Meeting Notes – Feb. 15, 2022

The LaFayette Rotary Club held its weekly meeting on Tuesday, February 15. Steve Wheeler was responsible for the program this week and had as his guest David Owen, assistant superintendent of the Chambers County School System, to speak with us on Superintendent Chambley's behalf. Mr. Owen spoke on the Lee v Macon desegregation case and the efforts of the local system to achieve unitary status. To achieve unitary status a school system must show they have abandoned the dual status of intentional segregation of students by race. The areas which are examined for unitary status are student assignment, faculty and staff assignment, transportation, extra-curricular activities, physical facilities, and resource allocation. Chambers County is not the only school system in Alabama to not have achieved unitary status.

In the area of student assignment, the goal is to achieve racial balance of 50% +/- 15%. In other words, the percentage of each race of students (black/white) in a particular school should fall between 35-65%. Four of the 10 schools do not meet the goal in this area. In the area of faculty and staff assignment, the goal is 50% +/- 10% (percentage of each race falling in the 40-60% range).

In addition to the racial composition in the schools, Mr. Owen shared slides with us that have been shared in recent community meetings regarding operational costs per school and utilization of our buildings. When our elementary schools are compared to each other, the operational costs for educating students vary by about $6,000 between the lowest-cost and highest-cost elementary school. The data is basically the same between the three middle schools and also between the two high schools. When enrollment figures are compared to building capacity, the data shows the utilization rate for elementary schools is 51%, for middle schools is 49% and for high schools in 59%. Various options regarding reconfiguring the schools were presented. All options for elementary schools involved closing anywhere from three to six of the schools. The options for secondary schools also involved new grade configurations and the consolidation of schools.

Diane Sherriff