

**February 12, 2010**

**Board of Education Approves Resolution  
Requesting the State Department of Education Phase-Out Three Schools**

At their February 9, 2010 monthly work session, members of the Newton County Board of Education approved by unanimous vote, School Superintendent Dr. Steve Whatley's recommendation to adopt a resolution requesting that the State Department of Education phase-out three district schools—Newton High School, Ficquett Elementary School, and Palmer-Stone Elementary School. This does not mean that the schools will be closed.

The school board has for many years been committed to constructing facilities that are not only functional but also have the technology required for instruction in today's classroom. Three facilities: Newton High School, built in 1972, Palmer-Stone Elementary School and Ficquett Elementary School, built in 1955 and 1956 respectively, lag behind the other schools in terms of the Board's initiative to provide facilities that are state-of-the-art to meet the needs of the students in the community.

According to Dr. Whatley, the school system's facilities plan serves as a roadmap in meeting the Board's commitment. The final plan to be approved by the Board and the State Department of Education generates state funding for construction of facilities. Those state funds with local funds become the building program from a financial standpoint. Dr. Whatley noted that replacing the three schools is more cost effective than the cost to renovate them and bring them up to current school building specifications. As a result, the decision to request the "phase-out" or removal of these buildings from the State Department's inventory is more fiscally responsible. Whatley added that while the facilities will no longer qualify for state renovation monies they will remain in use.

"At this time, the district has not made any plans to utilize Newton High School, Palmer-Stone Elementary School, or Ficquett Elementary School, for anything other than their current uses," said NCSS Deputy Superintendent Dr. Dennis Carpenter. "The new high school being written into the facilities plan will serve as a replacement for Newton High, which is being phased out on the state facilities plan."

Carpenter noted that the district could have continued to apply for renovation monies from the state but given the fact that the state's financial participation in renovation projects is only a fraction of its financial participation in new construction, it was determined that this was not the best approach given the current economic condition and district's facilities needs.

"As we continue to utilize these facilities, any further renovations and repairs will be funded locally, as is the case with Sharp Learning Center, another facility in the district that is no longer on our state facility inventory," said Carpenter.

Carpenter added, "Having facilities in use in a school district which are not on the state's inventory is a common practice and districts have been known to continue using these facilities for many, many years based on the needs of the district."

Phasing out the three schools from the State Department of Education's inventory generates a greater need for classroom space in the district and as a result, increases state earnings and financial participation in the district's building program. This one change in the district's updated five-year

facilities plan will infuse an estimated 24 million additional dollars, in state participation , into the district's building program while also addressing the school board's desire to accommodate facility needs in a timely manner from the standpoint of enrollment projections and current classroom needs.

"It just made sense to take these steps as we reviewed our future needs," said Dr. Whatley. "Our growth has slowed and we are near the end of our existing plan so now was the time to rethink the next facilities plan. The board passed the resolution so that we can move forward, prepare a plan for our new five-year facilities program and have a state facilities study. Once the process and plan are completed, we will determine the order of construction and renovation of schools beyond our currently planned construction of Elementary #15 on property at Hwy 142 and Airport Road."

According to Dr. Carpenter, the tentative updated building program will call for the construction of a new high school with a scheduled opening date of Fall 2013. Also under this new plan, the existing schools, which have been built having the core facilities (media center, cafeteria, office space, etc.) designed to accommodate additional classrooms, would qualify for state monies for those classroom additions. These include Liberty Middle School, Live Oak Elementary School, and South Salem Elementary School; however, no target dates for the completion of additions for these schools have been set at this point.

Carpenter added that it is far too early in the process to discuss naming of new schools as well as the specifics of subsequent staff transfers that would occur once the schools are constructed.

"When that time comes, the district will operate in accordance with established policies and procedures," said Carpenter.

### **NCSS Five Year Facilities Plan Development Timeline**

**January 2010** – Newton County BOE adopts a resolution requesting the Georgia Department of Education, Facilities Services Division to assist in the development of a New Local Facilities Plan.

**February 9, 2010** – Newton County BOE adopts a resolution calling for the "phase out" of facilities identified based on replacement being more cost effective than bringing the facilities up to current school building specifications.

**February 10-19, 2010** – School district architects will work in conjunction with administration and the State Department of Education Facilities Consultant to develop cost estimates needed to substantiate the facilities needs identified in the district.

**March 9, 2010** – The Newton County BOE adopts the updated Proposed Organization for the Newton County School System.

**March 15, 2010** – Deadline for the district's new facilities plan to be submitted for State Department of Education Review.

**April 2010** – A Facilities Review Committee, comprised of administrators from school districts around the state, will study the district's facility needs identified in documents submitted to the State Department of Education.

**May 2010** – Newton County BOE will adopt the district's new Five Year Facilities Plan.

**June 2010** – The district's new five year facilities plan is complete and adopted by the State Department of Education.