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# Report to the North Carolina General Assembly

## Interim Report

### Transition Planning for Governor Morehead School for the Blind (GMS)

### SESSION LAW 2023-10 (HOUSE BILL 11)

**Date Due: April 1, 2024**

#### **Governor Morehead School Board of Trustees**

Dr. Alan Chase, Chair

Ms. Tiana Sims Beachler, Vice Chair

Ms. Traci Wilkerson

Mr. J. Locke Milholland, IV

Dr. Sean Tikkun

Mr. John Deluca-Ex-Officio-Department of Health & Human Services (DHHS)

Dr. Ricky Scott- Ex-Officio-GMS Alumni Association

## Immediate and Specific Requests

### Legislation

1. Request to maintain 115C designation for licensed educators and 126 designations for all unlicensed employees, but provide exemptions related to hiring and dismissal processes.
2. Request that Trustees can approve policies and new contracts, except for teacher contracts (continue with current NC DPI teacher contract process through June 30, 2024), prior to July 1, 2024, so that they can go into effect immediately on July 1st.
3. Request that teacher salary supplements be funded through recurring state appropriations at the same percentage and adjusted annually to align with Wake County Public School System.
4. Request for creation of and reoccurring appropriations for the new employment positions outlined below.
5. Request for nonrecurring appropriation in the amount of \$22,500 to comply with a legislative requirement that GMS must begin billing Medicaid or can do so. This mandate came legislatively but came with no legislative startup funds.
6. Request for a nonrecurring appropriation of \$4,000,000.00 for twenty critical capital projects, including, but not limited to:
  - Primary Transition
  - Building IV HVAC and Generator
  - Gym Roof
  - Science Lab
  - Currin Waste Line repair Part 2
  - Currin HVAC
  - Dorm A-D Toilets/Sprinkler
  - Dorm Chillers
  - GYM HVAC
  - Simpson Structural
  - Primary Phase 2
  - GMS Security Phase 2
  - Boiler Plant renovations
7. Request for a nonrecurring appropriation of \$920,000 for Penland Building upfitting for maintenance and administrative project based on transfer of maintenance positions from DHHS to GMS. See December 15, 2023, JELOC Report for details.
8. Request for a recurring appropriation of \$34,500 to cover the costs associated with Information Technology, such as Office 365 subscription for each school staff member.
9. Request a nonrecurring appropriation of \$25,000.00 for a financial audit to be performed by a third party prior to July 1, 2024.
10. Request to transfer the Early Learning Sensory Support Program for Students with Visual Impairments to Governor Morehead School and restored under the name Governor Morehead Preschool.

## Human Resources – Changes to Existing Positions

Existing Position	Request
Facilities Maintenance Manager (60038486)	Transfer to GMS prior to July 1, 2024, to begin planning for maintenance transition
Grounds Supervisor I (60038385)	Transfer to GMS prior to July 1, 2024, to begin planning for maintenance transition
Maintenance Construction Technician III	Transfer to GMS prior to July 1, 2024, to begin planning for maintenance transition
Business Officer II	Reclassification of current Business Officer II to Business Director I - \$104,676

## Human Resources – Creation of New Positions to Support Transition and/or Reestablishment of School Programs

Creation of New Positions	Recurring Funding	Justification
Engineer III	\$115,000.00	Replaces work previously performed by DPI School Planning
Architectural Supervisor II	\$118,100.00	Replaces work previously performed by DPI School Planning
HR Director I	\$148,400	Per DPI JELOC report recommendation
HR Technician II	\$48,036	Per DPI JELOC report recommendation
IT Director I	\$125,000	Per DPI JELOC report recommendation
Budget Analyst II	\$82,300	Per DPI JELOC report recommendation
Accounting Tech I	\$55,453	Per DPI JELOC report recommendation
EC Director/School Administrator	NC DPI Certificated Salary Schedule	Aligns GMS administrative structure with that of a LEA
Outreach Programs Administrator/School Administrator	NC DPI Certificated Salary Schedule	Reestablishes outreach program transferred to DPI in 2011.
Outreach Programs Support/School Educator II	NC DPI Certificated Salary Schedule	Reestablishes outreach program transferred to DPI in 2011.
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Literacy Facilitator	NC DPI Certificated Salary Schedule	Per LEA/PSU allotment from NCDPI/State Superintendent (SY 2022-2023)/School Educator II

### **Reestablishment of an Outreach Program**

Prior to the transfer of GMS from DHHS to DPI, the GMS Outreach Program served 530 students in 1996 and 413 students in 2009 through assessment, observations, and consultation (Cansler & Pearson, 2010). Specifically, in 2009, the Outreach Program served 89 LEAs with nearly 3,900 personal contacts via in person visits, telephone calls, or email. In 2010, it was estimated that there were 115 Teachers of the Visually Impaired employed by LEAs (Cansler & Pearson, 2010). In 2017, that number remained almost static at 110 (Tikkun, 2021). In 2008, NC DPI indicated there were 2,251 students with visual impairments, but this number had increased to 3,577 in 2023 (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2017; North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023).

When the GMS Outreach Program transitioned from DHHS to DPI, there were six Consultants for Visual Impairment created within the Office of Exceptional Children. Presently, there are two Consultants for Visual Impairments. It is unclear where the remaining original four positions exist today. Therefore, given the unchanged number of Teachers of the Visually Impaired and the reduction of positions at DPI to provide consultative services despite a significant increase in the number of students with visual impairments, the Board requests the allocation of four (4) Outreach Programs Support/School Educator II positions and one (1) Outreach Programs Administrator/School Administrator.

### **Transfer of Early Learning Sensory Support Program**

From October 2001 to December 2010, the Governor Morehead Preschool served over 500 students (Cansler & Pearson, 2010). Specifically, in the 2008-2009 school year, GMP served 811 students. It was estimated that in the 2009-2010 school year they would exceed enrollment by nearly 100 more students. Once GMP transitioned to DPI, enrollment dropped significantly. In 2014, it was estimated that GMP served nearly 600 students, but current estimates place this number at around 300 (Tikkun, 2021). As noted above, it appears that the transfer of GMP from being part of GMS to a separate program within DPI has resulted in significant underserving of students with visual impairments. Therefore, the Board requests that transfer of Early Learning Sensory Support for Students with Visual impairments to GMS so that a comprehensive

educational program from birth to age twenty-two can facilitate seamless transition and services across all ages and grades.

## **Current Progress**

### **School Business**

It is important that the residential schools have authority over their budget requests that would be effective in the 2024-25 fiscal year. Based on guidance from OSBM, GMS will now submit their budget requests directly to the State Budget Education team based on information from NCDPI. The school director has connected with OSBM and submitted budget requests for the upcoming year that coincide with these reported needs from the school. During the submittal process and previous conversations with NCDPI staff, we have learned that additional professional development is needed to support successful transition of this responsibility to the school. Because NCDPI has held responsibility for specific functions and oversight, the school will have to learn what those responsibilities are and, subsequently, gain the necessary positions to deliver services in those key areas. NCDPI has reported that the school should follow all procurement guidelines for State agencies including the e-procurement system and the FIORI system for human resources. The schools' vehicles will be re-assigned to the appropriate schools by Motor Fleet Management. The school will work on the required paperwork and identify an Agency Fleet Coordinator to facilitate the transition and day-to-day operations with Motor Fleet Management. Buses that are currently accounted for at GMS are already on the school's fixed asset report.

### **Technology (IT)**

Email Domain: GMS will be assigned a specific email domain. NCDPI has suggested work would take place in the early spring. The school awaits the implementation plan and execution of this transition. Beginning with the 2024-2025 school year, GMS will need to pay for software that is currently being used at each school site. This expense has previously been paid for by the DPI. The estimated cost for software not previously paid by GMS is \$34,500. This has specifically been requested later in this report.

### **Governance**

The State Ethics Commission has made a preliminary determination that the boards of trustees are subject to the State Ethics Act because their functions are non-advisory. As such, at its March 6, 2024, Board Meeting, the Board of Trustees identified and selected Vice Chair Tiana Sims Beachler as the ethics liaison as mandated by G.S. § 138A-14(e). Further, pursuant to G.S. § 138A-14(c), the Board was informed of its obligation to attend an Ethics and Lobbying Education Presentation or complete the Online Ethics Education by August 26, 2024. Finally, Board members were informed of their duty under G.S. § 138A-22(e) to complete a 2024 Statement of Economic Interest ("SEI") by April 26, 2024, and annually hereafter.

## **Policy**

Using model policies from the North Carolina School Boards Association, the school has developed draft policies categorized into sections beginning with a 1000 series and continuing through a 9000 series. The draft policies are being reviewed by the school administration, boards of trustees, and legal counsel. The Board requests that the legislature authorize the Board of Trustees to approve policies before July 1, 2024.

## **Unresolved Matters from Previous JELOC Reports**

### **Finance**

The GMS Board requests a one-time funding provision of \$25,000.00 for a financial audit to be performed by a third party prior to July 1, 2024.

### **School Planning**

The GMS Board requests retention of its current relationship with NCDPI School Planning because of the nature of State Capital Planning and Construction via memorandum of agreement.

### **Human Resources**

Maintenance Positions/Governor Morehead School: The school administration reached out to DHHS in October 2023 to begin conversations around decoupling the maintenance agreement, transfer of certain facility maintenance positions (FTE + salaries + benefits), and a recurring budget provision for \$1,395,547.00 beginning in FY 2024-25. However, in October 2023, DHHS informed GMS that it was premature to have such conversations. The school administration reiterated the importance and urgency of meeting to develop a transition plan so that the school had the necessary provisions in place for a functional maintenance department starting July 1, 2024. Due to a lack of movement on the matter, in February 2024, the Board provided the school administration with specific guidance on how to proceed. This guidance included:

- 1) that DPI compel DHHS to transfer 16 maintenance positions as mandated in S.L. 2023-134 by July 1, 2024,
- 2) DPI, DHHS, and GMS convene a follow-up meeting regarding the maintenance MOA,
- 3) DHHS provide a detailed breakdown of the allocations of "\$1,395,547.00 in the budget of Central Regional Maintenance, Division of Property and Construction, to cover the cost of maintenance and utilities for the Governor Morehead School" to specify 1) maintenance costs, 2) salaries and benefits, and 3) utilities.
- 4) Inventory of all existing equipment, assets, or other items that were property of Governor Morehead School prior to S.L. 2010-31 that now are in possession of Central Regional Maintenance or DHHS.

Efforts to schedule a meeting for Monday, March 25 were unsuccessful. The Board reiterated that time was of the essence. Despite this, at the writing of this report, no meeting has been scheduled. As of the writing of this report, DHHS has yet to provide the Board with any of the requested itemed listed above.

The amount of \$1,395,547.00 that will transfer to GMS specifically for salaries and diverse utility costs that the school does not currently pay directly. The preceding figure is based on its initial transfer back in 2011. There have been multiple legislative increases since 2011 that would impact salaries with these positions. There have also been multiple utility rate hikes that have occurred as well. There would need to be recurring funds beyond what is required in HB 259 to address the differences in salaries from 2011 to their present-day rates.

S.L. 2010-31 transferred Governor Morehead School from DHHS to DPI via a Type 1 transfer pursuant to § 143A-6. The Board is of the opinion that based on this transfer any personnel or property owned by GMS at the time of the transfer should have remained property of GMS. Thus, GMS is entitled to reclaim that property if it still exists today.

## **Human Resources**

The NCDPI Office of Human Resources provided complete oversight for all HR support and services. The HR functions include but are not limited to: recruitment, classification, salary administration, benefits administration, time and leave administration, employee relations, policy management, performance management, policy administration, etc. At this time, the school is not aware of the process of how employees will have benefits or payroll. Thus, the Board specifically requests that DPI provide training and assign points of contact as part of the transition process to staff who have been designated to assume roles once administrated by DPI.

## **Technology (IT)**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) is currently paying for an Office 365 subscription for each residential school staff member. The total cost is estimated to be \$34,500.

## **Position Sharing**

Currently, GMS pays 34% of the cost of one employee who supports all three schools and is the Director of Digital Learning. This position wears many hats including serving as the “district level” Chief Technology Officer or Educational Technology Leader within and among all three schools (e.g., implementation of DLMI, Home Base products, UID, CIPA compliance, Eddie, OCR submissions, and e-Rate and pre-approval all IT purchases to ensure they meet the DPI and DIT requirements), Director of Career and Technical Education (providing leadership and management for the CTE comprehensive

local needs assessment, annual application for funding, grant applications, accountability for CTE testing, and ensuring federal policy adherence), and Chief Academic Officer (overseeing LETRS and Amplify implementation, ensuring graduation requirements are understood). How will the responsibilities of this position and this position, itself, be handled in the separation? This position will be needed across all three schools whether done separately with GMS alone or jointly with the other two schools.



## References

- Cansler, L., & Pearson, D. (2010). Plans to achieve efficiencies of scale and ensure the appropriate education of students with visual and hearing impairments. Raleigh, NC: Report to the North Carolina General Assembly.
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2017). *2016-17 Greenbook Testing Accommodations*.  
<https://www.dpi.nc.gov/documents/americanindianed/reports/green/2016-17-greenbook-testing-accommodations/open>
- North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (2023). *2022-23 Greenbook Testing Accommodations*. <https://www.dpi.nc.gov/testing-accomodations/open>
- Tikkun, S. (2021). Services to children with Visual Impairments and Teacher training: How to make NC the regional leader [White paper]. North Carolina Central University School of Education.