

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
February 6, 2023**

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

BUSINESS ITEMS (including amendments and rescissions):

1. Finalize Survey for Superintendent Search
2. School Calendar Alternative Draft 2023-2024

WORK SESSION DISCUSSION TOPICS:

1. County's Proposal for Deferred Maintenance Study and Capital Reserve Study
2. School Capital
3. Learning Recovery Strategies / Attendance
4. School Safety and Security Update
5. Funding Challenges for Exceptional Children's Program / Pre-K
6. ELL Funding
7. Computer Science Graduation Requirement

ADJOURN

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in regular session on February 6, 2023 at 5:30 p.m. at the Morris Education Center. The purpose of the meeting was to hold a short business session followed by the annual planning work session. Ron Kiviniemi led in a moment of silence and Chris Wiener led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. She reported that Mrs. Dalton was out of town and would join the meeting via speakerphone (All votes will be roll call votes unless other indicated). In addition to approximately five guests, the individuals listed below were in attendance.

BOARD MEMBERS:

Tawny McCoy, Chair
Kimsey Jackson, Vice-Chair
Tanya Dalton (*via speakerphone*)
Ron Kiviniemi
Chris Wiener

BOARD ATTORNEY:

Chris Campbell, Campbell Shatley

MEDIA:

Dan DeWitt, Brevard NewsBeat

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent
Missy Ellenberger, Director, 9-12 Education
Carrie Norris, Director, K-8 Education
Audrey Reneau, Director, Federal Programs
Alan Justice, Dir., Facilities, Athletics, Transportation
Jen Heatherly, Public Information Officer
Chris Whitlock, Director, Technology Services
Jason Merrill, Plant Operations Supervisor
Jessica Sharp, Dropout Prevention Coordinator
Jayson Rogers, School Resource Officer

1. Finalize Survey for Superintendent Search

Mr. Campbell reported that at the last meeting the board approved changes to the survey on characteristics for the next superintendent that would provide accommodations for non-English speakers, and to allow respondents in different capacities (e.g., parent and staff member) to take the survey more than once. He asked if board members had any other revisions. Mr. Wiener recommended that board approve the agenda first. MR. KIVINIEMI MADE A MOTION to approve the meeting agenda for February 6, 2023 as published. MRS. MCCOY SECONDED. MR. WIENER MOVED to modify the agenda to include an opportunity for public comment prior to finalizing the survey. There was no second and the motion to modify the agenda failed. ON A ROLL CALL VOTE of 4:1, the

motion to approve the agenda as presented was approved (FOR: Dalton, Jackson, Kiviniemi, McCoy; AGAINST: Wiener).

Mr. Wiener requested the addition of a question, "Have you ever had an issue/grievance raised with the school system that has not been adequately resolved to your satisfaction," to the survey instrument. Mr. Kiviniemi and Mrs. McCoy questioned the relevance of that question to a survey that is designed to identify the characteristics and traits for the next superintendent. Mr. Wiener explained that it may indicate context for open-ended questions. Mr. Campbell reported that the survey already contains a "catch-all" question in which a respondent could write whatever they want; however, grievances are typically handled at the lowest level and the survey questions are public record. Participants may not want their issue included in the public record. Mr. Wiener withdrew his request. MR. KIVINIEMI MADE A MOTION to approve the survey as previously revised at the last meeting. MR. WIENER SECONDED and the motion passed unanimously. Mr. Campbell reported that the survey would be distributed via district and school websites, email links, media advertisements, etc., and would be available in Spanish. Paper copies will be available at the schools also.

2. School Calendar Alternative Draft 2023-2024

At the last regular meeting, the board asked Dr. Brian Weaver to prepare a second draft calendar for the 2023-2024 school year that would allow first semester exams to be completed before Christmas break. Dr. Weaver presented Draft B which has a start date of August 14. Both Draft A and Draft B contain 179 student days and meet the 1025 instructional hour requirement. The board discussed the two calendars. Mr. Jackson stated that he does not want to violate the state calendar law and asked if first semester could end before Christmas under Draft A. Dr. Weaver explained that doing so would create a 76-day first semester, and could result in inequity of instructional time for students depending on which semester they take certain courses. Chairman McCoy gave a reminder that Union County Schools adopted a calendar that violated the state calendar law, got sued by parents, and voted to return to a calendar within state mandates. Mr. Campbell reported that the Union County lawsuit included an injunction against board members who would have had to pay attorney fees. School boards across the state are grappling with this issue. Currently there is no viable legal argument that allows school systems to deviate from the state calendar law. Mr. Wiener suggested that parents could sue the board for following the state law. Mr. Campbell explained that would be a frivolous lawsuit. There was a general consensus to approve one of the calendars at the February 20 meeting.

WORK SESSION

County's Proposal for Deferred Maintenance Study & Capital Reserve Study

Dr. McDaris reported that the county is seeking RFQs to perform a deferred maintenance study and capital reserve study of county facilities, including the schools. Mr. Campbell reported that this is not a typical county activity; it is something more usual for a school board. A capital reserve study looks at maintenance needs and costs them out for money to be set aside over time. It looks at infrastructure such as boilers, chillers, roofs, etc. The school board would need to give permission for whomever is hired to come onto school property and spend time with the maintenance department. It is unknown how long this study would take or how it would impact the formation and work of the ad hoc facility committee. Dr. McDaris gave a brief update on the ad hoc committee. He reported that while some people are confirmed and ready to go, we are waiting to see who they want to include as construction experts. Chairman McCoy reported that

the committee was supposed to report back to both bodies in February; however, we assume that will not happen now.

Mr. Campbell pointed out that the ad hoc committee cannot do its work until this new study is completed. It will significantly delay the process. Mr. Kiviniemi noted that the board was never contacted or informed prior to the county taking this action. He remarked that every step in the board's attempt to fulfill the wishes of the voters seems to be blocked and delayed. Mr. Jackson noted that the school board commissioned an extensive school facilities study in 2015 that was the basis of the bond issue. It seems this could be an update to the work that has already been done. He also gave a reminder that nothing has ever been publicly reported on the work of the consultants that were hired by the county several months ago.

Mr. Campbell reported that the original timeline for the sale of the bonds will expire in November 2025. It can be extended by three years to 2028.

Chairman McCoy expressed concern that this project was advertised and initiated with no input from the school board. At a minimum, there should have been an opportunity to request that any firm selected have experience with North Carolina educational facilities. It would be a reasonable request for someone from the county to meet with the superintendent or board chair to prevent a misunderstanding. Mr. Jackson stated that it is unclear what the county intends. Chairman McCoy stated that she would reach out to the commission chair to find out more about the study and how it affects the schools.

School Capital

Director Alan Justice and Supervisor Jason Merrill gave an status report on current and pending capital projects. Mr. Justice reported that he hopes to have most of the projects on the list done by the end of the school year. Mr. Wiener asked for reports on several items not on the list. He requested that the next report be updated to show scheduled completion dates, purchase order release dates, project start dates, bid dates, etc. He asked several questions about how priorities are determined and how projects are selected when there is leftover money from savings. Chairman McCoy requested that the report be shared with the county manager.

Mr. Campbell reported that he and Finance Officer Juba have been working on a historical study of the sources of revenue that the county is required by law to provide to the school system, including how much was actually provided. That report will be presented soon.

Learning Recovery Strategies / Attendance

Director Carrie Norris gave a report on strategies and resources to address learning recovery and academic progress in elementary and middle schools. She reviewed data and benchmarks for K-5 and 6-8 reading and math and noted that we are making improvements over last year, especially in the elementary grades. She attributed the smaller gains seen at the middle school level to the increased difficulty in closing learning gaps as kids get older. Mr. Wiener asked for several clarifications and elaborations regarding data. Mrs. Norris offered to provide any subgroup data that he would like to see.

Director Missy Ellenberger presented Fall 2023 EOC and ACT data and growth indicators for high schools and reviewed strategies to address academic progress. Mr. Wiener stated that he would like to see early indicator data if available. Mrs. Ellenberger stated that she would share whatever she has; however, we will not receive the state data early. Many questions were asked and answered. Mr. Wiener recommended putting hard copies back into students' and parents' hands because high schoolers are opting out of reading.

Mrs. Ellenberger reviewed attendance issues and the impact of chronic absenteeism on student achievement:

- Chronic absenteeism is defined as missing 10 percent or more of school days in a school year for any reason, including excused and unexcused absences. This can translate to missing 18 or more days per year or two days per month.
- Students who are chronically absent in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade are much less likely to read at grade level by third grade. This makes them four times more likely to drop out of high school than proficient readers.
- It starts early. Ten percent of kindergartners and first graders are chronically absent.
- A student who is chronically absent any year between grades 8-12 is more than seven times more likely to drop out.
- On average, a college graduate is likely to live about nine years longer than someone who has not completed high school.
- 2 days missed a month = 2 days a year = 1 year of school missed in grades K-9. This equates to 200 hours of math instruction missed in grades K-9 and 300 hours of reading missed in grades K-9.

Dropout Prevention Coordinator Jessica Sharp reviewed the percentages of students chronically absent in our elementary, middle and high schools from 2014-15 to 2022-23. The numbers have risen each year, peaking in 2021-22, and dropping back slightly in 2022-23. Ms. Sharp reported that the attendance review committee has been meeting for over a year to come up with strategies to address what has become a crisis nationwide. The committee is looking at a tiered approach with evidence-based research. It is not a one-size-fits all approach. Increased communication with parents and community outreach are key.

Mr. Wiener asked a number of questions about the attendance committee guidelines, committee make-up, and why parents are not included on the committees. Dr. McDaris reported that historically, including a person whose child has missed a lot of days has been unproductive. Mr. Wiener believes that that parents should be included on the attendance committee(s) and have input into the punishments for excessive absences, either for leniency or for stiffer consequences.

Chairman McCoy called a 10-minute recess at 8:00 p.m. The meeting reconvened at approximately 8:10 p.m.

School Safety and Security Update

Mrs. Ellenberger gave an update on school safety and security measures. We have School Resource Officers in all nine schools. They are invaluable. The "Say Something" tip line app is working very well. When a tip is submitted, administrators are contacted via text. If the situation is life-threatening, it includes phone calls. Some students have even self-reported. Materials have been ordered for a fence at BHS from the social studies wing to the CTE wing to provide additional security.

Director Chris Whitlock reported that site safety surveys are conducted each year with the Fire Marshall, EMS representatives, and building administrators to address potential safety issues on school campuses. We need security camera upgrades at several facilities. Current systems are eight years old and the typical life expectancy is five years. We also need more two-way radios. We received a grant from DPI for 70 additional radios and a repeater system for BHS. We are still waiting for some Kenwood radios that were ordered in 2021 and have not shipped due to supply chain issues. He reported that Gaggle is a new product that we pay for that serves as a

filter for student email and files in Google drive. We have received approximately 180 Goggle alerts. These can be minor, major, or sometimes false positives. Some of our neighboring school districts are using the Crisis Go App which is additional software to allow emergency mass communication during Codes Yellow or Red. The price tag for Crisis Go would be \$12,800 in the first year and slightly less in subsequent years.

Funding Challenges for Exceptional Children's Program / Pre-K

Dr. McDaris reported that federal funding for the Exceptional Children (EC) program is not keeping pace with the actual EC population in the schools. The EC funding formula is 40 years old. It was originally set up to fund 12-13 percent of the total school population, and it has remained at that level ever since. Our percentage of students receiving EC services currently is 18-20%. Because we are underfunded, it is becoming difficult to provide services and find people willing to work in EC. It is also affecting Pre-K. We are allowed to have 18 students per Pre-K classroom. However, if EC students are included, we are limited to 12 per classroom. This inhibits our ability to have additional Pre-K slots. This is something the board needs to keep on its radar.

ELL Funding

Dr. McDaris reported that our English as a Second Language (ELL) population continues to grow. We currently have 3 teachers for 185 ELL students. We asked the county for funds to provide an additional teacher position last year but it was not approved. This may be a consideration for the FY24 budget request.

FY24 Budget

Dr. McDaris presented a first look at the draft list of items for the FY24 local budget request. We have very little budget information from the state legislature at this time. In general, we think there will be some kind of pay increase. There likely will be an increase in retirement and health insurance costs. If there is a pay increase for teachers, an increase would be needed for the teacher supplement which is based on a percentage of salary. Other increases may include property insurance, copiers, and an increase to charter school payments. Ms. Juba may have more information when she returns from the finance officers' state conference.

Computer Science Graduation Requirement

Dr. McDaris reported that since the board adopted a local requirement for students to attain a computer science credit in order to graduate effective with the current 8th grader class, the state has proposed House Bill 8 which would make this a state graduation requirement as well. The only difference is that House Bill 8 would be effective with students entering ninth grade in the 2024-2025 school year (current 7th graders). We may need to realign our local decision in March when House Bill 8 may be decided.

Mr. Wiener expressed concerns about the gap in expectations for college graduates. A recent survey shows that the average starting salary for a college graduate is \$55,000 per year; however, many college graduates expect to make over \$100,000 per year. He would like to see students better prepared for the realities of the job market and to consider that selection of class curriculum in high school becomes more pressing when you enroll in college. That is why many students should look at community college as a viable option to a four-year degree.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MR. JACKSON, SECONDED BY MR. WIENER, the meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:45 p.m.

February 6, 2023

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Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary