

Committee on Joint School Services

MINUTES

December 5, 2019

The Committee on Joint School Services met in a regular, bimonthly meeting on Thursday, December 5, 2019 at Allegheny Regional Library with the following members present:

Jonathan Arritt	Covington City School Board
Gerald Franson	Allegheny County School Board
Matt Garten	Allegheny County Board of Supervisors
James Griffith	Allegheny County Board of Supervisors
Erika Hunter	Covington City School Board
Tom Sibold	Covington City Council
Allan Tucker	Covington City Council
Jacob Wright	Allegheny County School Board

Also present were Mr. Eugene Kotulka, Superintendent, Allegheny County Public Schools; Mrs. Melinda Snead-Johnson, Superintendent of Covington City Schools; and Christy Armentrout.

Mr. Wright called the meeting to order at 6:01 p.m. and led in a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Approval of minutes:

Mr. Wright asked the committee members to review the minutes from the November 14, 2019 meeting. After reviewing the minutes, Mr. Tucker made a motion to approve the minutes as presented. Mr. Garten seconded the motion, and it was passed by unanimous aye vote.

Chairman's update:

Mr. Wright began by addressing a phone call he recently had with Mr. Clemmons, who he termed "a longtime proponent of consolidation under the right conditions". Mr. Clemmons had challenged Mr. Wright to address why consolidation is a good thing as opposed to focusing on how to reach consolidation. Mr. Wright wanted to take this opportunity to publicly respond by stating that he believes that the community is currently working well together, given that both school systems have been able to reach and operate on a common school calendar recently, along with the successful joint venture that continues at JRTC. He stated that this committee wants what is best for the community and most importantly what is best for the kids. He stated that this is the goal and focus of this committee and that he is happy to talk to anyone at any time regarding this matter.

New Business:

Report on Governance. Mr. Wright stated that he and Mr. Arritt have spoken to the attorneys regarding the agreed upon governance structure. They informed him that there may be a need to have legislation crafted to allow the committee to proceed with a 2-2-3 board structure. He noted that they may need to agree on a "plan B" structure for board governance in case there is anything in state law that would not allow the previously agreed upon plan. Currently cross-jurisdiction is not allowed by law, and it is also out of the ordinary for some board members to be appointed while some are elected. These situations may cause a snag in moving forward. If this structure cannot be worked out under the law the board would need to have an alternative structure in mind, however, at this point this structure cannot be ruled out. Further guidance will be needed from Richmond, and essentially any plan needed will most likely require new legislation to be written. After some discussion, the committee members decided to go forward with what has already been agreed upon and tweak it as necessary. Mr. Griffith commented that he feels that the staff of Delegate Deeds and Representative Austin may need to be contacted for assistance with ironing the details of this matter out. Mr. Wright stated that he would find out more and report back to the committee at the next meeting.

Old Business:

Debt. Mr. Wright addressed the topic of currently existing debt for both localities. He noted that the last consolidation plan brought forward kept the debt within the jurisdiction it was assumed in. The committee agreed that moving forward in this process each locality should retain their existing debt.

Budgetary Concerns. Mr. Wright discussed with the committee the idea of reaching an equation for payments to a joint school system that would be based on the enrollment of both localities. Mr. Wright noted that something similar to this is already being done at Jackson River Technical Center, which is funded on a 3-year average of enrollments. Mr. Wright noted that this method helps to minimize the surprise of funding costs because there is a clear formula and rationale behind payment structure. He noted that this method could be used for the joint school system's future debt as well. It was added that the state will base funding for a joint school system based on the composite index and that hopefully it would operate off of the lower index from the two systems. Mr. Garten asked if the committee could ask the state to allow for a lower composite index during the transition period.

Mr. Wright noted that he has spoken with the fiscal consultants working on the financial study. The preliminary budget predictions projected by their study were optimistic toward the idea that efficiencies could be gained by operating a joint school system. He noted that the costs associated with equalization of pay between the two systems were less than the amounts that have been discussed during previous efforts towards consolidation. Mr. Wright added that he should have more concrete information regarding this at next week's meeting.

Budgetary Considerations: Capital Improvement. Mr. Wright noted that capital improvement projects in the county are typically paid for from budget surplus, whereas the city schools usually request funding from city council when capital improvement is needed. He added that the committee would need to establish some plan moving forward with ideas for having a capital improvement plan and funding for a joint school system. It was decided that an assessment of needs for capital improvements should be conducted so that the localities will have some idea what projects might be anticipated moving forward. From there the committee could reach a formula or equation to pay for capital projects as well. Mr. Tucker asked if the committee could perhaps do an assessment for capital projects now and perhaps use state funds to address those issues at the outset of the joint school system. Mr. Wright stated that perhaps a sub-committee should be formed to examine the ideas for what capital projects may come up. The committee also agreed that a facilities assessment should be done in order to provide a 5-year outlook on these matters. It was decided that these assessments should include both school buildings and athletic facilities. Mr. Wright stated that an outside person should be contracted to look at this and that

it would be a worthwhile endeavor regardless of whether or not consolidation becomes a reality.

Mr. Griffith added that he feels that the localities should commit to a certain percentage of expenditures to go toward career and technical education at Jackson River Technical Center moving forward, as it would no longer be a regional center and would be a part of a new school system.

Adjournment:

Mr. Wright called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Arritt made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Tucker, and the meeting was adjourned at 6:53 p.m.

Date Approved

Clerk

Chairman