

**Jackson County Board of Education  
Minutes of Special Called Meeting  
Sylva, North Carolina  
Central Office**

100 Smoky Mountain Drive

August 7, 2018

6:00 p.m.

The Jackson County Board of Education met in a Special Called Information Session at 6:00 p.m. on Tuesday, August 7, 2018, in the Auditorium at Smoky Mountain High School (SMHS), 100 Smoky Mountain Drive, Sylva, NC. The following members were present:

Ali Laird-Large  
Wes Jamison  
Abigail Clayton

Board Member Margaret McRae participated via telephone conference call.

Also present were Dr. Kimberly Elliott, Superintendent; Jacob Buchanan, Assistant Superintendent; Cora Fields, Board Assistant; and Mr. John Cort and Mr. Bruce Youngberg with Cort Architectural.

**CALL TO ORDER**

Ali Laird-Large, Vice Chair, called the information session to order.

**MIDDLE SCHOOL INFORMATION AND LISTENING SESSION**

Dr. Kimberly Elliott welcomed everyone in attendance. She thanked the board, parents, teachers, and administrators for attending the meeting. Dr. Elliott said that JCPS was asked to explore the concept of Middle School in Jackson County after several community members made a request of the board during the public comments at the March board meeting. Dr. Elliott stated that the board was very open-minded and were here to listen to options and public comments concerning Middle School in Jackson County. The board will review all information provided and decide on the next steps.

Dr. Elliott introduced Mr. John Cort and Mr. Bruce Youngberg with Cort Architectural Group. Mr. Cort provided a power point presentation with historical information on previous studies and construction. Mr. Cort discussed several options for Middle School that include:

1. Construct a new Middle School for 800 students on a new site which would reduce student population at all Elementary School allowing for significant student capacity growth at all facilities. Estimated cost - \$30,083,000.00
2. Construct a new Middle School facility for 800 students at the existing High School. Smoky Mountain High School would become a combined High School/Middle School. Estimated cost – \$14,464,500.00
3. Construct a new High School for 1000 students on a new site and convert the existing High School into a Middle School – Estimated Cost - \$39,000,000.00

4. Renovate one existing elementary school to become an 800 student Middle School. Redistrict displaced elementary students to other elementary school using classrooms vacated by Middle School students. Redistrict all remaining elementary schools.
  - a) Renovate Cullowhee Valley Elementary School – Estimated cost – \$5,835,000.00
  - b) Renovate Scotts Creek Elementary School – Estimated cost – \$3,160,000.00
  - c) Renovate Fairview Elementary School – Estimated cost - \$20,653,000.00

Estimated costs do not include the purchase price of the land or additional land for fields required at existing elementary schools.

### TECHNICAL CORRECTIONS

Page 3            School of Alternatives Enrollment is 117  
                      SWCC Early College should read Jackson County Early College - JCEC

Mr. Cort opened the floor for questions:

- Q:     Does the capacity in a school change with the age of the students?  
A:     The capacity is determined by a formula from DPI based on square footage, and can change annually.
- Q:     Have there been any studies about costs of personnel?  
A:     JCPS provided staffing and facility funding information at the JCPS Funding Forum that was held last year. There is a trend to eliminate small schools due to overhead. It requires more staff for smaller schools.
- Q:     Do the cost estimates include the cost of the land?  
A:     No, the cost estimates do not cover land acquisition or infrastructure. We would have to acquire 38 usable acres of land. If streams are included on the property that will change the amount of land needed.
- Q:     Is there a comparison on the time between new construction and renovation?  
A:     For new construction plan on a minimum of two years. For renovations it could take a lot longer, depending upon relocation of students and services.

### OPEN SESSION FOR PUBLIC COMMENTS

**Mr. Ben Pendry:** Mr. Pendry has two children, soon to be members of Cullowhee Valley Elementary School. He has experience with K-8 schools in his past that were typically underfunded. Mr. Pendry feels that middle schools better prepare students for the high school experience. His aunt was a middle school teacher and his mother was a school finance manager. He feels there is a better opportunity for students to learn and grow in middle schools. He said that he believes that the students who attend middle schools are receiving better preparation for high school than he did. He added that he couldn't think of any better use of our tax dollars or our bond energy, anything that we can bring to bear in enhancing the public education experience for Jackson County Public Schools. He is asking elected officials not to be afraid to pursue this, to invest in public education. He said that we are good at cutting

the budget and stretching the dollars, but we need to invest in infrastructure, quality instruction and teachers.

**Ms. Rita Osorio:** Ms. Osorio said she is in favor of middle schools. She said that she changed classes in fifth grade and feels that change helps transition to high school. She feels there is a difference developmentally for children in K-8 schools. Her daughter told her about seventh graders “making out” on the bus and that’s not something she said her 5 year old needs to see. Due to hormones their experiences are changing in middle school. She feel that behaviors on the bus between middle school age children and elementary children can cause kids to pick on the younger kids, and that it would be helpful to have them separate.

**Ms. Kirsten Morgan:** Ms. Morgan is a teacher with JCPS and a parent. She said that she was on the Middle School exploratory committee twenty years ago when the decision was made to keep K-8 schools in Jackson County. She stated that K-8 schools provide opportunities for student participation in athletics through their local school team, as well as the consolidated district team. She said that more students get to play with K-8 school teams. She said that students in K-8 schools have better attendance, fewer discipline issues, more opportunities to participate in school leadership roles, student government and provide better parent involvement. She said that K-8 students have better prepared emotionally and socially due to the school community where teachers and administrators watch and support these children throughout the elementary grades. She said that middle school would require longer bus routes. She stated that you can find studies that support both options. Ms. Morgan said that there are more opportunities for student involvement in K-8 schools, and more opportunity for working across age groups in K-8 schools. She said that K-8 schools offer the student the stability if a group of people who know the children and love the children.

**Phil Haire:** Mr. Haire said that he is in favor of middle school, as he was 20 years ago. He said that of the 100 counties in North Carolina, Jackson is one of only five to still do not have middle school. He feels that times have changed and kids are learning differently. Children in 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade are still developing, and that in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade they are changing emotionally and socially. He asked that whatever JCPS does, the students need to be in separate facility for these middle grades to eat, learn, athletics etc. Today it’s education, tomorrow it’s the future. He thanked the board for looking at this and said “Don’t get buckled down by the dollars.”

**Freya Kinner:** Ms. Kinner is the parent of an 8<sup>th</sup> grade student at Cullowhee Valley Elementary School. She said that her son has had a great experience at Cullowhee. He has been able to take part in leadership and athletic opportunities. He looks up to his peers in the older grades as an example of what he can achieve. She said that her son has gained more confidence, self-esteem and that the continuity of the K-8 school is a positive thing. She feels that there are higher academic social and emotional support in K-8 schools, but that more research is needed.

**Kelly Dinklemeyer:** Ms. Dinklemeyer is a teacher at Western Carolina University and has a 5<sup>th</sup> grade child at Cullowhee Valley Elementary School. She loves the culture at a K-8 school. She sees the older kids helping the younger students and it is great. The older children are great leaders and set a good example for the younger grade students. Her kids look forward to being in the higher grades. She feels that the K-8 setting is better socially and emotionally. She said that research shows that there is a set-back after transition to a different school setting. Her child has developed strong relationships because

she knows the staff, which is really important. The K-8 setting has provided a solid base for her future. She said that all the options that were provided sound like they would be much harder for her family. She said that the money could be better spent in other ways in the classrooms. If it ain't broke – so please don't fix it, she said.

### **OPEN SESSION**

Dr. Elliott thanked everyone for attending the information session. She said to email her or call her if they would like to provide additional comments. She reiterated that the board is open-minded and ready to listen to all options. Dr. Elliott thanked Mr. Cort and Mr. Youngberg for providing information and options to the board.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Ali Laird-Large thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and asked attendees to share the information with other interested parents and friends. She said that the board will consider all input from the community, parents and staff and make a good decision with their children in mind. She added that this is not the end of the discussion. JCPS is considering sending out a survey to determine interest in further pursuing middle school in Jackson County.

There being no objection, Vice Chair Ali Laird-Large adjourned the meeting at 7:10 p.m.

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Mrs. Alison Laird-Large, Chair

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Dr. Kimberly Elliott, Secretary