

**MINUTES OF A JOINT MEETING OF
THE JACKSON BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS AND
THE JACKSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
HELD ON FEBRUARY 06, 2025**

The Jackson County Board of Commissioners met in a Joint Meeting with the Jackson County Board of Education on February 06, 2025, 6:00 p.m., at Southwestern Community College, Burrell Building, 447 College Drive, Sylva, North Carolina.

Present:

Jackson County Board of Commissioners:

Mark A. Letson, Chairman	Kevin King, County Manager
Todd Bryson, Vice Chair	John Kubis, County Attorney
Jenny Lynn Hooper, Commissioner	Angela M. Winchester, Clerk to Board
Michael Jennings, Commissioner	Darlene Fox, Finance Director
John W. Smith, Commissioner	

Jackson Board of Education:

Wes Jamison, Board Chair	Dr. Dana Ayers, Superintendent
Abigail Clayton, Vice Chair	Jacob Buchanan, Deputy Superintendent
Dr. Lynn Dillard, Board Member	Ashley Leonard, School Board Attorney
Kim Moore, Board Member	Cora Fields, Clerk to the Board
Gayle Woody, Board Member	

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

Chairman Jamison called the meeting of the Board of Education to order.

Commissioner Bryson moved to approve the agenda. Commissioner Smith seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

Ms. Woody moved to approve the agenda. Ms. Clayton seconded the Motion. Motion carried.

(1) SCHOOL STATISTICS AND PRIORITIES: Dr. Ayers presented:

(a) JCPS Board of Education Priorities:

- 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 – this project could be removed from the priority list if a traditional middle school became a reality.
- 7. Blue Ridge Gym with performance space
- 8. Softball Field upgrades at Webster

(b) Current and Past Enrollment Information:

	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025
Blue Ridge Early College	134	130	133	136	128
Cullowhee Valley	624	618	615	609	577
Fairview School	768	734	767	780	802
Blue Ridge School	158	153	173	153	142
Jackson County Early College	118	100	101	109	113
Jackson Community School	70	81	75	72	51
Scotts Creek School	496	459	454	441	429
Smokey Mtn. Elementary	325	366	355	357	341
Smokey Mtn. High	897	888	904	898	878
TOTAL	3590	3529	3577	3555	3555

(c) Projected Enrollment Information:

	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030
Blue Ridge Early College	128	128	116	119	107
Cullowhee Valley	575	585	602	599	582
Fairview School	781	770	766	751	735
Blue Ridge School	139	142	152	152	159
Jackson County Early College	127	131	136	141	141
Jackson Community School	68	66	66	66	66
Scotts Creek School	423	421	410	402	387
Smokey Mtn. Elementary	343	347	342	349	344
Smokey Mtn. High	887	876	860	838	862
TOTAL	3470	3465	3450	3417	3383

(d) Priority #1 Cafeteria and Classrooms at Fairview School: Fairview’s cafeteria was undersized and underequipped. Access to the cafeteria was problematic and was not ADA compliant.

- Students with mobility challenges could not navigate the stairwell.
- Those who were unable to use the stairwell must exit outside and navigate the steep ramp outdoors in the elements.
- Fairview’s cafeteria served the school population of 811 students.
- The cafeteria could seat 300 students at any given time.

(e) Priority #2 Traditional Middle School:

- Received \$52 million NCDPI Needs Based Grant to build a traditional middle school and consolidate grades 6-8 from Cullowhee Valley, Fairview, Scotts Creek and Smokey Mountain Elementary.
- New middle school would also house middle grades students from Jackson Community School.
- Location was the next step in the process.
- Per NCDPI, they must break ground within 24 months of grant award.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

Randy Baker, Vice President, Pinnacle Architecture was present for the following items.

(2) **BLUE RIDGE SCHOOL PROJECT**: Mr. King stated an assessment was previously made at Blue Ridge School and deficiencies were found at that time. He wanted to discuss moving forward with the next steps for programming and engaging the community and stakeholders for the project.

Dr. Ayers stated Mr. Baker recently visited Smoky Mountain High, Blue Ridge, Fairview and the Bus Garage to make assessments. Pinnacle Architecture heavily involved students, teachers, community members and both the Board of Education and Board of Commissioners to be participatory in determining the needs.

Mr. Baker stated Blue Ridge School needed a gym and cafeteria space. They would meet with staff and get the community involved.

Mr. King stated they had started the process with the survey being done and core drilling to start the preliminary design. What would be the process to engage the public on all the projects?

Mr. Baker stated they would first meet with teachers, maintenance, parents and students. It was good for the entire community to be involved. He noted they also looked at the soccer field and ways to increase the size of the field at Blue Ridge.

Dr. Ayers stated they would start scheduling stakeholder meetings for Blue Ridge. They had held a meeting in the community for the Traditional Middle School project.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Jennings asked about other issues at Blue Ridge School with roof leaks and staffing?

Dr. Ayers stated the roof was replaced and completed before the Christmas Break. Over the Christmas Break, the interior ceiling tiles were replaced. A counselor started at Blue Ridge and they added a second custodian. They had not been able to find a media specialist, but they did hire an assistant to run the library. Bus driving continued to be an issue, but the cafeteria was staffed.

Commissioner Hooper asked about giving bus drivers and custodians a raise.

Dr. Ayers stated they had received a raise. The salary study conducted placed non-certified staff at an increase more than the state required. Also, they offered non-certified staff a one-time supplement.

General discussions were held.

Commissioner Bryson asked about an estimate for finishing the project from ground breaking.

Mr. Baker stated it would depend on the weather and subcontractors.

Commissioner Hooper stated she wanted to see all of the projects completed before students were placed in buildings. She also wanted to plan ahead for the future.

Commissioner Bryson stated they wanted everything to be there that was needed for a long-term plan.

Dr. Ayers stated they selected Pinnacle Architecture because they had the ability to manage multiple projects ongoing so they did not have to wait for one project to be completed to start another.

Informational item.

(3) **FAIRVIEW SCHOOL PROJECT**: Dr. Ayers stated last April the Board decided to move forward with the Fairview Project, which included the cafeteria, kitchen, six classrooms and a common space. The previous architect provided an estimate of \$18-20 million for the project. They had since recognized they did not need the additional classroom space since over time they would be pulling out approximately 300 students from Fairview to go into the middle school. They believed they now only needed a kitchen and cafeteria, which was estimated at a cost of \$3-4 million. The space and location for the cafeteria had been identified.

Commissioner Hooper stated she would be interested to see what the bid would be to do a two-story cafeteria and use the upper level for classroom space.

Commissioner Bryson stated the Fairview School was very old. He thought they needed to start working on the pods to classrooms as they went along after the cafeteria was completed.

Commissioner Smith stated he agreed.

Dr. Ayers stated when the middle school students moved out, they could move students around to renovate the pods in stages.

Ms. Clayton stated she agreed with Commissioner Hooper, she thought additional classroom space was still needed. She thought they should look ahead and add the classrooms above the cafeteria while they were in the process.

Chairman Letson asked if they should build the cafeteria for a greater capacity than 500 students? What would be the timeline for the cafeteria? Which would be first the cafeteria or the middle school?

Dr. Ayers stated the Fairview cafeteria had been the Board of Education's #1 priority all along.

Commissioner Smith stated he agreed with adding additional classroom space above the cafeteria.

Dr. Ayers stated they were thinking to design the new cafeteria to 600-650 students to accommodate potential growth.

Commissioner Hooper stated they could plan for 700 or 800 for the future.

General discussions were held.

Mr. King stated they received two proposals they were evaluating to move forward. He was looking at the projects for financing and construction. The hope would be for all the projects to start together.

Commissioner Bryson stated they wanted to save money, but they also wanted to see these projects last for a long time.

Informational item.

(4) SPORTS COMPLEX: Dr. Ayers stated this project included ADA upgrades, a concession and visitor restrooms at the Smoky Mountain High School stadium. These conversations would also involve stakeholders. They were looking at a new field house with weight rooms, locker rooms for both male and female students, an updated press box, updated home side restrooms and a track.

It did appear they would be able to place the track around the football field. They were getting ready to place lights on the softball field in Webster and on the baseball field. They were still looking to place the softball field on campus at the Jones Street property in the future.

Mr. Baker stated his firm was currently working on four high school football fields with tracks. The SMHS football field would be left in the position it was in, but there would be some destruction on the concrete bleachers. They were also looking at an eight-lane track, but field events may need to be located in other areas.

General discussions were held.

Informational item.

(5) MIDDLE SCHOOL: Dr. Ayers stated they held two community forums in January. Also, some of the team members visited a couple of middle schools and a team of teachers would be visiting other middle schools the future. They were ready to start talking about stakeholder meetings, but first, they needed to discuss a location.

Chairman Letson asked for an overview of the middle school in an ideal form.

Dr. Ayers stated there were approximately 800 middle school students that would be consolidated. They had discussed building for 900 students. Discussions included the full slate of athletics to include a track, baseball field, softball field, soccer field and tennis courts.

Commissioner Bryson stated he thought they should include a football field in the plan for the future.

Commissioner Smith stated he thought they should build for 1,000 students.

Mr. Baker stated every middle school they built had a football field and track included.

Dr. Ayers stated they wanted to include a gym, auxiliary gym, a performance space, band and chorus. They also anticipated a desire to continue to grow the Career and Technical Education Program. They envisioned everything in a functional and accessible space for all the students.

Commissioner Hooper stated she would want everything on the plan to be completed.

Commissioner Bryson stated he wanted to see the middle school be built in a centralized location.

General discussions were held.

Chairman Letson stated he thought there was a consensus to start on both the Fairview and Blue Ridge projects.

Dr. Ayers stated she would work with Pinnacle Architecture to set up the community input meetings for the Fairview and Blue Ridge projects.

Informational item.

(6) OTHER BUSINESS: None.

(7) CLOSED SESSION:

Motion: *Chairman Letson moved that the Board go into closed session pursuant to G.S.143-318.11(a)(3) Legal and G.S.143-318.11(a)(5) Real Property. Commissioner Hooper seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

Motion: *Chairman Jamison moved that the Board go into closed session pursuant to G.S.143-318.11(a)(3) Legal and G.S.143-318.11(a)(5) Real Property. Ms. Clayton seconded the Motion. Motion carried.*

Chairman Letson called the regular meeting back to order and stated no action was taken in closed session.

There being no further business, Commissioner Bryson moved to adjourn the Board of Commissioners meeting. Commissioner Jennings seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:24 p.m.

There being no further business, Ms. Clayton moved to adjourn the Board of Education meeting. Ms. Moore seconded the Motion. Motion carried and the meeting adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Attest:

Approved:

Angela M. Winchester, Clerk
Jackson County Board of Commissioners

Mark A. Letson, Chairman
Jackson County Board of Commissioners