

## School Board Clashes With Athletic Coaches

Tuesday, June 2, 2009

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When the Macon County Board of Education (MCBOE) met in special session on May 28th, a crowd of coaches and parents of student athletes were in attendance to oppose actions taken at the previous board meeting regarding sports practice being reduced and eventually taken out of the regular school day.

Three spokesmen addressed the Board: Jason Welch, Larry White, and Keith Anderson. Many others not on the agenda made numerous remarks throughout the meeting, opposing the board's move.

Early in the meeting MCHS Principal Wayne Deering asked, "Can I talk?" and was told by Board Member Jimmy Cook, "You're not on the agenda to talk."

At issue with Deering was the MCBOE policy on agendas and how it had not been followed at the meeting that created the new ruling about sports practice.

The policy specifies items to be considered for the agenda must be received in the director's office one week prior to the scheduled date of the meeting, that the agenda for a regular board meeting shall be distributed to board members at least five days prior to scheduled date of the meeting, and that the agenda shall be available for public inspection and or distribution, when it is distributed to board members.

The motion that passed at the May 11th regular session meeting was brought to the floor by board member John Wheeley limiting practice to 45 minutes during the school day in school year 2009-10, and no sports practice during the school day effective with the 2010-11 school year.

The agenda contained no reference to the material voted on regarding practice.

At the Thursday night meeting, Deering assured the board there would be a grievance filed because of this.

Agenda item 11 in the May 28th meeting was slotted to address the athletic concerns in Macon County Schools, and was moved up on the agenda, but only after the board took a second vote. In this vote, school board members Steve Walton, Jimmy Cook, and John Wheeley voted again in support of 45 minutes for 2009/10 and no practice during school day for 2010/11. Two

members Ronald Birdwell, and Bill Wilmore opposed the action.

### **Jimmy Cook Speaks**

Following the vote Cook explained why they took the action.

He spoke about opportunities available at the Tennessee Vocational School Tri-County Campus at Red Boiling Springs. He gave data on the number of students going to college and offered that sports practice hindered some from being able to participate in the vocational studies. Cook distributed literature showing the fields of study offered at the technological center ranging from Construction Welding, Construction Carpentry, Administrative and Information Support, Health Science-Nursing/EMS, Culinary Arts, Cosmetology, and Machine Shop.

“We want every boy and girl to have the opportunity to take the classes,” said Cook, and offered that jobs are hard to come by and that with these careers, students may be more able to get a job than some that attend college. “Every athlete should have the opportunity to go there,” Cook continued.

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Audience member Christy Gregory asked about the number unable to attend, “Do you know the percentage?”

“You’re trying to fix a problem that doesn’t exist,” Deering remarked to the board.

“What is the percentage not able?” Gregory asked again, “Shouldn’t you have looked into this?”

At one point in the meeting, Cook remarked to Coach Larry White, “You do a good job of stirring it up.”

Principal Deering reminded the board that kids have to have time to study.

### **Jason Welch Speaks**

When Welch finally took the podium; he told those gathered that only 78 students have signed

up for vocational for the upcoming year and that 206 athletes participate in sports. He discussed the current GPA average of student athletes, and said, "With less time to study, the GPA will go down."

He commented on additional costs that would be needed to give the coaching staff a planning period, equivalent to two teaching positions and \$80,000. He suggested a full block for sports and reiterated that student athletes are not a problem, stating graduation rates for athletes is close to 100 percent.

### **Larry White Speaks**

"Practically every coach is here," said Larry White, as he emphasized the support for sports practice within the school day. "I stress, we have excellent success with athletes. Our problem (RBS) is with one gym." White told board members that 75 days of the year, the gymnasium is used for 14 hours per day and provided data on other schools' gymnasiums and how they integrate athletics into the school day.

"With no sports practice in the school day, RBS Sunday practice would be every Sunday," said White. He explained that getting home at late hours limits time with family, and that junior high athletes would have to be at school to practice at 6:30 a.m. and noted, "I was just thinking, I was kinda praying, that you would rethink what you've just done."

### **Keith Anderson Speaks**

Keith Anderson addressed the Board, explaining the impact of block scheduling and homework. He quoted the number of students in sports, and agreed with the other two speakers that the costs to schools would increase with a planning period. "I think it is in the best interest for kids to have more time to do homework. It is your decision, not mine."

Anderson, White, Welch, and Deering adhered strong to student academics and that athletes are not a problem, and that they are not hindered from going to vocational school because of their desire to participate in sports.

Prior to the board meeting Anderson, White and Welch presented a packet to the board members for review, containing data on student achievement, local costs to the community, graduation rates, specific gymnasium concerns, participation in sports, and wrote, "We believe it is in the student's and the county's best interests to have one-block sports period for the upcoming school year."

The document contained details on night practice, homework, planning period with an estimated \$80,000 cost increase and graduation rates. Positive aspects of sports involvement listed were: students learn focus, commitment, and commitment to group success. Students learn to compromise and work together, dealing with disappointment and working diligently for a common goal, coping skills and that academic success is often tied to athletic experience.

At the close of the statements several attempts were made with board members Wilmore and Birdwell, also opposed to the move, plus a building full of vocal, displeased athlete's parents as well as coaches. However the majority ruled with three votes, leading to the second reading standing with 45 minutes allowed in the upcoming school year and practice removed for 2010-11.

### **In other business:**

- Elementary Science textbook were adopted and include 2nd grade.
- A special course on Tennessee Studies as a credit elective was approved for 09-10 school year.
- The board approved advertisement for bids for occupational therapy and physical therapy and technology equipment for 09-10.
- Approved Federal Programs Consolidated Application.
- Approved a trip request for MCHS FCCLA to National Convention in Nashville on July 12 through 16 of 2009.
- Approved preliminary General Purpose School Fund Budget for 09-10.
- Approved revisions to Policy 3.206 Community Use of School Facilities and Policy 6.3002

Code Of Behavior and Discipline MCHS, MCJHS and RBSHS (Second Reading).