

TEACHER ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
APRIL 20, 2005 – 3:45 P.M.
SCHOOL BOARD OFFICE

Present were:

Alan Lee	Division Superintendent
Gary Catron	Supervisor of High Schools
Joe Funk	Supervisor of Finance
Belinda Mullins	Supervisor of Middle Schools
Patty Barrett	Greendale Elementary School
Amy Cornett	Patrick Henry High School
Angie Hess	Valley Institute Elementary School
Diana Johnson	Watauga Elementary School
Jane Laoo	High Point Elementary School
Doug Minnick	Washington Co. Technical School
Jeffrey Musick	Rhea Valley Elementary School
Joe Preston	Damascus Middle School
Erin Ruble	Wallace Middle School
Nancy Sheets	Meadowview Elementary School
Melanie Smiley	Abingdon Elementary School
Jeannie Stallard	E. B. Stanley Middle School
Brenda Vernon	Abingdon High School
Linda Waldron	Holston High School
Sandra Wilson	Glade Spring Middle School
Randy Woodward	William N. Neff Center

Dr. Lee welcomed the group saying this will be the last meeting of the school year.

First topic of discussion was attendance. He asked them to tell him how attendance works in their schools and if there are any problems. Responses were:

- Sandra Wilson (Glade Spring Middle): Attendance is going well. There are a few that often do not show up.
- Jeannie Stallard (E. B. Stanley Middle): Middle schools do attendance at the beginning of the school day, so if a student checks in and then out, he/she is counted present. If they could record attendance the same way high schools do, attendance would improve.
- Nancy Sheets (Meadowview Elementary): Overall, attendance is going well. Mr. Cox has done a nice job following through and making the procedures clear to parents. The reason it is working is because it is enforced.
- Linda Waldron (Holston High): When students miss school, they miss instruction time, and it is hard to give a fair assessment of what they have

missed when they come back. They are unable to make up class discussions or presentations.

- Brenda Vernon (Abingdon High): Some of her 9th grade students miss several classes and do not bother to make up the work. This creates a problem for teachers who have to constantly remind them to get their work in.
- Melanie Smiley (Abingdon Elementary): Attendance is not enforced. Some kids in her class have missed several days, and she is not sure what has been done. There needs to be stronger guidelines. They need to know when to make up work and when not to, and parents need to be held accountable for the students.
- Angie Hess (Valley Institute Elementary): There is a student in her class that has missed approximately thirty days. He has been tardy a lot also. Letters have been sent home, and Ms. Fifer has talked to the parents. Parents should be held accountable.
- Diana Johnson (Watauga Elementary): At Watauga, the Guidance Department is responsible for attendance. They make daily calls to parents, home visits, and send letters home. Several students have been referred to the area wide committee. One child has shown improvement since having had to go to court. Attendance can be a full time job, and at the elementary level, it is difficult for the Guidance Department to handle the load. Stiffer court penalties would help.
- Amy Cornett (Patrick Henry High): Mr. Fore has done a good job with attendance. Teachers and the front office staff send letters home after the students miss a certain amount of days. Makeup work is still a problem. A separate person is needed to do attendance to make the system more consistent.
- Jeffrey Musick (Rhea Valley Elementary): Attendance is a parent issue. Teachers follow up and make calls.
- Jane Laoo (High Point Elementary): Attendance works well at High Point. Follow up calls are made. The responsibility falls back to the parents.
- Erin Ruble (Wallace Middle): This school sees repeat offenders. They need more clarification on truancy laws, and the laws need to be stricter. She also suggested that a Resource Officer could speak with the habitual offenders.
- Patty Barrett (Greendale Elementary): Greendale does an attendance award at the end of the year.
- Joe Preston (Damascus Middle): They have repeat offenders at Damascus. Clarification of truancy laws would be good to know.
- Doug Minnick (Technical School): Attendance is a tough job. He handles making the calls and asking the students to do makeup work.
- Randy Woodward (Neff Center): He would like to know that when he turns in a problem with attendance a follow up will be done.

Dr. Lee asked them to think of the number of kids in their classes and tell him the number that appears to be habitual absentees. Responses were:

- Approximately four every class period.
- Five out of ninety.
- Three.
- Six out of one hundred.
- Four out of thirty-nine.
- One out of eighteen.
- Five out of one hundred.
- Three out of seventy-six.
- One out of fifteen.
- Two out of ninety.
- Three out of sixty.
- Three out of eighty-four.
- 2%.

Dr. Lee said that we need to concentrate on those kids who are habitually absent to be sure our attendance rate is 95% or higher. It is very important to make Adequate Yearly Progress.

Ms. Mullins said that she is involved in the attendance meetings after they are referred, and her frustration is with the court system.

Mr. Catron said the court system is a slow process. There is a waiting list for students to enter the Highlands Detention Center. Facilities are limited. Each week he hold two to four meetings on truancy. The handbook clearly defines attendance, and everyone should be aware. He said he had done a ten-year attendance history since 1995, and our attendance rate is as high as it has ever been. It stays around 92-95%. Period by period attendance gives you a true reading. The state policy is followed. The SASI Program is used at the secondary level and is the school system's means of measuring attendance.

Dr. Lee said that this is the last advisory meeting for the school year. He asked how they felt about the advisory meetings and whether they served a purpose. Responses were:

- They are very informative, and she hears a lot of comments from other teachers.
- It is good to see what is going on in other schools.
- They are helpful, and she has enjoyed hearing from other schools.
- It gives her a window, and it is helpful to hear about other schools and the perspectives of other teachers.
- The meetings are very helpful and give an insight into other schools.
- She feels the meetings will prove productive when they see results of suggestions.
- It is beneficial to see what other schools are doing.

- She has enjoyed the experience.
- It has been helpful. One suggestion would be to give prior notice of topics to be discussed.
- It has been very beneficial. She sees profitable things happening from the meetings. It would be helpful to know the topic of discussion prior to the meeting.
- It has opened up a window and allowed her to see other schools in the county.
- It is a wonderful voice.
- It has been helpful, and she feels more connected.
- It is good to get all perspectives.
- It has been beneficial. Any time you get a group together to share ideas and problems, things seem to run smoother.
- It allows us to see we are not alone.

Dr. Lee responded that he would rather have them talk about issues and return to their buildings and share that information with other teachers. He will consider their suggestion of knowing the topic of discussion prior to the meeting.

He informed them that the school division currently had seventy-three elementary school applicants for fifteen jobs. Middle school had sixty-four applicants for eight jobs. The high school level had thirty plus applicants and twelve positions. He asked Mr. Funk to speak about salaries.

Mr. Funk said that he and Dr. Brannon had developed a plan to improve teachers' salaries over a five-year period. By the end of the five-year period, the teachers' salary scale should have years of experience equal to step and make Washington County very competitive with neighboring counties. This will allow us to hire and retain highly qualified teachers.

Dr. Lee gave them an update on health insurance. Health insurance will cost an additional \$926,927 for the next school year, and the school board has voted to pick up the cost increase. There will be no increase in premiums or services, but the deductibles will go up slightly. The current Key Advantage and Cost Alliance will no longer be available, but two new plans with the same coverage, including dental and vision, will be offered. Seminars will be scheduled to educate employees about the plans, and election periods will also be set.

This fall, the Board of Supervisors will be asked to approve the initial phase of the Facilities Plan.

Dr. Lee asked if there were any questions. Responses were:

- How do we come up with the daily attendance rate?

Mr. Catron explained that attendance is tracked through a computer program called SASI. It is computed by the state formula at the end of the day or the beginning of the next day (for the previous day).

Teacher responses continued:

- Do we have a contract with Anthem for health insurance?

Dr. Lee responded that two years ago the School Board, Board of Supervisors and other county entities hired a consultant to look at our health insurance plan. At that time, we found we could get it cheaper but for a lesser plan. Employees indicated they would prefer to keep the current coverage. Region VII superintendents also did a study and found that Anthem was our only choice.

Teacher responses continued:

- If we were not in a group plan, we could get health insurance cheaper elsewhere.
- There is a ninety-day waiting period to opt out of the current plan.
- One concern of this teacher is she feels we should have kindergarten intervention in every elementary school.
- Washington County has increased the eligibility age of retirement to 55.

Dr. Lee responded that the current plan would allow a person to retire at age 50. There are some tax issues that our attorneys are researching, where the IRS could impose a 10% penalty on supplemental retirements taken before age 55. The revised supplemental retirement plan would not allow employees to retire until age 55. When research is complete, everyone will be informed.