Vote on proposal to merge Pickens

Decision moved to Feb. 22

BY GREG OLIVER
THE JOURNAL

PICKENS COUNTY — A vote on whether the Pickens County School Board will accept the district facilities committee's recommendation to close three Pickens-area elementary schools won't take place Monday night after all.

The school district released a statement Friday saying the decision has been postponed until the school board's scheduled meeting Feb. 22. The location of that meeting has yet to be determined.

"The school board has heard the concerns from parents, principals and community leaders," district spokesman John Eby said Friday. "This delay will allow the board to have time to weigh and consider the input they have received."

Last Monday, the facilities committee voted 3-1, with chairman Phillip Bowers, Judy Edwards and Brian Swords in favor and Henry Wilson opposed, to a consolidation plan that would close A.R. Lewis, Holly Springs and Ambler elementary schools rather than approve a tax increase.

Both options were presented by superintendent Danny Merck during a special called meeting as a way of addressing capital improvement needs throughout the district over the next five years.

If approved by the full board, the consolidation proposal would combine A.R. Lewis, Holly Springs, Hagood Elementary and Pickens Elementary into a school for K4-second grade at Hagood and a school for third- through fifth-grade classes at Pickens.

In addition, Ambler students would be sent to Dacusville Elementary. The fifth grade at Dacusville Elementary would be moved to Dacusville Middle, so Dacusville Elementary would serve K4 through fourth grades.

Because the school board is made up of six members, it would take a majority of four votes to pass the proposal.

However, school board vice chairman Henry Wilson and trustee Alex Saitta have already stated their opposition.

Opponents of the proposed consolidation have also proposed the Pickens County Legislative Delegation get involved. On Thursday, State Sen. Larry Martin and State Rep. Davey Hiott, both from Pickens, said while they opposed the merger plan, there was nothing they could do legislatively to stop it.

However, both legislators are glad the board decided to allow more time for input on the matter. Martin said he had been in communication with several trustees to request they review the material more closely and give citizens time to respond.

Hiott said he understands the school board, like the legislature, is a governing body. But the Pickens representative was fearful that the original decision to schedule the vote for Monday night was too quick.

Martin plans to be at a communitywide meeting from 9-11 a.m. today at the Dacusville Community Center, located at 2671 Earls Bridge Road.

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County schools postponed