

By SABRINA GARRETT

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Whether to add more members to the Wilson County Board of Education will be the topic of a work session scheduled by Wilson County Commission's Education Committee on Monday, Feb. 11.

The school board currently has five members, which include Greg Lasater, Ron Britt, Wayne McNeese, Bill Robinson and Don Weathers, who serves as chairman. Deputy Director of Schools Mickey Hall said that board members receive \$200 compensation monthly to offset personal costs of serving in the position – with the chairman receiving \$260. Board members do not receive any other benefits or county insurance, Hall said.

Education Committee Chair Annette Stafford said that in a county of 116,000 – having only five board members seems inadequate compared to numbers held by other counties. For example, Blount County has a population of 118,000 and seven school board members, Washington County has a population of 114,000 and nine board members and Sumner County has a population of 163,000 and 11 board members.

Wilson County has the same number of board members as counties with dramatically lower populations including Johnson, population 18,244; Jackson, population 11,638; Hancock, population 6,819; Trousdale, population 7,800; and Coffee, population 52,796.

“Parents feel like it is unequally yoked. We have a board serving them and parents feel they have been heard and represented – but as this county grows we need the board to grow,” Stafford said. “Right now each member represents 23,000 people.”

Stafford said the meeting will regard increasing the number of board members to “seven to nine, possibly 10.”

“Last year, we as a commission had a committee where we had to redistrict. We didn’t think about the school board. We just thought about reapportioning the commission districts,” she explained, adding that if they choose to increase the number of school board members they will first have to get permission from the state.

“We would have to get a two-thirds majority vote and do a private act and send it to the state to get them to allow us to change our school board number.”

“In the past, these issues have come up,” said County Mayor Randall Hutto, a former educator and coach. “I have had concerns from people who think five board members might not have been enough. Others say the larger the board, the tougher to get consensus. I believe the education committee will do a good job of studying and communicating with the current board to get their input.”

Don Weathers, chairman of the county school board, has some reservations about the idea. “It is nothing that we have talked about as a board. My personal feeling is that it is in good shape the way it is. I don’t see a real need to expand the number of board members. What do you gain from it? I think it is perfectly fine the way it is,” Weathers said.

The topic will be discussed at 6 p.m. at the work session to be held in the commission room at the Wilson County Courthouse in Lebanon.

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