

# GASTON COUNTY SCHOOLS



## Superintendent's **PARENT FOCUS GROUP** Meetings

January 2016

### Summary Report

W. Jeffrey Booker, Superintendent of Schools

## ■ About the Parent Focus Group Meetings

In January 2016, Superintendent of Schools W. Jeffrey Booker hosted meetings for parents at four school locations across the county.

A Parent Focus Group meeting was held for each “corner” of the community. All schools were encouraged to select one or two parents to represent their child’s school at their area meeting. More than 80 parents participated in the Parent Focus Group program.

- The **Northeast** area meeting on Tuesday, January 5 included the 14 schools in the Mount Holly, Lowell, McAdenville, Ranlo and Stanley areas.
- The **Northwest** area meeting on Thursday, January 7 included the 14 schools in the Bessemer City, Cherryville and Dallas areas.
- The **Southwest** area meeting on Tuesday, January 12 included the 14 schools in the Crowders Mountain and west Gastonia areas.
- The **Southeast** area meeting on Thursday, January 14 included the 13 schools in the east Gastonia, Belmont and Cramerton areas.

The Parent Focus Group meetings gave parents an opportunity to share their ideas and ask questions in a small-group setting, which led to engaging discussion about our schools.

Superintendent Booker began each meeting with an introduction and overview of Gaston County Schools. He also highlighted progress made in areas such as Academics, Communication, Technology, School Safety, and Community Involvement since he became Superintendent two years ago.

The following pages provide a summary for each area meeting and outline the topics discussed by parents. Collectively, parents were most interested in academics and curriculum, facilities, issues related to funding, technology, instructional resources, and support programs for students.

The Parent Focus Group meetings are part of the school district’s on-going efforts to “continue the conversation” with parents, students, employees, business/community leaders, and others about public schools in Gaston County.

The information from parents is extremely important to have as the school district plans for the 2016-2017 year and beyond.

# **Northeast Parent Focus Group Meeting**

*Tuesday, January 5, 2016*

*North Belmont Elementary School*

*6:00 p.m.*

## **Schools in the Northeast area:**

Brookside, Catawba Heights, East Gaston, Holbrook, Kiser, Lowell, McAdenville, Mount Holly, North Belmont, Pinewood, Rankin, Springfield, Stanley, and Warlick.

## **Discussion related to the following topics:**

### ■ ***Curriculum***

Literacy/reading specialists are beneficial; consider adding math specialists  
Concerns about math curriculum and how it is taught  
Balance the emphasis on reading and math  
Schools are generating enthusiasm for learning and focusing on excellence

### ■ ***Exceptional Children***

Services offered for exceptional children are excellent  
Provide more information to parents who have children with special needs

### ■ ***Technology***

Continue efforts to provide more computers in the classroom  
Pleased to have the additional Chromebook computers  
Ensure that devices are kept current and replaced when out-of-date

## **Questions and comments about the following topics:**

Library Collections

Praise for Principals, Teachers and Staff

PTO/School Fundraising

School Mascots

School Nurses

School Safety

Student Behavior

Teacher Assistants

Teacher Pay

Title I Schools

Visitor Check-in Management System

# **Northwest Parent Focus Group Meeting**

*Thursday, January 7, 2016*

*Costner Elementary School*

*6:00 p.m.*

## **Schools in the Northwest area:**

Beam Intermediate, Bessemer City Central, Bessemer City High, Bessemer City Middle, Bessemer City Primary, Carr, Chavis, Cherryville Elementary, Cherryville High, Costner, W.C. Friday, Gaston Early College, North Gaston, and Tryon.

## **Discussion related to the following topics:**

### ■ ***Calendar***

First semester should end before the winter break  
State guidelines for developing the calendar

### ■ ***Curriculum***

Provide homework information and explanation for parents  
More Curriculum Night programs  
The status of Common Core; math curriculum  
Stress associated with end-of-year testing  
Consistent communication from teachers about classroom instruction  
Balancing classroom instruction for students who are ahead and students who need extra help  
Complimentary of Internet-based learning programs such as Discovery and Google Classroom, the summer reading program, and AIG (academically/intellectually gifted) program  
Importance of vocational/job training and WorkKeys certification

### ■ ***School Safety***

Efforts to secure school campuses (additional fencing, schools with multiple buildings)

## **Questions and comments about the following topics:**

Bus Schedules  
Calendar  
Class Size  
Community Involvement  
Parent Concerns  
Praise for Schools and Teachers  
Teacher Assistants  
Technology  
Visitor Check-in Management System

# **Southwest Parent Focus Group Meeting**

*Tuesday, January 12, 2016*

*Grier Middle School*

*6:00 p.m.*

## **Schools in the Southwest area:**

H.H. Beam, Chapel Grove, Forest Heights, Grier, Highland, Hunter Huss, Lingerfeldt, Pleasant Ridge, Sadler, Sherwood, Southwest, Webb Street, Woodhill, and York Chester.

## **Discussion related to the following topics:**

### ■ ***Curriculum***

Possible changes in the curriculum related to Common Core

Differences in math instruction; strengthen focus on math

The STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) concept

School Performance Grades; efforts to support schools and improve performance grades

Technology and materials for students with special needs

Options for exceptional children such as the partnership with Gaston College

### ■ ***Facilities***

New elementary school in west Gastonia; enrollment, capacity, resources, and consolidation of three schools into one large elementary school

Renovations and athletic improvements at Hunter Huss High School

Need for maintenance/upgrades at “older” schools to re-energize school and community pride

### ■ ***Parent Involvement***

Need for more parents to serve as advocates for schools

Encourage more parent involvement; provide support and resources for children whose parents are not involved in their education

Pleased with efforts to increase communication and online access to students' grades

## **Questions and comments about the following topics:**

Class Size

N.C. Education Lottery

Preparing Students for College

Programs (International Baccalaureate, Early College, STEAM magnet at Hawks Nest)

Teacher Assistants

Technology: Chromebooks and SMART Boards

School Safety

# **Southeast Parent Focus Group Meeting**

*Thursday, January 14, 2016*

*Stuart W. Cramer High School*

*6:00 p.m.*

## **Schools in the Southeast area:**

Ashbrook, Belmont Central, Belmont Middle, W.A. Bess, Stuart W. Cramer, Cramerton, Forestview, Gardner Park, Hawks Nest, New Hope, Page, Robinson, and South Point.

## **Discussion related to the following topics:**

### ■ *Curriculum*

Benefits of using technology in place of textbooks for instruction

The transition away from Common Core

More vocational training/Career and Technical Education options for students; partner with Gaston College to ensure students are prepared for the workforce

Advanced Placement (AP) and Career and College Promise courses

“Team teaching” approach to instruction

More options for students who are academically and intellectually gifted (AIG)

### ■ *Facilities and Growth*

Plan to replace Belmont Middle School; address population growth in the South Point area

Opening of Hawks Nest magnet school and the transition for Robinson Elementary

Lack of adequate funding makes it difficult to maintain buildings

### ■ *Teachers and Personnel*

Teachers and students need more support staff (teacher assistants, counselors, nurses, volunteers, etc.) to enhance the school experience

Ways to attract teachers to the profession, empower them, and make them feel valued

## **Questions and comments about the following topics:**

Communication

N.C. Education Lottery

Parent Involvement/Advocacy

Robotics Program

Technology/Chromebooks

School Safety (Visitor Check-in Management System)