

CUMBERLAND COUNTY FINANCE/AUDIT COMMITTEE
JUDGE E. MAURICE BRASWELL CUMBERLAND COUNTY COURTHOUSE
117 DICK STREET, 5TH FLOOR, ROOM 564
NOVEMBER 21, 2019 – 2:30 PM
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES

MEMBERS PRESENT: Commissioner Marshall Faircloth, Chairman
Commissioner Jeannette Council
Commissioner Jimmy Keefe

OTHERS PRESENT: Greg West, Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman
Donna Vann, Board of Education Chair
Alicia Chisolm, Board of Education Vice Chair
Carrie Sutton, Board of Education Finance Committee
Susan Williams, Board of Education Finance Committee
Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr., Cumberland County Schools
Superintendent
Clyde Locklear, Cumberland County Schools Associate
Superintendent of Business Operations
Charles McKellar, Board of Education
Joseph Source, Board of Education
Ricky Lopes, Consultant
Amy Cannon, County Manager
Melissa Cardinali, Assistant County Manager
Vicki Evans, Finance Director
Deborah Shaw, Senior Budget Management Analyst
Heather Harris, Budget and Data Performance Analyst
Andrew Jakubiak, Budget Analyst
Betsy “Pete” Horne, Clerk to the Board of Education
Candice H. White, Clerk to the Board of Commissioners
Press

Commissioner Faircloth, Chairman of the Cumberland County Finance/Audit Committee, called the meeting of the Cumberland County Finance/Audit Committee to order and welcome everyone in attendance.

Greg West, Board of Education Finance Committee Chairman, called the meeting of the Board of Education Finance Committee to order and recognized other Board of Education members in attendance.

Mr. West stated he came to the meeting with prepared remarks and was not going to use funding numbers because he felt there should be constructive talk about the children and their needs. Mr. West stated he planned to share the Board of Education’s five-year Strategic Plan and metrics/measures that will produce life-altering outcomes for children and families in Cumberland County. Mr. West stated he originally thought the funding agreements that had been in place since 2002 served both boards well, but now he is beginning to think otherwise because the unintended

consequence of the funding agreements was that there was no opportunity for the Board of Education to annually share the needs of the school system. Mr. West stated there have been massive changes in federal and state government and huge cultural changes since 2002; the human and additional resources needed are ever changing and the classrooms look vastly different than they did in 2002. Mr. West stated with all these changes, the two boards continue to approach school funding in the same way they always have. Mr. West stated moving forward, the school system needs the County's unconditional support and buy-in of the Board of Education's Strategic Plan and metrics/measures by which the school system will be measured and judged.

Mr. West distributed and reviewed a copy of The Cumberland Commitment: Strategic Plan 2024 with the Vision, Mission and Core Values and Strategic Priorities. Mr. West also distributed and reviewed a copy of the Roadmap to Achieve Success with priorities and actions and the growth metrics/measures. Mr. West stated the metrics/measures are research-based, are significantly over the state average and will drive the school system for the next five years. Mr. West stated the Board of Education is committed to this plan.

Mr. West stated much of the budget justification for the ask last spring centered around the Board of Education's increasing responsibility for the significant needs of the whole child. Mr. West stated this is based on the premise of helping every child get to a position where they can learn and become successful; this requires more resources, more manpower and a different way of thinking. Mr. West stated children cannot learn at the expected pace if they cannot control their behavior and an alarming number of children are coming to the school system with serious behavioral control issues. Mr. West stated these children have treatable problems that are not being addressed because teachers are not trained counselors, psychologists, nurses or Sheriff's deputies; these problems also affect teacher recruitment and retention in Cumberland County schools. Mr. West stated young inexperienced parents, the effects of poverty, substance abuse, deployments and abuse are part of the problem. Mr. West stated these problems will not solve themselves and are the reason the Board of Education is insistent that it must support the whole child if academic outcomes in this County are going to be turned around and the County is going to reach its maximum potential.

Mr. West concluded his remarks by stating out-of-the-box creative thinking is needed because this is not just about money. Mr. West stated the Board of Education recently attended a conference and heard about one county that is locating health clinics in their schools. Mr. West stated this could be coupled with mental health professionals to get all of them better spread around the county. Mr. West stated previous discussions about funding numbers did not go well and he is not sure of the best way to proceed.

Commissioner Faircloth asked Mr. West to relate to the County in numbers for budget purposes and stated he heard the Board of Education had asked for an additional \$8.9 million starting July 2020. Discussion followed about inflation, funding cuts and the needs of the school system. Mr. West stated the Board of Education does not have the ability to raise taxes, he does not know what funding is available from the County and the Board of Education would be willing to consider supporting a school tax to raise revenue.

Commissioner Keefe stated he appreciated Mr. West bringing up the idea of health clinics in the schools, he liked the plan and he liked measurements, but the Board of Education appears to have a five-year plan with a one-year ask and he is not sure about how the \$9 million ask relates to the plan's directives or whether the ask will increase each year. Commissioner Keefe asked how the \$9 million number was derived. Mr. West stated the Board of Education built business cases for each department from that number and broke it down into what was felt to be mission critical and what could wait. Commissioner Keefe asked what the Board of Education thought the cost would be to achieve the numbers set out in the metrics/measures for the Strategic Plan priorities. Mr. West replied by asking what amount can the County afford. Commissioner Faircloth stated it is up to staff to determine how to phase in the plan and the cost, which no one appears to know at today's meeting. During additional discussion to better clarify funding to implement the multi-year Strategic Plan, Dr. Marvin Connelly, Jr., Cumberland County Schools Superintendent, stated the Board of Education is not asking for all of the funding in one year because business cases will be built for year one, year two, year three and so on. Donna Vann, Board of Education Chair, stated the \$9 million requested last year was to get to the five-year Strategic Plan.

Commissioner Council stated the Board of Commissioners is committed to public education and asked Amy Cannon, County Manager, to provide a recap of the meetings and discussions thus far. At the conclusion of her recap, Ms. Cannon stated the draft agreement signed by the respective board Chair's on November 1 is financially sustainable within the County's resources and puts the Board of Education on a better path to meet some of the identified needs. Ms. Cannon stated from a cash perspective and if the Board of Education manages the true-up appropriately, the true-up can be determined and plugged into the school system's budget early on without waiting so it does not fall into fund balance. Ms. Cannon stated from a cash perspective, this will get the Board of Education to \$9 million within four years.

Commissioner Faircloth asked how the Board of Education planned to get from year one to year five as it relates to dollars. Mr. West stated the Strategic Plan has to be sizably front-loaded because the resources cannot be allocated evenly to get the desired results in year five. Commissioner Faircloth stated efforts need to be made to get this in financial terms and asked whether the plan included the school's fund balance. Mr. West stated the fund balance is part of the Strategic Plan. Mr. West asked whether the Board of Commissioners would be willing to raise taxes for education. Commissioner Council stated the Board of Commissioners has not been polled about raising taxes.

Commissioner Council stated as a County Commissioner she receives citizen input about moving/closing underpopulated schools and suggestions that funds may not be being utilized in the best way. Mr. West stated this is about efficiencies and everything is on the table. Susan Williams, Board of Education Finance Committee, stated she does not doubt that the Board of Commissioners supports education, she does not doubt that the Board of Education may need to consider some redistricting and that Dr. Connelly as the new superintendent will make the recommendations the Board of Education needs, but these children's needs have to be met now. Ms. Williams stated she is willing to listen to Ms. Cannon, Mr. Locklear or Mr. Lopes present if it will get the school system where it needs to be and benefit the children. Ms. Williams stated she does not know the fixed number but knows that if the school system keeps getting the same thing, she does not believe it will go forward. Dr. Connelly stated redistricting is a whole different

conversation because redistricting involves the entire county; this takes political will and community will and is a heavy lift. Dr. Connelly stated he does not think redistricting and a whole new budget process can be mixed and done at the same time in terms of what is being discussed today. Discussion followed. Commissioner Council stated she liked Ms. William's idea of having presentations for the whole board if small committees are not going to be put together.

Commissioner Faircloth stated if the County Manager cannot bring the Board of Commissioners a balanced budget, then the Board of Commissioners has to either raise the tax rate or look at cuts. Mr. West reminded everyone the Board of Education's Strategic Plan has to be front loaded in order to have a fair chance to be successful and stated although he does not know what that looks like, it should not continue to be \$9 million if it is going to be rejected every time. Mr. West stated he hopes raising taxes is an option. Dr. Connelly stated citizens in this community are hungry and eager for the Board of Education to take the school system forward and he believes there will be community support to raise taxes if it is for the school system.

Mr. West asked Commissioner Faircloth to take this back to the Board of Commissioners to get their buy-in and stated the Board of Education will ramp up and head towards its goals knowing support is coming. Commissioner Faircloth asked the Board of Education to instruct its staff to work with County staff to discuss the financial needs of the schools and options to move the school system forward in a financially sustainable manner. Closing comments followed.

There being no further business, the meeting of the Cumberland County Finance/Audit Committee and the Board of Education Finance Committee adjourned at 3:55 p.m.