

APPROVED  
53-1981

Rockville, Maryland  
November 3, 1981

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Tuesday, November 3, 1981, at 7:45 p.m.

ROLL CALL

Present: Mrs. Carol F. Wallace,  
President in the Chair  
Mr. Joseph R. Barse  
Mr. Blair G. Ewing  
Dr. Marian L. Greenblatt  
Mr. Jonathan Lipson  
Mrs. Suzanne K. Peyser  
Mrs. Eleanor D. Zappone

Absent: None

Others Present: Dr. Edward Andrews,  
Superintendent of Schools  
Dr. Harry Pitt,  
Deputy Superintendent  
Dr. Robert S. Shaffner,  
Executive Assistant  
Mr. Thomas S. Fess,  
Parliamentarian

Re: Discussion with the City  
of Takoma Park

Mr. Samuel Abbott, mayor of the City of Takoma Park, stated that in about two years the City would be celebrating its centennial.

The city was two and a half square miles and had a population that was stable. Where they once had group homes, they were now seeing the resurgence of single family homes. The city's population was 38 percent minority, 34 percent black, and this was reflected in the makeup of the school system. He felt that the city was experiencing a rejuvenation, and he hoped that the Board would not remove the schools from their city. He said that the Adventist population might be moving to Hagerstown which would mean the Andrews Elementary School would be closed. He indicated that there was a need for the schools for families moving into homes that the Adventist would vacate. He stated that the city had its own police, library, and crossing guards.

They paid extra taxes in order to have a say in the quality of life within their boundaries. He said that schools were absolutely necessary for their city, and, in fact, the city had donated land for two of the schools.

Mr. Abbott said they had just received answers to questions raised at the October 5 hearing which was not time enough to study them. They did not receive an answer to the civil rights questions raised. It was reported that members of the Board did ask their attorney to look into these particular points. He

said that the plan was vulnerable because it placed busing on the minority communities. He said that all the intermediate schools proposed for closing had high minority populations, and the decisions to close schools created segregated patterns. He reported that Takoma Park was an integrated city and closing an integrated school was an act of institutional racism. If the school were closed, they were prepared to exhaust all administrative relief even to the point of carrying this to the courts. He said that there was a study being done by ACLU on segregation in Montgomery County which would be available in a couple of weeks, and he asked that the Board postpone decisions on the schools inside the Beltway.

Ms. Jennifer Saloma said that the city council had voted unanimously to express their support for the status quo at Takoma Park Elementary and Piney Branch Elementary. They believed the proposal to make these K-6 schools would not result in improved education and would split their elementary school population along racial lines. She indicated that they were proud of the racial harmony they had achieved, and parents thought the gifted and talented and science magnets were appropriate for their students.

Mr. James Holland pointed out that their area had the highest concentration of single parent and single income families in the state. He said that the educational process did not take place solely in the classroom. Their library saw to it that students had the educational materials to help children with special needs. The Recreation Department offered a broad spectrum of programs for children and adults. He felt that the program conducted by the Recreation Department could not be picked up at the elementary school. He said that in the sense of a community school, Takoma Park Junior High School was probably the most used school in the county.

Mr. Donald Ramsey said the junior high PTA had just received the staff's follow-up and there had not been sufficient time to doublecheck the answers. However, the PTA felt the answers were superficial because there were no dollar figures on the Blair proposal. They thought that Mrs. Wallace had asked for option to the Blair "C" building, and they believed the information did not appear sufficient for the Board to make a decision. He hoped that it was not necessary to settle this in court. They had asked eight questions of the Board and only one Board member responded. He said that he was a little uneasy about what appeared to be an annual ritual of school closings. He understood that a lot of this was in the name of economy, but he felt there were community values that did not come out in terms of dollars. He pointed out that the Takoma Park taxpayers paid \$3 million a year in taxes and were willing to continue to pay to maintain a community identity.

Mr. David Weisman stated that they supported the schools in tangible ways. The city saved MCPS thousands of dollars by

providing school sites. In 1969 the city donated the land for Piney Branch and in 1970 for Takoma Park. The land was donated with the proviso that it would revert to the city if not used for educational uses. He felt that the best use of Takoma Park Junior High School was for it to continue as a school. He was disturbed about signals he was receiving from the school system regarding the reuse of the school. In a letter the superintendent has talked about the land being used for building lots which would create a need for a new junior high school. There was also a rumor that Montgomery College was negotiating to buy the Takoma Park site. He emphasized that they did not want an enlarged Montgomery College or tracts of housing, they wanted their junior high school.

Mr. Frank Garcia remarked that the proposed consolidation with Eastern was not beneficial to anyone. He felt that their children's needs would not be met in Eastern. He said that they had chosen to live in Takoma Park because of its diversity, and he thought that Eastern had low expectations for minority children. He believed that their children would receive more benefit if their education took place in a situation where there was a positive atmosphere.

Mr. Vernon Ricks said that in testimony it was alleged that Takoma Park Junior High School was in a ghetto and there was need to provide police protection in the school. He explained that students had an opportunity to interface with the employees of the city. The city provided to police officer who worked in close conjunction with all the schools of the city. Her responsibility included safety instruction, community relations, and juvenile services. He emphasized that they did not have a situation where they were providing police services for the protection of students. He said they had a stable and well-integrated community which provided full services to its citizens. They had a community school at the junior high school which was extensively used by the citizens of Takoma Park. He noted that they were speaking for the 16,000 plus people in the city.

Mrs. Wallace explained that the Board of Education could not negotiate any land use or facility use unless the Board kept the property. By law they had to turn over to the County Council any property not needed for educational purposes. The county would then do the negotiating for the reuse of the property.

Mrs. Spencer felt that the county as a whole would support education if they knew what their tax dollars were doing. She explained that if the Somerset case was finally decided against them, the taxes raised in Montgomery County would support education elsewhere in the state. Mrs. Wallace remarked that they had a problem within the entire county and schools were being closed in almost every community. She explained that they had instituted a top-down process and needed to make decisions by December 1; therefore, the junior high schools had to be taken up

next. She said that she had visited Takoma Park Junior High School as well as all of the secondary schools involved, and she felt that this was going to be a difficult decision.

The superintendent said they did have to close schools, and the question was whether they could provide the kind of services they were now providing in Takoma Park Junior High School if the school were closed. Mr. Abbott stated that Takoma Park had had schools from the time it was formed. They had their Recreation Department, and the citizens had built the libraries and the fire department. He felt that the overbuilding of the schools in the rest of the county was not their concern. He said they did not ask for Piney Branch or for a new school at Takoma Park Elementary. He said that at one point nothing was too good for Montgomery County students and the schools were built as magnets for developers. He said he was not concerned about what happened outside of Takoma Park, and he was not going to accept any decisions counter to the needs of their children. He said that a school removed from Takoma Park meant the end of that school, and they would proceed to seek all administrative relief, but he hoped that would not be necessary.

Dr. Greenblatt asked whether the Council was prepared to renovate the building locally and pay off the bonded indebtedness at Eastern. Dr. Faith Stern replied that Takoma Park's renovation did not appear until the second five years of the plan. She said that Dr. Greenblatt's question was inappropriate because Eastern was not a closure candidate.

Mrs. Spencer commented that some of the Council might not be aware of the policy which set up only one intermediate level school feeding into the senior high school which would speak to the consolidation of Eastern and Takoma Park. Mr. Ramsey stated that it was incredible arrogance to ask the Council to pay for the renovation of Takoma Park Junior High School when it was not on the books of the planners. Mr. Ricks asked whether the decision had already been made on the school. Mrs. Wallace replied that the Board was still reviewing the staff responses. She said that she had had many questions and probably would be asking the superintendent for more information in order to make the best decision she possible could.

Mr. Ramsey recalled the work of the TESS Commission. As a result of that the middle school was built, the new elementary school was built, and the junior high school was renovated. He felt that removing the junior high school would undo all that the TESS Commission had tried to do.

Mr. Barse stated that the Board had adopted a policy regarding 7-8 intermediate schools and four-year high schools, but that was by no means ironclad. He said that the move of the ninth grade to Blair would depopulate Takoma Park and Eastern, and he wondered how important it was to them to have a four-grade high school as opposed to a three-grade structure at the junior high

school. It was their feeling that with the diverse population at Blair it was better to have an enlarged enrollment at the three-grade level. Mrs. Wallace commented that one of the suggestions was the possibility of razing the "C" building. at Blair. She asked about whether they would receive support from Takoma Park or the Blair area for having a smaller high school and keeping Takoma Park Junior High School. Dr. Stern replied that there was a concern with getting the population at Blair too low because the diversity would work against this.

Mr. Ewing felt that the discussion had been useful and helpful.

However, the fact that the Board was doing this the night before decisions were to be made was a reflection on the inadequacies of the process. He was not very sanguine about the quality of the decisions the Board was making. He believed it was critical for the Board to demonstrate its commitment not to just integration or integrated education but to actions which protected the kinds of communities the Takoma Park community represented. He said it was a puzzle to him why the Board had recommendations which would disrupt the cluster organization, and he hoped that the Board would not follow recommendations which would be disruptive.

Mr. Abbott asked what would happen if the recent decision to equalize per pupil expenditure in the state was upheld. Mrs. Wallace explained that that was one reason they had all gone into this particular policy with the feeling that they had to bite the bullet and make decisions. They must put funds into programs, and they were all going to have to pull together because this decision would change the face of education throughout the state.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

President

Secretary

EA:mlw:mag