

A joint work session between the Botetourt County Board of Supervisors and the Botetourt County School Board was held on Tuesday, September 8, 2015, in Room 229 of the Greenfield Education and Training Center, in Daleville, Virginia, beginning at 6:30 P. M.

PRESENT: Members: Dr. Donald M. Scothorn, Chairman, Board of Supervisors  
Mr. Jack Leffel, Vice-Chairman, Board of Supervisors  
Mr. Billy W. Martin, Sr., Member, Board of Supervisors  
Mr. Todd L. Dodson, Member, Board of Supervisors  
Mr. John B. Williamson, III, Member, Board of Supervisors  
Mrs. Ruth Wallace, Chairman, School Board  
Mrs. Kathy Sullivan, Vice-Chairman, School Board  
Mr. Michael Beahm, Member, School Board  
Mr. John Alderson, Member, School Board  
Mr. Scott Swortzel, Member, School Board

ABSENT: Members: None

Others present at the meeting:

Mr. David Moorman, Deputy County Administrator  
Mr. Tony Zerrilla, Director of Finance  
Mrs. Kathleen D. Guzi, County Administrator  
Mr. John Busher, Interim Superintendent of Schools  
Mrs. Betty Holland, Clerk to the School Board

At 6:32 P. M., Dr. Scothorn called the Board of Supervisors meeting to order. Mrs. Wallace then called the School Board meeting to order and welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Dr. Scothorn thanked everyone for their attendance at this meeting. He noted that dialogue is the purpose and most important aspect of these joint Supervisors/School Board meetings and tonight's meeting is to receive some background on the school system's operational requirements, their necessities, and needs.

Mrs. Wallace stated that the two boards "laid a foundation" at the last meeting on the funding process and the School Board's activities to develop a budget for the Board of Supervisors' consideration. She noted that at this meeting, the schools will provide a "foundation of understanding" regarding the development of the budget and the related timeline. Mrs. Wallace encouraged those in attendance to ask questions during Mr. Busher's presentation.

Mr. Busher stated that it has been a wonderful opportunity for him to serve as the County's interim superintendent of schools. He noted that there are several new central office staff members this year and it was decided that this would be a good opportunity to review their strengths, weaknesses, roles, etc. Mr. Busher stated that the administrative staff was "out in the schools" for the first two weeks of the school year to assess the opening of schools and see how issues and concerns were handled and resolved. He noted that they were "taking stock" of what is done to have a good school system and how the public's money is used to support what the schools do. He noted that the schools need to evaluate what is working in their operations and determine the best use of the funding that they receive.

Mr. Busher stated that the Code of Virginia requires that all schools have a long-term plan which they review every two years. He noted that during this review, they determine what elements are "keepers," if they should be "tweaked," or whether they are a waste of time and money (organized abandonment). Mr. Busher stated that one of the school's purposes is to ensure that the children are employable once they graduate which includes a determination on how the teachers manage the kids and what skills they have to keep the kids under control in order to implement a learning environment. He noted that the school systems are also responsible for ensuring inclusion of special education students in a regular classroom.

Mr. Busher noted that their instructional strategies are research-based. He noted that Virginia is under the provisions of two accreditation services—one on the State-level and one on the federal-level. He noted that the schools are responsible for ensuring that every student understands the subject matter of each course. Mr. Busher stated that the school system also has professional development strategies for their staff members. He noted that these strategies take time and money to ensure that the children learn the classroom material.

Regarding State accreditation, Mr. Busher stated that this is a three year process which includes testing in reading, science, and math. He noted that if the students do not show progress in these test scores then the school system has to implement a new reading/math program.

After discussion, Mr. Busher also stated that they have students at Greenfield, Read Mountain, and Lord Botetourt in which English is their second language. He noted that they have to employ staff members who are bi-lingual and whose primary responsibilities are to work with these students.

After questioning by Dr. Scothorn, Mr. Busher stated that there are limited funds available from the State to assist school systems with students that have English as a second language. He further stated that there are also costs associated with having translators available for the parents to communicate with the teachers and school staff. He noted that the school system also needs to ascertain whether these children are literate in their own language before they can begin to teach them in English. Mr. Busher stated that they need to be proactive in determining the number of possible future students who speak little English in order to ensure that the expectations can be met and the resources made available.

Mr. Busher stated that the County currently has one school that has a “warning” in reading regarding their test scores; however, these same students have a 98 in science. He noted that the school system needs to determine what adjustments need to be made to increase the reading scores. Mr. Busher stated that the Fontas and Pinnell system is one of the best reading level assessment tools that they have as it strengthens the teachers’ understanding of reading and diagnoses the students’ needs in order to help them improve their reading skills.

Mr. Busher stated that teachers “deal with the individual” student and this costs money for the required professional development courses/training, the purchase of appropriate classroom furnishings, and needed electronic equipment. He noted that the individual school needs reports are due to the School Board Office next Wednesday which will help the administrative staff obtain a perspective on what each school needs for the next budget year.

He stated that the school system also evaluates their teachers each year and provides support, including funding, so that they can obtain accreditation and renew their teaching licenses. Mr. Busher further stated that it also helps the school system financially if the teachers have accreditation to teach dual enrollment classes, otherwise the School Board Office would have to pay the local community colleges to teach these classes. He noted that this evaluation process keeps the teachers accountable for their actions and allows reviews of their best teaching practices. Mr. Busher stated that a structure is needed that is flexible and can be changed when needed.

Mr. Swortzel stated that the school system does a wonderful job in the initial teacher interview and screening process. He noted that, contrary to the opinion of some individuals, the County’s teachers are not overpaid and they can be fired if they do not perform/educate as needed. Mr. Swortzel noted that newly-hired teachers have a five year probationary period.

After discussion, Mr. Swortzel noted that the schools want to “keep the best people in the right spots;” however, the County is losing teachers because of the higher compensation levels offered by other jurisdictions.

Mr. Busher stated that the School System’s long-term plan has to be reviewed by November 1 in odd-numbered years. He noted that this plan is not “static” but is constantly being changed and sets goals and objectives for each area of their education program.

After discussion, Mr. Busher stated that the individual school’s needs plans, including capital improvement requests, intent of the requested item, and cost of the proposed item, are reviewed along with the system’s long-term plan by staff and this information is then presented to the School Board in October for their consideration in the budget development process. He then reviewed the school’s budget development timeline for a typical budget year.

Mr. Busher then stated that the school system has a replacement cycle for technology-related items such as software, hardware, etc. He noted that during budget deliberations they also have to consider whether teachers will return to the classroom after having children or whether funding is necessary to pay temporary teachers to fill in. Mr. Busher stated that all of these details and many others are considered prior to determining what is included in the draft budget submitted to the School Board for review.

Mr. Busher stated that Botetourt is unique in that Supervisors members serve on the School Budget Committee. He noted that this helps in the County’s understanding of the school system’s budgetary needs. He further noted that the School Board Office does not receive the individual school budget request forms until October 1 which further impacts budget development for the next fiscal year. Mr. Busher stated that it is a very time-consuming process to develop a long-range plan and a budget.

After questioning by Mr. Dodson, Mr. Busher stated that the County currently has one school which has received a “warning” from the State’s accreditation standards agency regarding their test scores.

He noted that a large portion of the school budget is spent on the special education program including transportation costs. He noted that special education students need the least restrictive environment possible in which to learn.

After questioning by Dr. Scothorn as to whether the number of special education students has increased, Mr. Busher stated that the school system evaluates the children, including psychological testing and visits to their homes, to determine what their learning disability is and whether they are eligible for the special education program. He noted that the County’s program is monitored by the federal and State governments.

After questioning by Mr. Williamson, Mr. Busher stated that, in the past, assessments of special education students consisted of tests. He noted that currently there are benchmarks that are checked twice a year. Mr. Busher further noted that these assessments need to be diagnostic in their approach.

Dr. Scothorn then suggested that discussions at the next joint meeting include school funding needs that should be considered now, those projects that can wait, and future anticipated growth needs. He noted that this information should include project cost figures for these items which have been previously mentioned to include new buses, building repairs/improvements etc., potential future student growth areas, number of new teachers, teacher compensation ratio compared to area jurisdictions, how does the County compare with other jurisdictions on continuing education offerings, teacher licensing costs, and information as to whether it is

financially prudent for the County and School employee health insurance coverage to be combined into one plan.

Dr. Scothorn stated that the County is providing more and more local tax revenues to the school systems as the State has reduced their funding allocation and he questioned whether this will continue in the future. He also asked how can the County utilize our General Assembly representatives and give them the tools that they need to fight for additional funding for the County.

Dr. Scothorn then thanked Mr. Busher for his great presentation at this meeting and he applauded the schools for what they are doing to educate the County's children.

Mr. Dodson agreed with Dr. Scothorn's comments regarding this presentation and the dialogue between the two boards. He stated that the Supervisors are aware that the schools have immediate needs but "it is important to figure out where you are at so you know where you are going." He encouraged both boards to continue this dialogue to work toward determining the long-term requirements needed to have the County maintain its educational excellence.

Mr. Martin stated that he is concerned about the money. Mr. Martin stated that there are a lot of items that need to be done and buildings that need to be repaired including the roof at Lord Botetourt and a new elementary school in Blue Ridge but questioned "where do we get the money for it." He noted that needs versus wants should be considered and the projects prioritized for funding.

Mr. Martin stated that he thinks we can do better. He stated that the County has good teachers and they do an outstanding job but the boards need to prioritize these items to see what needs to be done first.

After questioning by Mrs. Sullivan, Dr. Scothorn stated that the Supervisors would like to see some cost figures for the items on the school's list of projects/needs. After discussion, Mrs. Sullivan stated that the School Board would like to see copies of the Exit 150 Study and the Agriculture Study to become familiar with the studies' economic development recommendations.

Mr. Martin then stated that he has represented the Supervisors for six years on the School Budget Committee and has previously asked for a copy of the "from scratch" school budget to review. Mr. Martin stated that he was never provided with this information and only received the "finished" budget document. Mr. Martin stated that he would like to see how the school budget is developed from the beginning.

Mr. Swortzel stated that the school budget is a very detailed, line-by-line, booklet which is developed by the school system's administrative staff. He noted that when their proposed budget is created it is an "all in" budget which includes all of the school system's needs for the upcoming fiscal year. Mr. Swortzel then stated that once they receive a revenue figure from the Board of Supervisors the budget is revised in order to confirm with the anticipated revenues. He noted that, "in fairness" to the Board, they need to see all of the school's budget.

After questioning by Mr. Martin regarding the use of funds to purchase electronic blackboards for the schools instead of replacing the Lord Botetourt roof, Mr. Swortzel stated that the School Board had to spend the money in the best manner that they could. He noted that replacing the LBHS roof would have cost approximately \$1 million. He stated that the decision was made to use the funds for the electronic blackboards and some minor roof repairs. He noted that the school system received approximately \$22 million from the County in this fiscal year but they had a total of \$28 million in needs.

Mr. Alderson stated that, between a decision to neglect educational standards and building needs, the School Board decided that the children's education came first. He noted that the

School Board has to make decisions that they are willing to live with and these decisions will affect the students for the rest of their lives.

Mr. Alderson further stated that a big part of the school budget is teachers' salaries and they are "getting in a tight spot." He noted that the school system has to address how to keep the most valuable teachers and the School Board will request funding to address this issue.

After questioning by Dr. Scothorn, Mr. Alderson stated that the schools have immediate and near-term needs but they recognize that all of their needs cannot be funded in one, 5, or 10 years. Mr. Alderson stated that the School Board understands what the Supervisors have been up against in the last few years of very little growth occurring in the County which has generated little new revenue.

Mr. Beahm stated that there is also a political aspect to this issue. He noted that it is great that both boards can come together to acknowledge their needs and he recognized that the County is providing more funding for the schools than the State of Virginia. Mr. Beahm stated that both boards need to be united and work together to influence the County's General Assembly representatives to increase State funding. He noted that the State continues to put the responsibility for more and more costs onto the localities.

Mr. Dodson agreed with Mr. Beahm's comments that a unified front is the key in this situation. He noted that both boards need to maintain dialogue, communications, and share information. He noted that the Supervisors are aware of the school system's \$28 million in budgetary needs. Mr. Dodson stated that members of both boards should meet with the County's General Assembly representatives to discuss the funding needs and the lack of revenues from the State to meet these needs.

Mr. Martin agreed that a unified front in this matter is needed.

After questioning by Mr. Martin, Mr. Busher stated that in the State there are strained relationships between boards of supervisors and school boards which is mainly dependent on the availability or lack thereof of funds. Mr. Busher stated that a united front is the key.

Mr. Martin stated that in various Virginia Association of Counties' committee meetings he has heard from other localities that their relationship with their school boards is not good. Mr. Martin suggested that two members from the School Board and Board of Supervisors create an agenda of discussion topics and meet with the County's General Assembly representatives to inform them what the County's financial needs are and ask for their assistance in getting legislation approved to increase revenues for localities and schools.

After discussion by Mr. Dodson, Mrs. Guzi stated that the discussions with the General Assembly representatives should be scheduled this fall, prior to the start of the legislative session in January.

Mr. Williamson thanked Mr. Busher for this presentation and noted that he is glad to see the efforts to tie academic assessment and the budget together. He noted that the schools funding focus in the past has been on teachers' salaries and pension costs. Mr. Williamson noted that academic assessment is a key aspect.

Mr. Williamson stated that the County had to use \$1 million from the Undesignated Fund Balance to balance the FY 16 County budget. He noted that for the County to fund the full \$28 million school budget request it would have necessitated a 15¢ increase in the County real estate tax rate. Mr. Williamson stated that he hopes that the property valuations from the current reassessment are flat but they could decrease which would further impact the County's revenues.

Mr. Williamson noted that he wants to keep the tax rate down but there is a lot to do in the County. He encouraged both boards to not point fingers at each other and work to keep the dialogue flowing. Mr. Williamson noted that the next 2 to 3 years will be a hard for the County and its finances.

Mr. Leffel thanked Mr. Busher for his presentation and noted that Mr. Busher has created the beginnings of trust between the County and the Schools. He noted that none of the projects mentioned for funding can happen without trust between these two boards.

Dr. Scothorn stated that he sees many teachers and parents in his practice and they have expressed their satisfaction with Mr. Busher's work during his term as Interim Superintendent. Dr. Scothorn congratulated the School Board and Mr. Busher for developing this trust.

Discussion was then held on proposed dates for the next joint meeting.

Mr. Dodson suggested that the Supervisors provide the School Board with an update on the results of the Exit 150 and Agriculture studies this fall so the School Board members are aware of the timelines for the Exit 150 project and the potential impacts on the County's economic development efforts.

Dr. Scothorn stated that the County could also request approval from the General Assembly on increasing our lodging and meals tax rates.

After discussion, Mr. Dodson stated that the Supervisors will probably not be ready to discuss details of the proposed FY 17 budget before March 2016

After review of calendars and discussion on proposed dates, it was decided that the next joint meeting between the School Board and Board of Supervisors would be Tuesday, December 15, 2015, at 6:00 P. M. at the Greenfield Education and Training Center.

After discussion, it was noted that this meeting will include an update on the County's economic development initiatives, review of the results of the Exit 150 and Agriculture studies, and a presentation of trend data.

There being no further discussion, on motion by Mr. Williamson, seconded by Mr. Dodson, and carried by the following recorded vote, the Board of Supervisors meeting was adjourned at 8:24 P. M. (Resolution Number 15-09-01)

AYES: Mr. Williamson, Mr. Dodson, Mr. Martin, Mr. Leffel, Dr. Scothorn

NAYS: None

ABSENT: None

ABSTAINING: None

Mrs. Wallace then adjourned the School Board meeting at 8:25 P. M.