

## Wise board adjourns for lack of quorum, again

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ST. PAUL, Va. – It was another non-official meeting Wednesday for the Wise County School Board – the second in a row adjourned for lack of a quorum.

The eight-member board is split down the middle over plans to consolidate the county's six high schools. The school system is moving forward with a plan to close three smaller high schools and consolidate the students into the three largest.

The pro-consolidation board members – Ted Thompson, Nolan Kilgore, Mike Mullins and Phillip Bates – held a brief meeting Monday, for which the anti-consolidation board members did not show.

The anti-consolidation members – Mark Hutchinson, Jess Powers, Rocky Cantrell and Betty Cornett – scheduled their own meeting Wednesday, for which the pro-consolidation board members did not show.

A regular school board meeting is scheduled for Monday, while Frank Kilgore, a St. Paul lawyer who represents the anti-consolidation four in a lawsuit against Thompson and school system Superintendent Jeff Perry, announced Wednesday that his group would be calling another meeting for Tuesday.

Kilgore said his clients will not attend a school board meeting unless the other four board members agree in advance to take specific items off the agenda, particularly the transfer of teachers and administrators from the smaller schools to the larger ones as part of the consolidation process.

Now that a lawsuit has been filed, he said, that issue – as well as the legality of using a county-wide tiebreaker to vote when the school board deadlocks – should be decided by a judge.

Another lawsuit, against the entire school board, has been filed on the consolidation issue by a community group opposed to the plan, with three other likely lawsuits in the works by various parties.

Kilgore said if his clients attended a meeting with the other board members they could invoke the tiebreaker, overruling the other four board members' objection to the school system moving forward with high school consolidation.

“I don't know how long this is going to go on,” Kilgore said of the poorly attended meetings.

Consolidation opponents have said they hope to delay the process for another year – enough time to let November's election intervene, after the re-districting process has redrawn the school board election district lines.

Perry said he'll attend scheduled meetings when notice is given – but it's up to individual board members to decide whether they'll attend.

Perry, who often has touted the monetary savings and expanded curriculum he says will be gained from consolidation, said school system staff will continue with the consolidation process, following the school board's direction given in a 5-3 vote earlier this year.

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