

APPROVED
16-1981

Rockville, Maryland
February 26, 1981

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Thursday, February 26, 1981, at 8:05 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
Mrs. Suzanne K. Peyser
Mrs. Elizabeth W. Spencer
Miss Traci Williams
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

Re: Proposed Policy Statement on
Long-range Educational Facilities
Planning

Mr. Barse explained his memorandum on the draft policy statement and said that the Board ought to express a desire to enhance the situation and not necessarily adopt a rigid percentage target. He felt that here was an opportunity to address a whole set of policy issues. He indicated that he had a problem with the draft statement because it was a double standard and they would wind up with most schools for further study and have relatively few excluded. He said that they should adopt a set of standards applying to every school equally, define them for different levels of schools, and measure and evaluate them. He said they had to face the problem of how they put all the criteria together to make a decision about any one school and what weight they should put on individual standards as applied to every individual school. He thought that they had to look at the sequence of decision making. He said they also had to look at the range of options to bring schools up to standards.

Mrs. Zappone remarked that she was looking for something that was a positive approach. She felt that they should be looking at all of the schools and all of the children to see what the optimum situation should be.

Mr. Ewing commented that they needed to consider the nature of the analysis that needed to be done. He felt that the issue of

minority enrollment was placed in the wrong way because as the policy dealt with minority enrollment it was a criterion for closure. He said that this needed to be considered in the analysis of what they needed to do with schools but it should not be a criterion by itself for closure. One thing that was missing was an analysis of current cluster arrangements. The Board might want to consider whether the clusters should continue in the same mode or not. He said there was not an emphasis regarding population forecasting in future terms. He was concerned about the way in which they did not tie in the statement of purpose regarding high quality education at reasonable costs to the plan. He recalled that there were some issues raised by the special education parents. In addition, there was an issue of just how far ahead they could name specific schools for closing.

Mr. Ewing stated that a good many people had doubts about the Board's implementing this policy in a fair and consistent way. He said there were some partial remedies to that the Board might want to consider. The Board majority could go on record as to why the closure decision was made and as to what criteria were applied in what way.

Mrs. Wallace reported that Park and Planning was going to be approaching the growth areas of the county in a different way. Instead of looking for growth in the Germantown area, they would be trying to cut down on that and focus on the growth in the downcounty area. She said that she had a sense of frustration because the Board was sitting here putting out fires which were a result of lack of forethought. She wondered whether they were going to have overcrowded schools and whether there was going to be growth downcounty. She hoped that whatever they ended up with that everyone would keep the future in mind.

Mrs. Spencer commented that she thought they were working on a master plan for school facilities. She remarked that programs could be transplanted, but facilities were not so easily picked up. They were charged with determining the locations for the schools in future years, and what they needed in the future were not the buildings but the sites. She thought that they might want a companion policy regarding educational program and equity of educational offerings. She said that there was reference in various people's suggestions as to what the middle level of schools should be; however, she was convinced that the Board had never heard impartially from the public on this subject. She felt that they had to be accountable in future years as to what they closed now. She said that they could not disregard racial balance and socioeconomic conditions, and she agreed that they needed more specific information regarding the clusters. She felt that they had to determine whether this was a facilities plan or an overall educational plan. Secondly they could leave it flexible so that the remaining buildings would not inhibit educational changes.

Dr. Greenblatt presented the Board with copies of her proposed

changes and explained she proposed dividing the county into high school districts. In each district there would be one senior high school, Grades 9-12, one feeder intermediate school, Grades 7-8, and those several elementaries which feed totally into the intermediate school. In addition, all schools should be operating at at least 85 percent utilization. In regard to process, they should analyze the enrollment and capacity of the high schools and the intermediate and elementary schools to establish the number needed. She said that she did not touch the guidelines because they had to look at the policy and then adjust the guidelines.

Mrs. Wallace stated that they were lacking a definition of what was capacity. They had to look at whether this meant they would have rooms set aside for art, music, reading, etc. She felt that the Board had to grapple with this because unless these were decided they would end up with a general policy. Dr. Greenblatt thought that if they put in a definition of capacity they should say whatever was used would be used consistently.

The superintendent remarked that the comments raised were very helpful and would give general guidance to the staff. He agreed with Mr. Ewing's comment about minority enrollment and said that it would have to be restated. He explained that he did not use school closures as a negative thing. He felt that most people they talked to after the consolidations were pleased with the consolidated school. He said that Mrs. Wallace's point about the planning areas was a good one, and he would expect that if a school were closed it would be kept for future consideration. He indicated that it was hard to know what impact Metro would have on a school system. He agreed that the business of capacity ought to be addressed in the policy, and he explained that it was not their intent to ignore the clusters.

It seemed to Mr. Ewing that they had to look at things they had forgotten or things that were not fully stated. He thought they had to consider some fundamental issues such as the one raised by Mrs. Spencer as to whether this was a plan to serve some fundamental educational purpose or deal with school facilities. Another fundamental issue was the point that Mr. Barse had raised regarding the decision-making process and whether it was quantitative exclusively. A third issue was whether or not they wanted to specify in the plan that there should be a single grade level configuration in the county. He noted that there were a set of middle schools in the county and the middle school evaluation effort was not completed. Mrs. Wallace hoped that they could discuss the grade level organization because this was a policy they were going to have to live with for a long, long time.

Mr. Barse called attention to lines 40 and 41 and the question of educational purpose as contrasted to the location of facilities purpose. Mrs. Spencer thought that the focus should be to provide facilities which could be the providers of educational programs which was totally different from a policy dealing with the educational programs. She said that for a facility to sustain high

level educational programs it had to have flexibility. Mr. Barse thought that there were some facilities that would be able to sustain a higher educational program. Mr. Ewing commented that it was easy to say that programs were transplantable but it did not always work. It seemed to Mrs. Wallace that they were comparing apples and oranges because what she considered to be a high quality educational program might not be acceptable to someone else. Dr. Pitt remarked that what they were talking about was very elusive. They could go into a building and say there was a quality educational program, but the problem was that it was not always there for all time. As they dropped population they said they would not allow youngsters to suffer; therefore, they added resources. He pointed out that because of the extra resources when they consolidated the school people would say the quality had gone down because the consolidated school had only one reading teacher when the smaller school might have had the same resources.

Mr. Barse reported that there was a whole area of school effectiveness studies, and he had asked Mr. Bowers to provide Board members with copies. Mrs. Wallace stated that as she looked at the paper there was a difference between consistency in the delivery of educational resources and equitable resources. She said that it was not possible to spend the same amount of money school by school, and she felt that the statement should be "reasonable and equitable costs." Mrs. Spencer said that she was after a policy based on providing educational services to meet the needs of each community to the same degree. Dr. Greenblatt said that one issue was providing those facilities and school sites necessary to sustain programs, and the other issue was should they be providing more services in a small school. Mrs. Wallace said it was equitable if they could justify the services in terms that were understandable. If they could explain the need and it was an agreed-upon need, it could be considered equitable. She said that she was hearing Dr. Greenblatt say that teacher/student ratios would be the same in School A, B, C, or D and they would assign staff according to that despite the problems in the school. She wondered whether that was what they wanted or did they want to address the problems in a given school. Mrs. Spencer thought they should use Mr. Barse's words "resources in a fair and equitable manner."

Dr. Greenblatt thought that in their statement of purpose they should be right out front as to what they wanted the facilities to be. She said she had asked Mr. Bowers to give the Board the write-up from Prince George's which was going through a similar process. She pointed out that Prince George's did not adopt a policy, but rather they set up a list of about five criteria. They were going the route of 9-12 high schools and 7-8 intermediate schools and would be able to close 13 junior high schools. The superintendent asked what they were going to do with Seneca Valley and Gaithersburg High Schools which had two large, overcrowded junior high schools feeding into them. Dr. Greenblatt replied that this was spoken to later on when they said it was an ultimate goal because obviously nothing could happen if the buildings could not

hold the students. Mrs. Wallace suggested that they state 9-12, where feasible, and Grades 7-8, where feasible, which would still allow them to have 7-8-9 where needed. Mr. Barse suggested that they state that the organizational pattern for most of their schools would be K-6, 7-8, 9-12, but there will be exceptions based on a case-by-case basis. They could define a cluster of schools as a senior high school plus its feeder schools. He said that except for special schools, each school would be part of a cluster known by its senior high school; however, a junior high school feeding more than one senior high school would be part of the cluster of each senior high school which would allow for the flexibility of split articulation.

Mrs. Spencer remarked that she had some problems with this because they were dealing with a 15-year policy. She pointed out that 15 years ago there was hardly a whisper to move to 9-12 high schools or 7-8 middle schools. She felt that it was highly inappropriate to be this hidebound because a policy should allow for flexibility.

Mrs. Zappone thought they could say "optimal organizational pattern" or "a goal to be worked toward." Mrs. Wallace suggested that they needed to consider where the statement on organizational levels should be in the policy or whether it should be in the implementation plan.

In regard to 7-8 schools, Mr. Ewing pointed out that the Board had paid for an evaluation of middle schools and said it would make decisions about whether or not it would continue those. He said that this particular action would vitiate this which would be a direct violation of the word of the Board. Mr. Barse said that what he had in mind was something similar to the 9-12 high school, a statement to the effect that it was a general guideline. He did not believe that this prejudged the middle school issue, and he pointed out that they were going to be forced to make decisions this spring and fall even before the middle school results came in.

He said that they needed some guidance because if they didn't begin limiting the scope for decision making they would proliferate the middle school option. He felt that this would be a parameter rather than a standard. He said that he would prefer a listing of parameters or principles in an ABC fashion with an understanding that the principals altogether were to achieve the broader goal.

Mrs. Wallace asked whether there were four or more Board members who would say that 7-8 was the preferred organization pattern. Mr. Barse, Dr. Greenblatt, Mrs. Peyser, Mrs. Wallace, and Mrs. Zappone, by a show of hands, indicated their preference to 7-8.

Mrs. Spencer pointed out that in the second five-year span if they were forced to close a senior high school they would almost be forced to close a feeder intermediate school. She suggested the language of "one or more feeder intermediate schools." Mr. Barse indicated that they could have half an intermediate school feeding into one high school. Mrs. Wallace asked whether Mr. Barse could work on a paper that would incorporate some of the suggestions that had been made. Mr. Barse agreed to provide the paper at the next

meeting.

Dr. Greenblatt explained that in her paper she had suggested 85 percent for utilization because they were trying to say the buildings should be well used. She felt that this would result in a substantial reduction in the number of buildings. Mrs. Spencer pointed out that a 7-8 serving a high school would rattle around in the junior high school buildings they had now. She did not think the goal was to utilize the buildings, but rather the goal was to provide the facilities to enhance the educational program. Mr. Barse stated that the utilization percentage was one of an array of standards or criteria which needed to be considered school by school. Mr. Ewing commented that the problem of Dr. Greenblatt's draft was that it scattered the criteria throughout the document. Mrs. Wallace indicated that there did not seem to be support for including "utilization" in this section. She said that Mr. Barse would come forward with additional wording for this particular section and when the Board resumed its discussion on March 2 they would pick up with attendance patterns and process.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 11 p. m.

President

Secretary

EA: ml