

Webster County Board of Education Moves Ahead with Middle School Proposal

Written by Dennis Beard Wednesday, 20 October 2010 14:03



WEBSTER COUNTY, KY - Calling it "a very productive meeting," Webster County Board of Education Chairman James Nance said a weekend board retreat held in Dawson Springs Friday and Saturday gave the board members a clearer picture about where the district stands financially and what each of its schools need in order to improve. All of the building principals and administrators had the opportunity to discuss their concerns and needs within the district and at each of their respective schools, Nance and others said on Monday.

"They need more help," Nance said, when asked if there were any common requests from the staff. "All of them are being stretched to the max."

He said principals indicated during the board retreat, which was treated as a special called meeting, that the Trojan Academy tutoring program is helping, "but it's not enough."

Of course, the main topic at the retreat was whether the district should convert one of its existing elementary buildings - specifically, Dixon Elementary - into a middle school.

Webster County School District James Kemp said previously that the financial forecast for the district in the coming two years will likely necessitate such a change, as it struggles to continue to operate on fewer state dollars. In an article printed in The J-E last week, Nance and others on the school board said that such a middle school proposal would require full support of the entire administrative staff before they would act on it.

On Monday, Nance said the support they required was there, enough to begin discussing the idea more openly. He said such a middle school would have to be at Dixon, and would have to involve conversion of the elementary building for that purpose.

"There is nothing we can do except use Dixon's grade school," he said, explaining that the high school space previously proposed won't be adequate enough to house the number of students. He also echoed administrators' comments that the location of the Webster County Area Technology Center on the Dixon campus makes having a middle school at another location impractical, because it prevents students in that age group from easily utilizing the facility.

Right now, only Dixon Elementary has easy access to the ATC facilities, and Webster County School District assistant superintendents Alan Lossner and Riley Ramsey agreed that is an "equity issue" for the district, meaning other students in those grade levels aren't being offered the same opportunities.

Nance said the first step is to hold a public forum during the board's meeting on Monday, Oct. 25, at Sebree Elementary. As part of that forum, Kemp, Lossner, and Ramsey were asked to make a presentation, outlining the pros and cons of the middle school concept.

"This board needs to make a decision," Nance said. "Either we do it, or let's move onto other things."

Nance said the main thing about making the transition is to ensure all teachers keep their jobs, and to do what's best for all the students in the district.

"Everybody wants to do what's right," he said. "The question is how we get there."

Some of the specific issues to be addressed include determining bus routes, how it will affect the district's transportation budget, and what such a change would do to students' test scores.

Lossner and Ramsey shared Nance's sentiments about the main objectives for converting Dixon Elementary into a middle school.

"In the final analysis, the district administration and principals feel it's best for kids," Lossner said.

"It's not about what's best for a particular school, but what's best for all kids," Ramsey said in agreement.

The Webster County Board of Education meeting on Monday starts at 6:30 p.m. at Sebree Elementary.