

January 7, 2015

A special meeting of the Giles County School Board was held at 7:00 p.m. on January 7, 2015 in the School Administration Office Building Conference Room. Persons present were:

E. G. Gentry
J. M. Gollehon, Jr.
Drema K. McMahon
J. L. Webb, Jr.
R. B. Whitehead

Dr. Terry E. Arbogast II, Superintendent
D. Scott Meade, Assistant Superintendent
Amanda J. Tickle, Clerk

The meeting was called to order by Dr. Arbogast.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA

The Board, on motion of Mr. Gollehon, with second by Mrs. McMahon and unanimous voting, approved the Superintendent's January 7, 2015 School Board Meeting Agenda.

2015 ORGANIZATION

The Board, on motion of Mr. Whitehead, with second by Mr. Gollehon and unanimous voting, appointed Dr. Webb as School Board Chairman for 2015. Dr. Webb abstained.

The Board, on motion of Mr. Gentry, with second by Mr. Whitehead and unanimous voting, appointed Drema McMahon as Vice-Chairman for 2015. Mrs. McMahon abstained.

The Board, on motion of Mr. Gentry, with second by Mrs. McMahon and unanimous voting, approved the third Thursday at 4:00 & 7:00 (PM) (odd number months at 4 P.M./even number months at 7 P.M.) as the monthly meeting date and time for the 2015 calendar year and holding the first Thursday of the month if needed.

The Board, on motion of Mr. Whitehead, with second by Mr. Gollehon and unanimous voting, appointed Amanda Tickle as School Board Clerk for 2015.

The School Board, on motion of Mr. Whitehead, with second by Mr. Gollehon and unanimous voting, appointed Barbara Perkins and Dr. Terry Arbogast, II as Deputy Clerks for 2015.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Mrs. Meekins spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. She stated that "after last month's school board meeting, she wanted to share with them some information that they may not be aware of. Giles High School is accredited, granted "accredited with warning", but still accredited. It is true that changes do need to take place; however, will the start date being moved up make a difference; probably not. The testing window is based on when school starts. If you move up the start date, the writing test will probably be moved up. Dr. Webb stated that even by moving up the testing schedule, we should still have an additional 4 weeks of instructional days. Mrs. Meekins stated that the last 3 weeks are definitely not wasted time at Giles High School. Some students may not have to take final exams, so they may have the last 4 days of school off. The last 3 weeks of school are still the last 3 weeks of school, even when they start. The last month and a half at Giles are one of the busiest times. We start SOL testing most times the first week of May. We go from SOL testing every day, to expedited retakes with remediation crammed in along the way, to post testing for our teacher evaluation, to final exams. Somewhere in between, we have academic performance, sports performance, academic ceremonies, band/choir performance, graduation practice, just to name a few. Now, the math department is having to do additional benchmark testing. I encourage you to go back and look at the test scores. We have two feeder schools, Eastern and Macy and that combined number goes to GHS. I encourage you to look at that before you make a decision."

Mrs. Toni Chidester spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. She stated that "the last meeting got off on the wrong foot, unfortunately. We know that you are trying to do what is best for the students of Giles County, but so are the teachers. We are in the classrooms with these children from the first day to the last day. We become very much involved in their lives and want them to excel; however, we are dealing with many obstacles that teachers did not have to deal with 10 years ago. The majority of students in our classrooms used to be in two parent homes where education was valued. Those parents provided discipline, parental education, experiences and stability for our children. Today, many of our children do not have these benefits from day one. Each year, we are seeing our children asked to assume educational and social responsibilities that they are not prepared for. Therefore, the children stay behind even with remediation and extra time. You cannot make up the important developmental stages of the child's lives from birth to five years that have been neglected. The federal government is now providing funds to be used for preschool and this is a definite step in the right direction, but it should have been done 10 years ago. Now in saying this, I'm sure you are thinking, we should start school earlier, however, the school year will still be the same number of days. We will receive no more instructional time.

The main reason given for the early start to the calendar was for the first semester to be over before Christmas break. I can see how this may help the block schedule with their SOL testing; however, no other schools have that mid-year. We are constantly testing and reviewing with the elementary school children, so that would not be beneficial to three of the schools in the county. The other reason was to get as many days as possible in the calendar before SOL testing. Regardless of when we start, the testing window will be adjusted. Testing in the schools takes 3-4 weeks to complete. I have done some research since our last meeting. At the last meeting Dr. Webb talked about how Roanoke City schools had improved since they began their early start calendar. I compared SOL scores for Roanoke City for 2011-2012, 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Math improved by 4 points, English improved 2 points, Writing dropped from 83 in 2011 to 63 in 2014. History improved 1 point and Science improved 2 points. These are not remarkable improvements to support starting a month early, but what you also have to understand with comparing scores from year to year is that each year, there are a different group of students. The variables are within your students and what they bring to the table. In closing, I will quote "Save Alabama summers". No academic benefits from early school starts have been shown to exist. In fact, schools in top performing states start classes later than schools in Alabama. The top 10 academic states in 4 commonly used states education ranking systems have two things in common; they begin the school year in late August or early September and administer winter finals after the winter break."

Mrs. Ellen Hawks spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. She stated that "I am going to continue on with where Mrs. Chidester was. She was given some data as well. When Dr. Webb compared Giles County Schools to Roanoke City schools she felt that this was insane in the first place. Dr. Webb stated that when he mentioned Roanoke City schools, he in no way compared Giles County to Roanoke City. In any event, Mrs. Hawks stated that Roanoke City's vision is to be a model for urban, public education. Surely, we are not going to compare rural Giles County to urban Roanoke City. The numbers of schools academically fully accredited in Roanoke City for 2013-2014 term is 10 elementary, 1 middle, 2 high schools. That is 13 of the 25 Roanoke City facilities for a 52% success rate. Both high schools in Roanoke City are on block scheduling. NHS has received great honors this past year. Data from VDOE website also leads to other advantages. According to education's great Harry Wong, there is only one way to improve student achievement - "200 studies have shown that the only factor that can create student achievement is a knowledgeable, skillful teacher. A large scale study found that every additional dollar spent on raising teacher quality netted greater student achievement gains than any other use of school resources." So, I ask, when was the last time Giles County School Board has offered a masters or advanced degree incentives to their teachers. Roanoke City Schools, if we are going to compare, have increased their overall teachers attaining higher education degrees (teachers with masters) by 9%. I am curious what the increase for Giles County teachers have been in the last several years. In closing, I want to share a personal note. I have a daughter, who is brilliant, who wants to be a teacher and that's why I care about this issue. There is a lack of respect that I feel this board, especially last month and in this decision, has shown their educators. If this is how it's going to be, I will encourage her to teach elsewhere. Dr. Webb stated that this board could have no more higher respect for their teachers in Giles County. We have some of the most excellent faculties throughout our county all across this county that I would compare to anybody, anywhere. Over this issue, we disagree, but that doesn't take away from the respect for the staff that we all have. We respect the calendar committee very highly and we respect their right to have an opinion on this subject."

Mrs. Darlene Cunningham spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. She stated that "I'm glad that you all are meeting at this hour. I would like to address some of your topics from your previous meeting. I read your minutes from November and read the account of the December meeting in the local paper. I read about the calendar proposed start dates. During my 36 years teaching here, periodically, there were proposals to start before Labor Day, but none as early as August 8th. Some factors that I hope you will consider before adopting such an early start date are: Students and teachers often have summer jobs; Teachers may have classes to either recertify or further their education; sports programs such as rec leagues which are for kids of all ages; summer camps such as 4H or camps at various college campuses; higher utility costs for the schools and then time off for kids and teachers. On a personal note, I have grandchildren that live in North Carolina. Several years ago, they started school the first week of August and that lasted only a couple years before their state legislators terminated the early start date due to tourism/travel. As to SOL scores, I looked at Montgomery County scores and found that some schools there have not reached benchmarks in some subjects. Lower scores in Math occurred most frequently. The start date for Montgomery County in 2012-2013 was August 14th, 2013-2014 was September 4th and 2014-2015 was August 12th. Looking then at the report card from the Department of Education for 3 year averages, there was no significant changes in scores in relation to start dates. Math was below the benchmark all 3 years. There are so many factors that determine student achievement. Some are not controlled by school personnel and to provide the optimal environment for student success, good teachers who feel they have a voice in the system and feel they are supported by administration are of the utmost importance. Not having a voice or having your voice minimized often leads to low morale in any occupation. I can honestly tell you that on many different occasions in my 36 years, I felt that teacher's voices were not heard and sadly, teacher's hesitation to speak out or to show up for fear of retaliation is reality that is well founded. In closing, I know that your job is very challenging, I know that you are driven my local, state and federal guidelines; however, I want you to keep in mind that our school system can learn from other systems at times, we should not copy them without considering factors that may be unique to us."

Ms. Carol Spangler spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. "I appreciate the School Board having a 7 p.m. meeting so more people can voice their concerns with the proposed calendar for 2015-2016 and 2016-2017. Hopefully, this time frame will continue at all of your future meetings. First, I will address the economic disadvantages of starting school the beginning of August. This will have a negative impact on students and staff who depend on their summer jobs to balance their budgets. I was one of them who depended on that summer job. Obviously, these

changes also interfere with numerous vacation schedules of families in our area. I do not understand how starting a month earlier eliminates wasted time. The schools have 180 instructional days no matter when you start. During the 26 years that I worked for the Giles County School System, I never experienced wasted time during the beginning of the school year. In fact, this can be one of the busiest times of the year. This school year, the state board of education retired SOL testing on these grade level subjects – 3rd grade history/science, 5th grade writing/history and middle school social studies. Jason at the assessment office for the state board of education said that each school needs to do their own test or do a portfolio for these areas. In fact, these state report cards did not support that starting earlier always improve SOL scores. I also believe there should be some fun activities as a reward for students at the end of the year. Also, isn't it wasted time to require a calendar committee and to totally disregard its deliberations regarding the school calendar. That's my definition of wasted time. Research indicates the instructional methodology impacts test scores much more than arbitrary calendars. One of our teachers said at the December board meeting – we can't be like Montgomery County, in fact we do not want to be. Once again, I believe our teachers and staff will step up to the challenge and show the School Board they are willing to work hard to improve SOL scores and all of our schools will be fully accredited again."

Mrs. Tracy Ferguson spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. "First of all, I would like to say thank you for allowing me to speak and thank you to the board members who work very hard to make Giles County schools such an excellent place to teach and to be taught. I'm proud to have been a Giles County student myself and also an educator for 15 years. Also, thanks to my colleagues who strive each and every day to provide an exceptional education to the students of Giles County. I'd like to address the board today regarding the calendar proposal. I feel that starting school the beginning of August will be detrimental to the students/staff of Giles County. I know there are many, many others who feel the same way. I have been approached by others, including school employees, parents and community members, who are adamantly opposed to the early start. I have read a variety of research that I feel will encourage you to reconsider the calendar issue. However, I first would like to clarify a point of discussion that Mr. Gentry brought up at the last meeting. He stated that I brought up a shortened summer first when he and I spoke in the library. That is not exactly correct. I first thanked him for his service. Then, at that time, I did ask him about the calendar issue and he spoke to her at length. We talked about the short summer. At that time, the calendar committee had received news that school would be starting the next year (16-17) at the beginning of August and at that time, it would give them a very short summer. Mr. Gentry informed me that board members had looked back at minutes from prior meetings and realized that parents/community members would be given at least a year's notice before the major changes. This calendar committee meeting had come at such a shock to them that she was glad to hear that they had looked back and realized it would be at least one more year before such drastic measures were taken. I feel it is very important for the board members to realize teachers are not in this profession to have our summers off. We chose to be in this field so we can make a difference in the lives of Giles County school children. We choose to be here because we love the children and we want to be with the children. Staff members are not opposed to the new calendar purely based on what it does to our summer break. 180 days of work is 180 days of work. If I thought this proposal would be truly beneficial, then I would say let's go for it; however, I feel that changing the calendar so dramatically is not going to improve our schools, most especially, when the calendar committee only benefits the smallest of our 5 schools. Many, many reasons have been given for opposing such an early school start, but I encourage you to look at the teachers and ask their opinions. As teachers, we know the needs of our students. Some kids go home to chaos and if it weren't for us, it's hard to tell what their lives would be like. Please listen to the ones who are working daily to meet the challenges of these students, both personal challenges and ones set forth by the Department of Education. In closing "According to a Richland's school district study, scheduling appears to be a neutral variable as it relates to student achievement. Also, common sense also dictates that it is not the schedule that makes a difference, but what you put into it." In short, the calendar is a framework for instruction. What truly matters is that we are giving our students quality instruction, which we as teachers are striving to do."

Clayton Davis spoke regarding the proposed calendar changes. "I appreciate the time that you have given me this evening. I have a great love and appreciation for our teachers and our students. I have talked to some of you before about other concerns that I have and what I felt like was a lack of sympathy and empathy with our teachers. You have a calendar committee that you work with and have a lot of input. I know they have had 2 or 3 meetings. I heard Dr. Webb say at the December meeting that we are waiting to get the input from the committee. I can understand what their concerns are and every suggestion the calendar committee has come up with has been later changed. It seemed to be a foregone conclusion of me just sitting out here as a private citizen and listening to the replies to what these teachers have to say. I think they are with their students every day and I trust them tremendously. If I were looking for a better means of educating them, I don't know of anyone else I would rather trust than them and their input to this board. In December, when you mentioned that you were trusting the calendar committee, you asked them (after they had received input from the schools) why they didn't have more input and the response was that some felt intimidated by administration and school board. I think it's a shame when any employee can't go to their leaders and express those concerns without fear of losing their job."

Dr. Webb stated that at this time, he wanted the audience to hear a report from Dr. Arbogast. Dr. Arbogast stated that he had a couple comments about school improvement. Dr. Arbogast stated, "As you are aware, DOE has applied for a waiver. Part of that waiver introduced new teacher and principal evaluations and more rigorous assessments. Through that, we have had to reevaluate and determine the cognitive level of testing questions that we are using based on the blooms taxonomy scale. We are practicing the technology enhanced questions (15%) and are aligning our written curriculum with the taught curriculum to make sure that what is being assessed is appropriate. We are using our resources (regional curriculum director) to provide professional development on the aforementioned items. Our improvement plans incorporate these essential

actions that have been approved and submitted to DOE based on recent visits. We anticipate more professional development will be scheduled for the schools based on these meetings.”

Dr. Webb stated that he had a conversation with Mr. Meade the other day about how the “prime time” school months are September and October because there are usually no interruptions. “In my mind, it feels like if we have some additional time before Labor Day that would only enhance the run at the beginning of the school year. In previous years, in 2005, we required the calendar committee to start either before or after Labor Day (depending on when Labor Day fell). We were in hopes that at time that it would jumpstart the creative thinking of the calendar committee. For the last 10 years, every calendar that has been brought forward is within one day or so of the previous year. Education is evolving every day since No Child Left Behind and SOL testing. We, as a School Board and school system, have to endure certain things that we didn’t used to have to take into consideration when forming a school calendar. This is something that has really put increased pressure on our teachers since No Child Left Behind came along. Our classroom teachers are under increased pressure every day in these classrooms to make sure that “Johnny” is learning and learning enough to pass these tests. The feeling of this board is to get more instructional time in before these tests are given and it will be more beneficial to these students. Grade level teachers that are responsible for these SOL tests are carrying the weight of the shoulders of their entire school on their back as far as the school receiving accreditation. One final thing, for those of you that are not educators, our teachers for the last 3-4 years have been required to go under a new evaluation system. This evaluation system for teachers contains 40% of student progress. We are not here tonight to discuss whether Giles County Schools will start before Labor Day - That is something that is cast in stone already. There will be no more starting post Labor Day. There will be no more 4 days added on before Labor Day and then have a 4 day break and then have another 4 day week, especially for those young students who need to get in these schools and have a routine. I would appreciate if you all would listen to us, as we have listened to you.”

Mr. Gentry stated that “after our last meeting, I got several calls and was looking back at my notes at what was said. I went down to Giles and got with Mr. Mills and I apologized to him for what came out at the last board meeting as saying his school was a big reason for this – It came out wrong from the whole board and I apologize because it was incorrect. I don’t believe it was said in that manner, but it was how it came out. Also, we haven’t voted on it yet, so the calendar is not set. The reasons we have heard over time to not change the calendar is because of summer jobs, sports, that the end of the year is not wasted time (and I disagree with that) and that it will only help NHS (it’s not the only reason, but if it helps, that’s great). The positives I see in it are the additional weeks we will get prior to the writing test and the days we will get prior to the non-writing test. I think those are all positives that we should try. The thing I really don’t want to hear again is the word “intimidation”. If it is going on, I want to hear it and know it. I personally think the first of the month is way too early and personally think that starting 10 days before is good.”

Mrs. McMahon stated that “after the last meeting, my greatest concern were the comments about the 3 weeks of additional time and impact it would have on preschool students. I have researched it. I went to the John Hopkins early learning program, I went to CDC’s division of human development, I studied several articles in the Journal of Pediatrics, I discussed this with a pediatric nurse practitioner with many years of experience both in hospital and private practice, I discussed this with a pediatrician with many years of service and I discussed this for quite a while with our Childhood Development Specialist, Michele Thompson. Everything that I took from that was that those 3 weeks would not impact or delay a child’s development. It was felt that many of those children are at risk children and it would be advantageous for them to be in the pre-school program and have a structured environment (play, fun and also learning). Everything that I have read or everyone that I have spoken to, indicates that it would not impact their neuro development. The other comment that has come up frequently is that the only school that would benefit from this is NHS because of block schedule. They would benefit from this, but discussing with other teachers and remembering my children, remembering that the end of the 6 weeks, they have projects and tests and to me if you finish those tests/projects prior to Christmas break, then those projects would be turned in or end of 6 weeks testing would be completed. We were also accused of wanting to “Montgomery County” Giles County and I don’t know of anyone on this board who has ever had that idea. I did discuss with a teacher over there about her short summer over this year. She said they were very upset about the short summer, but said that now the atmosphere has changed because they realized they are going to get out in the middle of May. I asked her when you found out that you were going to start the first of August, did you all go in mass to the School Board or did you call School Board members, etc.? Her response was no, we could never go before the School Board or call them. I was very shocked at that. There has been a lot of discussion about intimidation and we have asked publicly if anyone feels intimidated by their administrator or any administrative person, we have asked that the person to please come to us. As Dr. Webb said at the last meeting, we will assure you this will not happen again. There are a lot of other issues that we are far superior to Montgomery County schools, so we would never want to “Montgomery County” Giles County. I know this meeting tonight is for calendar concerns, but I feel like I must reply to some comments at the last meeting and again today. I want to ask Terry/Scott what are the educational opportunity for the teachers here in Giles County as far as going back for their masters.” Dr. Arbogast stated that “they have the ability to pursue the master’s degree. When they get 15 hours complete, they can get \$1000 bump per year and when they get their master’s degree, they get an additional \$2000 per year. We had Title grants, but they have dried up for that ability, but we do offer some coursework (financial reimbursement) for college classes (recertification).” Mrs. McMahon stated that “the calendar committee is not a reality for many public schools and we have tremendous respect for those that serve on the calendar committee. We did ask for this change for the 2016-2017 school year, which we discussed earlier and the motion has not been made yet. We do not ignore the calendar committee. I personally always questioned 4 hour early releases because I think it is a great expense for Giles County Public Schools. I was always

overruled when I requested that this did not happen. One last comment, the reason we have had 4 o'clock meetings is not for our convenience, but for the public school children who would come to the school board meetings and do educational features. Until recently, I have not been asked for us to meet at 7 or later in the day for the opportunity for others to come to the meetings."

Mr. Whitehead stated that "I started here in 1957 and it was 1989 before teachers were allowed to even make a schedule and it was mentioned recently about accreditation. Montgomery County in my thinking has never been fully accredited. Giles may be the only fully accredited system in Southwest Virginia. We lost it...I want it back. There are 132 school divisions in the state of Virginia and only 36 were fully accredited and we were one of them. I want that back again. If that helps starting school earlier, then let's do it."

Dr. Webb stated that "I would like to say one more thing. At the last meeting, Mrs. Sable did make a very good point. She was talking about the cognitive development of the preschool/kindergarteners being and how this would be affected by coming to school 3 weeks early. Since the December meeting, we have taken the opportunity to talk to instructors, professors of early childhood development at several local colleges and universities. In particular, I would like to share with you an email I received from Dr. Kathryn Hoover, Professor of Early Childhood Development of Radford University." She stated "If I understand correctly, the school board is considering starting school 3 weeks earlier than you have in the past—so you would start the school year around the first week of August, is that accurate? If so, and as I am sure you are aware, both Floyd and Montgomery counties began their school year the first week of August this past fall, and Carroll County has begun school in early August for several years. I have supervised student teachers in early childhood special education classes in all of those counties, and I have not seen any issues with this early start impacting the cognitive development of preschool children. In my opinion, the age of the child beginning school in a structured setting is more relevant than the time of year that experience begins. If your teacher was stating a concern about starting preschoolers in a structured setting earlier in their lives, my suggestion would be to ease them into the structure slowly: to perhaps begin the school year with more opportunities for children's choice of activities with enriching materials and adults acting as facilitators to scaffold learning for several weeks, while gradually adding in such structured activities as a short group time (to increase in time as the year, and development, progresses), scheduled center/instruction time, etc. I don't see that starting school around August first is more impactful than September first on the development of a preschool-aged child. It is the nature of the environment and support a child receives that I see as having a major impact on development."

Mr. Gentry made a motion to for students to start the 16-17 calendar 2 weeks prior to Labor Day. There was no second. The motion died for the lack of a second.

The School Board, on motion of Mrs. McMahon, with second by Mr. Gollehon and 3-2 voting (YAY: McMahon, Gollehon, Webb; NAY: Whitehead, Gentry) made a motion to re-direct the calendar committee to develop the school calendar, beginning with the 2016-2017 school year, to end First Semester at Christmas/Winter Break, with 2 make up days included at the beginning of the Christmas break. Dr. Arbogast stated that we need to make sure that we qualify to start that early based on the number of days we have missed in prior years.

NEXT BOARD MEETING

The next School Board Meeting will be held Thursday, January 15th, 2015 at 4:00 p.m.

The Chairman, on motion of Mr. Gentry, with second by Mr. Whitehead and unanimous voting, adjourned the meeting.

Chairman

Clerk