**Questions and Comments from the Public Hearings with MCSS Responses**

Question/Comment: Will the faculty and staff at GEWES be retained as a result of the closure of GEWES?

MCSS Response: Certainly. Most of the faculty and staff from GEWES will be reassigned within the school system.

Question/Comment: Lower the salaries of teachers and staff to provide the revenue to sustain GEWES.

MCSS Response: The state has a minimum salary scale that school systems should adhere to. Lowering the pay for teachers and staff will make it impossible for the school system to recruit and retain teachers and staff.

Question/Comment: Concerns with removing low-achieving students from their current environment.

MCSS Response: There is research both in favor of and not in favor of this scenario. The Motto for the MCSS is, “Aim High, Achieve, Graduate, Succeed.” Per our Mission, the MCSS is committed to empowering students to accomplish this Motto. Raising the level of expectations will be an integral component of this process.

Question/Comment: If GEWES is closed, will revenue be redirected to other schools?

MCSS Response: Certainly. Revenue saved will be used to enhance learning for our elementary students.

Question/Comment: The School System is rated a D.

MCSS Response: This D references the overall CCRPI (College and Career Ready Performance Index) rating. MCSS was at 67.9 in 2017 (State Average of 75.0). MCSS was at 64.4 in 2018 (State Average of 76.6). MCSS was at 68.6 in 2019 (State Average of 75.9). In 2019, MCSS improved 4.2 percentage points where the State fell 0.7 percentage points.

Question/Comment: Close a high school in lieu of GEWES. Combine the high schools, and convert GEWES into the middle school for the county.

MCSS Response: This scenario would require the expense of renovations at GEWES to accommodate middle school children. Under the current proposal, three elementary schools are being converted into two elementary schools while causing the Board to not have to absorb any new expenses, thus being good stewards of the taxpayer dollars. The busing of students regarding the scenario of GEWES as the county middle school would be difficult and expensive due to the fact that in addition to alternate transportation plans for the GEWES students under this scenario, all middle school students and the students from one high school would require an alternate transportation plan.

Question/Comment: Why the sense of urgency?

MCSS Response: The original dates for the Public Hearings were during the week of March 16, 2020, and the venues would be GHS and MHS. Due to the COVID-19 threat, schools were initially closed from Monday, March 16, 2020 through Friday, March 27, 2020. The Public Hearings were rescheduled to March 30-31, 2020 at GHS and MHS respectively. Unfortunately, these Public Hearings had to also be cancelled as a result of the Governor’s Executive Order banning assemblies of 10 or more people. With looming shelter-in-place orders and states of emergency enacted, the Public Hearings were set on April 8-9, 2020 via telephone conference. The fiscal year ends June 30, 2020 and contracts have to be issued by May 15, 2020. Decisions had to be made regarding personnel and finances for the 2020-2021 school year. As a result, the Public Hearing dates were set for April 8-9, 2020. Since these dates were set, the state of emergency was extended to May 13, 2020 and the shelter-in-place order was extended to April 30, 2020.

Question/Comment: Why was there no video conference?

MCSS Response: So many Meriwether County citizens have no Internet or weak Internet due to living in a rural area. Telephone conferencing was the most viable way to assure all who had access to a phone could participate without Internet dependency.

Question/Comment: The GEWES facility will be sold to Flint River Academy.

MCSS Response: This is in no way factual. The use of the facility is yet to be determined.

Question/Comment: The Board should delay any decision until there is a face to face meeting.

MCSS Response: The state of emergency has been extended to May 13, 2020 and the shelter-in-place order has been extended to April 30, 2020. Assemblies of 10 or more people are not permitted during these times. Dates for Public Hearings were set two times in March, 2020 and had to be postponed both times due to updated Executive Orders from the Governor. The Board, like every other governmental entity across the state and nation, has been forced to conduct their meetings through communication devices. This scenario is not ideal, but these are unprecedented times.