

Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education
School Choice Special Committee
MINUTES
March 25, 2019
5:00 p.m., Education Building Room 223

Board Committee Members Present:

- Andrea Bramer, Committee Chair
- Dana Caudill Jones
- Deanna Kaplan

Additional Board Members Present:

- Barbara Burke
- Leah Crowley

Committee Chair Andrea Bramer called the meeting to order at 5:13 p.m. She announced that the committee will meet once a month on the first Monday. The committee will meet again on Monday, April 1 and then will be on the correct schedule.

Mr. Homan Atashbar, Director of Student Assignment presented updated information on School Choice and answered questions raised in the last meeting.

Dr. Kenneth Simington, Interim Superintendent, provided a handout for developing surveys to help the committee design a survey to go out to the community.

Ms. Leah Crowley asked about the purpose of a survey. She queried the driving force for the need for change. She indicated that the district has a good market share based on Mr. Atashbar's presentation. Mr. Bramer responded that 50% of students do not choose their residential schools.

Ms. Dana Caudill Jones stated that 50% do choose to stay at their residential school. Many of the concerns that she hears are about zones. She has anxiety that the district has a middle school opening without a zone.

Ms. Bramer stated that the transportation department will come to the next meeting and give a presentation about efficiency so the committee can understand why that piece is in place. She lives in a zone where there isn't a choice. She drives her children 35 minutes each way every day to school. As a parent, she would want choice of any school in the county, but that isn't reasonable because of the transportation piece. Connecting this committee to the Climate, Culture, and Equity Committee makes sense because, if we improve the quality of all schools, then there are choices. If not, something drastic has to happen.

Ms. Carolyn Highsmith, community member, asked a question about zones followed by a comment from another community member. Ms. Ronda Mays, president of FCAE, started to speak, but she was interrupted by Ms. Amy Rich, staff attorney.

Ms. Rich interjected to ask whether community members are permitted to speak who are not on the committee. She explained that the format of the agenda does not allow for public comment/questions.

Ms. Bramer indicated that the community members desiring to speak would be added to the committee.

Ms. Mays stated that diversity in schools is important and the schools should reflect that. Ms. Bramer responded that if the desire is to desegregate, then we have to take away choice and assign. She wants to do a survey to have community buy in to hear from parents. She also thinks there needs to be community representation on the committee. Are parents willing to give up a neighborhood school?

Ms. Jones thinks that data needs to be incorporated into the survey. The demographics of WS/FCS have changed over time. We need to look at socioeconomic status in addition to race.

Ms. Crowley asked if we have looked at schools that are diverse and successful in our district to see how we might emulate those schools. For example, could we look at schools with strong magnet programs that diversify by choice?

Ms. Bramer indicated that Atkins A&T High School has a high academic rigor. You can't expect to do that at every school in the district.

Ms. Jones suggested looking at schools like Speas Global Elementary. Something is clearly working there.

Ms. Crowley asked what drove parents away from residential schools to go to magnet programs. Dr. Simington responded that arts and STEM programs attract students. Some of the magnets are very strong, while other programs are not as strong.

Ms. Jones asserted that part of the process is to look at magnet programs to identify why some are not strong and may not be what the district needs in 2019.

Dr. Simington referred to the survey tips document. If the committee decides to conduct a survey, Dr. Ward has provided some guidelines to help get the answers to the questions that the committee has.

Ms. Bramer would like to see two sections to the survey: one with opinions about the current plan and one with opinions about what respondents want to see. We can push to parents through the school, but we will need to publicize in media to get out to the community. To keep confidential, we can't collect information other than zip code. We will have to assume honesty in what zip they provide.

Ms. Crowley stated that the goal is to keep a majority of students in the county in our schools.

Ms. Jones averred that charter schools take your students and your money. Why do you choose to take your child to a particular school? How far are you willing to drive your child? These questions could be drop down boxes on the survey. Respondents could write stuff out. Dr. Marty Ward and other staff can help formulate questions.

Ms. Bramer asked a series of questions. Do you want assignment or do you want choice? Do we want to maintain magnets? Do you want to go to your residential school? If you aren't willing to go to your residential school, how far are you willing to drive? Do you expect transportation to be provided?

Ms. Jones indicated that the survey needs to articulate what we are currently doing. People may not know. They can't know if they agree or disagree unless they know what is currently being done.

Ms. Bramer thinks that Ms. Jones will be surprised at how many people don't like the choice plan.

Ms. Eunice Campbell, community member, indicated that students are in public school for a reason. Parents don't have to send students to private school because they've made the public schools their own private zones.

Ms. Highsmith inquired about a hybrid of choice and student assignment. She has an issue with how the zones were created. The district may not have to change the choice plan if they change the zones.

Ms. Jones responded that the zones were determined when the district looked different than it does now.

Ms. Bramer indicated that there are hybrid options. There are algorithms and computers that can be used, but we aren't there yet. We have to get community buy in first. We have to know who is unhappy and why.

Mr. Robert Leak, community member, stated that the district needs to be careful on what they say because people think that "choice" sounds great.

Ms. Bramer stated that it's not a choice if all schools are failing. She sent her children to their residential school for 3 years. We have to do something because current choice is not working.

Ms. Bramer adjourned the meeting at 6 p.m.