

Education
Committee Minutes
January 10, 2011

Members present: Steve Lowrance, Joel Street, Pat Hicks, Charles Von Cannon, John Lewis, Gebe Ritchie and Russell Kyte sitting in for Sonja Culler. Richard (Dickie) Renfro was absent due to a death in the family.

Others present: Mayor Leon Humphrey, Dr. Shirley Ellis, Daniel Holder, Dr. Kevin Ward, Noel Church, Jerry McManhan, Bobby Blevins, Kelly Crain, Ronnie McAmis, and other Members of the Carter County School Board as well as concerned citizens.

Steve Lowrance, Chairman of The Education Committee opened the meeting and welcomed all present. The committee met for the first time in 3 years with a goal of putting together a long-range plan for an aging school system. Mr. Lowrance introduced Dr. Shirley Ellis as the Director of Carter County Schools to address the committee.

Dr. Shirley Ellis stated to the committee that it is important to prioritize the needs of the system and to be sure to spend money wisely. There are three things happening in education that are helping to determine how schools should be remodeled or built when projects take place. Factors include new high school requirements, middle school readiness and the effect of technology changes. More space will be required in order to add new computer, biology, physics and chemistry labs. Many challenges are ahead in order for our county to keep up with the changes in education. Carter County is in good shape as far as wiring capabilities but other technology skills need to be addressed. Dr. Ellis pointed out that not all students are coming to school with technological skills. Quality and equitable education is a fundamental right of every child. School buildings must enable the transformation of teaching and learning. Teaching is evolving and relationships with students are changing. Children have deeper modalities of learning, we need to pride those and do the best we can to make sure they learn. We can't control the future but we can help shape it. Dr. Ellis presented the committee with a handout of the Bloom's Level Application.

Steve Lowrance introduced Daniel Holder to give an information report. Daniel Holder, Chairman of The Building Committee, stated that the Board had not been pro active because of the situation with the completion of the jail. Education is changing at a rapid pace and the construction of schools is changing with the future. Mr. Holder reported that the School Board members had attended the annual School Board Conference in Nashville where a nationwide research on Education in America had been presented. The focus was on what the best schools were doing to educate the children. We must determine which direction the County needs to go, what we can afford to do, and what can be done to benefit the students the most in a short amount of time. We should look at school construction from a county wide stand point. Other school systems must be looked at, needs of the students for the future, and what kind of job skills they need to have. Planning for the future of our county schools is precedence. Mr. Holder stated the Board welcomes any help in planning for our schools.

Steve Lowrance asks the School Board if they would be opposed to asking an independent agency to come in and evaluate Carter County Schools to help determine our needs. Mayor Humphrey stated he would support the education system, reiterating Mr. Lowrance's statement on having an independent third

party come in and educate us. There have been commitments made in the past, but we want to make sure when we put that shovel in the ground what we build will serve the county for many years.

Steve Lowrance made the statement that Vocational Education is a great need in our county. A vocational technical school could teach people to work with their hands, provide services for our community and create jobs for others.

Other comments: Jerry McManhan stated that Career Technical Education, Academic Education and Special Education must all work together. Carter County needs skilled workers to bring industry into the county. Charles Von Cannon stated there were many educated people who have come from this county but they have to leave it because we don't have the jobs to keep them here. Gebe Ritchie stated there was a question of staffing a new school with qualified teachers.

NEW BUSINESS - Long range planning, discussions of overcrowding in several schools. Russell Kyte suggested that school consolidation should be considered. Jerry McManhan stated there were pros and cons to consolidating schools, agreeing there does need to be an independent study.

Daniel Holder informed the committee the Board has plans to conduct a work shop in February. The Board would also like to hire an independent firm to study Carter County schools and help craft a long term plan.

Dr. Kevin Ward informed the committee that he and Dr. Ellis had just come from a School Board Meeting where they discussed short term needs. No set plan or outcome as yet, plans to prioritize will be discussed in the next meeting.

OLD BUSINESS -Unaka School Project-plans were made to renovate the Unaka High School instead of building a new school. Valley Forge School Project-property has not been purchased, discussing new ideas for the school.

Other Comments: Noel Church stated the students at the small schools do not receive the funding or the education as some of the bigger schools. Some of the children in the county do not get the same quality of education as others; there is a big gap in the level of technology in the schools. Sports are not important once the student leaves school. Gebe Ritchie stated that the overcrowding occurred at Hunter when they built new classrooms. When the new schools are built will overcrowding become a problem there as well? Joel Street stated we need to get on with our long range plan. Every high school in this county was built before 1960, with understanding that we don't need to jump in head over heels and do it, but there are other things going on in the county that we need to address. We as County Commissioners and the Board of Education need to get a plan and put it on the table. The funds are there and some are going to go to the most important thing that I think Carter County needs to look at and that's our education system. Dr. Kevin Ward stated that his dream for Carter County would be that the value of people's lives and mindset be changed. My vision would be that industry would come in and we could fund our own schools and not need the help of the Federal Government. Transportation has changed a lot in the last 40 years and will play a big part into changing our buildings also. Pat Hicks complemented the Board Members for doing a fine job and stated that he was here to help the school system in whatever way as long as we keep the lines of communication open. Mayor Humphrey stated we need to work as one; otherwise we will not be successful.

Steve Lowrance: Does anyone have any suggestions to hiring an independent agency to conduct the study? Request was made for the School Board to get some figures together, decide on a company to perform the study and bring the information to the next meeting on February 7, 2011.

Other comments were made regarding the cost of a study. Motion to adjourn was made by John Lewis, second by Russell Kyte meeting was adjourned.

Submitted respectively

Debbie Street, Recording Secretary