

THE BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
and  
DURHAM PUBLIC SCHOOLS BOARD OF EDUCATION  
DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA

Monday, February 23, 2004

4:00 – 6:40 p.m.

Place: Commissioners' Room, second floor, Durham County Government Administrative Complex, 200 E. Main Street, Durham, NC

Present: DPS Chairman Michael D. Page, Vice-Chairman Gail Heath and members Steve Martin, Regina George-Bowden, Jackie Wagstaff, Phillis Scott and Superintendent Ann T. Denlinger.

Commission Chairman Ellen W. Reckhow, Vice-Chairman Joe W. Bowser and Commissioners Philip R. Cousin, Jr., Becky M. Heron, Mary D. Jacobs and County Manager Mike Ruffin.

Absent: DPS Board Member Kathryn Meyers

Presider: DPS Board of Education Chairman Michael D. Page

**Welcome/Opening Remarks**

Board of Education Chairman, Michael Page, and Board of County Commission Chairman, Ellen Reckhow, welcomed everyone to the joint meeting of the Board of County Commissioners and Durham Public Schools Board of Education.

Becky Heron asked if Creekside School was going to be discussed at the meeting. It was a unanimous decision of both boards to add this item to the agenda for discussion.

**High School Program Initiatives**

- Early College High School (ECHS)  
Superintendent Dr. Ann T. Denlinger introduced Dr. Carl Harris, Associate Superintendent for Instructional Services. Dr. Harris gave a brief overview of the Josephine Dobbs Clement Early College High School Program. He said the mission is to expand learning opportunities for students, to offer them a rigorous curriculum that includes college courses leading to two years of college credit and to provide in-depth support for students in those rigorous academic classes. Dr. Harris introduced Dr. Nicholas King, Principal of the ECHS.

Dr. King said the ECHS is an innovative partnership with North Carolina Central University and Durham Public Schools, with initial funding from SECME, Inc. through

the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Early College High Schools are small, autonomous schools where: Students earn an Associate's degree or two years of college credit toward the baccalaureate while in high school; Mastery and competency are rewarded with enrollment in college-level courses and the years to a postsecondary degree are compressed; and, The middle grades are included or there is outreach to middle-grade students to promote academic preparation and awareness of the ECHS option. Currently there are approximately 400 students enrolled in the program in both 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grades. Teachers and staff have regular time to discuss student work, and there is continual assessment of individual student progress toward performance expectations. The consistent focus of the school is on instruction. All rising ninth-grade students enrolled in Durham Public Schools who have completed Integrated Math I by the end of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade are eligible to apply. There will be about 100 students accepted into the program for next school year. The basic approach used to develop the curriculum for the program is to create a marriage between the North Carolina Basic Standards for high school graduation and the North Carolina Central University Core Curriculum. The national initiatives focus population for this program is students who are traditionally underrepresented at the university level (African American, Hispanic, Latino or Native American students). Certified high school personnel will teach courses. University level courses will be taken with university professors in university classrooms.

Dr. Harris introduced Dr. Alan Teasley, Executive Director of Grants. Dr. Teasley shared information about another initiative - The Middle College Program is associated with a technical college. The goal of this upcoming initiative is for students to complete 12<sup>th</sup> grade with a high school diploma and half of their work towards an Associates Degree by the 5<sup>th</sup> year of school. The program began two years ago with Dr. Janice Davis, former Assistant Superintendent, and Dr. Bill Ingram at Durham Technical Community College. Dr. Denlinger stated that a little more planning is required before the Program is ready to open. It is a comprehensive and complex issue with some limitations.

Steve Martin pointed out another benefit for the students. The students get the college credits at no charge so their bill for finishing college is going to shorten by two years. The Middle School Program is one year of the Associates Degree and the Early College is two years. It clearly reduces the individual's financial burden. Dr. Denlinger stated that between the Early College High School Program and the Southern High School City of Medicine there will roughly be 1200 students, which is equivalent to a high school. Dr. Denlinger stated, "We have essentially provided 1200 additional high school seats in the County of Durham without having to build a high school. From a financial standpoint, that is also a tremendous savings for our school system."

### **Southern High School City of Medicine**

- Dr. Teasley gave an overview of the Southern High School City of Medicine Program. He stated that \$11 million was given to the State of North Carolina to develop smaller high schools. Durham was one of eight schools in the State who received the funding. The grant is for \$52,000 for the upcoming year. Durham is committed to developing the

Southern High School City of Medicine. The Southern Center now in existence serves 260 students in grades 9-12. The City of Medicine Academy proposed on Erwin Road in Durham will include a new facility that would house students during the school day. It will be a state-of-the-art facility. Currently, there are three strands that will be offered, depending on what the student selects: Professional, Technical, and Other (emergency medical technicians, etc.). Duke, UNC, NCCU, Glaxo, Eli Lilly, the County of Durham, and the City of Durham support the program. This is an exciting opportunity for high school students.

### **High School Improvement Plan**

- Dr. Harris told everyone that data from all high schools is being looked at. A letter will be forthcoming that includes the appointment of a seven-member team for each high school. The teams will develop a plan for their high school. These teams will be led by Dr. Harris and will meet once a month. Specific graduation goals for each high school will be developed in an effort to raise student achievement. Dr. Denlinger stated that data will be reviewed and realistic goals will be set for K-12 school improvement.

### **Report Reviews** **Dropout Report**

- The *First Semester Preliminary Unadjusted Dropout Report* for 2003-04 was presented. The number of Durham Public Schools students dropping out of school decreased slightly during the 2002-03 academic year, giving the district its second lowest dropout rate ever. It is now mandatory that a Dropout Prevention Plan be in place at every school. All schools have tailored plans to specifically address the needs of their respective populations.

Becky Heron raised a concern about Southern High School's low test scores, high absentee rates, and truancy. Ms. Heron said it would be good if parents were made aware of what was being done to improve these problems. Ellen Reckhow said there is a 9<sup>th</sup> grade bulge when students are often not successful and they end up dropping out of school. Dr. Harris stated there are things already in place that will present positive results, the AVID Program and Pre-College Program to name a few. It is indeed a challenging and complex issue.

Superintendent Denlinger informed everyone that Durham Public Schools has made tremendous progress in student achievement over the past several years. Until now, efforts have been focused on the K-8 level. It is now time to turn more of our attention to grades 9-12. During the month of February, a yearlong process began to examine data and plan for the future. Specific goals and action plans will be tailored to each high school. DPS is committed to increased student achievement for all students in all schools.

### **Suspension Report**

- The *First Semester Suspension Report* for 2003 – 2004 was discussed. 2337 students received a short term suspension during the 2003-04 first semester. 14.5% of the student population received a short-term suspension during the first semester of the 2003-04 school year.

Michael Page reminded everyone that suspensions are not only a local problem, but a national problem as well. Phillis Scott said she hoped the community realized the tremendous time and energy spent on cutting suspension rates. She said that everyone must help in order to turn it around.

A lengthy discussion centered around graduation rates, ninth-graders dropping out of school, middle school problems and solutions, dropout rates, and suspensions.

Philip Cousin asked the Superintendent if DPS practices “0” tolerance for suspensions. Dr. Denlinger stated the school system does not practice “0” tolerance. Every single one of the suspensions has a series of factors surrounding it that makes each event different from the other. It is a true statement to say that our principals and administrators work very hard to look at each event and all the facts surrounding it. That enables them to make the best decision based on all the information. Each of the suspensions is very personalized, and the decisions are made considering all the factors for each event; none of which are exactly alike.

Dr. Regina George-Bowden said there were far too many African American males being suspended from school. She asked if the African American male population posed a threat to safety at the schools. Dr. Harris answered her by saying that he did not associate safety with any sub-group. Violations of Board Policies result in consequences, he said, and all students know that up front. All issues are being looked at. There is no group targeted for suspensions or associated with the threat of safety in the schools. School principals and staff members are encouraged to recognize and see what other things can be done to minimize the suspensions without compromising the safety and integrity of the learning environment.

Dr. George-Bowden asked about funding for the New Horizons Program. Grant funding for the program ends June 30. The new Community Learning Center program jointly funded by the City and County was developed specifically in response to the need to provide for students who were suspended from Jordan High School. Funding covered one semester only and there is no expectation that this program will exist beyond this school year. The Community Learning Center was not designed as a replacement for the students being served by the New Horizons Program. It is the Superintendent’s intention to ensure there is a community-based program to provide for students who are on long-term suspension and are not being served by Lakeview School, as well as those who are on a 365-day suspension.

Jackie Wagstaff stated that Durham Public Schools had acted as a fiscal agent for the New Horizons Program. New Horizons has applied for those monies again. Ms. Wagstaff understands that DPS is not going to be operating as the fiscal agent to support New Horizons after the June 30 grant expires. Michael Page indicated that Ms. Wagstaff’s assessment was correct. Rev. Page stated he was informed by administration that DPS had elected not to support the program because of concerns in regards to the financial management of the program.

### **Creekside Issue**

Becky Heron was concerned after reading a letter to the editor in a newspaper about the Creekside Elementary School site. She asked who is responsible for soil analysis on school construction projects. She said somebody really fouled up and Durham Public Schools should get its money back.

Joe Bowser stated that an architect is paid to analyze the soil and that someone was given the wrong information. There have been, he pointed out, other DPS schools that have had soil problems.

Dr. Denlinger stated that staff members are working within the contractual agreement to correct the problem. There are punitive damages provided for in the contract and DPS intends to exercise this right.

A sewer line issue regarding the Creekside project was brought to the School Board's attention by Joe Bowser. He stated that in his opinion, the DPS should not be catering to a developer at the expense of local taxpayers. He felt that the bond monies, if used for extending sewer and water lines, should benefit all the County taxpayers in the area. He mentioned that the water and sewer lines could run parallel and help all the neighboring citizens. He encouraged DPLS to review the whole process.

### **Citizen Comments**

1. Isaac Woods voiced a major concern about his family property not being included to tap on to Creekside School sewer line. He said the neighborhood should be included in the plans. The City of Durham has the power to correct certain issues and can stop the work order for the sewer line.
2. Ella Woods also owns property that is affected by the sewer line on Creekside School property. Ms. Woods said the project has already begun; ground has been broken and trees have been removed. She considers the process to be unfair to the homeowners.
3. Lavonia Allison talked about total distrust with the school system. She stated the sewer issue at Creekside was a racial thing. She said the school system makes promises and commitments, but does not meet them. It continues to be a serious problem.

### **Adjournment**

Chairman Page adjourned the meeting at 6:40 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Debbie R. Terrell  
Board of Education Liaison

