

**MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF  
THE JACKSON BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND  
THE JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION  
HELD ON JANUARY 31, 2023**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Meeting with the Jackson County Board of Education on January 31, 2023, 6:00 p.m., at Southwestern Community College, Burrell Building, 447 College Drive, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:

Jackson County Board of Commissioners:

Mark Letson, Chairman	Don Adams, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	Heather C. Baker, County Attorney
Mark Jones, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
John Smith, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board
Tom Stribling, Commissioner	

Jackson Board of Education:

Elizabeth Cooper, Board Chair	Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent
Wes Jamison, Vice Chair	Jacob Buchanan, Assistant Superintendent
Abigail Clayton, Board Member	Ashley Leonard, Board Attorney
Kim Moore, Board Member	Jason Watson, Director of Operations
Dr. Lynn Dillard, Board Member	Kristie Walker, School Finance Officer
	Cora Fields, Clerk to the Board

Ms. Cooper called the meeting of the Board of Education to order and noted there would be no public comment at the meeting.

Mr. Jamison moved to approve the agenda. Ms. Moore seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Ms. Cooper led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Chairman Letson called the meeting of the Board of Commissioners to order.

Commissioner Jones moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Stribling seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Chairman Letson noted that there would be no voting or decisions being made at the meeting. This was the first time the Commissioners would see some of the information. This would be a learning phase.

**(1) BUDGET INFORMATION:** Dr. Ayers presented:

**(a)** Capital: \$1,455,700 - total capital budget for Jackson County Public Schools (JCPS):

- \$335,000: Capital Outlay
- \$375,000: C.O. Preventative Maintenance
- \$400,000: Capital Outlay Technology
- \$320,700: Capital Outlay One to One
- \$ 5,000: Capital Outlay Security
- Jackson County and the Board of Commissioners provided the funding source.
- One to One was the single most-costly item they expended money on for capital.

**(b)** Operations: \$8,600,097 - total operations budget for JCPS. This did not include the additional \$455,300 set aside recently awarded.

- Jackson County and the Board of Commissioners provided the funding source.
- Salaries were the single most-costly item they expended money on for operations.

*Informational item.*

**(2) PRIORITIES AND DISCUSSION:** Dr. Ayers presented:

**(a)** Several years ago, the JCPS Board of Education members created a priority list. This list was updated at their last work session and included the following items:

- The egress projects were the top priority and were currently in progress, near completion.
- 1. Cafeteria and classrooms at Fairview
- 2. Traditional middle school
- 3. ADA upgrades/concession stand at SMHS stadium
- 4. Track on Jones Street property
- 5. New bus garage on current site
- 6. Erosion control at Scotts Creek\*
- 7. Blue Ridge gym with performance space
- 8. Softball field upgrades at Webster\*

\* These projects could be removed from the priority list if a traditional middle school became a reality.

**(b)** School info: The following dates were for each school's original construction and do not include additional buildings:

- 1975: Blue Ridge School and Early College
- 1994: Cullowhee Valley
- 1973: Fairview
- 1951: Jackson Community School
- 2010: Jackson County Early College (SCC Building)
- 2001: Scotts Creek
- 1980: Smokey Mountain Elementary
- 1960: Smoky Mountain High

**(c)** Priority #1: Cafeteria and classrooms at Fairview:

- Fairview's cafeteria was undersized and underequipped.
- Access to the cafeteria was problematic.
- The cafeteria served the whole school population of 778 students.
- The cafeteria could seat only 300 students at any given time.

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams stated that the cafeteria and classrooms at Fairview had been a priority for the school system for some time. The conversation was delayed because there was an opportunity for state grants.

Mr. Buchanan stated they submitted an application for grants twice and both were denied.

Mr. Adams stated that when the Board of Commissioners started going through its priorities regarding CIP planning, this would be a discussion, even though there were grants available for future applications. They may want to place priority on this project to proceed forward versus waiting for the grant application. If this was a priority of the Board of Education and the Board of Commissioners, what would be the timeline?

Dr. Ayers stated there was a preplanning meeting with school staff in December. They put out a wish list of what they would want the classroom space to look like. There would be a meeting with the architect coming up that week. They had not requested any architectural plans at that point, but that would be the next step.

Mr. Adams requested that Public Schools put together a rough timeline to be part of the conversations with the Board of Commissioners when they started planning out resources over the next multiple years. They were probably talking about a couple of years out before actual construction would start, which would play into the planning process for financing.

**(d)** Priority #2: Traditional middle school:

- Across the district (excluding Blue Ridge grades 6-8), there were 724 middle grades students:
  - 268: FVS
  - 196: CVS
  - 110: SMES

- 150: SCS
- Without a traditional middle school, students lacked many opportunities in academics, the arts, Career and Technical Education and athletics. The equitable access to these offerings was marked differently across the district’s current middle school grades at the elementary schools.
- A traditional middle school would offer:
  - Advanced coursework
  - Students with disabilities and students at risk more resources
  - Access to Career and Technology options
  - Access to Arts – visual, performing arts, band
  - Teacher collaboration
  - Student transitions
  - Staff training and expertise

General discussions were held.

Mr. Adams noted that if they went back to the grant priorities, which included the cafeteria, ADA upgrades and the track (#1, #3 and \$4), he did not believe that #4 and #8 could be separated in the conversation. The original plan of the Smoky Mountain High School campus was for the baseball field and softball field to be on the Jones Street property and for the track to be at the lower end. When dealing with investments and fields, they had to have those conversations together.

If the Boards agreed and chose to fund the track on the Jones Street property, the long-term strategy and planning needed to be understood regarding the softball field. As the conversations progressed, he felt obligated to bring that conversation up so that everyone understood where all the fields would be long-term. He thought they had to have a conversation about the Jones Street property and where all the fields would end up being located.

When the gym was built, the entire area was graded out and discussions were to have the baseball and softball facilities there. As the previous Boards and staff transitioned in the conversations, priorities had shifted. He thought they had to ensure that equity was being applied to the conversation. He thought they had to tie #4 and #8 together so they had a long-term plan for all of the fields. Once the Jones Street property was developed, they no longer had the options. He thought they should openly have these conversations.

Dr. Ayers stated that next, the Board of Education would collaborate with the Board of Commissioners, knowing what priorities were for the Board of Education. They were on the same page about what Public Schools’ priorities and desires were. The meeting was not intended to have action, just conversations. She thought it had been very fruitful for learning for both Boards.

*Informational item.*

There being no further business, Mr. Jamison moved to adjourn the Board of Education meeting. Ms. Clayton seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Jones seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

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Angela M. Winchester, Clerk  
Jackson County Board of Commissioners

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Mark A. Letson, Chairman  
Jackson County Board of Commissioners