

Committee on Joint School Services

MINUTES

September 5, 2019

The Committee on Joint School Services met in a regular, bimonthly meeting on Thursday, September 5, 2019 with the following members present:

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

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

Mr. Wright called the meeting to order at 6:05 p.m. and led in a moment of silence and the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag.

Mr. Wright asked that the approval of the minutes from the August 22, 2019 meeting be moved to the next meeting in order for the committee members to have time to get copies of them and review them.

Old Business:

Establish a List of Pros and Cons (1-06): Mr. Franson presented to the board a list of positive results that he believe will come of combining resources between the school systems. After reviewing the list, the committee members

agreed with all items included and decided to begin by making these the pros for consolidating. Members also briefly discussed Mr. Franson's ideas and added to them.

The list of pros for consolidation includes:

1. Greater utilization of Jackson River Technical Center
2. The ability to provide wider curriculum choices to the students
3. Reduction of class sizes
4. Fewer scheduling conflicts with Jackson River Technical Center
5. More flexible schedules for students (because of the wider curriculum offerings)
6. More participation in athletic programs due to a larger student pool
7. Greater economy of scale for purchases and buildings
8. Avoidance of serious budget issues that will face both school systems if they remain as is
9. The opportunity for more state funds due to a lower Local Composite Index (LCI)
10. The ability to maintain the current staff levels and avoid layoffs and eliminate positions through attrition as needed
11. More efficient use of buildings and facilities
12. A more cohesive local population/community (eliminates rivalries)
13. No competition for teachers and students
14. Better opportunity to recruit qualified professionals into the area and encourage population growth
15. Taking advantage of state interest in the project
16. The opportunity to increase student achievement through greater efficiencies
17. Enhanced support for under-supported programs
18. Increased networking opportunities for teaching staff
19. More efficient child services action
20. Greater assistance for teachers' classroom needs
21. Greater efficiency of student transportation leading to better quality of life for students who will not have long bus rides and have to get up as early or home as late

The committee proceeded with the task of establishing a list of cons. Mr. Tucker noted that these were more issues that would need to be worked through than they were cons. The committee decided to call this a list of obstacles as opposed to a list of cons.

The list of obstacles included:

1. The questions and unknowns that need to be determined
2. Budget issues – finding a plan that will be fair to everyone
3. Duplicate positions
4. Athletic programs – team cuts and reduced playing time for athletes
5. Composition of the joint school board
6. Trust issues in the community
7. Equalization of pay for employees

WSLS Interview (1-07): Mr. Wright informed the board that WSLS has written and published/broadcast a story about the formation of the committee and the exploration of consolidating the school systems. Mr. Wright stated that he wanted to have full transparency in this matter, as he agreed not to give an interview to the media regarding the process until there was a prepared statement approved by the committee first. He assured everyone that he has not given an authorized interview to the media, but that they have gathered information through social media and made a news story out of it.

New Business:

Retention of Law Firm to Conduct Study (1-08): Mr. Griffith stated that the committee needs to develop a scope and a timeline for this project, and to set a price limit for the initial phase of this process. Mr. Franson stated that transparency was key in this process in order to address the public's questions and concerns.

The committee decided to use the established list of pros and obstacles to direct the project. The first step of the process should be addressing the obstacles. It was decided that the three initial objectives would be to address salary and benefit equalization, governance, and the budget.

Mr. Wright explained that all expenses related to this study will be taken from the \$400,000 in funding that the General Assembly has granted to the area to explore this project. The money came from a budget amendment drafted by Delegate Terry Austin last year, and is specifically earmarked for the Alleghany Highlands to find an efficient way to run its school systems. Mr. Wright also emphasized the responsible use of this funding, and noted that any money left over once the project is complete will be used for Jackson River Technical Center, which is a joint venture between the two school systems.

The committee came to the consensus that they should contact Troutman Sanders Law firm in Richmond and request that a strategies team be present at

the next meeting so that a scope and timeline can be placed on the project. They also agreed that the dollar amount on this initial phase of the project should not exceed \$80,000 and that it should be requested that Troutman Sanders LLC notify the committee when this allocation of funds is 75% spent.

Adjournment:

The meeting adjourned at 7:00 p.m. on motion by Mr. Tucker, seconded by Mr. Sibold.

Date Approved

Clerk

Chairman