

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
October 18, 2021**

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

BUSINESS ITEMS (including amendments and rescissions):

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comment
3. Good News Report
4. Former Students in the Military
5. Consent Agenda:
 - A. Minutes
 - B. Personnel Report
6. ESSER Mechanical Engineer RFQ Award
7. Rosman Property Purchase
8. FY22 Budget Update
9. COVID Update & Review of Mask Policy
10. Superintendent's Update
11. Important Dates
12. Report from NCSBA Training Event
13. Other Items
14. Closed Session

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in regular session at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, October 18, 2021 in the Brevard High School Auditorium. Chairman McCoy reminded everyone of the mask requirement for school buildings. Marty Griffin led in a moment of silence and Courtney Domokur led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy welcomed everyone, called the meeting to order, and introduced the board members and staff. In addition to approximately 28 guests, the following individuals were in attendance.

BOARD MEMBERS:

Tawny McCoy, Chair
Ron Kiviniemi, Vice Chair
Courtney Domokur
Marty Griffin
Kimsey Jackson

BOARD ATTORNEY:

Kris Caudle, Campbell-Shatley

MEDIA:

Jordon Morgan, Transylvania Times

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS:

Brandon McGaha
David Wright
Tyler Snipes
Kelly Cook

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent
Norris, Barger, Director Business Services
Missy Ellenberger, Director 9-12 Education
Carrie Norris, Director K-8 Education
Audrey Reneau, Director, Federal Programs
Alan Justice, Director, Transportation/Athletics/Safety
Jen Heatherly, Public Information Officer
Dr. Bryan Abernethy, BHS Principal
Chris Whitlock, Director, IT Services
Stephen Shields, Technology Specialist

1. **Approval of Agenda**

ON A MOTION BY MRS. DOMOKUR, SECONDED BY MR. GRIFFIN, the meeting agenda for October 18, 2021 was unanimously approved as presented.

2. **Public Comment**

Chairman McCoy reviewed the guidelines for public comment. She announced that a maximum time of 30 minutes would be allotted for public comment and that each speaker would have 3 minutes. Excerpts from the speakers' comments are listed below.

Deanna Campbell, BES teacher - Thanks to the board for following health guidelines and continuing masks. Wearing masks has not injured the classroom or learning at all. It takes less time to remind students to pull up their masks than for them to miss days and have to make up work. I encourage each of you to visit our classrooms and speak with the teachers. Morale is low and we feel attacked from all sides.

Andrea Kubilus, parent - Thank you for your leadership in mandating masks. I ask you to continue. Masking has helped prevent the spread in our schools. You prevented my child from having to quarantine. Universal masking is the best tool we have right now for protecting the classroom. It is exciting to see the numbers going down. We are not ready to take away the advantage of masks yet. We will get there. A large percentage of the infected are the young ones who can't get the vaccine shots yet. We have to trust our medical professionals. We are all tired of it, but we need to keep kids in the classroom. Masks are the best way to do that.

Sasha Jones, parent - I have a child in 7th grade. His teacher asked her students to raise their hands if they had been vaccinated, then praised the ones who raised their hands. It's hard for me to find the words to describe my outrage that a teacher would do this. My child is there to learn the lesson plan and not to tell kids who have not received the vaccine that they are wrong. The teacher (*gave the name, and was reprimanded by the chairman*) should be disciplined. Other parents are deeply concerned.

Jonathan Owen, parent - Tawny is my sister. I have two kids in the school system. The dangers to our children have to be respected. Social distance and masking should be done across the board. It's a halfhearted effort because they can play sports outside together. The 6-foot rule was changed to 3-feet. I understand that. Numbers are changing. You will save yourself a lot of trouble if you can't prove the numbers have declined due to masks. It has to be consistent. You have to set parameters. It's how you do yourself a favor with the numbers.

Heather Blythe, parent - I am certain that numbers are declining because so many have already had COVID. I have talked with educators and they are suffering too. We will see dropouts because of this. Your truth is not mine and mine is not yours. We do not have omniscience about death. Some families do not let other families or family members visit because they do not think it is safe. We are sending kids out eight hours a day strapped down with a mask. Some have a horrific home life. All to make educators feel safe. Wearing a mask to the doctor and grocery store is not the same as wearing a mask for eight hours. We have to draw the line somewhere. There are a million and one ways to serve others. Masks only make a dent. Controlling our neighbors is not the same as helping our neighbors.

Nickie Vaughn, parent - Why are you okay with elementary and middle school scores for reading and math? Instead of playing health professionals, just do what you were hired

to do. Can any of you tell me anything about my children? What is their favorite food, or their favorite color? How would you like it if your child could not make any decisions for themselves? What if someone like me made decisions for them without your guidance? If someone did that without the parent's permission it would be wrong. You do not have the right to say what is right for my children in terms of masks, vaccines, etc.

Brittani Summey - Thank you for your time this evening. On Oct 13, a teacher asked her student a lot of questions about personal politics. This should not be allowed. Why aren't we disciplining educators for indoctrinating our children? We as parents find this appalling. Their political views should never be made public. Thanks to Kimsey Jackson for his consistency and support of non-masking.

J. J. Janowitz, BHS student - Thank you for keeping kids safe. Parents and students could get sick without the masks and we could return to online classes. I have done research on mental health. Being out of school affects students' mental health. Feelings of isolation would skyrocket. The number of kids in mental health facilities has shot up. Please continue to keep students safe mentally and physically.

Zach Quinn, parent - It is good that numbers are down. The silver lining on the cloud is taking a closer look. A lot has changed since the last meeting. There have been changes from the CDC that if you are vaccinated you don't have to wear masks. A new law passed last week in Senate Bill 64 that requires districts to put a remote learning process on the table. The purpose is to support kids in quarantine. The new mandate makes it more of a personal choice than ever before. It's the parents' choice if they want to quarantine. Why can't they have that personal choice? I am willing to accept responsibility for myself and my kids. It's preposterous to think that our community is contributing to the drop in cases.

Ann Kimble - *Roe v. Wade* will be challenged in a court of law . . . a plaintiff suffered from a rare bone disease. They went to court . . . in order to save a life of someone else. For any person to be forced to accept a procedure goes against our society. Make a choice to make it optional because that is fair and equitable for all involved.

3. Good News Report

Dr. McDaris reported the following items:

Marty Griffin Selected to NCSBA Board of Directors

Congratulations to Marty Griffin for being selected by the NCBSA Nominating Committee to serve on the Board of Directors of the North Carolina School Boards Association. Formal election to the board will take place during the NCSBA Annual Conference on November 11-12, 2021 in Greensboro.

October is National Principals' Month

National Principals' Month in October is a widely recognized celebration of school principals for the essential role they play in making a school great. It is their vision, dedication, and determination that provide the mobilizing force for achieving student success. Join us in recognizing the Transylvania County Schools principals for their tireless pursuit of excellence in our schools:

Mike Kirst, Brevard Elementary
 Dr. Bryan Abernethy, Brevard High
 Jeff Bailey, Brevard Middle

Barbara Grimm, Davidson River
Tonya Treadway, Pisgah Forest Elementary
Bob Dinsdale, Rosman Elementary
Jason Ormsby, Rosman High
Scott Strickler, Rosman Middle
Patrick Chapman, T. C. Henderson

National Custodial Workers' Recognition Day

October 2, 2021 was National Custodian Day, a time for recognizing the people who work diligently, often behind the scenes, to make sure our schools and workplaces are spotless and sanitary. Our school custodians have been true heroes during the COVID-19 pandemic. Everyone is encouraged to show their appreciation to the custodians who help keep us all safe.

National School Lunch Week

The week of October 11-15, 2021 is National School Lunch Week and an annual celebration of the importance of a healthy school lunch in a child's life, inside and outside the classroom. This year's theme is *Wild About School Lunch*, and we encourage everyone to celebrate cafeteria workers by showing them that we are "wild" about the healthy and delicious meals they prepare and serve every day.

National School Bus Safety Week

Held during the third full week of October each year, National School Bus Safety Week (October 18-22, 2021) is an excellent time for parents, students, teachers, motorists, school bus drivers and others to promote the importance of school bus safety. Although school buses are considered to be the safest motor vehicles on the road, accidents do happen, and most accidents occur when a vehicle illegally passes a stopped school bus. School Bus Safety Week helps spread awareness and offers a reminder to everyone to adhere to all safety procedures and bus-stopping laws.

National Bullying Prevention Month

October is National Bullying Prevention Month, a month-long event to help prevent childhood bullying and promote kindness, acceptance, and inclusion. Wednesday, October 20, 2021 is National Unity Day, when everyone is urged to wear orange as a visible message that no child should ever experience bullying.

National Red Ribbon Week

Red Ribbon Week takes place each year from October 23 through October 31. The 2021 theme, *Drug Free Looks Like Me*, was created by Marin Wurst, a 7th grader at Solon Middle School in Solon, Ohio. It serves as a reminder that everyday Americans across the country make significant daily contributions to their communities by being the best they can be because they live drug-free.

4. Former Students in the Military

The board recognized the list of former students from Brevard High School, Rosman High School, and Davidson River School who are currently serving or have previously served in the U.S. Military. There was one new name, Jason Voiselle, on the list.

5. Consent Agenda

ON A MOTION BY MR. GRIFFIN, SECONDED BY MR. KIVINIEMI, the minutes of the October 4, 2021 meeting and the personnel report for October 18, 2021 (see attached) were unanimously approved.

6. ESSER Mechanical Engineer RFQ Award

Norris Barger presented two responses to the ESSER RFQ for mechanical engineering services. One was from McGill Associates, PA, and the other was from Reece, Noland, McElrath, Inc. He reported that both firms presented outstanding credentials and references, and both are highly qualified to perform the services needed. There is a combination of ESSER funding and Capital Outlay budget funding available for six schools (all except Brevard High, Rosman High and Rosman Middle, which will be addressed in the construction bond). Given the number of separate projects and the nature of the projects, the superintendent recommends that the board award the work to both firms based on the accompanying dollar breakdown and subject to appropriate contract terms.

Mr. Kiviniemi asked about the scope of work. Mr. Barger reported that the project will provide better air quality and airflow in the six schools. Much of our equipment and systems is very old. With the ESSER money available, we can do quite a bit of improvements. If approved, the firms would be notified this week and then come in and begin testing. Design work could start before Christmas. The work would be done over a three-year span due to the need to work around instruction. Systems will be down for the most part while the work takes place. ON A MOTION BY MRS MCCOY, SECONDED BY MR. KIVINIEMI, the board unanimously approved McGill Associates, PA; and Reese, Noland, McElrath, Inc., to perform mechanical engineering services for the six referenced schools based on the dollar breakdown as presented and subject to appropriate contract terms and attorney review of the contract terms.

7. Rosman Property Purchase

On August 2, 2021, the board approved the purchase of the former Paul's Quick Service property in Rosman under the terms listed below. The purchase would provide improved accessibility and security to the back side of the Rosman High School property. Mr. Barger reported that Phase I and Phase II environmental site assessments have been performed, and there no evidence of any incidents with the underground storage tanks with the exception of a tiny leak that is below actionable levels. The board of commissioners have approved the purchase price. Mr. Barger stated he has no qualms about closing on the property and completing the sale.

- Purchase price - \$100,000
- Non-refundable due diligence fee - \$2,500. This allows an examination of the property by the Board for up to 90 days.
- Closing to take place no more than 60 days after the end of the examination period

MR. GRIFFIN MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MR. JACKSON, to authorize the superintendent to move forward with closing on the purchase of the former Paul's Quick Service property in Rosman. Mr. Caudle advised that the board still has a number of days to review the environmental and legal issues and does not need to take action at this time. He recommended amending the motion to include this proviso. Mr. Griffin and Mr. Jackson agreed to amend the motion as recommended, and the board voted unanimously to authorize the superintendent to move forward toward closing on the property as the administration continues with due diligence.

8. FY22 Budget Update

Dr. McDaris reported that that the judge issued a ruling in the Leandro case today to have the plan available for review by November 1. There is still no state budget.

9. **COVID Update & Review of Mask Policy**

Dr. Brian Weaver gave an update on COVID-19 cases in the school system. As of October 18, there are 449 total positive cases for students and 60 positive cases for staff; 15 students and 2 staff currently isolated; and 27 students and zero staff currently quarantined due to being considered a close contact. He reviewed weekly data trends, student absences, and reported that a COVID-19 Dashboard has been added to the district website. Additionally, in an effort to align with ever-changing guidance, the local health department recommends a protocol change regarding quarantine and contact tracing (based on the *StrongSchoolsNC Toolkit*, updated October 5, 2021):

Effective October 20, 2021

Individuals, after close contact in a classroom or other school setting, **if masks were being worn appropriately and consistently** by both the person with COVID-19 and the potentially exposed person, do **NOT** need to quarantine. The change applies to exposures in classrooms, other in-school settings, and school transportation but does not apply to exposures during extracurricular, including athletic activities. In the classroom setting, this should limit contact tracing if masking protocols are followed.

Dr. Weaver presented additional COVID information based on board members' requests:

- To date, we have 827 students quarantined due to being identified as close contacts. One-hundred thirty one (131) of those students have tested positive for COVID following their exposure. ($131/827 = 15.8\%$ of the students identified as a close contact have tested positive).
- To date we have had 14 home COVID tests reported as positive since our last update on September 20. These 14 home positive tests resulted in 11 close contacts.
- To date, 122 students have been quarantined/isolated more than once since August 2nd.

Mr. Jackson asked at what point we will be able to do away with masks. He expressed concern about no-mask football games and airborne transfer. He stated that it seems to him the schools are the only ones pushing masks. He said that he "does not think it is good for students, teachers, or staff to get vaccinated in classes all the time," and questioned whether masks are effective at all. He feels that Transylvania Public Health representatives should be at the board meetings to back up their data. He reported that the flow of emails to his inbox had basically stopped, then recently increased to about 50 messages, all in favor of masks. He stated, "I can't help but think that the parents that write these emails supporting masks don't have anything else to do." He does not think masks allow effective communications. He went on to say that reading scores are down and we should correct that. He concluded by expressing appreciation to Dr. Weaver for his work.

Mr. Kiviniemi stated that when he first proposed mandatory masks in the schools, his objectives were 1) to reduce the number of cases among students and staff, and 2) to keep as many kids as possible in school. He addressed Mr. Jackson, saying that the board is concerned about learning loss. Last year students had to spend a lot of time in virtual learning. Nothing can replace great in-person teaching.

Mr. Griffin stated that when schools began the mask mandate, the numbers of cases improved. He believes that we have to keep doing what we are doing and keep doing what is right.

Mrs. Domokur noted that the revised protocols have eliminated the three-foot boundary. She asked who does the contract tracing. Dr. Weaver reported that it is done by school nurses, administrators, teachers, and lead teachers. In late August to mid-September, school administrators averaged five hours per day in contract tracing and notification. Mrs. Domokur noted that teachers on the educator climate committee have indicated no issues with masking—they see it as what we have to do right now, and say it is less preparation to mask than to catch up all the kids that have to quarantine.

Chairman McCoy stated that this has been the most difficult decision in her time on the board. She shares Mr. Jackson's concerns about football games and airborne transfer. She feels the data is changing for the better and numbers will continue to go down due to revised tracing protocols. Her goal is to keep children in the classrooms. She wants our system to reach a place where masks can be optional, but does not feel we are there quite yet.

MR. JACKSON MADE A MOTION for the Morris Education Center to move to optional masks effective immediately. Chairman McCoy explained that optional masks is already the protocol for the Education Center, unless students are present in the building. THERE WAS NO SECOND and the motion failed.

MR. KIVINIEMI MOVED that the board continue the current mask mandate for schools for another month and revisit again at the second meeting in November. MR. GRIFFIN SECONDED, and the motion was approved 4:1 (FOR: McCoy, Kiviniemi, Domokur, Griffin; AGAINST: Jackson).

10. **Superintendent's Update**

Dr. McDaris reported that Fujifilm Diosynth is planning to build a \$2 billion manufacturing facility in Holly Springs, NC. It will be one of the largest construction projects in the state (around 2 million square feet of space), and will add 725 new jobs to Wake County in the next five years. State and local governments offered more than \$100 million in incentives to seal the deal. According to Fujifilm, filling all those needed positions will require a network of partners from the university level all the way down to the local school system. N.C. State University Chancellor Randy Woodson said those expansions, while good, will provide a challenge to North Carolina's institutions in terms of growing enrollment. "We've been working with the legislature on a plan to grow our computer science, biotechnology, genetic engineering, and biopharmaceutical degree programs that feed into these growing industries." Talent, Woodson said, is the first thing every company asks about. "They want to make sure that they can attract and retain a high-quality workforce," he said. "And so we have a responsibility there."

Contrast this with the growing shortage of workers and our state's goal of 2 million credentialed workers by the year 2030. As the *Wall Street Journal* notes, more than a year and a half into the pandemic, the U.S. is still missing around 4.3 million workers. That's how much bigger the labor force would be if the participation rate—the share of the population 16 or older either working or looking for work—returned to its February 2020 level of 63.3%. U.S. employers are struggling to fill more than 10 million job openings and meet soaring consumer demand. Workers are quitting at or near the highest rates on record in many sectors, including manufacturing, retail, and trade, transportation and utilities, as well as professional and business services. Many economists expected school re-openings, expiring unemployment benefits and the fading Delta variant to boost labor-force participation this fall. But evidence suggests the labor shortages might be deepening: Labor supply declined in September and workers quit at record rates in

August. There is a concern that worsening worker shortages reflect longer-term shifts, such as the acceleration of retirements, that won't reverse.

As highly technical jobs continue to open in the state, Fujifilm's CEO notes it has many roles in logistics, supply chain, facilities management and computer programming. As we look at strategies to help our graduates, computer science crops up more and more. Another critical element of preparing the future workforce is getting students into community colleges and university programs. We cannot overlook the importance of the FAFSA (federal student aid) completion as part of this process.

11. Important Dates

Oct. 19	Remote learning day
Nov. 1	REGULAR MEETING, 6:30 p.m., MEC
Nov. 11	Veterans Day holiday
Nov. 11-12	NCSBA Annual Conference for Board Member Development
Nov. 15	REGULAR MEETING, 6:30 p.m., MEC
Nov. 24	Annual leave day (no students)
Nov. 25-26	Thanksgiving holidays
Dec. 6	REGULAR MEETING, 6:30 p.m., MEC
Dec. 20	REGULAR MEETING, 6:30 p.m., MEC
Dec. 22	Students dismissed at noon
Dec 23-Jan 3	Christmas break
Jan. 4, 5	Teacher workdays
Jan. 6	Students return from break
Jan. 17	MLK Day (annual leave, no students)
Jan. 18 (Tue)	REGULAR MEETING, 6:30 p.m., MEC

12. Report from NCSBA Training Activity

North Carolina statute requires board of education members to receive a minimum of 12 hours of professional development training every two years. Local board policy states that members who attend a professional development activity will provide a report of the event to other board members. On October 13-15, Mr. Jackson and Mr. Kiviniemi attended the NCSBA 2021 Fall Law Conference in Asheville. They reported that it was an excellent conference with many informative and timely topics presented by school board attorneys from across the state.

13. Other Items

Chairman McCoy reported that the board would be having 2-on-2 work sessions with the architects later this week to discuss bond options. She added that although the projects are currently stalled, she greatly appreciates all of Mr. Barger's hard work in getting the bond passed and managing it from the ground up. She announced that Mr. Barger will be retiring at the end of the month, and as this is his final board meeting, invited board members to share their thoughts:

Mr. Kiviniemi: "I am very glad to have known you. Your wife was in one of my classes years ago. Thank you for the untold hours you have put in for the students and staff of Transylvania County Schools." Mr. Griffin: "Thank you for all that you have done. Norrris has done a great job for us, and even with the huge job he had, he also found the time to coach for us." Mrs. Domokur: "I remember that you took the time to answer all of my questions as a new board member. That was one of my very first experiences working with you and I will never forget it." Mr. Jackson: "You have always been open and honest and answered all my questions. I am sorry to see you go. Thank you for all

you have done for us.” Mr. Barger remarked, “During my 35 years in education, it has been a pleasure to work with the board and the staff of the Education Center. It has been a pleasure to serve the students and staff of Transylvania County Schools. Thank you for your kind words.”

Chairman McCoy announced that the board would go into closed session. Jami Reese interrupted and demanded to speak, claiming that the board did not provide the full 30 minutes for public comment at the start of the meeting. Chairman McCoy refused Mrs. Reese’s demand and informed her that the board had reached the 30-minute limit at the beginning of the meeting, and that Mrs. Reese was not present when her name was added to the sign-up list.

14. Closed Session

CHAIRMAN MCCOY MADE A MOTION for the board to go into closed session pursuant to N.C.G.S. § 143-318.11 under subsection (a)(3) to consult with an attorney in order to preserve the attorney-client privilege. MR. GRIFFIN SECONDED, and the motion was approved unanimously. Chairman McCoy announced a brief recess, after which the board convened into closed session at approximately 8:30 p.m. Present in the closed session were members Tawny McCoy, Chair; Ron Kiviniemi, Vice Chair; Courtney Domokur; Ron Kiviniemi; Marty Griffin; and Kimsey Jackson. Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent; and Kris Caudle, Board Attorney, were also present. No action was taken in the closed session, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. MCCOY, SECONDED BY MR. KIVINIEMI, the closed session was unanimously adjourned at 8:53 p.m.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. MCCOY, SECONDED BY MR. GRIFFIN, the meeting was adjourned at 8:56 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary

**PERSONNEL REPORT
October 18, 2021**

- I. ACCEPT THE REPORT OF RESIGNATIONS/TERMINATIONS ACCEPTED/INITIATED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT FROM/FOR THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

Licensed Personnel

Elizabeth Ballard, Teacher, TCH & RMS, effective November 5, 2021

Classified Personnel

Laura Rogers Cheek, Teacher Assistant, BES, effective October 15, 2021

Alice Tate, Teacher Assistant, BES, effective December 31, 2021

- II. APPROVE THE EMPLOYMENT RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE SUPERINTENDENT FOR THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

Licensed Personnel

None

Classified Personnel

Amanda Allison, Teacher Assistant, BES, effective October 14, 2021

Gabrielle Frost, Chief Finance Officer, MEC, effective January 4, 2022

- III. ACCEPT THE REPORT OF TRANSFER OF ASSIGNMENT MADE BY THE SUPERINTENDENT FOR THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

Licensed Personnel

None

Classified Personnel

None

- IV. APPROVE THE LEAVES OF ABSENCE RECOMMENDED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT FOR THE FOLLOWING PERSONS:

Licensed Personnel

None

Classified Personnel

None

- V. APPROVE THE SUPERINTENDENT'S RECOMMENDATION FOR THE FOLLOWING SUBSTITUTE EMPLOYEES:

Substitute Teachers

Matthew Blue

Yvette Somekh

Substitute School Nutrition Workers

None