

Dr. Charlette T. Woolridge
County Administrator

Gary. L. Cifers
Assistant County Administrator

Russell Slayton
County Attorney



Belinda Astrop
Chair
Election District 1

James Brown
Vice-Chair
Election District 2

William Cain
Election District 3

Tony Conwell
Election District 4

TO: Greensville County School Board

FROM: Greensville County Board of Supervisors

DATE: March 31, 2023

RE: PUBLIC SCHOOL MATTERS

The March 28, 2023 Meeting

On March 28, 2023 the Greensville County Board of Supervisors participated in a meeting with the Greensville County School Board and members of Emporia City Council. The stated purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposed school budget for FY23/24. Jim Saunders opened the meeting by saying that there should be a public comment section added to the agenda. The Supervisors had no prior notice of this development, but did not object to this addition to the agenda, so the agenda was revised to add a public comment section.

What followed then should have been discussions among the Board of Supervisors, County School Board and City Council regarding the proposed school budget for FY23/24. Instead, comments were made by numerous people, not all of whom were on City Council, but seemingly all of whom were there to lobby for the City's positions on school issues. Many of the speakers' comments indicated that they had advance knowledge that they would be allowed to speak at the meeting, both at the business part of the agenda and the part of the agenda set aside for public comment.

Despite having no advance knowledge of this procedure, the Supervisors did not object to the meeting proceeding in a manner which was not consistent with the agenda prepared for that meeting.

The means by which the March 28 meeting proceeded were not helpful to reaching a long- term agreement between the County and the City on school cost sharing and related issues.

The County's Position

The County has consistently stated its position on important issues to the City and the County School Board. There are four key points:

1. The County and the City should pay the same amount, on a per student basis, of the local cost of the Greensville County Public Schools.

2. The County will continue to work with the County School Board and the City to provide education services to City students.
3. The County will continue to work with the City in an effort to develop a long-term agreement to share local school costs. This long-term agreement must include a commitment by both localities to pay a share of long-term debt incurred to construct a new school. Without a long-term agreement, there is no mechanism for City representatives to participate as members of the County School Board.
4. The existing situation results from a 1969 Federal Court Order which requires the City to send its students to Greensville County Public Schools and to pay an appropriate share of the cost of the County Public Schools. To be clear, the current arrangement is the product of a Federal Court Order which was entered in an action which resulted from the City's attempt to create a segregated school system.

The County and the City should pay an equal amount per student for local school costs.

There are two issues which have drawn a great deal of attention, and deservedly so.

The first of these issues is the per student payment by the County and the City for the cost of educating students in the Greensville County Public Schools. The County's position is simple. The County and the City should pay the same amount per student for the local cost to educate students in the County Public Schools. The Supervisors believe that it would not be fair to County taxpayers if the County paid more per student than the City pays to educate students in the County Public Schools.

The actual amounts contributed by the County and City will depend on the number of students from each locality being educated in the County Public Schools; but again, the Supervisors believe that each locality should bear the same per student share of local school costs.

A new long-term agreement should address all matters necessary for the County and City to support the County Public Schools.

In 1968 the Town of Emporia elected to become an independent city. The City attempted to create its own school system. Citizens challenged the City's plan in Federal Court. The Federal Court ruled that the City's purpose was motivated by a desire for a segregated school system. The Federal Court ruled that the City could not create its own separate school system. That Federal Court Order has remained in place since 1969. That Federal Court Order did not create a joint school system. Instead, the Federal Court ordered that City students must continue to attend the County Public Schools. The school facilities are owned by the County. The County School Board governs the County Public Schools. There is no "joint" County-City School Board.

In 2003, the County entered into a contract with the City to share local school costs. This 2003 Agreement included a provision for two persons appointed by City Council to participate as members of the County School Board. The Federal Court approved this 2003 Agreement in 2003. After long negotiations over many years, the County and City were unable to reach agreement on terms of a new contract. The 2003 Agreement has expired. As a result of there being no contract which entitles City Council to appoint two representatives to a school board, unless and until City representation on a school board is created by a new contract, City Council does not have the right to appoint representatives to the County School Board.

Other comments at the March 28, 2023 meeting.

One speaker commented that the City should not pay another dime to the County for public school funding. This statement reflects a misunderstanding of how County Public Schools are funded. All of the City's payments are used by the County Public Schools to pay the cost of educating City students. City payments are made to fund school purposes. City payments for school purposes are not made by the City to the County.

Another speaker stated that the County should not decide for the City how school funds are spent. The budget for the County Public Schools is developed and approved each year by the County School Board. The fact that City representatives have been in constant communication with the school Superintendent evidences the City's active participation in public school matters.

It was suggested that the County had not participated in good faith negotiations with the City to resolve school issues. Nothing could be further from the truth. The County invested considerable time, and considerable money, in attempting to negotiate a new long-term agreement over a period of several years. The County participated in a mediation process, but the mediator was not able to negotiate a contract which was acceptable to both the County and the City. This long negotiation process is well documented.

Certain City residents have stated that they have no information about school budget matters and have no voice in developing the school budget. The County understands that these same individuals meet with the School Superintendent on a regular basis. The development of the budget for the County Public Schools is a public process that involves both the County School Board and the County. The City participates in the development of the school budget. There are several opportunities for public comment during the school budget process. Budgeting information is widely available from both the County and the School Board. The County School Board and the School Superintendent determine how the County Public Schools operate, not the Board of Supervisors.

A statement was made that Davenport & Company, a financial consulting group, was paid \$75,000 to prepare scenarios regarding sharing of school costs, and that City Council supports the recommendation of Davenport. This is not a correct characterization of the Davenport report. Davenport presented four different scenarios for sharing local school costs. The Davenport scenarios are one of the many issues which need to be explored by the County and the City.

It was said that State law requires that the County and City have a contract for operation of the school system. That is simply incorrect.

At the joint meeting a speaker objected to "taxation without representation" being imposed on the City. This position is wrong for a number of reasons. First, the County has no power to tax City residents. More importantly, the City is paying for an important and valuable service, namely, the education of students who reside in the City. The City is not being taxed for that purpose, but instead is paying its fair share of costs incurred to educate City students.

Everyone agrees that the County Public Schools should provide the best education possible for County students and City students. The County recognizes the hard work being done by the County School Board and the School Superintendent, and the progress which has been made. The Supervisors are confident that under the leadership of the County School Board the County Public Schools will continue to improve.