

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
February 2, 2009**

Planning Retreat

Welcome/Agenda Review

Discussion Topics:

- Community Land Trust
- Calendar
- Communication
- Strategic Plan
- FY10 Budget
- Dropouts
- Reduction in Force

Closing Thoughts/Next Steps

The Transylvania County Board of Education held its annual planning retreat at 5:30 p.m. on February 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; and the presenters and reporters listed below. Mr. Rogers gave the invocation and Mr. Whitmire led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Rogers welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order.

Norris Barger

Dian Brewton

Jennifer Heaslip, *Hendersonville Times-News*

Jeff McDaris

Lenora Moody, *Transylvania Times*

Carroll Parker

David Sutton

Bo Williams

Community Land Trust

Carroll Parker gave a report on the activities and progress of the Transylvania County Community Land Trust Formation Committee. The project is moving along well. By-laws have been approved; legislation has been drafted and forwarded to the General Assembly to allow the Board of Education, Transylvania County, City of Brevard, and the Town of Rosman to work with the CLT to provide housing for critical workforce employees; and the Board of Trustees selection process has begun. The attorney is submitting Articles of Incorporation and is filing for IRS 501(c)3 status. Mr. Parker estimated that it would take about a year for 501(c)3 status to be granted. The attorney will draft a deed to transfer property to the CLT pending passage of the enabling legislation, and will draft a contract between the Board of Education and the CLT for the construction of houses. The group is also talking with potential funding sources, consulting with other CLT's, and exploring a possible partnership with Advanced Energy for energy efficient systems. Mr. Parker feels that it may be possible to arrange interest-free loans for homebuyers through the State Employees' Credit Union. Additionally, they are exploring the possibility of purchasing land adjacent to Gillespie Circle.

Dr. Jeff McDaris discussed the integration of the project with CTE classes. Much of the construction work would be done by CTE students. Logistically, the goal would be to have BHS classes work on one house and RHS classes work on another. Dr. McDaris estimated that the two schools could complete two houses every three years. Science classes could also be

involved in studying energy consumption and other environmental factors associated with the project.

Dr. McDaris reviewed the plat map for the project. Board members requested that the Gillespie Circle site be included on the upcoming school facilities tours.

Mr. Parker briefly reviewed statistics on taxpayers and properties in Transylvania County. Non-residents own a large number of improved properties in the county. Their incomes are not figured into HUD funding equations. Construction costs in this county are very high as a consequence of the number of extremely wealthy homeowners who are not full-time residents.

Mr. Whitmire commended Mr. Parker as the vision and driving force behind the formation of the Community Land Trust. The Board commended everyone involved for working to provide this exciting opportunity for teachers, students, and the community.

Calendar

Dr. Bo Williams presented the draft calendar for the 2009-2010 school year as recommended by the Calendar Committee. He gave a report on the calendar development process. A flex calendar option that would have allowed first semester exams before Christmas had been the overwhelming choice among staff, parents, and students. Dr. Williams met with camp owners and other local business owners in January to get their reactions to the flex calendar. They were appreciative of the opportunity for input, but not in favor of the flex calendar due to the fact that many school system employees have camp jobs during the summer. Those employees rely on that additional income, which might be reduced if the summer were shortened by going to a flex calendar this year. Additionally, camp schedules would have to be re-adjusted for the 2009 season if the flex calendar were implemented this year. However, business and camp owners were willing to work with the school system had the flex calendar been approved. Ultimately, the flex calendar option was defeated by DPI.

Mr. Whitmire suggested obtaining a copy of the calendar legislation and drafting a re-write for proposal to local legislators. Dr. Lyda explained that it is not local legislators, but Senate leaders who oppose changing the calendar law. Dr. Williams stated that it was interesting to note that the State Tourism Board now employs the individual who was responsible for pushing the initial "Save Our Summer" calendar legislation through. The Board requested more information on year-round schools and other calendar options and pledged to not give up on finding a way to have first semester exams before Christmas.

Approval of the 2009-2010 school calendar will be requested at the February 16, 2009 meeting. The recommended calendar includes the following:

- First day for students is August 25.
- Early (11:30 a.m.) dismissal on the last student day before Christmas break.
- Spring Break is the third week of April.
- May 31 (Memorial Day) is a teacher workday. This day could be used for weather make-up if needed.

Communication

Lisa Anderson and Scott Elliott gave an overview of communication in the school environment, including central office communication with teachers and principals, communication within and among schools, and communication from schools to families and the community.

Mr. Rogers sees a need for better communication with the community. Dr. Elliott reported that although this is done for specific needs/issues, we are trying to do more. We need a systematic way to communicate with businesses regularly. Administrators serve on a number of community councils. We need to better communicate our needs so that businesses can know how best to support teachers and schools. Principals were seen as the first and best contact in creating positive PR for their schools.

Mrs. McCoy noted that communication between teachers and parents is sometimes limited to problem situations. She stated that parents would like to hear from teachers even when there are no problems with their child. Mrs. Norman added that parents like face-to-face contact and phone calls, not just written notes or e-mails. Board members recommended establishing positive contacts early in the school year before problems start to occur.

Board members agreed that the Parent Advisory Council and the ProActive System are good communication tools.

Mr. Whitmire asked about the process for communicating mid-year changes to student handbooks. Dr. Elliott explained that handbook updates are typically made during the summer. Most major policy revisions are timed not to occur during the school year. It was suggested that schools create a cover letter highlighting the major handbook changes in order to better inform parents of new policies and procedures.

Mr. Rogers thanked Dr. Elliott, Mrs. Anderson and Mrs. Brewton for their ongoing efforts to improve communication. Mrs. Brewton expressed thanks to the local newspapers for publishing articles and school news. Mr. Rogers thanked the administration for its timely and honest communication to staff regarding the state budget crisis and the possible impact on jobs for next year.

Strategic Plan

David Sutton gave Board members an overview of the Transylvania County Schools strategic plan and systems approach to continuous improvement. He discussed the purposeful alignment of priorities from the classroom level to the Board of Education. Strategic indicators may be accessed online at <http://info.transylvania.k12.nc.us>.

Under Priority 4.1 (Leadership), Mr. Whitmire suggested using a more all-inclusive term instead of "United Way." Mr. Sutton and Dr. Lyda will work on this suggestion. Mr. Whitmire also asked whether performance thresholds such as School of Excellence and School of Distinction would still be considered as realistic goals, given the changing landscape in the State Testing & Accountability Department. Mr. Rogers, Dr. Elliott, and Dr. Lyda indicated that they believe the goals to be achievable. The Board thanked Mr. Sutton for providing an outstanding plan.

FY10 Budget

Norris Barger gave a "Budget 101" overview. He reviewed account code structure and state, federal, local, and capital outlay allotments.

Mr. Barger reviewed state purchasing and contracting guidelines. Mr. Whitmire asked whether there would be any benefit to opening up smaller jobs (less than \$300,000) to bids. Mr. Barger explained that the possible cost savings from low bids could be negatively offset by the possibility of poor workmanship. He emphasized the importance of working with qualified, experienced contractors.

Mr. Barger estimated that Transylvania County Schools would receive approximately \$250,000 in lottery proceeds this year. Lottery proceeds are based on a complicated formula that favors low wealth counties in the eastern region.

The Board reviewed "What We Think We Know" regarding the state budget:

1. Districts have been told to plan for 3-5-7% cut scenarios. More at Four, DSSF, Literary Coaches, and Learn & Earn will not be cut, so the magnitude of cuts in other areas will be greater. A 3% cut for TCS would be \$1.2 million. Mr. Rogers calculated that a 5% cut could mean 27 teaching positions.
2. Possible ways to achieve the cuts:
 - A. Possible 25% cut in teacher assistant allotment.
 - B. Heavy cuts in central office, instructional support, and school-based administration.
 - C. Adjustments to formulas and class size calculations, mostly at middle and high school levels.
 - D. No carryover from FY09 and probably none from FY10.
 - E. PRC 072 eliminated or consolidated into PRC 069 (which means a cut).
3. Health insurance will increase at least 25%. Employee-only health insurance may no longer be free.
4. Retirement contribution may be cut or frozen to pay for health care.
5. At most a step increase for teachers and school-based administration, but probably not even that.
6. No ABC bonuses.

The Board reviewed the list of FY10 local budget needs (see below). Dr. Lyda emphasized that the list is very much a work in progress. Depending on the cut scenario, several items could be changed or eliminated. With massive cuts, there likely would be no way to request a technology facilitator, school nurse, or additional math teacher. This is not the year to add programs. Dr. Lyda stated that she would be opposed to a teacher supplement increase if there are massive cuts, noting that \$90,000 is the equivalent of two teacher positions. She added that a COLA increase is very unlikely. The \$50,000 item for Child Nutrition is very much a necessity. The Child Nutrition program is in trouble this year. Labor and food costs have skyrocketed with no increases to the operating budget. The program must have help from state, local or federal sources to maintain operations. Mr. Whitmire asked whether any of the funds could go towards reinforcing obesity prevention efforts. Dr. Lyda explained that the \$50,000 would be strictly to keep the current program afloat.

<u>FY10 Budget Needs DRAFT</u>	<u>Current Expense</u>
1. Teacher supplements to 8.08%	\$92,946
2. Local COLA increase (2% certified, 2% non)	65,894
3. Health insurance 20% increase	92,883
4. Retirement increase?	
5. SRO contracted services	9,134
6. Math teacher (1) to meet core curriculum	50,759
7. School nurse	51,650
8. Technology facilitator (1)	51,650
9. Child Nutrition	50,000
	<u>\$465,934</u>

There was much discussion about how all of this would impact classrooms, students, and staff. Board members fear that the impact could be devastating.

The Board reviewed drafts of the FY10 current expense and capital outlay budgets, FY09 capital outlay board priority list, and athletic facilities surveys.

Board members asked about the feasibility of having CTE students or in-house staff perform some of the needed repairs and renovations. Mr. Barger reported that most items would require licensed contractors. Additionally, with the minimum salary and benefits requirements for in-house labor, we would end up paying more per hour than what we could contract out for.

There was some discussion about concession stands. Mr. Rogers emphasized that the BHS baseball/softball concession stand is a significant source of revenue, and he would like to see this project done this year if at all possible.

The Board also reviewed the lottery balance, fund balance, and budget timeline.

Mr. Whitmire asked the Board to consider hiring a facilities engineer. He feels that a facilities engineer could provide more supervision, better quality control over architectural services and a better stewardship of funds. He stated that he has talked with a couple of firms and feels that a local resident would know how to ask the pertinent questions. Dr. Lyda emphasized that this is not the year to add positions. She reported that the Board had had a facilities engineer on staff in the past, and he was let go because we were not recouping enough in savings to justify his salary. Mr. Rogers stated that in light of the budget situation and the relatively small scope of our construction budget, he does not believe that a facilities engineer would be cost effective. Plus, it would be hard to justify hiring a facilities engineer while not hiring a math teacher or a technology facilitator.

Mrs. Norman asked about the possibility of a parent coordinator. A parent coordinator would function as a liaison between the schools and parents to help better educate and inform parents about changes to policies, new programs, etc. The Board liked the idea, but did not see any way to fund such a position at this time. Mrs. Norman suggested looking into a "Train the Trainer" program through DPI using volunteer services.

Dr. Lyda reported that the county's budget constraints mean that the Education Center facility would not be a topic for consideration this year.

Dropouts

Dr. Elliott presented the just-released dropout data for the 2007-2008 school year. Transylvania had 65 high school dropouts last year, up from 62 in 2006-2007. There was also one middle school dropout. The TCS rate is 5.04%, slightly above the state average of 4.97%. Dr. Elliott observed that TCS continues to see a disproportionate number of dropouts in the higher grades and ages compared to the rest of North Carolina. Forty-five percent of our dropouts were from grades 11 and 12. School counselors report lack of engagement in school, unstable home environments, substance abuse, and student employment as the leading factors. Student exit interviews reveal interest in a GED, choice of work over school, unstable home environments, and not returning after long-term suspensions as the leading factors.

Dr. Elliott noted that plant closings and the poor economy are causing families additional stress and strain. In times like this, schooling can become less of a priority or a more difficult priority to manage. Parents working multiple jobs can mean less supervision at home. More students are working. There are no mental health services in this county. All of these factors are reflected in

our dropout numbers. Dr. Elliott stated that it might be time to re-evaluate the arrangement with Schenck Job Corps. Schenck students are very transient, and this has an impact our dropout rate as well.

For the 2008-2009 school year, there are 32 dropouts to date. Dr. Elliott noted that the budget picture has limited the ability to offer any new programs. The question becomes what is missing in our spectrum of services? What more can we offer with our current resources?

Reduction in Force

Dr. Lyda presented a first look at the re-written Policy GCPA "Reduction in Force." She explained that the policy needs to be updated in case we have to use it. The policy will be presented for first read information at the February 16 meeting. David Sutton reviewed the policy and Board members suggested some changes for clarity.

Mr. Whitmire stated that he had received reports from teacher assistants that the news of a possible reduction in force was handled in a joking manner. Dr. Elliott reported that he had witnessed the message being delivered very professionally and respectfully. Dr. Lyda reported that most people have expressed appreciation for being informed in order to be prepared should the worst happen.

Closing Thoughts/Next Steps

Dr. Lyda summarized the follow-up plans for each of the topics discussed. She thanked everyone for their preparations and the Child Nutrition staffers for the meal.

Dr. Lyda shared a letter from Cathy Childress, lead teacher at RES, which stated, "I have been so impressed with the involvement of the Central Office staff with each and every school. I have never, in my 30 plus years now, seen Central Office so much involved *and at the schools on a regular basis* as I do with Transylvania County. As a principal, I always had to do all my observations by myself with no assistance from anyone. I think it means a lot to the schools and the teachers for *you* to see them in action." Dr. Lyda added her thanks to Central Office for all that they do. Chairman Rogers seconded those sentiments.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. NORMAN, SECONDED BY MRS. MCCOY, the retreat was adjourned at 10:55 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary