January 30, 2024

Tuesday, January 23, 2024, will be a day Maconians will remember for years to come. On that day, the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Catherine Truitt, came to Franklin to present a state check of 62 million dollars to build a new Franklin High School.

I learned about a meeting with the superintendent last Friday afternoon when Senator Kevin Corbin contacted me. I had just arrived in Richmond, Virginia, to run a cross-country race when I answered his call. He invited me to the meeting with the superintendent because I, along with other Highlanders, had expressed our support for the new high school. I assured the senator that I would be at the meeting.

I also contacted all the town commissioners to see if they could attend as a statement of support for the new high school. Every commissioner expressed enthusiastic support for the high school. Two commissioners, Stiehler and Dotson, already had commitments at the time of the meeting, but both told me to convey their support for the new school. Commissioners Patterson, Pierson, and Weller attended the meeting. We had the honor of sitting next to the members of the Macon Board of Education while Senator Corbin and Superintendent Truitt made their presentations.

At our call on Friday, Senator Corbin stressed to me that the county needed to come together to ask the state to direct lottery funds for this capital project. So, I thought the meeting was going to be a last pitch sales effort to the state superintendent about the county’s need and commitment to build a new school.

Midway through Truitt's remarks, a man walked into the room with a cardboard document in his hand. He told the superintendent that she had left it in the car. The superintendent took the piece of cardboard and turned it around to reveal the 62-million-dollar check. It’s hard to describe the joy and excitement that the reveal generated among the officials in the room.

After the meeting, I told Senator Corbin that he and Representative Gillespie were the mailmen for Western North Carolina. They made sure those state checks supporting this region were mailed and delivered. They played a key role with the state in securing these critical funds.

So, now that the state has weighed in with about half the funding for the new school, it is now time for Macon County to move forward with this project without delay. If funds from the county reserved fund are needed, so be it. If the county has to borrow money to build the high school, let's do it. With this wonderful state support, now is not the time to attempt a scale-down of the project. Like the state, Macon County needs to invest in building a high school that will serve the educational needs of our young people for years to come.

Congratulations to all the folks who worked so hard to make this new high school a reality: the Macon Board of Education, LS 3 Architects, and the Macon County Commission, especially Chairman Gary Shields, the former Franklin High School Principal and lifelong educator.