

APPROVED
2-1981

Rockville, Maryland
January 14, 1981

The Board of Education of M-ntgomery County met in special session at the Educational Services Center, Rockville, Maryland, on Wednesday, January 14, 1981, at 8:10 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
Mrs. Eleanor D. Zappone

Absent: Miss Traci Williams

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

Re: Draft Policy, Background and Implementation
Guidelines--Long-range Educational
Facilities Plan

Mrs. Wallace announced that the Board was meeting tonight to look at the draft policy the staff was presenting to them. She felt it was important to do this prior to the public hearing on February 18.

The superintendent stated that his predecessors and members of the Board had had more experience in attempting to work with the declining enrollment problem in the county. He noted that there were other school systems that operated 30 fewer buildings than Montgomery County although they had the same enrollment. He said that the closures last year were done without benefit of a policy. Because they had no framework that issue was raised in some of the appeals to the state. He said that both the state and the county had said the Board needed a long-range plan and some stability. They had received a grant from the State of Maryland to develop this. They had decided to separate this into two phases: the draft policy with final action no later than March 10 and recommendations within six weeks of adoption of the policy.

The superintendent hoped that the policy made it clear that every school in the county was to be involved and the same data are to be prepared for every school. He said that the proposed policy stated what criteria were to be used to look at schools more closely. Then the policy looked at what some minimum enrollments ought to be and what solutions ought to be achieved. He said that by the time they got to final action everyone would know what data were being used and what the options were. The public would know how the Board would work through this process and how the Board would handle the community involvement process. He explained that the proposed policy would be

sent out to the community for reaction and proposed alternative solutions. He felt that there should be very few surprises in this process.

The superintendent reported that he had formed a work group with people like Mrs. Zoe Lefkowitz and Mr. William Kaye who met eight different nights to work through the process. He said that what they had here was the next move toward getting a logical framework for a long-range plan.

Dr. Lois Martin, associate superintendent for instruction and program development, said that the paper contained some background information because many groups had addressed the problem of declining enrollment and had reached consensus on a number of criteria. She reported that the school system had declined from a high of 126,000 to fewer than 100,000 and they expected the decline to continue throughout the decade. Dr. Martin said they had reviewed the efforts that had been made to address changing enrollment. She indicated that they felt strongly about the purposes they had listed. She reported that half the counties in Maryland had undertaken the development of a 15-year plan. Their second goal was to set forth guidelines for the development of that master plan, criteria for identifying the schools needing change, and criteria for developing solutions to the problems. The third purpose was to establish a continuing process until the Board made its final decision. The fourth was to improve public understanding of the process.

The superintendent indicated that they would ask the Board to agree on what information they should consider about each school because there might be some things the Board did not want to consider. Dr. Martin commented that they would look at minimum enrollment which referred to the total number of students in the school regardless of school size, building utilization, minority enrollment which referred back to the policy on quality integrated education, the need for modernization or additions, and attendance patterns. She said that those five criteria would be applied to every school in the county. She said that then they would move to the development of a master plan. The first guideline was to begin with senior high schools moving to the lower levels. The next was to apply criteria consistently and consider each school separately along with each of its adjacent planning area schools. The fourth was to prioritize the needs to be addressed. The next was not to be constrained by adherence to boundaries or feeder patterns. They would consider high schools with Grades 9 to 12 and consider various organizational patterns for Grades K to 8. Next they would determine housing for special programs. They would consider a variety of options in response to conditions requiring change. They would attempt to provide for long-range solutions and allow for Phased implementation.

Dr. Martin explained that two of the criteria should be used to identify a given school for closure. They would reassign, to the extent possible, a significant portion of the student body to a given school.

Dr. Martin stated that the paper went on to discuss the five criteria to develop a solution for each school identified as having conditions that require a change. She said that they would try to have two or three classes per grade in elementary schools, an average of 250 to 300 students per grade in middle/intermediate schools, and an average of 300 to 400 students per grade in high schools. Operating and capital costs should be minimized, and the greatest number of students should be able to walk to a school. She said that the capacity of a facility to accommodate educational programs should be considered, and the potential of a facility for alternate use should be considered.

Dr. Martin explained that they would present a preliminary 15-year facilities plan to the Board of Education where each problem was examined. The next section dealt with community involvement. The final step in the process was the development of a final plan and submission of that plan to the Board of Education. The paper then described the appeal and hearing process. The final sections dealt with decision making, implementation, and an annual review and

updating. In October of each year the superintendent would be required to prepare an annual report on the plan.

Mr. Ewing called attention to the section in the draft policy which called for the "goal of consistency-" He said they had used all kinds of words from "equity" to "consistency," and he wondered why this was chosen. Dr. Martin replied that it was chosen because as they deliberated "consistency" implied having data and a logical explanation which could be applied uniformly. Mrs. Spencer suggested that line 59 be rewritten so that it was clear that every school would be included.

Mr. Barse noted that they would be developing a data base but the function of having a data base was to have information. However, there might be information that did not qualify as data. He felt that there was a gap between educational programs and the evaluation of the quality of that education. Dr. Martin replied that they had discussed this in depth. She said that while it was true that at any one time one could find some differences their contention was that they had a countywide program which differed because of the characteristics of the staff and the leadership of the principal; however, those were moveable. Mr. Barse stated that he had seen preliminary results of a study regarding testing and one variable was the parental involvement in a given school. He wondered whether they should look at the extent of parental involvement such as the percentage of eligible parents belonging to the PTA and those volunteering for chores in a school. Dr. Martin replied that they had looked at all of these kinds of things, but they were not persuaded that those were decisive or desirable data to put in. Mr. Barse suggested that they revisit this topic.

Mrs. Spencer commented that if they were talking about a 15-year facilities plan they were talking about where the buildings should be placed for 15 years. She said they had the problem of locating the

schools but they also had a different problem regarding the educational program. She thought that they might want to do these in parallel. Mr. Barse pointed out that on the other hand they were being asked to apply criteria which would have an immediate effect. He felt that the quality of education was very relevant. Mrs. Zoe Lefkowitz reported that the groups that met through the MCCPTA forum to study educational programs did not rank it as a primary criteria because programs were moveable. Dr. George Fisher, director of the Department of Educational Facilities Planning and Development, added that in the data base there were a number of elements speaking to program, programs that were to be available in each school at each level. They would also identify all of the continuum education programs. They would also look at the staffing of the school in order to determine the capacity which was in a way a definition of program.

Mrs. Wallace remarked that one of the problems was a people problem because when they got into a school closure there was emotion attached to it. She said there was no way they could look at a group of parents who said they had high test scores and happy children and wondered why they were trying to tamper with this. She felt that people could be translated into program, and she did not know how they could ignore this. Dr. Martin replied that she did not think they could either. She felt there was no reason the data base could not include the elements Mr. Barse had discussed. Mrs. Wallace said they had to examine a school in relation to the other schools, and this was where program became a factor.

Mr. Ewing commented that research on organizational effectiveness had not gotten very far. He said that organizations with similar functions had varying degrees of effectiveness. He thought it was true that programs were portable, but he was not sure that organizational effectiveness was portable. He recalled that when the Board talked about priorities they had decided to look at schools that were achieving success and attempt to make those concepts portable. He said that if one were able to identify the organizational variables that would make a difference in his votes on which schools to close, but he agreed that success was an elusive element in educational and programmatic terms. He remarked that if they didn't say anything about it the communities would say the Board had ignored the only thing that was important which was the quality of the program. Dr. Martin reported that there were school effectiveness studies now and all of them seemed to have identified the same characteristics. They all pointed to the principal and the principal's leadership and capacity to set goals for the school. Mr. Barse asked that the Board be provided with copies of the key research studies on school effectiveness.

The superintendent indicated that the numbers in the draft were debatable. He thought that they were on the low side, but there were others who would take the opposite point of view. Mr. Barse suggested flagging the distinction between minimum numbers and desirable enrollment. Mrs. Zappone inquired about "200 at the elementary school regardless of numbers of grades served." The superintendent replied that they could make that differentiation when they looked at it. He

agreed that a 200 student K-2 was different from a 200 student K-6. He noted that there were some high schools that were built to be small. He said that utilization was a difficult factor and called attention to the glossary which had three different kinds of capacity ratings.

In regard to minority enrollment, Mr. Ewing remarked that one thing that wasn't here was the relationship of the draft policy to others such as quality integrated education and the clusters. He wondered whether staff saw whether there would be changes in the way in which those other policies operated or did this affirm existing policies.

The superintendent replied that it was their intent to reaffirm existing Board policy, but this was not to say that their initial looking at the clusters did not suggest some changes. Mr. Barse pointed out that the initial QIE policy was approved in 1975 and subsequently modified and the cluster action occurred at different times. He thought that they could modify the implementing resolutions in an appropriate way without modifying the policy. The superintendent suspected they would be making recommendations for change as they looked at the clusters.

Mrs. Spencer said that she did not understand the implications for a building not more than 25 years old but in miserable condition. Dr. Fisher replied that they might have a difference of opinion as to the scope of the improvements needed. Mrs. Wallace wondered where they were going to put a school renovated prior to the 25 years and requiring major capital expenditures. Dr. Fisher replied that they would make an adjustment. He said that if there had been a major capital improvement since 1971 it had extended the life of the building. He noted that the bonded indebtedness was in another section of the draft policy. Mrs. Spencer suggested flagging this section.

Mr. Ewing suggested that the language in the section on attendance patterns and section 3-1 on closings needed to be a little clearer. Mrs. Spencer noted that they were now speaking of planning areas which was a major change which should be pointed out to the public. Mr. Ewing felt that the language in lines 92 and 93 should be changed because it could be read another way. Mr. Barse asked whether they did have any estimate of how many schools they were talking about in the identified category. Dr. Fisher replied that they could get it by exact number; however, it was a very large number mainly because of the utilization criteria. Mr. Ewing remarked that "apply criteria consistently" was a guideline to the superintendent, and he did not see it as a guideline to the Board. He thought there needed to be some kind of a piece of the recommendation that came to the Board regarding the application of the criteria.

Mr. Barse asked why it was necessary to use the MNCPPC planning areas, and Mrs. Spencer replied that they had been told by the county executive to use these. Dr. Martin explained that once a school was identified it would be studied and the schools in the planning area would be studied. Mr. Barse wondered what they would do where a

boundary of the park and planning area passed through a senior high school boundary. Dr. Fisher replied that it would be a rare exception where a high school could be addressed in one planning area. Mr. Barse pointed out that they would have the reverse problem because the park and planning area would be larger than an elementary school area. Dr. Fisher indicated that the planners were struggling with this. If they had to look for a solution to a problem, they would try to look within a planning area; however, he agreed that it was not at all a good match at the present. Mr. Ewing said it was important to note that the park and planning areas were drawn so they were consistent with the sub-tracts of the census which would make forecasting information available.

Mrs. Spencer suggested that the section on low enrollment and underutilization might have to be rewritten to make the distinction clear. Mrs. Zappone said that in the same section they did not address the weighting factors. Dr. Martin replied that they would have to consider certain things first. Mrs. Wallace recalled that weighting was going to be used when they had two schools adjacent to one another. She called attention to the section on organization, and Mr. Barse pointed out that it did not give much guidance and direction. Dr. Martin replied that in another section they had information on a variety of organizational patterns. Mrs. Wallace said that if Board members wished to give stronger direction they might want to include this in the policy. The superintendent explained that they were proposing that they maintain some flexibility in organization. Mrs. Wallace thought that organization could be phrased in terms of future changes.

Mrs. Spencer thought that if they wanted the policy to be good for 15 years they might want to leave this more general and change other policies. The superintendent suggested that if the Board did want to have a different pattern of organization they should include it in the policy. Mrs. Spencer thought that the section on busing should be reworded to make the intent clearer. Mr. Barse said he was not clear on the section minimizing operating and capital costs. He wondered about the standard against which the concept of minimization was measured. Dr. Martin said they would look at one solution versus another. Mr. Barse said they really meant they were seeking an option that had the lowest total cost against a group of options. He asked whether they were attempting to merge operating and capital costs together. Dr. Martin replied that they would compute them separately and deal with costs as a whole. Mr. Barse thought that in this section they should spell out the formula.

Mr. Ewing pointed out that actions will be identified for the first five years of the plan. He said that the Board would receive a 15-year plan and actions would be identified for the first five years which would say close Schools A & B in the first year, close C & D in the second year, etc. He said that granted there was provision for an annual review but that kind of five-year decision making was not necessarily what he would call a five-year plan. He said that it raised some important questions about how Boards and the public would be able to sustain this. The superintendent replied that this had

been a major basic point of debate about "lame ducking" schools. Mrs. Wallace wondered what they would do if they said a school was going to close in five years and children were entering kindergarten. Mr. Barse said that on page 10 they had identified an inconsistent process which was an annual review. The superintendent explained that they would check their commitment each year. Dr. Pitt stated that one of the things they debated was what indication they needed to give the state and the county as to where they were going. Mrs. Wallace wondered whether they had to give a school that kind of notice by naming it. Mrs. Lefkowitz replied that during their discussions when there were changes to be made in the five-year plan they hoped that changes could be made in the first two years. Mrs. Spencer pointed out that for schools that were becoming overcrowded they might well be able to do this on a five-year basis.

In regard to an individual or community group wishing to develop an alternative plan, Mr. Ewing asked whether "individual" modified "group." Dr. Martin replied that it did not. Mrs. Spencer said that she liked the idea of the hearing being limited to one hour, and Mr. Ewing indicated that he was opposed to the one hour limit. He said he was wondering about the wording of "appealing the recommended action" because usually appeals followed a decision. He wondered whether or not the staff saw a relationship between the work to be done by the staff and the reduction in the area office staff. Dr. Martin replied that the major work would be done this fiscal year, and they were optimistic that the 15-year plan would be near an action stage. She said that the planning staff would remain the same; however, one of their biggest needs was for data processing because they really did not have a facilities data base. They were concerned as they worked through the area reorganization regarding the timing, and for that reason they were saying phase in the implementation.

Re: Adjournment

The president adjourned the meeting at 10 p.m.

President

Secretary

EA:ml