

Moor Parents Oppose Merger

By GREG KEMMIS
Daily News Staff Writer

After listening to an hour-and-a-half discussion on a county school reorganization looming a year-and-a-half away, more than 500 parents and county residents learned Monday night how limited their options are.

The Education Reform Act is going to take effect and B.L. Moor Attendance Center is going to change.

Those changes mean that Moor will become a part of a Lowndes County school system, based in Columbus, or the school, along with others in the county could join a countywide, Starkville-based school

system.

It is unlikely, the group was told, that plans for merging county schools within the present system could meet new requirements for accreditation, and there won't be time to build a central county high school without a merger with Starkville city schools.

Consolidation with Lowndes County schools is the mandate from the state Educational Finance Commission. But consolidation with the Starkville Municipal Separate School District was the consensus of the crowd in the Moor High gymnasium Monday night.

Residents attending the meeting — the first in a series

between parents, residents and county school district officials — were unanimous in their opposition to joining a school system in Lowndes County, and they were vocal in their support of finding a way to merge with the Starkville district.

Several residents said they do not want to send their tax dollars or their school-age children to another county.

Bluford L. Moor, former county schools superintendent, said he was in favor of consolidating with Starkville and that the EFC plan to put two Oktibbeha County schools in a Lowndes County system was "absolutely ridiculous."

"Moor High is going to change," he told the audience. "As I see it, there's nothing nailed down hard and fast yet. And I have two plans. The most sensible thing, and my first plan, is to join hands with Starkville — they're in the same pickle we are. They need money and they need space. Let us help them build their needed space, build a high school if we have to, but let's get into a system embracing all of Oktibbeha County in one district."

"My second plan is: Why don't you try it — my first plan — and see if it works," Moor said. "If you don't like that, just sit where you are, look for your thumbs, and you'll find See Moor page twelve"

yourself in Columbus, Miss., where you won't know them and they won't know you."

County schools Superintendent Don Christensen, state Rep. Tyrone Ellis and his wife, Rene, who is a county school board member; Dr. Bart MacNeill, chairman of the county school board; and Thad Easterwood, a former county schools superintendent, all spoke to the parents and answered questions about the changes proposed for county schools.

Christensen called for the parents' help in drawing up alternate plans to submit to the state Educational Finance Commission before Feb. 15.

"We probably need some type of consolidation, some type of reorganization to better meet the needs of our children," Christensen said. "But I think we should keep our children in Oktibbeha County."

When asked why the state plan had not called for consolidation with the Starkville school system, Christensen said, "I have no idea whatsoever why we were left out of Starkville."

Several parents asked about the possibility of consolidating Moor and Alexander schools on one side of the county and Sturgis and Maben schools on the other side. But the education commission criteria, they were told, would not allow an accredited district established in Oktibbeha County, with a single high school, without at least 3,000 students. The county schools now serve about 1,800 students.

Ellis said the Legislature would not back down from implementing the Education Reform Act, and he urged county residents to come up with alternatives that would keep the students and schools in Oktibbeha County.

"We're trying to upgrade our educational system, and that task is going to take some reorganization," Ellis said. "But children here are inadequately educated in inadequately equipped schools."

"We need to upgrade the quality of education for those potential doctors and lawyers here at Moor High, but we must consider the alternatives for the children of tomorrow as well as today."

The education commission's plan does not call for closing Moor or any other county schools but would dismantle the administration of the four county schools and place them under school boards in Choctaw,

Lowndes and Webster counties.

District 5 Supervisor George Curry said that he favored improving the quality of education at county schools but questioned giving the schools to another county.

"How is it," Curry asked, "that the state can come up with a demand to hand over our schools to Lowndes County but cannot come up with a demand that the Starkville school district take in our schools?"

The group elected two representatives — Jossie Ledbetter and Moor Principal Charles Davis — to a county committee at Christensen's request. Representatives will be sought from the three other county schools, and they will help draft a

proposal to be sent to the education commission before Feb. 15.

Moor told the parents to make their wishes known to the people who can help them get a countywide consolidation — the people of Starkville.

"Go to your merchants in Starkville," Moor said at the close of the meeting. "Go to your car dealer in Starkville and go to your grocer in Starkville and tell them that you want to keep your children and your money in Oktibbeha County."

"They'll get the message."

Another meeting on proposed school plans will be held Wednesday at 7:30 p.m. at Alexander Attendance Center.