



**Pitt County Board of Education Legislation
Comments by Dan Nichols, Chairman of the Board
Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce**

The Greenville-Pitt County Chamber of Commerce has, for years, been a fierce advocate for public schools. We believe that education is extremely important because our community's future workforce is in the classroom today.

From an economic and business development point of view, we have some concerns about achievement in our schools, and we are working to be a part of the solution. We are proud to have 170 businesses engaged in education through our OASIS program and an Education Cabinet of committed individuals ready to assist in escalating business involvement. Our Teen Leadership program is among the best in the state. And all of our efforts in education are county-wide.

Also, we believe that leadership and accountability must start at the top. Separate and apart from our Education Cabinet, our Issues Committee and Board of Directors took positions on issues of a legislative nature regarding funding and the governing body of our school system, the Board of Education. Our positions have to do with effectiveness and efficiency and accountability; they are not personal.

These positions, which you can see on page 2 of the legislative position paper we have provided you with, were formulated last year and were recently re-emphasized by the Issues Committee and adopted by the Board. As you know, these legislative positions were shared with our Legislative Delegation in Raleigh last week.

You can see that point one is asking for equitable and adequate funding for K-12 schools. We share your concerns about funding, about the potential for losing teachers and other issues that could make our school system not competitive for a quality workforce in the future.

The next three points reference governance issues. Our legislative delegation has made it clear to us that they wish for you, as a board, to legislate yourself, so to speak. They have stated their unwillingness to pass legislation on any of these points without a request from the Board of Education.

Therefore, we are here tonight to share our opinion with you and to ask for your leadership in making a change in the governance structure of our school system.

Our three positions – as outlined in the legislative paper – are:

1. Shorten the terms from 6 years to 4 years;
2. Reduce the number of school board members from 12 to 9 – one from each of the six districts and three at-large

3. Have new school board members take office 30 days after their election as opposed to the current unnecessary gap.

Shortening the terms to four years and reducing the number of board members to 9 will align the school system with our county commissioner governance system. Since you are a county-wide governing body, that just makes sense.

From the history we have been able to learn from persons who were around at the time, this conversation dates back to merger of the city and county school systems. Nobody wanted to give up their seat, so some 15 sitting board members of the two systems formed the new board. Reduction to 12 occurred a few years later, but the contemplated reduction to a school board of 9 never occurred.

We believe the current structure of two members per district has created territorial mindsets on many occasions. Most recently, we see a divided school board, mostly among city and county lines which is creating a tremendous amount of negative energy throughout the whole community. All board members should be for ALL students, not just the ones in their attendance zones.

We believe that a smaller board will create better focus and transparency. It may alleviate dissension amongst members and create better opportunity for consensus building for the good of the whole system as opposed to personal agendas.

Some of you included in your platforms when you ran for the board that you would support a reduction in the number of school board members. We trust you will honor that commitment.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have the largest school board in North Carolina. The two largest systems – Wake and Charlotte –Mecklenburg – have 9 members. In this case, more is not better.

We are asking you to take the lead in making this change. We are asking you to start at the top – with yourselves – to create better efficiency and effectiveness with our school system.

For a community with our resources, our achievement scores are much lower than they should be. Our business community stands ready to work with Pitt County Schools to improve achievement and to build a workforce for the future of which we can be proud. Our vision is to build the most advanced school system in the state. Governance is extremely important in leading change and right now, this is where we need to start.

We are asking you to send a resolution to our legislative delegation asking for these three changes. We are asking you to take the lead. Leadership requires tough decisions. We are asking you to be leaders for our children, our future workforce.