

City seeks to stave off schools split

More discussion sought

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Rocky Mount city officials say they are concerned over recent actions taken by the Nash County Board of Commissioners to split Nash-Rocky Mount Public Schools along county lines.

Nash commissioners voted last week to seek state legislation to divide the school system, undoing a 1992 merger of the Nash and Rocky Mount school districts by the N.C. General Assembly.

N.C. Rep. Jeff Collins, R-Nash, has a bill he is ready to introduce during the state legislature's short session.

N.C. Sen. Angela Bryant, D-Nash, said she will oppose the bill in every way possible.

Officials from Nash, Edgecombe and Rocky Mount met last week in a last-ditch effort to stave off a split.

The joint committee failed to reach a compromise.

The Rocky Mount City Council released a statement Friday providing its 7-point position:

■ The council sees a strong school system as vital to economic development because families decide where they will locate

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based on the quality of the schools.

■ The council is willing to review the 1992 funding formula legislation and supports a five-year transitional period where Rocky Mount is removed from the funding picture.

■ The council believes the realignment of the state sales tax should help Edgecombe County pay more for education.

■ The council doesn't support dividing students by county line as proposed by Nash County board Chairman Fred Belfield and once again calls the plan a segregation of students.

■ The council thinks residents in both counties

"Any proposed county line merger or split of the Nash-Rocky Mount school system is of no financial benefit to either impacted school system or the city of Rocky Mount, Nash or Edgecombe County."

David Combs
Rocky Mount mayor

should receive a full financial accounting of dividing the school system.

■ The council points out that the city's fiscal gap funding was \$120,000, which computes to \$4.44 per city utility customer. In the past five years, the financial support from the city of Rocky Mount has averaged \$568,150 a year, which calculates to \$21 a year per utility customer or

\$1.75 per month.

■ The council says the impact on the athletic programs and operations of the four Nash-Rocky Mount high schools should be fully examined.

"Any proposed county line merger or split of the Nash-Rocky Mount school system is of no financial benefit to either impacted school system or the city of Rocky Mount, Nash or

Edgecombe County," Mayor David Combs said in the statement.

"Further, any plan that would create any boundary that puts forth the semblance of racial segregation and ignores the diversity of the region is unacceptable and deprives the impacted students of the opportunity of many cultural and ethnic interactions and opportunities."

The council said a strong Rocky Mount, inclusive of both Nash and Edgecombe counties, is important to the continued economic viability and development of the region.

The council said it's ready to work with both counties and regional partners to ensure the area continues to move forward in education, job creation and financial prosperity.

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