

Draft

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS
CALLED MEETING** October 9, 2017

**ALEXANDER COUNTY
STATE OF NORTH CAROLINA**

PRESENT: Milton H. Campbell, Chairman
Ronnie Reese, Vice-Chairman
Josh Lail
Dr. Jeffrey P. Peal
Ryan Mayberry

STAFF: Rick French, County Manager
Jamie Starnes, Clerk to the Board

A joint called meeting was held between the Alexander County Board of Commissioners, Alexander County Board of Education, and Catawba Valley Community College staff on Monday, October 9, 2017 at 6:00 PM in the Board of Education Meeting Room, Taylorsville, North Carolina. Those present from the School System included Board of Education members Caryn Bryzcky (Chairman), Scott Bowman (Vice-Chairman), Sallie Hartis, David Odom, Marty Pennell, Brigitte Rhyne, and Harry Schrum along with Superintendent Dr. Jennifer Hefner. Representatives from CVCC were Vice-President Dr. Keith Mackie, CVCC / Alexander Center Executive Director Brett Fansler, and CVCC Board of Trustees members Jeremy Fortner and John Watts.

EARLY COLLEGE DISCUSSION

Discussion began with growth objectives for Alexander Early College (17.5% of upcoming freshmen for the next 3 years at max capacity of 294) as well as comparisons to other one high school districts (15% in McDowell, 9% in Davie, 29% in Watauga) and Challenger (400 total from 4 districts). Dr. Jennifer Hefner, Superintendent, pointed out that students enrolled at AEC (151 currently) counted towards Alexander County's ADM as opposed to those at Challenger who are considered Catawba County students. In addition, she explained that the School System continued to receive teacher allotments for AEC students, noting that full enrollment of 294 at AEC would equal 19.5 positions, 8 for AEC and the remaining 11.5 to be used within the system to supplement other academic areas.

Due to stated concerns with the anticipated number of students in the Early College Program and how it would affect Alexander Central High school in regard to AP programs, elective courses, etc., Dr. Hefner reported that an additional AP course had been added at ACHS each year since 2015-2016 (two since AEC began) and that virtual AP courses are offered when there are not enough students to fill a class. Participation in JROTC has increased and efforts are being made to ensure AEC students are still able to participate in athletics, band, chorus, etc.

Commissioner Mayberry stated that, while he supported the Early College Program, he was not happy with it being housed at the CVCC / Alexander Applied Technologies Center which was promoted and constructed with the intention of providing workforce training for industries such as the Furniture Academy, welding, metallurgy, etc. It was his understanding that the Applied Technologies Center would be a temporary location for AEC and he felt a better plan for facilities was needed before beginning the program or moving forward any further.

Dr. Keith Mackie, CVCC Vice-President, advised that the CVCC / Alexander County would be able to accommodate the next group of freshmen for the 2018-2019 year (approx. 50 students) but that space would be a major concern past that point, especially with additional requests for training opportunities from local industries. Brett Fansler, CVCC / Alexander Center Executive Director, added that the welding program had requested an additional classroom at the Applied Technologies Center which could further impact immediate space issues for AEC.

Options discussed for alternate locations included mobile units, transitioning CVCC day classes to the smaller adjacent building to allow AEC to utilize the current CVCC / Alexander Center (enough room for 6 classroom requiring extensive renovation), and using a wing of ACHS similar to what's currently done for the Freshmen Academy as well as the early college program at Watauga High School (allows for easier access to extracurricular activities and gyms).

Regarding suggestions of housing AEC in either the former Wittenburg Elementary or Ellendale Elementary / Head Start facilities, Dr. Hefner provided minutes from a September 21, 1998 work session where the Division Chief and AIA Consulting Architect from the Division of School Planning recommended the old Wittenburg Elementary "not implement a regular education program...due to small room sizes and the lack of areas for special programs." While neither school is ideal due to location, the grandfathered status to operate as an education facility has also expired for Ellendale / Head Start according to Harry Schrum, School Board Member.

In a response to a suggestion made by David Odom, School Board Member, related to borrowing funds to assist with AEC housing, Commissioner Mayberry felt building a new facility was hard to justify when considering the number of students that will be taken from ACHS to attend AEC as well as declining enrollment throughout the entire school system. (ACHS max capacity - 1,650 / current enrollment - 1,341 / possible enrollment with AEC at full capacity - less than 1,050).

Caryn Bryzcky, Board of Education Chairman, pointed out that the model for any early college program was to be located on a college campus; however, due to many concerns and space issues, she felt the School Board should discuss short-term needs regarding housing of AEC as well as develop a longer-range plan to be presented to the Board of Commissioners and CVCC in the near future.

Other items mentioned included the benefit that AEC had on CVCC / Alexander Center's application to the State for multi-campus / center funding that would aid in operating costs and possible teacher and teacher support positions, needed clarification on the responsibilities of the County, Schools, and CVCC regarding facilities, and Cohort / College & Career Promise

programs. Jeremy Fortner, CVCC Board of Trustees member, felt expansion of the Cohort and CCP programs could aid in the capacity issue for AEC until a more permanent solution was implemented. Dr. Hefner, Mr. French, and Mr. Fansler agreed to discuss drafting a MOU regarding expected custodial and maintenance roles of each group.

COUNTY BUDGET ALLOCATION TO ALEXANDER COUNTY SCHOOLS

The group discussed the need for a funding agreement between the County and School System to eliminate uncertainty surrounding yearly budget requests and appropriations. Mr. French expressed concerns that a funding agreement would prove to be impractical when considering the County's growth rate had remained steady at approximately 1% for many years. Mr. Odom suggested a funding model based on sales tax revenue and/or a combination of several factors in comparison to similar counties.

Ms. Bryzcky inquired about the County's plans for the \$1.3 million in revenue from the new sales tax earmarked for economic development, public education, and community colleges. Mr. French replied that \$400,000 was set aside for the school system and the remaining funds would be used for economic development purchases such as grant matches for the Shurtape Job Retention Sewer Project and the Industrial Park Pump Station Project as well as debt service on a low-interest loan from the State for sewer in the Bethlehem area. He discussed the County's difficulty in providing more funding for the School System with so many financial obligations and ongoing needs but felt economic development was the key to boosting population, sales tax revenue, etc.

Mr. Schrum stated that elimination of the \$150,000 yearly appropriation from the County for the auditorium payment had negatively impacted the Schools budget and he asked if this could be restored from the County's Contingency Fund, especially since no funding would have to be reverted to the State for enrollment based on 20th day numbers. Although it was stated that the County had fulfilled its responsibility toward the auditorium agreement (County paid the first \$2 million on auditorium debt for 12 years / final payment of \$150,000 made in 2017), Chairman Campbell advised that Contingency was a "cushion" not earmarked for any specific item and that conversations could occur for these types of requests.

Several School Board members spoke to the use of Fund Balance for operating expenses and the possibility of having to eliminate positions if this continued. Mr. Odom explained that because the School System could not levy taxes or borrow money, they had no means to restore their Fund Balance without additional revenue from either the State or the County. He added that selling vacant buildings as previously suggested created a possibility of those facilities being converted to private schools that would further impact decreasing enrollment, reducing State allotments and other funding.

Vice-Chairman Reese pointed out that, although the County's appropriation to the School System has decreased by percentage, the dollar amount had increased in excess of \$1 million since the 2013-2014 budget year. Other contributions from the County to the School System include additional funding for the 21st Centuries Community Learning Center at Taylorsville

Elementary due to the program longer being funded by the State and additional low wealth funding gained from the 2015 property tax increase.

Commissioner Mayberry felt continued decreases in enrollment would eventually force the School Board to either realign districts or close a school(s) and that the County could not continue to be a “catch all” to balance the Schools budget. Commissioner Lail agreed, pointing out that the current Board of Commissioners had spent the last several years cutting as many expenses as possible including employee benefits. Dr. Hefner advised that the School System had done the same by capturing positions through attrition (over 100), combining positions, utilizing energy efficient LED’s, etc.; however, the system continues to bleed the Fund Balance. She added that going any leaner would negatively impact student achievement.

Brigette Rhyne, School Board Member, responded that, because the County was the only hope for additional funding, the Board of Education would continue to ask year after year if necessary. She felt it was their job to fight for every school and that continually asking was only doing justice for the system.

It was agreed that Chairman Bryzcky and Mr. Odom along with Chairman Campbell and Commissioner Mayberry would serve as the committee to develop a funding agreement suitable for Alexander County.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

Ms. Bryzcky mentioned the need to resurface the community tennis courts next to the Central Office in the near future and that any assistance through County funding or grant applications would be appreciated. She also stated that the School System hoped to partner in the County’s vision for economic development.

Marty Pennell, School Board Member, agreed that both boards should work together for the children of Alexander County, who he felt were a main source of infrastructure.

Mr. Odom pointed out that the students of the Alexander County School System academically outperformed systems funded at a much greater level for which everyone should be proud of.

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 9:08 PM.

Milton H. Campbell, Chairman

Jamie M. Starnes, Clerk to the Board