

Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
January 2, 2009

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in special session at 10:00 a.m. on January 2, 2009 at the Morris Education Center. Present were Mike Rogers, Chairman; Chris Whitmire, Vice Chairman; Tawny McCoy, Shelia Norman, and Cindy Petit. Also present were Dr. Sonna Lyda, Superintendent; Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant; Tom Sweet, NCWISE Coordinator; Dr. Scott Elliott, Director of 9-12 Education; Dr. Jeff McDaris, CTE Director; Brian Weaver, RHS Principal; and Doug Odom, BHS Principal. The purpose of the meeting was to hold a work session on high school scheduling. Chairman Rogers called the meeting to order.

Dr. Scott Elliott led the work session. He indicated that the session would focus on concerns that have been expressed and ways to improve high school scheduling and registration. He remarked that although it is not possible to accommodate 100% of requests for courses, the schools do seek to accommodate the greatest number of needs for the greatest number of students.

Mr. Whitmire expressed the following concerns:

- Need better coordination of limited availability classes in a strategically feasible place and time to better serve self-motivated students who want to take those classes.
- Current process for students wishing to take courses at another campus is not user-friendly.

Dr. Elliott provided an overview of the registration and scheduling process for 2009-2010. He outlined areas of needed improvement and changes that have been or will be made to address those concerns:

1. Inadequate time for parental review of registration materials and communication of the overall registration timeline and process. *Registration timeline will begin sooner to give parents more time with materials. Additional parent nights will be scheduled and one-on-one appointments will be offered.*
2. Process for inter-school registration is unclear or discouraging as currently written in the *Course Guides*. *Alternative enrollment options will be more prominently displayed in the Course Guides. Unclear or discouraging language will be removed and replaced with directions for how students will be assisted through the process.*
3. Four-year plans are not developed or updated for some students. *All freshmen now meet individually to develop four-year plans. Counselors have now met with sophomores who started the year without plans. Each plan has been evaluated to see if second semester schedules needed to be modified.*
4. Scheduling is ongoing up to the last days of summer break. *By starting the scheduling process sooner and through closer communication with parents, most schedules should be completed by the end of the semester. Individual requests for*

schedule changes should be minimized by having students rank their alternate choices.

5. Students did not receive a specific requested course, though all courses received were requested or required. *Students and counselors identify the core course requirements, then students will be asked to rank their elective requests.*

Mr. Sweet, Mr. Weaver, and Mr. Odom discussed the NCWISE simulation process and the automated schedule templates. Many simulations are run in an attempt to make the greatest number of matches possible. Manual manipulation is done for problem matches. This process typically goes on all summer. Mr. Sweet discussed the advantages and pitfalls of combined scheduling for both high schools.

Dr. Elliott asked for specific concerns that Board members have received from students, parents and teachers. He reiterated that the schools cannot do everything for everybody; however, most parents understand reasonable explanations, once they talk with the school and allow them to explain why decisions are made.

Mrs. Norman reported that she had heard concerns from parents about the rapid turnaround for schedule requests last year. She also reported concerns regarding lack of response from counselors to parents' concerns/questions.

Dr. Elliott explained the new alternates procedure. The schools are 1) reducing the number of electives that can be requested, and 2) asking students to prioritize their alternatives. Mr. Odom and Mr. Weaver explained how this is handled at BHS and RHS. Dr. Elliott pointed out that students could usually get what they want at some point; however, it is sometimes necessary to differentiate between what is wanted and what is needed.

Mr. Rogers asked if we would risk taking teachers away from some areas by putting them into smaller, special interest classes. Dr. Elliott explained that schools would seek the most efficient balance by weighing the number of students who need something else that the teacher can offer against the four or five students who want the special class. Mr. Whitmire stated this would increase the opportunities for students, and teachers will be teaching students who are more motivated and not being forced into classes they do not really want.

Mrs. Norman asked whether a BHS student could be bumped from a course in order to place a RHS student in that seat. Would the requests be treated equally? Dr. Elliott explained that if the scheduling is combined it could possibly bump a student from their home school. He stated that in his opinion, the home student should have priority, and suggested they run a trial simulation and see what happens. One ripple can affect the whole picture. Any problems could be fixed manually.

Dr. Elliott reported that in the past, some students have been unwilling to take a course at another high school campus, even when they should. He cautioned Board members that they will probably hear complaints about scheduling every year, and asked that they advise callers to relay their concerns to their principal or Dr. Elliott. He observed that he has received very few parent calls regarding scheduling.

Dr. McDaris noted that some limited availability CTE courses have prerequisite courses, which are usually taken as sophomore or freshmen. Since these students are too young to drive, it would be difficult to take the prerequisites at another campus. He estimated that it would cost \$15,000 to run two buses simultaneously for two periods a day.

The Board asked about travel time between high schools and the impact of lost time on instruction. Dr. McDaris estimated 15 minutes of travel time per trip including loading and unloading. Dr. Lyda reported that over 200 students currently travel between campuses, and teachers are flexible in working individually with those students regarding class time.

The issue of high school consolidation was raised. Mr. Whitmire stated that he is opposed to consolidation at all costs. Mrs. Norman stated that she would like to examine this issue as a Board.

Mr. Odom noted that counselors are 10-month employees and do not officially work during the summer. Summer is the busiest time for scheduling. Anytime someone changes a schedule other than a counselor, they must check accommodation to the student's four-year plan. The hope is that by starting the process earlier, the onus of individual scheduling can be taken off the principals and assistant principals and allow them to do other planning. Mr. Rogers asked for an estimate of the cost to add one month of employment for high school counselors. Dr. Lyda explained she would need to run the numbers as the cost would depend on counselors' pay grades. She stated that in light of the poor economic picture, it is unlikely that the system could afford to fund additional months of employment. Mr. Whitmire stated that he would support giving counselors a stipend or some other measure of compensation for the time they give during the summer.

Mr. Rogers asked for an estimate of the number of contacts received during the summer regarding class schedules. Mr. Weaver and Mr. Odom reported contact rates of about 30%. Most of those were due to changing electives. Less than a handful were scheduling concerns that could not be fixed. Mr. Rogers stated that he was trying to ascertain how big an issue this really is, or if it is a concern confined to a few individuals.

Mr. Whitmire suggested that reserved parking spots could help facilitate the travel time issue. He stated that students should be encouraged to take courses outside their comfort zones.

Mrs. McCoy recommended giving parents more information on the four-year plans. Board members agreed that better communication with parents is key in addressing scheduling issues. Dr. Elliott encouraged Board members to funnel concerns to the administration so that they may be addressed.

Chairman Rogers thanked everyone in the work session for their time and effort to improve high school scheduling. He expressed the Board's appreciation for the thorough materials and informative dialogue. He remarked that most problems can be solved at the school level if parents will let us know their concerns, and challenged Board members to channel concerns to the superintendent in order to be addressed by the appropriate person(s).

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. NORMAN, SECONDED BY MR. WHITMIRE, the meeting was adjourned at 12:00 p.m.

January 2, 2009

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Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary