

APPROVED
18-1981

Rockville, Maryland
March 5, 1981

The Board of Education of Montgomery County met in special session at the Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Thursday, March 5, 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: Policy Statement on Long-range
Educational Facilities Planning

Mr. Barse explained that his new paper was on top-down planning and incorporated the exact language that was already in the draft. He said that he felt there were important concepts that were left unclear; and, therefore, he attempted to sharpen up the details in his new paper. Mrs. Wallace commented that she was frustrated with the way the meeting went the other night. She pointed out that the staff had to get to the closure of three schools, and the policy had to be in place by March 10 even if they had to work all night.

She said that four Board members had decided they would close three schools and there had to be adequate time for planning. She said that she had pulled together all the decision points and would like to see the Board grapple with this. She said they needed to decide on minimum enrollment at the elementary school level, utilization, minority enrollment, etc.; and she suggested they take straw votes on these topics.

Dr. Greenblatt explained that her draft included a statement so that no additional expenditures would be made because it was a small school. She had started with the macro approach so that they could determine what their overall needs were. Mrs. Wallace asked whether she was talking about the number of schools or the numbers of classrooms. Dr. Greenblatt replied that she was talking about the number of buildings. Mrs. Spencer remarked that part of Dr. Greenblatt's paper included developing a data base but also

proposed to analyze before they had a data base. Dr. Greenblatt noted that they had just received the projected enrollment for the areas and they knew the number of seats in each building throughout the county. In this way the staff could estimate the number of buildings needed. Mrs. Spencer stated that this totally ignored the fact that they might need certain sites in the future. She said they might be left with not enough schools for the projected needs 15 years from now.

Mrs. Wallace commented that to say "schools" did not take into account that schools had different seating capacities. She felt that they had to say they needed x-number of classrooms which might be translated later into schools. Mrs. Zappone thought that perhaps it should be the number of seats at any given level. Mrs. Spencer pointed out that there might be sections of the county such as Kensington where there would be a recycling of communities as the older residents moved out, and ten or fifteen years from now they might have to buy some expensive sites.

Mr. Ewing felt that the staff draft was the superior paper. He thought Mrs. Wallace was right because they had to deal with the issue of capacities by grade level and take into account long-term needs. He felt that the notion of deciding they should need this number of buildings now and forever was absurd. Dr. Greenblatt explained that her first point was to analyze the needs of the entire county and then look at the high school cluster. The superintendent asked whether there was agreement to add a section on estimating and projecting needs at each organizational level and estimating the total classroom needs countywide as an additional step. Mr. Barse added they should consider this at different points in the future and indicated that a section should be added phrased in terms of the future, classrooms, and countywide considerations.

In regard to Dr. Greenblatt's section on a data base, Mrs. Zappone explained that "indigenous population" meant that they were native to the area and were not transfers in. She said that it was important to know who lived in the service area and whether there was a major draw to bring children in from out of the area which would be a valid distinction to make. Mrs. Wallace remarked that this was important because if they were trying to look at the facilities to keep it was important to know whether they were serving the children. Mr. Barse said that if they found a school was a successful magnet they could beef up that magnet.

Mrs. Spencer thought that there was a major flaw in the staff draft. She contended that this was basically a master facilities plan which could not ignore education. She had mentioned the possibility of two separate policies, but she had decided on one and was in the process of rewriting it. Mr. Ewing commented that they paid a price every time they asked for additional information and should be clear that it was a piece of information they would consider. He suspected that he would ignore the data Dr. Greenblatt was proposing to collect. Mrs. Zappone asked whether

the data on transfers and where they were from was readily available. Dr. Lois Martin, associate superintendent, replied that this data would have to be collected by hand and would be difficult to get because some schools were closed to transfer. Dr. Greenblatt thought it was important that they know how many people in a particular school were from the service area and how many were from without. Mrs. Spencer wondered how it would affect a decision that they needed a school at that site. Dr. Greenblatt explained that if a school had a small number in its service area it could be relocated. Mrs. Wallace asked how many people felt this information would be useful, and five Board members indicated that they would.

Mrs. Wallace asked about "facility adjustments for Continuum Education students," and Dr. Greenblatt explained that this was information on what had been done to the building to modify it for handicapped students. The superintendent said that they would include any modifications made to the buildings for special education purposes. Dr. Greenblatt recalled that when they had held closure hearings some schools had mentioned that they were barrier free.

The superintendent said that it would be useful if the Board would tell the staff which data elements they would like to drop and what they would like to add. Dr. Greenblatt felt that it was important for communities to see what the per pupil costs were. She noted that there was an annual report that reported on per pupil costs and professional staff ratios. Mrs. Wallace pointed out that if there were 200 more pupils in a building, the per pupil costs would change. The superintendent noted that there were major differences in operating costs per building based on utilities. He thought they needed to know the operating costs, but to be fair they had to have all the bits and pieces. For that reason, they would never have a formula that would point to a school. Mr. Barse agreed that they had to have the data, but he said they had to talk about what the data base should contain. Dr. Greenblatt asked how they could get at something to see that overhead costs were greater when they were operating a large building with a few people in it. Mr. Barse replied that they could call this standard costs and have a cost model. The superintendent said they could get at these things by saying there were minimum size schools that they were going to tolerate, not ignoring operating costs; however, per pupil did not give you this. He pointed out that they could not afford to pro-rate one principal over 130 students, and it did not make sense to have a part-time principal; therefore, they had small schools which were very costly. Mrs. Wallace requested a show of hands to include "per pupil costs," and only three Board members were in agreement to add this.

Mr. Barse stated that he had proposed that there be no screening criteria but rather one set of criteria. He said that in this section they were setting forth standards, and after they did this they would say how decisions were going to be made. The superintendent said they were going to look at the number of senior

high schools and the seats they needed countywide and look at the intermediate and elementary levels. Mr. Barse thought there was a fundamental flaw in the staff draft because how they put the decision together based on the proposed standards was not at all clear to the Board. The superintendent asked that they look at the new Number 6. In this they would identify schools that had to be looked at further and provided the full data on all the schools. He indicated that there would be a recommendation concerning every school, and no school would be left out of this. Mr. Barse understood that they had five individual criteria and were going to apply them and rate each school according to the criteria. He asked how they weighed those ratings against each other to reach a single decision. The superintendent reported that the staff had been spending some time on simulations without the names of the schools. He did not see a thing wrong with going through the policy, doing a simulation, and then signing off on the policy; however, this could not be done until they had a policy.

Dr. Pitt explained that they would apply the five criteria and look at the schools that were lacking in some of these criteria. Then they would say how can you resolve the problem. If enough of these things were wrong, they might look at the school for closure. Mr. Ewing said the initial analysis might suggest that the Board could close two high schools and there would be adequate space. Under those circumstances the high schools might close later than 1981, and in the interim they would have to think about attendance and feeder patterns. They would have to look at feeder schools if they integrated Mr. Barse's notion of top-down planning. The superintendent reported that they had done a simulation with eight junior high schools with the ninth grade coming out, the schools were at the 20 to 40 percent utilization mark. This would identify a school and then they would have to look at operating costs, the need for renovation, etc. Dr. Shaffner emphasized that as they went through these steps it was very important for them to receive direction from the Board as to what they wanted.

Dr. Greenblatt commented that they were still looking at what was in an individual building without looking at the overall capacity needs in an area. The superintendent replied that they would have to do this if the Board adopted the high school feeder pattern area. He explained that their idea to have a screening step was to address past criticisms. They wanted to have two different levels with the same criteria. In this way the community would know that here were the points below which their school would not be untouched. Mr. Barse commented that passing the schools through the screening did not bring the schools to the Board for action. They would have to go through the second set of criteria before any recommendation was made to the Board. Mrs. Spencer remarked that the first screening would look at individual schools, but the solution got back to Dr. Greenblatt's set of schools feeding a high school. Mr. Barse felt that the process could not be explained to the community in an adequate way. Mrs. Spencer asked whether they had done it both ways, with a screening and final and only one set.

Dr. Pitt explained that when they screened the schools they would come up with a number of schools that could be closed, but they could not close all of them. If they had four schools meeting these criteria, they probably could close only two. Then they would decide that because of these factors certain schools could close.

Dr. Greenblatt asked where the other schools would fit in and suggested that they had to add a section for the school that was not caught in the net. The superintendent pointed out that adjacent schools would be considered in the policy. Mrs. Wallace called attention to the superintendent's new version which stated that every school would be included in the process of finding solutions to the problems of changing enrollment. Mr. Ewing recalled that when they had a policy people argued that the trouble with the application of the policy was not that it resulted in closure but that it did not make it clear to the public why some schools were selected for consideration. He said that last time they closed schools they should have closed some in the West Bethesda area but did not do so. While he thought that the language on the screening criteria could be clearer, he thought it would be understood. He indicated that no one in the public hearings commented on the adverse aspect of this.

Mr. Barse viewed the criteria as more in the sense of a desirable situation in which the degree of undesirability trails off as a spectrum from that desirable point. He felt that it was a point on a rating chart, and applying the five criteria would be rating on a numerical basis as deviations from the norm. Then they would make a judgment regarding that particular school.

Mrs. Wallace thought the Board was saying that it could accept lines 57 to 59; however, this needed to be repeated in the staff's suggested lines 64 to 66 which discussed the application of the five criteria. Mr. Barse did not think it should be in that place because he felt it should come in the decision process.

Mrs. Wallace suggested that the Board discuss minimum enrollment in that at the elementary level they had to have 200 students regardless of the grades served. Dr. Greenblatt said that she had suggested setting the standard at 350 students enrolled in a regular program. She pointed out that Baltimore County, Prince George's, and Fairfax all used 300 or more. She felt that elementary schools should be in the range of 350 to 650. Mr. Ewing pointed out that in another paper there was a suggestion from Dr. Greenblatt that the superintendent might recommend continuing some K-5 schools. He said there might be recommendations to continue K-3, 4-6, or some other pattern. He said he would be interested in knowing what the staff learned from the simulations regarding the impact of a 200 or 300 figure. The superintendent replied that 350 would mean a larger number of schools that they would have to study. He said that he did not have any problem with the larger numbers because he viewed this as an evolutionary process and these were the numbers that came out of these processes as a minimum. He

felt that there was some sentiment in the community for the 200 figure, but he personally thought that this number was a little low. In regard to school size, Mr. Ewing said that they should be aware of what the impact was likely to be where they had made some effort in the past to assure some degree of racial balance. He said that it was tremendously important for them as a school district that they did not take actions which would end up causing them enormous problems. He indicated that they had to be careful about these numbers in terms of their impact on the cluster areas.

He said it was important for them to look at the impact of these figures on the cluster schools, and the superintendent agreed to provide that information by March 10.

Mr. Barse commented that he had not seen a statement that the 200 figure had any educational significance. He would challenge anyone to provide him some evidence that an educational outcome was harmed when they went below 200 or 300. The superintendent did not think they could do that; however, he pointed out that this was not an educational policy, it was a facilities policy and they were trying to have the money to operate good educational programs. Mr. Barse asked why they did not eliminate enrollment, and the superintendent replied that it would break faith because people accepted enrollment as an important fact to be considered.

Mrs. Spencer remarked that as she looked at the projected enrollment through 1985-86 they would drop 3,000 elementary school students, but they had to be careful that they did not trap themselves in having a number too high so they didn't write all schools out of existence. Mrs. Zappone reported that establishing a minimum capacity for a viable educational program was number two from the MCCPTA forum results. She asked about the breakpoint for having art, music, and physical education. Dr. Martin replied that they would have a full-time person when the enrollment was around 500 to 600. She pointed out that there were fixed costs for operating any elementary school such as the principal, the secretary, the building services workers, etc. Mrs. Zappone said that she was concerned about all the schools that had been built small if they set a higher minimum. The superintendent explained that it was for this reason that they picked 200 because there were a number of schools that could not hold the higher capacity. Mrs. Zappone noted that some of these schools had a limited grade span and suggested they write in a variable here. The superintendent recalled that they had talked about students per grade, but in a K-2 school they might have 100 students and keep the school open.

Mrs. Wallace indicated that she could go someplace in between 200 and 350. Dr. Greenblatt asked whether they were prepared to say in some of these smaller schools that they would not put in more administrative overhead. Mr. Ewing thought they should take into account that while they were looking at options for saving money that some children had different needs.

Mrs. Wallace said that two people favored the 350 number while three favored the 200 number. Mrs. Spencer said they could go as

Mrs. Zappone had suggested and tie the 200 number to something less than K-6. Mr. Barse suggested that they say "K-6 equivalent" or on a "K-6 basis." He thought the number per grade was useful. Dr. Greenblatt suggested two classes per grade or 50. Mr. Ewing stated that if they were talking about these numbers as screening numbers he did not have a problem with the superintendent's wording, but if it were a single set he did not know how he would come out.

Mrs. Wallace asked whether they would use this as a screening criteria, and four Board members indicated that they did. She asked that they turn to the secondary level and noted that Dr. Greenblatt had proposed 1,400 at the high school and 700 at the intermediate level. Dr. Greenblatt explained that later on in her draft she had written in they would have no more than 10 percent below the desired level. Mrs. Spencer inquired about Wheaton's new capacity, and the superintendent replied that it would 1,275. Dr. Greenblatt explained that this would not be affected because her draft stated that it would be only if it could handle this number.

Mr. Ewing pointed out that Dr. Greenblatt had stated elsewhere they should close small capacity buildings, and he wondered why she was not proposing closing a high school because it did not have the room.

Mrs. Wallace indicated that only one person was in favor of Dr. Greenblatt's proposal of 350 per grade as a screening criteria. She said that four Board members were in favor of 600 for a three-grade intermediate school and 500 for a two-grade intermediate school.

Mrs. Zappone stated that she could go for a 250 per grade at the secondary level with 500 in a 7-8 school and 1,000 in a four-year high school. Mr. Ewing asked whether these screening criteria would be applied as of the start of the plan and only for one year or for a five-year period, and the superintendent replied that it was the latter. Mrs. Wallace indicated that four Board members were in favor of 900 at the high school level.

Mrs. Wallace said the next item they had to consider was utilization and whether they should use 85 percent or between 70 and 90 percent. Mr. Barse recalled that this screening criteria would pick up a substantial number of schools in the county. He asked about the rationale for 90 percent, and the superintendent explained that the state used 90 percent. He said that in a secondary school they would be talking about using every classroom every minute. Mrs. Wallace announced that one Board member favored 85 percent, two Board members favor 80 to 90 percent, and four Board members were in agreement with 70 to 90 percent.

Mrs. Spencer asked that the staff come back with a response on how they would refer to minority enrollment in the proposed policy. Mrs. Wallace recalled that the 50 percent minority enrollment was a figure used at a time when they had an 11 to 14 percent minority enrollment. Now they were up to 21 percent minority enrollment, and she would like to hear from staff about this.

The superintendent pointed out that they had a decision to close three junior high schools and they needed to finish action on the policy on March 10. He thought that they might want to consider modifying the agenda, and Mrs. Wallace agreed to defer the items on the Blue Ribbon Commission and the proposed resolution on committee membership and move the item on legislation to the morning session.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 11:05 p. m.

President

Secretary

EA: ml