

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE
BOARD OF EDUCATION OF HOWARD COUNTY
AND
HOWARD COUNTY COUNCIL**

February 1, 2006

The Board of Education of Howard County and the Howard County Council held a joint quarterly meeting on Wednesday, February 1, 2006, at 8:15 a.m. The meeting was held in the Ellicott Room at the George Howard Building, 3430 Court House Drive, Ellicott City, MD 21043.

Present:

Board of Education

Diane B. Mikulis, Vice Chairman
Patricia S. Gordon
Mary Kay Sigaty
Courtney Watson

Howard County Council

Christopher J. Merdon, Chairman
David A. Rakes, Vice Chairman
Charles C. Feaga
Guy Guzzone

Sydney L. Cousin, Interim Superintendent
Sandra J. Erickson, Deputy Superintendent
Raymond H. Brown, Chief Operating Officer
Mamie J. Perkins, Chief of Staff
Susan S. Shown, Executive Assistant

Sheila Tolliver, Administrator
Jeff Myers, Legislative Assistant

Mr. Rakes called the meeting to order at 8:20 a.m. and welcomed the members of the Board of Education.

Clarksville Middle School - 2005/2006 Maryland Blue Ribbon School

Mrs. Linda Wise, Assistant Superintendent for School Administration, introduced Ms. Joanne Hutchens, Principal, and Mr. Woodrow Rhoades, Assistant Principal, of Clarksville MS, and announced that the school was chosen as a *2005/2006 Blue Ribbon School* for the students' high achievement on the Maryland School Assessments.

On behalf of the members of the County Council, Mr. Rakes congratulated Ms. Hutchens, the students, and the school staff for achieving such an honor.

Ms. Hutchens acknowledged the work and dedication of Ms. Beverly Koren, past principal of Clarksville MS, the staff, and the students. She also recognized the importance of the parents for instilling a value for education in their students and for the students' readiness to learn.

Northeastern Elementary School

Mr. Merdon asked for an update on the land acquisition for the access to the school. Mr. Ray Brown explained that the school system has obtained approval of a limited site development plan, which will allow application for a building permit so construction can begin by March 1.

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The site can be temporarily accessed through Ellicott Mills MS property and the BGE right-of-way.

Condemnation proceedings will take place in court on August 7, 2006, to settle a dispute between the school system and the property owner on the cost of the land.

Mr. Brown noted that cost-saving measures that were implemented during Dr. Cousin's former position, such as the development of a prototype school and using separate bid packages, have resulted in bids for the construction of the new school coming in at \$4,000,000 below the budget. He pointed out, however, that bids for renovation projects, which often have unknowns and have to be completed in a short timeframe, are coming in significantly over budget.

Mr. Merdon asked if the school is expected to open as scheduled, and Mr. Brown responded yes. He noted that the site was pregraded, which will help the construction schedule.

Rising Energy Costs

Dr. Cousin stated that the rising cost of energy would have a negative impact on this year's budget; however, the relatively mild winter has helped to lessen that impact. He explained the school system's collective bidding process for the purchase of energy sources with Anne Arundel, Carroll, and Baltimore counties and sometimes state contracts. He noted that the cost of natural gas has increased by about 50%.

Mr. Guzzone asked what the actual dollar increase would be, and Dr. Cousin responded that the information was not yet available. Staff had projected a \$2,000,000 shortfall based on past usage, but with the milder-than-usual winter, that projection may be overstated.

Mr. Feaga asked how the rising cost in fuel affects school bus contractors. Dr. Cousin explained that school bus routes are competitively bid; however, a fuel escalation clause is included in the contracts, and for every 5 cents that the cost of fuel increases, the contractor receives a 1-cent-per-mile increase.

Mr. Merdon asked what assumption for energy costs was used in preparing the FY 2007 proposed budget. Dr. Cousin responded that preparation for developing the budget begins in early fall, and the high increase in energy costs had not yet occurred. Staff will reexamine the actual costs during the budget process.

Policy 9521 – Wellness Through Nutrition and Physical Activity

Mr. Brown explained that federal law requires all school systems to implement a wellness policy, and state regulations require Maryland school systems to implement a policy by July 1, 2006. A task force of representative stakeholders developed the proposed policy to address food and nutrition, physical activity, and nutrition education. The task force followed the Maryland State Department of Education guidelines, which apply to all food served on school property.

Following concerns expressed by PTAs and other fundraising organizations, the Board asked the task force to review the proposed policy and consider the testimony and feedback.

Mrs. Watson stated that the PTAs and other organizations were concerned that the restrictions on what food items could be sold at after-school activities and for fundraising events would have a negative effect on the amount of money raised by the organizations.

Ms. Gordon pointed out that teachers have also expressed concern that it would not be permissible to use food items as teaching tools.

Mr. Guzzone asked about the regulations concerning vending machines. Mr. Brown responded that vending machines are required by law to be turned off until the end of the school day. Ms. Sigaty clarified that vending machines which are located in the cafeteria and operated by the food service department are permissible.

Mr. Brown added that the restrictions apply only to packaged foods and not to hot food items such as hot dogs sold at athletic events. Organizations would have to comply with health department regulations for cooking and serving food items.

Mr. Merdon stated that he heard concerns that the policy is not strong enough in requiring exercise throughout the school day. Mrs. Erickson replied that the committee felt that the school system has a good program and one of the best in the state. She also noted that adding more time for physical education would impact the budget as well as the instructional day. There are many instructional requirements that must be met during the school day, and every curriculum area would like to have more time.

Mr. Rakes commented that parents have a vital role in developing good nutrition habits in their children outside of the school day. Mrs. Erickson agreed and added that parents share responsibility in all aspects of education.

Charter Schools

Mrs. Ellen Miller, Charter School Specialist, provided background information about charter schools and the process for approval of application.

Mr. Feaga stated that he attended an information session at the Maryland Association of Counties which was presented by staff of the Frederick County Public Schools. The presentation was excellent and included both the pros and cons of charter schools. Mrs. Perkins noted that staff visited Frederick County last year and met with the team that presented the program.

Mr. Merdon asked if there is an appeal process, and Mrs. Miller responded yes.

Ms. Sigaty noted that staff and the Board have been extremely thorough in the review process, and this is the applicant's third time back to the Board.

Adjournment - There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 9:00 a.m.