

The reasoning behind the closing

Morehead City, N.C.
June 24, 2019

TO THE EDITOR:

I sent an email (at 3:31 a.m. the morning after our board voted to close MaST) to Principal Rosen, our county school superintendent and the Board of Education, expressing my condolences to MaST families and providing a detailed explanation for the board's vote; I welcomed Principal Rosen to distribute my message to MaST families. After I learned that she had not received my communication, I sent Mrs. Morrow a personal email that I was sorry for Cameron's disappointment at not being able to attend MaST, but that an extreme amount of thought and deliberation had gone into our decision to close the school.

Regarding the accusation of the "premature vote," some continue to ask "What would it hurt to delay?" Well, I had previously warned our board and also explained in our special meeting that we risk losing our top choices for teacher hires in Carteret County if funding for their hiring was in limbo due to a delay in closing MaST. These great teachers may instead decide to accept a firm offer from another school system, and we would be left with our 2nd or 3rd choice, or worse. I instead ask "what would it *help* to delay?" It might have made some people less antagonistic toward four of our board members, but when the facts show that continuing to fund MaST is not feasible, I would hope that parents could appreciate that we did not mislead them into thinking it might be possible to let the school remain open.

The uncertainty of funding for Early College is not some surprise that just appeared in the last month, or something that delaying its closing for another week or two would be able to remedy. This lack of funding has been known for well over a year. Below is an email, verbatim, that I sent the superintendent and BOE a year ago with my plea to please delay the opening of Early College. This final plea was unfortunately ignored:

Sent: Thursday, June 28, 2018 7:34 a.m.

Subject: Pull the plug on the opening of Early College

Importance: High

Mr. Bottoms and Board:

I feel strongly that we need to pull the plug on trying to open the Early College this fall. After numerous attempts to receive any sort of confirmation of funding, we are still without guaranteed funding from the state for the Early Collage. It would be financially irresponsible of us as a board to proceed with Early College this fall when future funding is still unknown. We are attempting to

use money diverted from CCC's aquaculture program and use other temporary gifts, and have cut the Early College budget substantially in order to try to open the doors this fall with a "bare bones" Early College. Opening at this point will put us at risk of a financial strain on our school system finances, especially in future years. It is simply not worth the risk. Are we going to open the new high school for a year, only to close the doors next year if future funding does not materialize? That is not fair to students, and it is not fair to our county's taxpayers.

When the Early College idea was first proposed, I asked the question "Why are we applying for Early Collage instead of simply trying to work on increasing vocational options for our students?" The answer I was given was "It is all about the money." We were supposedly going to receive substantial funding assistance from the state. According to the application we submitted, we would receive \$500,000 from the state in the first year (along with \$350,000 in Year 2, and then \$250,000 in years 3-5). We were later told that our actual funding would be only \$180,000 per year over the first five years. (See attached documents.) When I asked "Why are we rushing this to open in the fall?" I was again told that "It is all about the money" ... that we currently have funding for five years, but if we don't take advantage of it immediately and open in the fall, we risk not receiving the five-year state funding. Now, it appears that we will not even be receiving this five-year state funding of \$180,000 per year. So given our current lack of funding, again I ask, why are pushing to try to open the doors this fall?

Some county commissioners have accused us of "alleged careless spending practices." I can think of nothing more careless than proceeding with the Early College without guaranteed funding in the future. I could go into great detail debating against the need for the Early College (as opposed to other alternatives). But the decision now is not about whether we want Early College in its current form. The decision now is whether we can sustain Early College for the next five years and beyond.

It would have been easy for us to rely on county commissioners to make the Early College decision for us. We actually should have discussed all of this in public and debated this decision during our last board meeting before presenting our final budget to county commissioners. Approval of the memorandum of understanding for MaST (at our last meeting) would have been a good opportunity for us to discuss the lack of funding and whether we should proceed. But it unfortunately remained on the consent agenda and was not discussed in public by the board.

Now we, as a school board, must make the tough decision. A surefire way to prove we are not careless with our spending and to maintain credibility and faith with county commissioners and the public is to delay the opening of the Early College High School. Even if we did receive state funding for five years, full funding of the Early College beyond that not been assured to us. But without any state funding, the decision appears to be an easy one.

I move that we NOT open Early College High School this fall. We can reevaluate the program again for next year, once we feel more confident in our ability to sustain the program going forward. In the meantime, we can further explore other opportunities to increase vocational training for the students in our county.

TRAVIS DAY

Shame!

Newport, N.C.
June 24, 2019

TO THE EDITOR:

How do you control a population? Keep them uneducated. Our (generational) future relies on education. Shame on the Carteret County Commissioners and the County Board of Education for voting to defund MAST.

BECKY RUPPE

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