The Stokes County Board of Education held a Town Hall Meeting on Tuesday, September 30, 2008, at 6:00 p.m., at Nancy Reynolds Elementary School in Westfield.

Board Members Present: Mr. Steve Shelton, Chairman; Mrs. Yvonne Rutledge, Vice-Chairman; Mrs. Sonya Cox, member; Mr. Bill Hart, member; and Ms. Becky Boles, member.

Administration Present: Dr. Stewart Hobbs, Superintendent; Mrs. Donna Boyles, Assistant Superintendent; and Mrs. Ann Robertson, Administrative Assistant.

Dr. Hobbs welcomed everyone and stated that he appreciated their attendance. He shared that he and board members wanted to provide the Nancy Reynolds community with all the information they had on Nancy Reynolds Elementary. He stated that with 100% certainty he and the board did not want to tear the building down. He believed in getting all the information you can before making a decision. He shared that an architect had been hired to complete a study on all eighteen schools in our county. The study looked at factors including capacity, traffic flow, efficiency, and safety. He stated the purpose of tonight’s meeting was to provide the community with the information on their school, give the community two or three weeks to digest the information, and then come back together to see what the community would like to do at Nancy Reynolds Elementary. He stressed that the Board of Education has no money to do anything, but that they are working with the Stokes County Commissioners and hope there will be money to address needs in our county. Dr. Hobbs believes every student in Stokes County is entitled to a facility that is safe, conducive to learning, and that will prepare them for the 21st Century.

Chairman Shelton welcomed everyone to the Board of Education’s Town Hall Meeting. He stated that he had taught at Nancy Reynolds Elementary for eleven years. He shared that the Board of Education had been asked by Stokes County Commissioners if money were available to name the top three needs of the Stokes County School System. Nancy Reynolds Elementary is one of the top three. The Board of Education is at Nancy Reynolds to share options, and to listen to the families of the community. This Town Hall Meeting is being held before discussion has taken place between board members about Nancy Reynolds. Chairman Shelton stated that this current board can not answer questions regarding why things were not done by previous administrations.

Tom Hughes, an architect with sfL+a, presented a powerpoint presentation on the initial findings of the structure of Nancy Reynolds Elementary School. Afterward, Dr. Hobbs shared that when Nancy Reynolds Elementary was built in 1927, a ditch was dug out and bricks were laid. The school has no foundation. He also explained that the school’s foundation walls are leaning inward, while also pulling away from the roof. He stated that an architect who completed the study was able to stick a screwdriver into the foundation’s mortar and it is nothing but sand. He stressed that the building is not going to fall tomorrow, but that it needs attention. Dr. Hobbs also elaborated on Mr. Hughes’ concern with the school’s retaining wall. The wall is in deteriorating condition, due to water damage, and needs to be replaced. NCDOT officials have told Stokes County Schools that if the wall is
replaced it will have to be moved back 16 feet. That move will put the wall right at the waste water treatment field. It will cost millions to relocate the drainage field. Dr. Hobbs also explained that if a new school was built on the current site, students would have to be relocated for two years.

Questions and Comments of Nancy Reynolds Community:

Several citizens believed that the wall can be grandfathered and repaired in its exact location. (Dr. Hobbs shared that he was reporting what the school system had been told by NCDOT. He stated that if DOT were willing to grandfather the wall’s location, the school system would need that in writing from NCDOT.)

Several voiced concerns that the Stokes County Board of Education and the Stokes County Commissioners had not invested money into Nancy Reynolds Elementary. (Chairman Shelton stated that this current board could not answer for previous administrations. He reminded citizens that the Stokes County Commissioners had requested the top three priorities of the Board of Education and it is the Commissioners intention to give the school system the money for those top three. Nancy Reynolds is one of the three, and if the money becomes available, Nancy Reynolds will be a project.)

Several community members stated that Nancy Reynolds Elementary was given free and clear to Stokes County. The county does not have a dime in the investment process. This would be the first time county money would be invested in this school and they wanted their current school brought up to code. (Mr. Hughes stated that it was possible, but that it would take money. Dr. Hobbs explained that it would take millions of dollars to renovate the building, and he wanted the community to be aware of that.)

Citizens questioned the selection process of architectural firms and asked who had actually looked at Nancy Reynolds Elementary. (Dr. Hobbs explained that eight architectural firms had been interviewed and sfL+a had been the company retained to perform the study on all eighteen schools in Stokes County. He also stated that another firm specializing in historical renovations had been retained to complete a study on Nancy Reynolds. This second firm requires a $13,000 payment, before any work is completed. At this time, the Board of Education has not asked the firm to complete their study. He also shared that Jerry Moorefield, an engineer from Stokes County had examined the building.)

Community members who spoke were not in favor of a new school being built and the current elementary building being given to the community for their use as a community building.

Questions were asked about possible growth studies and meeting the future capacity needs of Nancy Reynolds Elementary. (Dr. Hobbs explained a school’s capacity and core capacity and
designing a school around the core capacity. He stated that if a new school was constructed for Nancy Reynolds the core capacity would be for 250 students. He also addressed questions regarding a growth study and shared that the Board of Education had an intensive study completed by a department of NC State. He shared that reliable numbers can only be projected out about three years.)

At a citizen’s request, board members acknowledged that they had heard the concerns and desires of the Nancy Reynolds community.

Some Nancy Reynolds citizens expressed their desire to keep the original 1920’s core section of Nancy Reynolds Elementary. They were willing for the wings and the back of the school to be replaced.

In closing, Dr. Hobbs stated that what he heard from community members is that they want their current school renovated to meet the needs of the students. He warned citizens that architects and engineers would have to complete an intensive study to determine what could be done and what it would cost. The study will take months to complete and will not be cut and dry. He thanked everyone for their attendance and stated that he would get information to them as quickly as possible.

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Secretary     Chairman