

Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
February 6, 2012

Planning Retreat

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The Transylvania County Board of Education held its annual planning retreat on February 6, 2012 at 5:30 p.m. at the Morris Education Center. Chris Whitmire, Chair; Tawny McCoy, Vice Chair; Cindy Petit, Shelia Norman and Sue Fox were present. Also present were Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent; Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant; April Mackey, School Resource Officer; Eric Crews, *Transylvania Times*; Meredith Licht, TCAE; and approximately 15 presenters and guests. Mr. Whitmire led in a moment of silent prayer and Mrs. Petit led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman Whitmire welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order at 5:50 p.m.

Public Comment

Rance Jones, parent, expressed concerns about activity bus routing. He feels that having buses travel on Interstate highways is unsafe due to the higher rates of speed and the number of big trucks. He would prefer that TCS activity buses travel over mountain roads rather than Interstate highways.

April McNeely, parent, expressed similar concerns. She feels that the chances of an accident involving activity buses and big trucks are greater on I-40 versus Highway 107, for example. She also spoke about the number of hours that student athletes have to miss from class due to travel to away games. She feels it would be quicker and safer to send buses over the mountain, or for parents to transport students to games in their personal vehicles.

Mack McNeely, parent, stated that he thinks bus drivers frequently exceed the hours they are legally allowed to drive. He added that vehicles on Interstate highways travel at high speeds on some of the worst roads in the state. He pointed out that Highways 107 and 64 have recently seen improvements such as repaving, widening lanes, and adding more guardrails. He sees it as a waste of time and fuel to send buses on the longer Interstate routes to away games.

Afterschool Update

Dr. Kim Elliott reported that the state has passed a new ruling that afterschool daycares must upgrade to five-star licensure in order to continue receiving Title XX benefits. Currently, the afterschool daycare programs at Brevard Elementary School and Pisgah Forest Elementary School hold two-star licensures. To upgrade to the five-star rating would require costly playground upgrades (over \$90,000—mostly for rubberized mulch) and increased staffing ratios (approximately \$40,000 in additional salaries at each site). Dr. Elliott reported that an option exists to pull out of the star rating system and operate under the TCS umbrella. This would

necessitate finding money to replace the Title XX funds. Dr. Elliott is also exploring possible options to get the star upgrades for zero money. She stated that afterschool daycare programs are held to higher staffing ratios and other standards than for regular classrooms. The TCS daycare staff to child ratio is 1:12.

NC QUEST Update

Dr. Kim Elliott gave an update on the Transylvania County Schools Responsiveness to Instruction (RtI) model, provided by the NC QUEST grant. The RtI model provides interventions and enrichments in reading and mathematics across the district. Dr. Elliott reported that the program is going very well and providing many benefits already. The grant funding is expected to run for least 18 more months.

Curriculum Updates

Dr. Scott Elliott reported that the TCS dropout rate for 2010-2011 was 2.92%, the lowest percentage rate in the last 18 years. This number reflects a 20% drop from last year, and a 42% since the 2007-2008 school year. Dr. Elliott observed that this is especially impressive in light of the fact that 1) standards have gotten higher, and 2) children have experienced a greater number of needs over the past several years. He stated that the decrease in dropouts speaks to the success of our student advocates and other programs.

There was some discussion about the lack of state accountability for home schools with regard to attendance laws. Dr. Elliott reported that TCS receives good cooperation from the sheriff's office and DSS in investigating cases of truancy that are reported to us.

Dr. Elliott gave updates on new and expanded CTE courses in health sciences, graphic design and marketing, construction, and entrepreneurship. BHS hopes to pilot a pharmacy technician course next year. Dr. Elliott described a new College and Career Promise initiative which provides college courses in applied technology and college transfer pathways. One of these exciting new offerings will be a partnership with Blue Ridge Community College in Mechatronics. Mechatronics refers to the high tech skills such as welding, machining, and mechanical and electrical engineering that are in demand for automated systems. The old AG mechanics course will be phased out at BHS leaving an empty shop area. This space will be used to offer Mechatronics classes to students during the day and adults in the evening.

Dr. Kim Elliott reviewed the ACRE timeline for implementation of common core and essential standards. She gave a review of the state curriculum resources that teachers are using now and outlined professional development activities that are planned for upcoming early release days.

Dr. Scott Elliott discussed high school course sequencing in math and social studies. He also reviewed the state's Instructional Improvement System that is in development.

Dr. Kim Elliott gave an update on assessments (testing). The state may revise the K-2 model. In the meantime, TCS will sit tight with AIMSweb. New online EOG and EOC assessments are coming from the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The state is developing assessments in every content area and grade level that are not currently tested with EOG or EOC. The timeline is to field test this year and implement in 2012-2013. Board members were skeptical that this could be done so quickly. Meredith Licht reported that the NCAE task force foresees problems in standardizing assessments for certain curriculum areas as dance, drama, chorus and band, to name a few.

Dr. McDaris reported that there has been ongoing discussion with principals this year regarding the TCS attendance policy. There may be some policy recommendations later for the Board's consideration. Principals Kerry Putnam and David Williams reported that administrators are looking at ways to deal with excessive tardies and models that are incentive based rather than punitive.

Dr. McDaris reported that another topic being discussed is grading practices. Board members may be asked to serve on a committee to study options. Mrs. Norman volunteered to serve on a future committee.

Chairman Whitmire invited RHS baseball coach, Derek Huggins, and RHS student T.J. Henderson, to address the Board. Mr. Huggins reported that he has been working to help T.J. on his senior project, renovation of the RHS baseball backstop. He quoted an overall price for the project of \$9,400. He reported that local companies have offered donations of labor and discounted materials toward the project, and asked the Board for their assistance in the amount of \$2,500. Chairman Whitmire asked for a motion. Mrs. Norman suggested that since this was a planning retreat with no action scheduled, the matter be tabled until the next regular meeting on February 20. Mrs. McCoy agreed, and asked Mr. Huggins if he could wait a couple of weeks so the Board could think it over. Mr. Whitmire stated that the matter could be added as an agenda item to the facility tours scheduled later in the week. Mrs. Norman stated that she was uncomfortable at being asked to vote so quickly on something that had not been previously vetted or discussed. Chairman Whitmire asked Dr. McDaris and Mr. Justice for their thoughts. Dr. McDaris stated that his concern would be making sure the project fit in with the larger sports/recreation facility that the county is planning to build in that area. The Chairman instructed that the matter be added as an action item for Thursday, February 9.

School Calendar 2012-2013

David Sutton presented the Board's first look at school calendar options for 2012-2013. He reported that Transylvania County Schools has requested a waiver from the 185-day requirement for next year. The State Board has not yet taken action on that request and may not take action for several months. Therefore, the calendar committee has recommended that the Board adopt two calendars (a 180-day version and a 185-day version) in order to give staff, students and parents some guidance in planning for next year. He also reported that the calendar committee had agreed that the schools would determine individually the placement of their designated workdays (DW) based on each school's specific circumstances and needs. He presented four calendar drafts and reviewed the major differences among the versions:

	First Student Day	Spring Break	Good Friday	Easter Monday
Draft A (180 days)	Aug. 13	Apr. 1-5	holiday	(spring break)
Draft A (185 days)	Aug. 08	Apr. 1-5	holiday	(spring break)
Draft B (180 days)	Aug. 13	Apr. 15-19	holiday	teacher workday
Draft B (185 days)	Aug. 08	Apr. 15-19	holiday	school day

Mr. Sutton reported that Draft A aligns well with the local community college schedule. Draft B shortens the time between spring break and the end of the year. He reported that the calendar committee had voted in favor of Draft A by a slim majority. Approval of the school calendar(s) will be requested at the February 20 meeting.

Year-Round and Magnet Schools

Dr. McDaris reported that some parents and community members have expressed interest in exploring year-round and/or magnet schools in Transylvania County. He reviewed the pros and cons of year-round schools and gave Board members calendar comparisons and a handout with frequently asked questions. He explained that the first step would be to find out how much interest the community as a whole would have in year-round schooling or magnet schools. To that end, the administration is developing a survey to gauge the level of public interest. The Board touched briefly on transportation, scheduling, athletic eligibility, transfers, and child care as just some of the issues would need to be studied. Brevard High School principal, Jeremy Gibbs, spoke about his experiences with magnet schools. Dr. McDaris stressed that no decision has been made either for or against year-round or magnet schools at this time—the administration is merely seeking to determine the level of interest in and support for the concept. The Board requested a review of the survey instrument before it is administered.

Athletics and Conferences

Alan Justice gave an update on athletic conference assignments for 2012-2013. Rosman will be in the 1A conference and Brevard will be in the 2A conference. Mr. Justice feels these are good rankings in terms of travel and school rivalries. Mr. Justice reported that the middle school athletic programs are building. Mr. Whitmire spoke at length about what he would like to see in middle school athletics.

Dr. McDaris and Mr. Justice explained the reasons for having TCS activity buses travel Interstate highways versus mountain highways. They reported that buses are much larger and heavier than in years past. They are powered by V-8 engines that are not well suited for mountain travel. Buses must stay within the yellow lines—shaving curves to save time is strictly prohibited. Dr. McDaris reported that he had shared with Board members information from the Department of Motor Vehicles which indicated it is safer for buses to go around rather than over the mountain. Dr. McDaris reported that he had also polled other western region superintendents regarding their districts' practices. All superintendents polled reported that their staffs have been directed to take the Asheville (Interstate) route. Mr. Justice stated that those who advocate for the over-mountain routes may not realize how slowly buses must move on curvy two-lane roads in order to meet safety guidelines. He suggested riding the Highway 215 route with bus driver Barbara Kilpatrick, whom he commended for driving that route in the proper manner, in order to get a true experience of the slow speed that is needed. He recalled his days as a coach and the number of children who became carsick from buses that took the curves too fast. He stated that he wants our buses to travel the safest way with the fewest breakdowns, and that as the Transportation Director and Athletic Director of Transylvania County Schools, he would oppose sending buses over the mountain. However, if the Board feels that further study is required, and if the data supports changing our routing procedures, he would be happy to comply.

Mr. Whitmire acknowledged that Mr. Justice and Dr. McDaris both presented valid points, but he feels that more study is needed. He stated that the bottom line is our kids are traveling too many hours, and he would like to find a better, smarter way. He suggested that our next bus procurement may need to be a smaller model. He feels that the recent improvements to some mountain roads do warrant another look.

Mrs. Petit reported that she has seen a lot of activity buses from other school districts traveling past her shop in Lake Toxaway. She stated that she has also polled other school officials while attending her kids' games, and they have said they prefer, but do not mandate, the Asheville route. She stated that she sees validity to both sides of the debate.

Mrs. Norman recommended that the Board members ride one of the mountain routes to get a firsthand view. She stated that her daughter plays sports and she is just as concerned with her child's safety. She expressed concerns about heavy fog and poor visibility at night on mountain roads, and stated that she would not support pushing buses to travel unsafely just to save time. Mrs. Norman asked to be a part of any new study on this matter.

Mrs. McCoy stated that she thinks that any change in procedures should be based on data from the Department of Transportation safety experts, not parent opinion only.

Substance Abuse

Mr. Justice gave an update on student drug testing. He reported there were four positive test results (all for marijuana) during winter sports. He informed the Board that principals have reported increasing numbers of students arriving at school under the influence of drugs. The drug testing policy will be reviewed for ways to address this issue. Dr. McDaris stated that he is greatly concerned about drug use in the community at large. He reported that people of all ages, not just teens, are increasingly engaging in risky behaviors.

FY13 Budget

Norris Barger reported that the schools could see a state budget by June 30 if the legislature does not make a lot of changes to the biennial budget that was adopted last year. He reviewed some of the anticipated budget changes for FY13. EduJobs money will end this year. This has been used to fund 14.5 teacher positions. If the county is asked to make up the EduJobs funding, we could be looking at a 10.4% increase in county appropriation.

Mr. Barger reviewed lottery balance, current expense and capital outlay. He reported that even with our lottery balance, the capital outlay fund is woefully inadequate to cover all of our needs. The five-year capital outlay plan has been updated based on principal submissions. Items shown in red reflected changes from the previous year in either priority or amount, or as a new addition to the plan.

Mr. Barger highlighted two critical projects: 1) the BHS gym and field house water line repair, and 2) the BHS auditorium roof and electrical repair. He reported that the auditorium electrical problem has been noted as a safety hazard by the fire marshal. Other urgent projects include reseal of the PFES stone façade and repair of bricks on the high school edge of the Rosman auditorium roof. Several schools have expressed strong interest in key card security systems for front entrances.

Mr. Barger reported that the school district has an opportunity to finance 66-passenger activity buses at a very low interest rate. Purchasing three buses could cost \$68,000 in year one, with about \$4,500 in interest payments over three years. Mr. Barger noted that the district's passenger cars also have very high mileage and will need replacement soon.

Mr. Barger observed that the ongoing postponement of needed capital repairs due to lack of funding is raising the future price tag on these items through the roof. Most of the capital projects in the FY13 column are either safety, repair or replacement items--no improvement items. To be able to make improvements would require more than \$1.8 million. Mr. Barger reviewed the TCS master plan. Total cost to implement the plan would be \$16.6 million.

Jeremy Gibbs gave an update on fundraising totals to date for the student art gallery project at BHS.

Technology Update

Dony's Merrill gave a report on the state of technology in the schools. We currently have wireless saturation at all sites. Brevard High School has four computer carts in classrooms, and Brevard Middle School has an additional cart. Software delivery systems and professional development options for teachers have expanded. This spring, Rosman High School received 250 netbooks for individual student use, and more are on the way. Beginning this week, the middle schools and high schools will receive access to Google Docs and Gmail for coursework and communication with teachers. Microsoft Office 2010 was purchased to replace the unpopular Open Office software. The Alert Now parent notification system will be replaced with the ParentLink system in 2012-2013. ParentLink will provide better communication with NCWise. The Parent Assist Module (PAM) is coming. PAM will allow parents to review their child's grades and make updates to contact information, demographics, etc. Future goals include continued rollouts of laptops for students, further expansion of professional development, support and monitoring, public relations, and redesigned websites. The ultimate goal is 1:1 computer access for students down through third grade. Mrs. Merrill demonstrated a netbook and carrying case like those the RHS students received, and a Google chromebook that is being considered for BHS. She also demonstrated the new design for school websites. Board members were enthusiastic about the many new changes and the direction for the future.

50-Celebration of Integration

Dr. McDaris reported that he is working on a system-wide celebration of the 50-year anniversary of racial integration in the Transylvania County Schools. He hopes to be able to get a big speaker for the beginning of school. The date of the event will hinge on the resolution of the calendar issue. He noted that the City and the County governments have indicated they would like to be involved in the celebration as well.

Mr. Whitmire gave an update on the county budget.

ON A MOTION BY MRS. FOX, SECONDED BY MRS. MCCOY, the meeting was adjourned at 11:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary