

Merger Bulletin

of the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

Issue 3

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools

December 1, 2003

County Commissioners Schedule Third Public Hearing on School Merger December 4 and Begin Discussion on Next Steps

Public Hearing and Potential Discussion Scheduled on School Merger

- December 4** Public Hearing, Gordon Battle Courtroom, 106 East Margaret Lane, Hillsborough, 7:30 p.m.
- December 9** Commissioners' Meeting, Potential discussion on next steps/options to merger, Southern Human Services Center, Homestead Road, Chapel Hill, 7:30 p.m.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools' website on merger: www.chccs.k12.nc.us/merger/

Orange County government's website: www.co.orange.nc.us and click on Merger

Four Commissioners Suggest Merger Alternatives; More Discussion Expected December 9

During a work session on November 11, four of the five Orange County commissioners presented draft plans that outline next steps in the merger discussion.

They expressed interest in further discussion on December 9 after receiving public comment at the third public hearing on merger.

The full proposals are accessible through the websites above.

The proposal from Alice Gordon outlines steps to achieve funding equity through a special countywide tax. Barry Jacobs also proposed a supplemental tax.

Gordon's proposal, if approved by residents countywide, could result in a four-cent tax increase in Orange

County and provide Orange County Schools with about \$1.5 million in additional funds.

The city schools' special district tax rate could be reduced to offset the additional resources. The commissioners would determine the priorities for the countywide school tax.

Gordon also proposed that the two districts increase collaboration. She called for a facilitator to work with the two districts and for an interim report by May 4 in order for meaningful collaboration to occur during the 2004-05 school year. A final collaboration report would outline steps for 2005-06.

(See reverse for more on the plans.)

The Orange County Board of County Commissioners will hold its third public hearing on school merger December 4 at 7:30 p.m. in Hillsborough.

The commissioners held two public hearings on merging the two school systems in October in Chapel Hill and Hillsborough.

Most comments during previous public hearings have opposed merging the two school systems. Many speakers have advocated for more equitable funding to bring in more resources to the Orange County Schools.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro has a district tax which provides \$1167 in additional funds for each student. The Orange County Schools do not operate with a special district tax.

Chamber Calls Rural Orange Boycott Misrepresentation

The Chapel Hill-Carrboro Chamber of Commerce has said a small group of Northern Orange residents has misrepresented sales tax information in calling for a boycott of local businesses.

The Northern Orange group is promoting merger of the two districts.

Sales tax revenues for purchases made anywhere in the county go to support the total county budget, including both school systems on a per student basis. A boycott of Chapel Hill-Carrboro businesses would adversely impact county services and both districts if purchases were made in other counties.

Commission Chair Recruits Bill Friday to Lead Schools Task Force

Jacobs Specifies Collaboration Measures

Commissioner Barry Jacobs' proposal called for a task force to analyze resources and programs, address funding disparities, and outline opportunities for collaboration.

He called for the group to complete its work by July.

In addition to the task force, Jacobs suggested that a consultant review operations of each school system for efficiency.

He further recommended that the building plans (Capital Investment Plans) of both districts include the construction of one shared central office for the two school systems within the next 10 years.

He also suggested that both school boards return by June 1 with a plan to collaborate in these areas:

- a middle college program,
- a single alternative school,
- a joint early childhood program,
- recruitment of Chapel Hill-Carrboro parents to the year-round school program in Orange County,
- student access to courses and programs in the other district if they are not available in their own district and
- student contacts between students in the two districts through ideas such as pen pals and joint projects.

County commission chair Margaret Brown has sought the services of Bill Friday, President Emeritus of UNC, to head up a task force to review both school districts. Madeline Grumet, former dean of the UNC School of Education, would assist the task force along with graduate students in education.

Called the Commissioners' Educational Excellence Task Force, the group was proposed by both Brown and Barry Jacobs. It would be formed to provide a review of both districts and ways to collaborate and share resources to provide equal opportunities across the county for all students.

Carey Recommends Merger Timetable

Commissioner Moses Carey asked his colleagues to decide on merger by February 12. The effective date of merger would be July 1, 2006 or July 1, 2008.

He recommended the appointment of a Citizens Merger Advisory Task Force to recommend a merger plan.

He also suggested that no student in either system would be involuntarily transferred within the first three years after the effective date of merger except to fill the third high school in Chapel Hill and the third middle school in Orange County.

He recommends phasing out the Chapel Hill-Carrboro district tax over a three- or five-year period.

School Board Questions Purview of Task Force

School board members questioned the authority of county commissioners to require joint programs during a preliminary discussion of the commissioners' proposals at the Nov. 20 school board meeting. The item will return for further discussion on Dec. 4 at the board meeting at Chapel Hill Town Hall at 7 p.m.

Supt. Neil Pedersen noted that some of the proposals call for program implementation that has heretofore been within the purview of school boards.

One of the proposals, relocating pre-kindergarten programs in both districts to an early childhood education center, would not preclude the need for new elementary school construction, he said.

In response to a question from a board member, attorney John McCormick noted that the responsibility of the county commissioners is to allocate funds, and the charge of the board of education is to develop educational programs in the district. When pursued through the legal system, the determination has consistently favored school boards' authority to determine educational programs. None of that case law has involved the Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools and Orange County Commissioners, McCormick noted.

Board members expressed interest in having more time to review the commissioners' proposals and requested that the item return for discussion at their next meeting.

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