



Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Board of Education listens to teacher concerns during its meeting last week.



Teachers, most of whom wore red, listen during the public comment session of last week's Board of Education meeting.

Teachers

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eight to 26th in supplements in the last five years. On Sept. 16, a video involving local supplements was mass posted on social media. It shows a presentation by Superintendent Beverly Emory of the school system's proposed budget to county commissioners on May 10 in which Commissioner Everette Witherspoon told her that if the school board asked for more money in the county budget for supplements that they'd probably get it, which Commissioner Vice Chairman Don Martin agreed with. This resulted in #justaskme going viral with the video being viewed more than 4,400 times.

In response, Emory put out her own video, saying a school board committee has been working on finding a sustainable way to increase supplements since February. She said they're continuing to work on the issue and that she should've done a better job communicating that to teachers. She proposed a new hashtag, #justaskme, if school employees have any questions or concerns.

This was a sentiment school board Chairwoman Dana Caudill Jones repeated during last week's meeting, telling teachers "the work is happening."

"We need to do a better job of communicating to our stakeholders, because you guys didn't know we were doing all this," she

said. There were so many teachers dissatisfied with the situation that the meeting's public comments took almost an hour. They talked about how many teachers work second jobs or contemplate quitting because of the pay.

Teacher Tripp Jeffers, who was one of the teachers involved in spreading the video, told the school board that action on supplements was taking too long and that they needed to come up with a plan on subsidies before the election.

"If it takes me seven months to write a lesson plan, you would have probably fired me by now," said Jeffers.

Teacher Tamela Payne

suggested a new hashtag, #justtellme.

"Just tell me that you have a plan, not that you're working on one or not that you're going to get one," she said. "Just tell me you're not going to put a BandAid on this, but that you're going to come up with some real solutions."

Several said the bonus was not enough, nor was the 1 percent to 2 percent supplement increase that had been talked about. School board Member Victor Johnson agreed, comparing the \$300 bonus to money you'd give a child for Christmas.

A six-year plan was discussed during the meeting to increase the supplement to put the district among the Top 10 in sup-

plements, which would cost about \$1 million the first year. This would increase individual teacher supplements annually to \$5.2 million a year by the sixth year. This would increase the monthly supplement of a new teacher with a bachelor's degree from \$260 a month now to \$355 a month by year six.

Emory said there were discussions with the county on devoting almost 40 percent of excess revenues from the proposed quarter-cent county sales tax to the school system. The board asked her to get a commitment from the county commissioners on that.

There was also discussion of the school system needing more than what's

allocated in the current funding formula, and forming a new committee to look into that, which would include a county commissioner. The committee is supposed to handle both supplements and the funding formula, instead of having two separate committees.

Emory sent an email with both requests to County Manager Dudley Watts. Commissioners agreed with the sales tax request and plan to vote on that today. They turned down a spot on the formula committee.

For more details, see the county commissioners story on page A1.

Sales tax

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regressive, would support it if part of it goes to teacher supplements. He felt this could turn the sales tax from a ballot item that has gotten little visible public support to one that could pass.

"I don't even know if this is going to pass without a push from the school system or without a push from the Forsyth County Association of Educators, because right now there's hardly any momentum," said Witherspoon.

The school board's request essentially applies the county's school funding formula to the excess revenue. The formula devotes nearly 40 percent of new property tax revenue to school funding. This doesn't apply to property tax increases used to solely cover debt, so if the sales tax fails and the county has to instead raise property taxes

next year for debt service, the school system would receive no revenue from that.

It's estimated that the sales tax could bring in \$1.2-\$1.4 million for the schools. This would easily cover the school system's first year of its six-year plan to increase supplements, which would cost \$1 million. The second year would cost nearly \$1.9 and continue increasing until it costs \$5.2 million by the sixth year, which would require other revenue sources.

Emory's email had a second request, asking for a county commissioner to be part of a school board "Funding Study group." During last week's school board meeting, this was described as a committee that would look at the school funding formula and see if it should give a higher percentage of tax revenue to the schools.

The commissioners rejected that request. Only Witherspoon and Commissioner Fleming El-Amin sup-

ported the idea. Witherspoon said he thought the group could use the expertise of a commissioner and El-Amin, a former teacher, volunteered to be a part of it. The other commissioners didn't want to do it, saying that the school board should come up with its own proposals and then bring them to the commissioners. County staff can help with whatever the group needs, but the commissioners didn't want to be part of the decisions of another elected body like the school board.

"They need to do their work and then they can come and say 'We've done this work, this is where we see it is and this is what we'd like to propose' and then we'd be in a position to ask questions and begin discussion," said County Commissioner Don Martin, who is a former school superintendent.



Artist Aron Belka unveils his portrait of Larry Leon Hamlin in the Benton Convention Center.



Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin speaks at an unveiling ceremony for the portrait of Larry Leon Hamlin, her late husband, in the Benton Convention Center on Saturday.

Hamlin

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1988, he started the National Black Theatre Festival, which draws theater enthusiasts from around the world to Winston-Salem every two years. Last year it had more than 45,000 attendees, more than 140 performances and contributed more than \$8 million in economic impact. In his career, Hamlin wrote four full-length plays, two infodramas and directed more than 200 productions.

The painting of Hamlin

is by New Orleans Artist Aron Belka, who pulled off a white drape to unveil his portrait of the local legend.

"This is the first time I've depicted someone like Mr. Hamlin, who has done some incredibly important and historical work in his community," Belka told attendees.

Hamlin's widow, Sylvia Sprinkle-Hamlin, who is president of the Black Rep's board and NBTF executive producer, thanked those involved in the portrait and teared up as she talked about how grateful she was for the

Black Rep's many supporters.

"I'm really proud the city is honoring him because he worked so hard," she said afterward.

"Late at night, early in the morning, all the time, all he thought about was festival business."

The portrait hangs outside the room that, on Saturday, housed the Marvtastic Bash, an NBTF fundraiser that celebrates Hamlin's birthday. Hamlin would've been 70 years old last week.

The suggestion to honor Hamlin with artwork came from Mayor

Pro Tempore Vivian Burke. The City/County Public Art Commission commissioned applications from more than 20 artists for the project. Bella was chosen by a majority of a committee that included Sprinkle-Hamlin, and was then approved by a majority of the Art Commission.

The other permanent pieces that hang on the walls of The Benton were part of an earlier project by the commission and includes a 13-foot tall portrait of the late Poet Maya Angelou made out of her own quotes.



Belka

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