

August 27, 2010

**Newton County Board of Education Supports
Opposition to Georgia Charter School Commission Law**

During a special called meeting on Tuesday, August 27, the Newton County Board of Education unanimously supported joining an “amicus brief” in support of the Georgia School Boards Association and the Georgia School Superintendents Association’s court challenge to the Georgia’s Charter School Commission.

Under current law, the Georgia Charter School Commission can grant charter school petitions even after local school boards have denied them, resulting in state-created charter schools that would be funded in part by local revenue yet not subject to the management and control of the local board of education.

According to Gary Mathews, Superintendent of Newton County Schools, “there is no cost to the school district for joining in the brief.” He added, “The amicus brief is not directed against charter schools or the charter concept, just the law that allows state schools to be created without local control yet funded by local tax dollars.”

“I have nothing against charter schools,” added Cathy Dobbs, Chair of the Newton County Board of Education. “I think they have a place in this state and in the educational system of this country, and some of them are done very well. If it’s coming to our county to use our local funds I think they need to come before us and we approve and we have with Charter Challenge. I just feel strongly about being circumvented in that process by the state legislature. I have no problem joining the rest of the school systems in the state that also see the problem with this.”

Herb Garrett, Executive Director of the Georgia School Superintendents Association, said there are now over 20 districts in the state that have joined together in support of the “Amicus Brief” in addition to the local school districts, including Gwinnett, Atlanta City, DeKalb, Clayton, Bulloch, and Candler—that filed a lawsuit in Fulton County Superior Court fighting the legislation, which was passed three years ago by the Georgia General Assembly.

“I’m a citizen of Henry County, and we elect our local board members and give them the authority to levy taxes to support our local school system,” Garrett explained. “My local taxes should go to support my local school system, not a school established by a state entity without the approval or support of my local school board.”

“Any school district in the state, including Newton, could be a target under this law,” Garrett added. “They could have one of these commission charter schools established in their school system and have no say in it at all, yet still have to give them a share of their local tax money.”

“Charter school companies are an industry and you have to be really careful,” said Dobbs. “You have to be good stewards of your local funds. Personally I really have a problem with somebody else spending our local funds when I don’t know who these people are and I really feel like we have to be very careful when we look at charter schools...that a charter school business that’s coming into our county is really a viable business and that our money won’t be wasted. We don’t have money to be wasted. I feel like this

could happen if we don't have control over it. If they want to spend state money that way that's their business, but they don't need to spend local school dollars for us—we can do that ourselves.”

According to Garrett, the Amicus Brief will be submitted to the Supreme Court of Georgia and oral arguments are scheduled for October.

For more information, contact the Newton County School System Office of Public Relations at 770-784-2908.

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