

INVOCATION

Commissioner Mendenhall delivered the invocation.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT-GOVERNING BODY-PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

Chairman Nickelston invited those in attendance to join the Board in the Pledge of Allegiance.

GENERAL GOVERNMENT – GOVERNING BODY – APPROVAL OF AGENDA

Chairman Nickelston entertained a motion to approve or amend the June 10th Agenda.

Commissioner Mendenhall moved to approve the June 10th Agenda as presented.

Commissioner Barneycastle seconded the motion.

Chairman Nickelston opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

With no discussion the agenda was unanimously approved.

Chairperson Knight stated that the Board of Education would adopt the Agenda as presented.

Board Member Bryant moved to approve the adopted the Agenda as presented.

Vice-Chairperson Robertson seconded.

Chairperson Knight opened the floor for discussion/questions/comments.

With no discussion the Agenda was unanimously approved.

Presentation of the Board of Education's Budget Request

Chairman Nickelston turned the floor over to Superintendent Dr. Brad Rice.

Superintendent Dr. Brad Rice presented the School Budget Request beginning with School Current Expense Budget of \$14,981,977.00.

Dr. Rice reviewed six new requests that he listed in priority order:

- Two Technology Engineer Positions
 - These are at \$184,000. We have had the same technology staff for years. When I came on board five years ago, we had 400 chrome books at North Stokes High

School. Since then, we have them for every Kindergartener thru Twelfth-Grader. With the increase in technology, we're looking at adding two positions.

- One Maintenance Position
 - We have some maintenance people that are getting ready to retire. Some of those are skilled positions like a Locksmith. We're looking to bring in a Carpenter I position to be that apprentice that can help us in that transition, so we won't have to contract out.
- Increase the Certified/Classified Supplement from 4% to 5%.
 - This will make us more competitive with surrounding counties.
- One Coordinator – MTSS (Multi- Tiered System of Support) and Grant Writer
 - We received that mandate and we put that “coordinator” title on several people.
 - We're looking to add this position and pair it with a Grant Writer. Hopefully, this position will bring in enough money to offset the cost.
- Two Instructional Coach Positions (Elementary and High School)
 - We've had these positions in the past but we had to cut in previous budgets. We're looking to restore one at the Secondary level and one at the Elementary level.
- Part-time Public Information/Marketing Position/Contract Service
 - We constantly have new people to compete with for school services. Currently, our HR Director is our Public Information Officer. Hopefully, with an increase in ADM, that would help offset those expenses in the future. We've tried to do some things with some marketing videos. I don't know if you've seen the one recently that South Stokes put out and they did a great job, but that one was about \$1500. Think about that for 19 schools, someone in marketing could help offset that cost.

Dr. Rice commented:

- Those are our new requests in addition to our normal budget we've had in the past plus some cost of living added expenses.

Dr. Rice opened the floor for any comments/questions/discussion.

Chairperson Knight commented:

- They are all very much needed items.
- Thank you to the County Commissioners for always supporting the students in the county.
- I also want to thank our teachers, students, parents, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, and all of our staff who have endured this last year and half with the pandemic.
- As far as these new request items go, I may would move number six up a few steps. That's very big right now, we did lose some ADM. As far as when the mask mandates hit, some parents went elsewhere for education.

- I do think the marketing position is very important going forward. That is much needed, but so are every other one of these items.
- They can definitely help our students and staff and keep Stokes County good and successful.

Vice Chairperson Robertson commented:

- Thank you to Lynette Moore and Dr. Rice for their work and for helping put this budget together.
- All parts of the budget are important parts. We do feel like we have a good budget, old requests and new requests.
- We do appreciate your consideration of the budget.

Board Member Bryant commented:

- Thank you for having us here today. Dr. Rice and Ms. Moore and all of their staff have really done a good job.
- One thing that is dear to me, is number three, that five percent increase.
- Our employees are really underpaid in our school system.
- We have maintenance people making about \$20,000 less than they should be making.
- We really need the maintenance position. We have a guy retiring and we have to fill that as soon as possible with that trade.
- Our technology and engineer position, we definitely need that. The staff are working themselves to death.
- I don't see anything on there that we were being conservative about.
- We need more than that, but we are trying to do the best that we can.
- Our students deserve the best education they can get and it's our job to make sure that they get it. We can't do it without you.

Board Member Messick Commented:

- I would also like to thank Ms. Moore and Dr. Rice for getting together our budget every year.
- All things we have here and have asked for, we feel that we need for the next year.
- Thank you to the County Commissioners and County Manager Jake Oakley for supporting Stokes County Capital Outlay and Current Expense budget in the past years.
- The requests I feel are most important in my mind:
- Increasing the certified/classified supplement from four percent to five percent.
- This request benefits all personnel and makes our system competitive with surrounding systems our size.
- We need the funds from the current expense to maintain all the personnel we have now.
- Need support for the resource officers because the matching grant would come from local money.
- I'd like to see the firefighter academy funded throughout the year. This is potentially a huge benefit to our community.
- Need additional social workers to help our students with the emotional and social needs to bridge from our schools to our families.

- The really need the two technology/engineer positions for local school monitoring and managing network needs for all the technology.
- Please consider the request for two additional instructional coaches, or teacher coaches.
- At present, our teacher coaches have about three schools each and this isn't as effective as I would like.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- Thanks everybody for working together.
- Technology/engineer positions. These are the positions that have to help students and their parents get that county-issued back online, so they can continue learning.
- Maintenance position. Right now, our locksmith is 67. If he decides tomorrow he doesn't want to come to work, that \$43,000 becomes \$75,000 in contracted service. We can keep it in house and get a better rate.
- Increased certified supplement from four to five percent. Four percent was the basement and we were the only ones there. Five percent is what the surrounding counties already offer and we need to hold par with them.
- MTSS, another Raleigh mandate that is unfunded. It takes 30 hours a day, so we decided to look at that and a grant writer position.
- The grant writer, if you can help us get the money, that \$70,000 could very easily become \$300,000 which would come back to you all later.
- Instructional coach. These allow us to build a bridge to help students and build that team.
- The public information marketing position. You need to go to the website and look at South Stokes. We have great product and we have to sell it.
- We need to hire someone so that people know how good Stokes County is or our ADM is going to continue to drop.

Dr. Taylor presented the Schools Capital Outlay Request.

Dr. Rice commented:

- The first several items most years are on there with emergencies, fall protection floors, those reoccurring expenses.
- We added band equipment this year and look to add it as a reoccurring expense.
- I'd like to draw your attention to number six. Smart Boards are getting obsolete at this point.
- Looking at a four-year replacement plan for SmartBoards.
- Presentations and surveys with staff to figure out what type they want to go with.

Dr. Taylor noted that this request is reflective of the five year plan.

Chairman Knight commented:

- All of these are much needed.
- Heating systems, monitoring systems, etc. can fall under safety needs. Aging buildings and lots of needs.
- Dr. Rice pointed out a few items that stand out. We haven't touched band equipment in almost 40 years.

- The money to the struggling band staff needs to increase if we want to keep those programs intact.
- Thanks Dr. Taylor for all of his hard work in this and the maintenance staff.

Dr. Taylor commented about his team looking at safety, energy efficiency, and roof needs. He continued to highlight some major needs of the school system.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- Are there any tracks that are still out of order? That are not used at all.

Dr. Rice responded:

- Chestnut Grove's is not being used and will never be used for an official track meet due to the way it is laid out.

Chairman Rogers responded:

- We can't fix every track. We are trying to get every high school track in good shape and then we will have the middle school track meets there.

Board Member Messick commented:

- I'm glad we were able to repair West Stokes' track. Chestnut Grove has not been able to have a track meet at their school even before I got on the board. It's a really important sport for a lot of students.
- Of course, roofs are important for school. We don't want children sitting there in a leaky building.
- Ricky has been really astute in going around and making sure things are safe, but when he brings something to us that is in need, then we all really need to look at and get things repaired that we can.

Commissioner Mendenhall asked Chairman Nickelston that we proceed with the same protocol and order as the Board of Education and Administration did.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- Made a good point about the roofs leaking. That's one thing that over time if you don't fix, it will cause a bigger mess and be more expensive to fix.
- I get emails all of the time that we need more in our schools and we need more in our county.
- I do agree and the thing we are sitting here faced with is money.

Vice Chair Cox commented:

- Thank you for coming today.
- I want to commend you all for the job you've done and with COVID.
- Is that the plan next year is to have the online academy? For those that do not want to come into the classroom, they can do it all online?

Dr. Rice commented:

- We have not set up a straight online academy. We've not gone that direction at this time because we have such small schools and we don't want to risk closure.
- We have flexibility and ability to do that and create clusters of classrooms if needed.
- Hopefully, we're to that point that it won't be needed as much. We do have the skills, technology, and experience to make it happen though.

Vice Chairman Cox commented:

- That I can see, especially in elementary schools, would be tough.
- I'm not a big proponent of it myself, I think kids need to be in the classroom.
- I also get we are living in different times and people have different concerns.

Dr. Rice responded:

- In high school, we're more equipped to make it work with virtual public school and different options.
- K-3rd grade, I'm not sure as the superintendent if I support it educationally.
- It's not an educationally sound model unless you have that special parent.
- In those early grades, it's extremely difficult to get a quality education.

Vice Chairman Cox commented:

- Do the bands still do as much fundraising as they used to?
- Is that where they typically get the money to buy the equipment?
- I know it's really expensive though.

Board Member Messick responded:

- It's so expensive and you're seeing fewer people take band because the instruments, they have to rent or buy them.
- People just aren't able to afford that, unless they are musically inclined or they really want their child in band.
- We see the band getting smaller and smaller.
- We need some band equipment every year.
- Right now, they're getting a little money for each school for repairs and kids are not that protective if it's not their equipment.
- I imagine your fundraising is being impacted if the number of students taking band is decreasing.

Vice Chairman Robertson commented:

- Fundraising for the bands has been pretty good but some of those instruments are very expensive.
- Some people don't realize for the sheet music, they have to pay the copyright fees just to play the music at concerts or marching bands. That can be several thousand dollars a year.
- We should give them a little more money every year, reoccurring.
- Middle school is not very strong at all as far as band boosters.
- Some students would love to play in band but their parents can't afford it.
- We need to provide for it if we are going to offer it.

Board Member Messick commented:

- Someone has to pay for band competitions and for the children to go. We provide the transportation most of the time, but there are a lot of costs associated.
- Some of the fundraiser money helps, but it also goes to other things.

Dr. Rice responded:

- The capital money for the instruments has been neglected and it will help to do reoccurring.
- This is a drop in the bucket, but something is better than nothing.

Vice Chairman Cox commented:

- Piggybacking on what Mr. Rogers said about the teacher coaches positions.
- My daughter has enjoyed her job this year immensely. The biggest thing is feeling like you're being pulled in all different directions and feeling like each school needs you there more than you're there.
- Adding a position and having these coaches not being spread so thin, I think is a tremendous asset.
- They can be so much more effective if they only had two schools instead of three.
- Is there anything in your budget that specifically speaks to addressing ransomware?

Dr. Rice responded:

- It's not an increase, but we have line items in our budget.
- We're fighting one end and protecting ourselves on the other.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- Leadership in our IT is basically what we're getting at.
- We're contacting and working closely with Forsyth Tech to get eight to ten recent graduates.
- These kids are coming out of Forsyth Tech and we are encouraging them to look Stokes County residence.
- Gone through Forsyth Tech and gotten their degree, now they're ready to enter the workforce.
- The money is only for three years. But, our intention is, now we've got a local product that has just graduated and has three year's worth of working in IT for Stokes County Schools to add to their resume to help attract more business because now we have a workforce in Stokes County.
- Although it's only eight to ten, but it's a great stepping stone to the next level.
- They come in knowing it's a three year position, but it's a three year gold star on their resume and we just need somebody to oversee that.

Vice Chair Cox commented:

- Will it cut down on any of your contracted services?

Dr. Rice responded:

- Yes

Board Member Knight commented:

- What a huge help to our media coordinators and librarians that wear many hats with testing and juggling all these technology issues they were hit with during the school year.
- To know that they can call on these folks or have them rotate and be stationed at different schools will be a huge asset.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- We have received our amount that we'll be getting from the American Rescue Plan. Could you tell me how much the school system is getting out of that?

Dr. Rice responded:

- \$13,394,488

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- You have predictions and guidelines for what you can use it for.
- One of the things we could use our money on was broadband.
- Is that one of the things the school system can use it on?

Dr. Rice commented:

- For the school systems, it wasn't limited to the county.
- The money that came in to the school systems, the state held back 10% of it and we got 90% of it.
- The state had to use that 10% for broadband connectivity.
- There were things we could use it for technology that we have looked at, not specifically for broadband.
- We looked at tech assistance, that Mr. Rogers talked about with getting recent grads from Forsyth Tech to do the troubleshooting and when things break in the school that we have.
- That's where we have designated ours out of that.
- The State had it set aside for broadband for us out of the money that was filtered to us.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Technology is one of the things that we emphasized on the committee I'm on for Forsyth Tech.
- Were you all asking for \$75,000 for payment of officials?

Dr. Rice responded:

- We looked at increasing our budget \$75,000 this year and next year, we did it through local money to help our athletic programs with up \$20,000 in reimbursements to our high schools each for officials and travel.
- Then, \$5,000 for the middle school level.
- We were extremely limited in the number of people that could come to games.
- Official cost and travel cost were the same, but our income was severely limited at those levels.

- The Board agreed to designate \$75,000 in local funds to offset that in reimbursement.
- For what they spend on travel and officials, we will repay up to \$20,000 for each high school and we looked at that again for next year if it's needed.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- I was very worried for limitations this year.
- I'm hoping we can get to where that is eliminated because it's just not the same.

Dr. Rice commented:

- They are behind financially, and they will be for a while.
- The loss of games, the loss of fans that came to games.
- Our athletic program is going to be hurting for years to come.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- The other component is that basketball and football have been major money producing sports.
- That \$75,000 doesn't even refer to football recertification.
- Helmets have to be recertified every year, refinished every year, and after ten years have to be totally replaced.
- Those aspects are not even touched.
- You can't have a marching band fundraiser if you don't have a football game.
- You can't have an athletic booster that would help with uniform cost, if you can't have a football game.
- The referees are charging full price whether there is anyone there or not.

Dr. Rice commented:

- We were elected on what we could do with concessions, it had to be prepackaged.
- Around here, the money making is in the home-cooked food
- The amount of money these booster clubs lost is unbelievable from concessions.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- On your capital, you have 37 or 38 items listed. I'm assuming they are in priority order.
- It's a \$598,200 increase from last year.
- Over \$2,122,600 for capital.
- I always put safety items first.
- We get mandates from the state yet they don't want to pay for it.

Commissioner Barneycastle commented:

- What year did they give the four percent raise?

Dr. Rice responded:

- A year and a half ago.

Chairman Nickelston:

- The Winter of 2018-2019.

Dr. Rice commented:

- They froze the supplement.
- The supplement had been four percent for a long time, but then in 2012-2013 to balance the budget, they froze the supplement based on the pay of 2013.
- It was up to about 3.3 % when the Board made it whole and put it back.
- It was an increase for the employees, but it made it up to the whole four percent.

Vice Chairman Cox commented:

- When I was on the Board it went from 3 ½ to 4 percent, so around the year 2000.

Commissioner Barneycastle commented:

- Has there been a decrease in the number of kids since COVID as far as coming back to school?

Dr. Rice responded:

- We have. We've lost a couple hundred kids.
- A lot of that had to do with masks. When the masks go away, they will come back.

Commissioner Barneycastle commented:

- As far as the list of 38, you have ten roofs listed.
- How did we get that many that need to be repaired at one time?

Dr. Rice commented:

- Every year they go and they check the roofs and we project the ten worst roofs that need to be repaired.
- Some of them can just take another band-aid and maybe get another year out of it.
- Those are the ten in priority order that will need to be replaced in the next several years.
- We slot them into our budget.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- Part of the way we got there is because there for a while, our capital expense budget from the county was \$300,000.
- One roof at South was \$330,000.

Vice Chairman Robertson commented:

- Plus, our schools are getting so old there's a whole set of issues we will have to deal with too.
- Sooner or later we will have to deal with it.

Dr. Rice commented:

- When you look at our budget, the number one thing on it that we make sure is on there every year is the \$100,000 for emergencies.
- When you have nineteen buildings, that's a realistic number.

- The things that pop up is \$100,000 and that's half the capital one year that we had was just for emergencies.

Dr. Rice commented:

- There are a lot of needs for a lot of our older buildings.
- Our youngest high school, West Stokes, is 21 years old.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- The money proposed by the County Manager to fund the capital request, is that all money passed through that has to go to the school system?

Finance Director Edwards responded:

- Yes, we hold it and it has to go to them eventually.

Commissioner Morris inquired about a sheet Finance Director Julia Edwards passed out containing federal and state money granted to the schools. Dr. Rice responded and gave an overview of the information included in the sheet.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I'm trying to understand the outside funds that were available and how they can be used versus based on what we are going to fund you guys.

Dr. Rice responded:

- The state funds are designated for COVID-related expenses to get our schools up and running.
- Whether part of that was for child nutrition as they lost money this year, cleaning supplies, the extra hours that went into that, the overtime pay, the extra people we had to put on staff.
- A lot of that came out of the state money.
- We're trying to use that proactively.
- One of the line items that it specifically stated was that it could be used for window replacement.
- Knowing the age of our buildings and the energy efficiency, we look to designate about a million out of our 13.3 for window replacements.
- It all has to tie directly to COVID or learning loss due to COVID.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- Our population has lost basically a year in the classroom but at least a year and a half worth of education.
- We looked at options for additional tutors for those that didn't have broadband or the home structure that would allow them to stay caught up.
- We are trusting the schools to spend it how they will get the most bang for their buck.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- If you will talk to us if you see that you will lose any of the COVID money.

- We can work together and make sure we don't lose any of that money.
- If at all possible, given what all of the restrictions are.

Dr. Rice commented:

- They gave us the \$13.3 million.
- The Board sat together and looked at the needs we could use it on.
- We got up to 17 or 18 million, then we had to cut it back down to 13 million.
- We've got about seven million in our heads that if something becomes an unallowable expense, we have other things to put it towards.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- Are you also getting money from the American Rescue Plan.

Dr. Rice responded:

- That is what those funds are from, they are federal funds.
- The state had given us some money first and that's what we used to get us up and running and that's gone.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- On the current expense, how did you go about prioritizing?

Dr. Rice commented:

- They are all of high priority, it just depends on the day which one is the highest priority.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- On number six, where it says Public Information Officer, it also says contract services. What is that?

Dr. Rice commented:

- That would be hired contracted services that would be able to assist us.
- Maybe finding someone who is retired.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- Since we increased the supplement, we had asked you to start the monitoring for your turnover trend.
- Have you had enough time to establish a trend?

Dr. Rice responded:

- Not with COVID, because it has forced some people into retirement.
- I don't think it would be an accurate assessment.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- #4, the multi-tiered system is a mandate. Is that right?

Dr. Rice commented:

- Yes, we have to have MTSS and we have to have full implementation of it.
- We have to coordinate that and teach the administrators what to do.
- It's an unfunded mandate.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- If we took that in conjuncture with a grant writer and we hope this collaboration continued.
- Our goal is to find a lot of grants and sometimes there may be a matching grant.
- If it makes sense to match funds then we will come to you, if it doesn't, then that isn't a grant we will pursue.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- On the current expense fund balance, we had discussions about keeping that around 350.
- I think Julia told me it was around 800 something now, is that right?

Finance Director Edwards commented:

- It is \$229,898 unassigned per your audit.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- So, is that just money that is sitting there that could be used for some of these things you guys are requesting?

Dr. Rice commented:

- That was unassigned as of the last audit we had in 2020.
- We have gotten into some of that, but Lynette will be very cautious about fund balance for the next audit because of the unpaid bills that have yet to come in.
- Potentially, yes, if it's still there at this point.

Board Member Messick commented:

- I would bet that we have the lowest fund balance of any school system in our area.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- Even if that's the case, the County is still on the hook to back you up if you need it.

Board Member Messick commented:

- We still need a fund balance because all school systems have those.
- We have been draining our fund balance a lot.
- It's an uneasy feeling to have such a low fund balance.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- We need to take that into consideration.
- We all agreed that 350,000 is the right amount to keep there

Dr. Rice commented:

- That is the absolute lowest it needs to be.

- It's difficult to plan a school year when you're looking at classes that maybe you need an extra teacher or maybe not.
- If we don't get funding for that one or enrollment hops down a little bit and we lose \$60,000, then we are broke or in the red.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I'm open to discussing that if that is what it should be.
- The general statute says that we are on the hook to cover your burdens.
- It's not like you don't have it, it's just what is the logical amount you need from year to year.

Dr. Rice commented:

- The Board of County Commissioners recommends for you all to have a certain level?

Commissioner Morris responded:

- Yes, three months operating costs.

Finance Director Edwards commented:

- The LGC says that.
- The general statute says around eight percent.

Dr. Rice commented:

- Eight percent for us would be a lot more than \$350,000, but we don't have that written for school boards.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- If we go under eight percent, the state takes over.
- They take every decision-making process.

Dr. Rice commented:

- I believe they are saying that is good fiscal management to have at least eight percent.
- We don't have eight percent.

Chairman Knight commented:

- One chiller and one stove. We dealt with that over this year and it was \$300,000.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- Our proposed budget has a 16 percent fund balance in it and I guarantee you that's not three months operating expense.
- The two are tied to each other.
- If we give you a low amount of money, we need to have more in our fund balance.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- I agree, and I think a big part of our concern is the age of our buildings.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- I actually think you are allowed to use your current expense fund balance before capital.

Dr. Rice responded:

- If we had to.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- One thing we need to explore is we should have a fund balance in our four-cent fund.
- We talked about expanding the use of that four-cent fund to do stuff with the buildings.
- To maintain buildings and do remodeling and so forth.
- Whatever that fund balance is, we need to make sure to factor that in.
- Do you know what the fund balance is for that four-cent fund?

Finance Director Edwards responded:

- \$2,000, 544 is the four-cent fund balance estimation.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- That fund balance is in place to take care of several contingencies, so it has to stay at a pretty high level.

Board Member Messick commented:

- That is technically the school's money, it couldn't be spent for anything else?

Commissioner Morris commented:

- The commissioners have the authority to change that at any point, but they haven't.
- We can expand the use of it if I remember correctly.
- We can't take any chance of it not being able to cover the debt or the contingencies.
- In the budget message it will say we have a 62-cent tax rate and we will spend this percentage of it for the county and this percentage for the schools.
- Under the old system that percentage would have shifted for what percentage you are spending on the county and what you are spending on the school. It still just stays at 31 – 31 though?
- Even though we split it into two funds, that fund balance and the school's half of that is not automatically funded for schools. It really is part of the general fund balance.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- Since attendance was down a little bit, are there any schools looking to drop below the 100?

Dr. Rice responded:

- We have several in the ballpark of that but are not projected to go below that 100.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- Do you see it going back up come Fall because of COVID?

Dr. Rice commented:

- That's certainly the hope, that if the restrictions are relieved, students will come back.
- The younger kids don't have the ability to be vaccinated yet.
- It has been an increased burden on families paying for private school.

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- We had one commissioner to bring up about the amount of schools, about numbers in the schools.
- There's a lot of people asking why the School Board is asking for more money when there is less to do?

Dr. Rice responded:

- That would be a great formula to use if expenses were not going up.
- The reality is that it costs more than it did before.
- If we had that larger number of students, then we'd be asking for even more money.

Board Member Rogers commented:

- \$2.1 million for capital expense. Not one facility less than 20 years old listed here.
- We've got elementary schools that are 70 years old.

Dr. Rice commented:

- At some point, some of those elementary schools are going to have to be buried.
- What we haven't brought in years is that new construction cost because we know it will take away from this money to pay them back.
- We have nine to ten more years of debt on the books right now that we are working to get off.

Chairman Knight commented:

- Then, either you build something back in the place where you buried that elementary school, or you have an empty building sitting there that the county will have to maintain.

The Board of Commissioners and the Board of Education discussed the future of schools in Stokes County followed by their goals and vision for them.

Vice Chairman Robertson commented:

- We have to have a plan and make those hard decisions as leadership for the County.
- We need to start with getting our schools in better shape, whether that is building a new school or consolidating schools.
- I'd like to ask Commissioner Mendenhall, he has been in the school system and is on the commissioner side now. What would his be his recommendations?

Commissioner Mendenhall commented:

- Ultimately, the Board of Education made the decision of closing Francisco.

Dr. Rice commented:

- When there are less than 100 kids in the school, the decision is just about made for you.

Chairman Nickelston commented:

- Dr. Rice, have you and your staff looked at anything like that?
- For consolidating schools, what the cost would be or seems to be.

Dr. Rice responded:

- The cost savings is not a ton in this regard.
- If you have 100 kids in a school, you have more combo classes, more teacher isolationism, nurses coming one day a week to a school.
- If you consolidate, you still have the same number of nurses.
- You may save on heating and air, some on insurance, etc.
- In the grand scheme of thing, it is not earth-shattering numbers.
- You'll still have to pay for a new school, portable units to house and educate them.
- We can either increase funding and serve kids at a high quality in a less efficient manner.
- Or, we can consolidate schools and potentially lose customers from the school being further from their house and make another decision.
- I'm not going to say that saving money is more important than educating our kids in a quality manner.

Vice Chairman Robertson commented:

- Parents do pay attention to those choices and the options that are available to educate their children.

County Manager's Recommendation

County Manager Oakley presented the recommendation for the School Budget. (The recommended Budget and attachments presented at the meeting will be attached at the conclusion of the minutes)

County Manager Oakley introduced the new Clerk to the Board, Amber Brown.

County Manager Oakley commented:

- When I look through the budget and see the technology, the maintenance position, MTSS, and instructional coaches, I look at that as you guys know what is needed in schools.
- I'm not going to sit here and say that you don't need this assistant, you don't need this grant writer, because that is what you all are for.
- I don't look at cutting anything like that.
- I did look at the four percent and the five percent. We went through a salary study, we need to consider our teachers too.
- I looked at what COVID has done to us and what the schools need because of that.
- I commend the School Board, Dr. Rice, and our teachers.
- I'm not going to sit here and say what you do or don't need. You know what is needed in the schools.

- As far as your capital expense, I looked at your feasibility study and the priorities matched what was in the budget request.
- The money came from the reevaluation and increased the amount of revenue we had while leaving the tax rate alone.
- It increased the revenues about two million dollars.
- From that, Julia and I were able to meet your demands and could give you what you all requested.
- The reevaluation comes every four years.
- We don't raise the tax rates around here, but the cost of living still happens.
- It's a cost of living that the reevaluation is needed for adjustments or we will have to raise the tax rate in order to pay for that increase.
- It's tremendous what our county government is doing with these funds and with the tax dollars we are collecting. There are so many services that we provide.

Board Discussion

Chairman Nickelston opened the floor for any discussion/questions/comments.

Commissioner Morris commented:

- The American Rescue Plan Act funding, the thirteen million.
- Is that primarily capital stuff you want to do with it?

Dr. Rice responded:

- No sir. Learning loss is a big part of that.
- The final testing numbers have not come in yet. Kids in summer school are covering credits.
- We have had more failures than ever before, so we are trying to get our kids caught up.
- Anything to get caught up. Whether that is summer school, tutoring, or additional math one classes.
- We are using that to refresh the chrome books that we have been using.
- The chrome books went into North Stokes five years ago. Anyone that knows technology, knows that they are on their last legs.
- It's also to help supplement the money for the smartboards.
- We are looking at counselors because of the social-emotional side of this.
- Unfortunately, Stokes County is one of the top suicide rates in the state.
- I've been advocate to get our kids back in school because they were suffering and they're still suffering.
- It goes with a lot of things but has to be coded related to COVID.

Adjournment

With no further business to come before the Board, Chairman Nickelston entertained a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Mendenhall made a motion to adjourn.

Commissioner Barneycastle seconded.

Chairman Nickelston opened the floor for any discussion/questions/comments.

With no discussion, the motion carried unanimously.

Chairman Knight entertained a motion to adjourn.

Board Member Rogers made a motion to adjourn.

Board Member Bryant seconded and the motion carried unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:28 pm.



Amber Brown

Clerk to the Board



Andy Nickelston

Chairman