

NEWS & RECORD INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Joe Hill Responses to Select Questions

April 18, 2008

Question 5 (this is really several questions)

Could GCS use several more rounds of school construction?

- With needs approaching one billion dollars, coupled with constant growth, ageing facilities and deferred maintenance, it will be necessary to continue addressing these issues in incremental steps.

Will school bonds always be the answer?

- School bonds may not always be the answer. Among other potential options are Certificates of Participation and Public/Private Partnerships.

Are there other innovative approaches going on elsewhere that could slow the pace of construction of new schools?

- Virtual classrooms are one innovative approach that is getting some attention. The North Carolina Virtual Public School initiative is an example of how students can do independent work online. Does this mean that we may see students doing coursework outside the normal classroom setting? Could this reduce the number of classrooms required? This is certainly an interesting possibility. Other technological advances may also decrease the need for conventional classrooms. GCS is also reviewing and implementing certain strategies to improve utilization efficiencies in school facilities. For example, creating teacher office space in high schools makes classrooms available for students when that classroom might otherwise have been occupied solely by a teacher during their planning period. Our Educational Specification workshops have also discussed flexible spaces and shared spaces that may make space utilization more efficient. Adaptive reuse of existing commercial facilities is a strategy that is sometimes used when new greenfield sites are not available, however it can be just as costly to adapt an existing facility as it is to build new. Other more conventional initiatives include 4-track year-round school schedules and even the consideration of dual shifts. These two are generally the result of not having the resources to build facilities in a timely manner and are not readily accepted by parents.

What about the idea recently suggested in Wake of having the county handle school construction?

- This suggestion probably resulted from the ongoing frustration experienced by Wake and other districts in getting funding approved for school construction and the incessant second-guessing of the needs, size, quality and cost of school facilities.
- GS 115C-521 is very clear that it is the responsibility of local boards of education to build school facilities and the responsibility of the county

commissioners to fund those facilities. In my opinion, any other process would require legislative action.

- GS 115C-521 also states that the commissioners should be presented each year with a budget that states the needs and cost of providing adequate school facilities and, upon investigation, shall provide the funds necessary for the same.
- This process of providing adequate school facilities to meet the requirements of the state-mandated instructional program requires a significant cooperative effort between the two boards. In order to successfully accomplish the mandates of GS 115C-521 there must be a much higher level of interaction than we currently see. GCS has been very pro-active in trying to include county commissioners in the process of designing and constructing schools, with very limited success. Commissioners have been invited to be members of Project Teams for each school project with only one commissioner attending one or two meetings of a single school project. Commissioners were invited to have representatives on the Construction Advisory Committee with only one commissioner attending just one meeting of this group. Commissioners were invited to participate in development of our Educational Specifications with none choosing to do so. There appears to be little or no interest on the part of our commissioners to become actively involved in the process of planning and building school facilities.
- I don't think it wise for the Board of Education to abdicate their statutory responsibility to provide school buildings equipped with suitable furniture and apparatus. They are in the best position to determine the facility needs for delivery of the instructional program. Ideally, both boards should work together to adopt Educational Specifications and Facility Standards that provide the basis for future school construction.

What about the idea of public/private partnerships?

- Recent changes in state law allow school districts to enter into agreements for a public/private partnership to construct school facilities. GCS has been following development of this delivery process with much interest but is yet to be convinced that there are any significant advantages to this approach. At some point in time, probably around five years, the district would still assume ownership of the facility. While this may make it possible to have delivery of facilities a little earlier, it only delays the inevitable cost of ownership. There is some speculation that private developers have the expertise to deliver facilities at lower cost to the district because they do not have the same legal constraints as the public sector. However it is also assumed that there must be a profit motive for the private developers which may offset some or all of the potential savings. The bottom line is that this is something worth exploring but there are still many unanswered questions.

Question 7

How will the Eastern bond funds be applied?

- Some of the bond funds would be used to repay funds borrowed from other school projects in order to facilitate the immediate start of the Eastern construction. This is consistent with a commitment made by the County Commissioners to repay those funds and to fully fund the Eastern project with bond funds or some other method of financing if the Eastern bonds fail.
- The balance of the Eastern bond funds would be used to fund the ongoing construction, furniture, equipment, technology and soft costs for the project.

Are there any workflow/educational issues that could come up if any of the two bond referenda are voted down?

- As indicated above, there should not be any workflow issues on the Eastern project because the commissioners have committed to funding this project by some other means if the bond vote fails.
- Two other projects in the 2008 bond would be impacted from a workflow standpoint if the bond vote fails. Jamestown Middle School and Special Education Center West are currently partially funded and work is in progress. These projects would not be able to proceed to the construction phase if the bond vote fails.
- There are many educational issues that will be impacted if the bond vote fails. Having adequate facilities to provide for the instructional program will be a significant issue. Providing classroom space for a growing student population will be difficult. We have or will soon max out the ability to add mobile classrooms at some sites. Even if we can add mobiles, where will the funding come from? It may require consideration of 4-track year-round school programs in some locations. Deteriorating infrastructure in many existing facilities will impact our ability to provide safe, clean and healthy environments for students. Even in situations where mobile classrooms can be added, the core facilities (dining rooms, media centers, restroom facilities, etc.) will not support additional students. Lunch times are already stretched beyond reasonable timeframes. Some students are forced to eat in hallways or outside because of inadequate dining facilities. All of these issues impact student learning.