



School Consolidation Feasibility Study

Presented by

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Board of Commissioners Regular Meeting



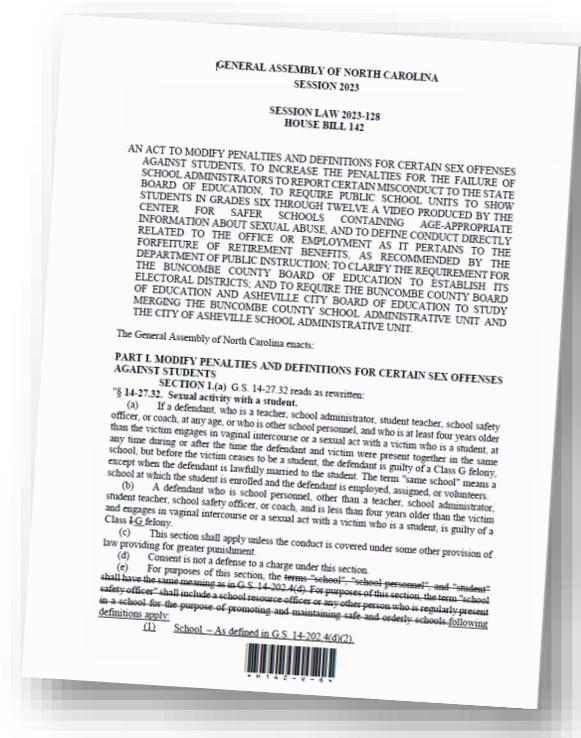
Request for Board Action

Consider approval of the award for a vendor to conduct the feasibility study & the budget amendment to pay for the study



Project Background

- North Carolina General Assembly mandated that the Asheville City and Buncombe County school systems jointly study the feasibility of a merger
- House Bill 142 / SL 2023-128 was signed by the Governor on September 29, 2023
- Asheville City Board of Education & Buncombe County Board of Education voted to designate Buncombe County Government as the lead entity for the project
- Buncombe County Commissioners accepted lead role on October 17, 2023

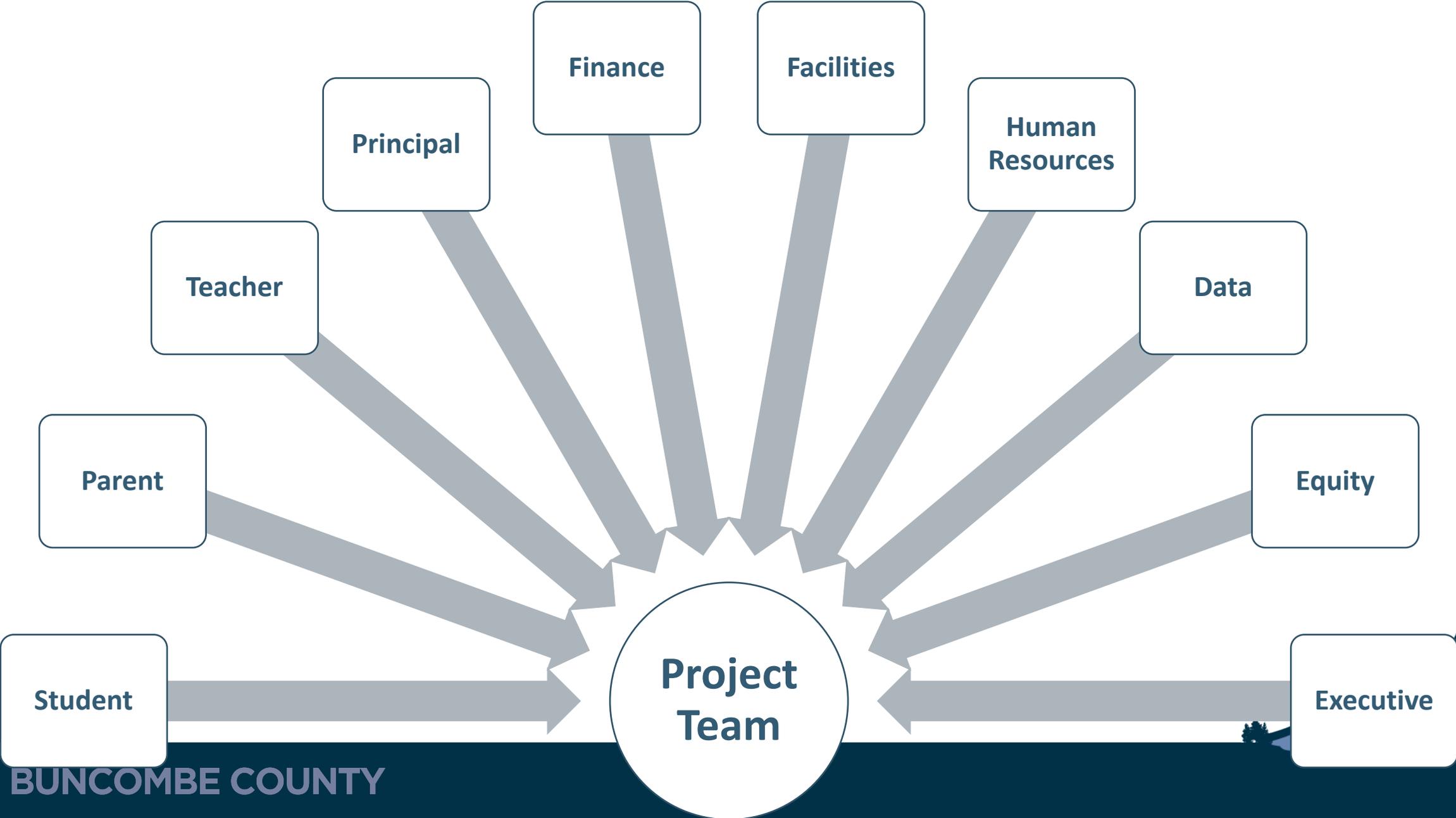


Legislative Mandate

“The **Buncombe County Board of Education and the Asheville City Board of Education shall jointly study the feasibility of the merger of the Buncombe County School Administrative Unit and the City of Asheville School Administrative Unit, including the potential economic and educational impact of merging the school units and any other relevant information.** The Buncombe County Board of Education and the Asheville City Board of Education shall report **findings and recommendations** to the standing committees of the General Assembly hearing elections matters no later than **February 15, 2025.**”



24-member project team, including representatives of county government and both school systems:



Request for Proposals (RFP)

- Buncombe County issued request for proposals for professional consulting services from highly skilled, experienced, and diverse vendor(s) to provide a feasibility study for the consolidation of the two public school systems within the boundaries of Buncombe County
- RFP opened December 1, 2023
- 11 vendors attended pre-submittal meeting
- Proposals were due January 18, 2024
- 7 vendors submitted proposals
- Proposed cost ranged from \$57,000 to \$1.5 million



RFP Requirements

- Utilize a rigorous approach in the completion of the study, including assessment of comprehensive factors - **Student membership, Academic, Student wellbeing, Policy & procedure, Operational, Facilities, Personnel, Governance, Financial, Partnerships, Geographical, Community, Historical & Contextual**
- Incorporate **equity** analysis for all elements within the study
- Center stakeholder and **community engagement**, including opportunities for impacted individuals to contribute to the study/learn about the findings & results
- Include qualitative & quantitative sources of **data** to accurately identify the feasibility of a consolidation
- Identify significant similarities & differences between school systems
- Include short- and long-term impacts as well as projections & scenarios



Review Criteria

Criteria developed by the full project team & reviews completed by a 9-member subgroup, based on the following elements:

- **Philosophy** - Reflective of expressed priorities - engagement, equity & data
- **Approach** - Well-developed, rigorous methodology, inclusive of all required elements
- **Project plan** - Detailed and clear activities likely to yield high quality deliverables
- **Project timeline** - Reasonable timeframes for planning, implementation & delivery
- **Vendor/staff qualifications** - Expertise, organizational structure, similarity of past work, staff qualifications
- **Cost** - Clear, detailed and reasonable project cost & value



Selected Vendor

Prismatic Services, Inc.

- Headquartered in Charlotte, NC
- Network of 50+ contract consultants across the country
- Woman-owned business
- Founded in 2007
- Provides services to schools, school districts & educational agencies
- Has completed more than 300 projects for clients in 31 states and the District of Columbia



Our mission is to support positive change in preK-12 organizations by providing information, insight, and actionable ideas. In all our efforts, we remember the most important customer – students.



Reviewer Feedback

The review group believes that Prismatic Services will produce a quality product that meets the criteria set forth in the RFP based on:

- strong understanding of the project & context
- did their research on prior ACS/BCS consolidation studies
- asked great questions
- experienced staff that can contribute to an effective and efficient study
- seems very hands on and candid
- confident, competent and knowledgeable
- looking for compelling data to make a recommendation, objective, not vested in the outcome
- size of team & level of onsite work
- good value



Proposed Approach

- **Boots on the ground** - a highly skilled, experienced, and diverse team of preK-12 professionals who will provide a substantial number of hours onsite, interviewing school district and community leaders, as well as completing key operational observations.
- **Project management** – team led by a certified Project Management Professional to help ensure effective project planning, project monitoring, and reporting.
- **Communications** – regular written and verbal communication with the local project point of contact, project team, leadership of the 2 school districts, and various constituents.
- **Community input** –interviews, focus groups, surveys, community meetings & online forum.
- **Rigorous analysis** – literature review on the topic of district consolidation, review of the historical discussions of consolidation in Buncombe County, analysis of data, comparison of data to peers, best practices, benchmarks and standards, and an equity-centered analysis of the possibilities given the current state of each school district.
- **Reporting** – a final report detailing all areas analyzed, constituents involved, and a recommended path forward given the risks/benefits of consolidation.



Vendor Deliverables

Prismatic Services will be expected to provide:

- A comprehensive report including description of research method, summary of activities, findings, risks/benefits of consolidation, recommendations, and implementation considerations as applicable
- A summary of key information from the report in a concise, accessible format
- A slide deck summarizing the report
- Presentation of findings in public meetings, to include both Boards of Education and the Board of Commissioners



Cost

- \$301,543 fixed fee based on:
 - ◆ work completed over a 9-month timeframe
 - ◆ 19 onsite visits to Buncombe County, with 75 days spent on-site
 - ◆ more than 1,800 hours of consulting time
 - ◆ a team of 11 highly qualified PreK-12 consultants



Timeline

March 2024:

- County finalizes contract w/ Prismatic Services

April 2024:

- Prismatic Services launches study

December 2024:

- Prismatic Services submits final report

January 2025:

- Commissioners & School Boards discuss findings / recommendations

February 2025:

- Boards of Education report to General Assembly



Next Steps

- If approved, Buncombe County will enter into a contract with Prismatic Services to begin work as of April 1
- Project initiation will include:
 - Finalizing contract
 - Convening local project team
 - Confirming project plan
 - Interviewing local leaders
 - Establishing communication cadence & data transfer methods
 - Collecting initial background data for each district



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