it will mean addressing the issue at all levels of the community as well as in the school system.

Assistant Superintendent Donna Smith then presented Durham Public Schools' Strategic Dropout Prevention Plan that was developed with input from other internal departments, outside agencies and community-based organizations. The report was divided into five sections with appendices containing research-based programs for system or building-level consideration.

- Section I Snapshots of the Dropout Problem (national & state)
- Section II Current Dropout Report (local)
- Section III Focus Group Summary
- Section IV DPS Approach to Dropout Prevention
- Section V Program Evaluation, Monitoring, and Review

Ms. Smith recognized the fact that there had been an increase in the number of students who had dropped out of school over the past four years. Ms. Smith said the school system and community must work together to make an impact on the dropout problem. Ms. Smith then called on persons from the community dropout and suspension discussion group. Attorney Karen Bethea-Shields, Judge Elaine O'Neal, Attorney Mark Trustin, Irene Dwinnell (PROUD Program), Beverly Rose (Edgemont Community Center), Cheryl Lide (Kings' Park Life Center) and County Manager David Thompson shared their perspectives on the dropout issue.

There was a question and answer period. Commissioner Bowser asked about the relationship between suspensions and students dropping out of school. Commissioner Bowser said the community must realize that the poverty rate in Durham must be reduced before significant progress is seen in the dropout problem. Commissioner Becky Heron said a lot of money was already being put into the dropout programs and it was time to get additional people and groups involved. Commissioner Reckhow asked about the number of students dropping out of school illegally or underage. She said the dropout problem needed to be tackled systemically and strategically to target one piece at a time for small

successes along the way. Commissioner Bell recognized that schools could not bear all the responsibility for students dropping out of school. He was interested in the 97-98 disaggregated data and wanted to know more about the school system's absentee policy and its correlation to dropouts. Chairman Black said parent(s) are responsible to their children first and the community is then responsible to help those children get where they need to go. She stressed that the school system must begin to recognize and develop teaching strategies for different learning styles of students in order to keep more students in school.

Update on Raising Compulsory Attendance Age to 18

Chairman Kathryn Meyers said the Board of Education recently met with the Durham Legislative Delegation. At that meeting, there was brief discussion on the status of raising the compulsory attendance age to 18. Chairman Meyers said the Board of Education had not fully discussed or taken a position on the issue. The legislators seemed to be united that the issue should be addressed statewide rather than county by county. Commissioner Reckhow noted states surrounding North Carolina had higher attendance ages and that she thought it was worth discussing. Chairman Meyers said if research on the topic could be identified the Board might pursue discussion on the item in the future.

Adjournment

Chairman Black adjourned the meeting at approximately 6:50 p.m.

Approved by the Durham Public Schools Board of Education

May 27, 1999