

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
February 7, 2022**

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

Discussion Topics:

1. School Calendar 2022-2023
2. Pre-K Update
3. Curriculum Update
4. Mental Health Update
5. Capital Projects
6. Strategic Considerations

ADJOURNMENT

The Transylvania County Board of Education held a planning/work session on Monday, February 7, 2022 at 5:30 p.m. at the Morris Education Center. Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order and welcomed everyone. In addition to two guests, the following individuals were in attendance.

BOARD MEMBERS:

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

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent
Audrey Reneau, Director, Federal Programs
Carrie Norris, Director, K-8 Education (*remote*)
Jen Heatherly, Public Information Officer
Alan Justice, Director, Facilities/Transportation
Jason Merrill, Plant Operations Supervisor
Chris Whitlock, Director, Technology Services
Blake Tesnow, Technology Specialist

SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICER:

Mike Hall

1. School Calendar 2022-2023

Dr. Brian Weaver presented a first look at the recommended calendar for the 2022-2023 school year. He gave a reminder that North Carolina school districts have very little flexibility in their calendars due to state legislation; however, counties such as Transylvania that typically experience weather-related closures may apply for a calendar waiver to start the school year earlier than the legislature prescribes. A recent spate of mild winters (except for this year) resulted in our system not meeting the required threshold for a waiver in 2022-2023. This means that the first pupil day for the 2022-2023 school year may not take place before the Monday closest to August 26 and the last pupil day must occur by June 11. The first pupil day for Transylvania County Schools will be Monday, August 29 and the last pupil day will be Friday, June 9.

Dr. Weaver reported that starting on August 29 means first semester exams cannot be completed before the Christmas break. First semester will end on January 20, 2023. The four early release days are no longer in the calendar. They have been replaced with remote learning days. The calendar committee agreed that this would be less of a hardship on parents. Also, the school district's spring break will not match the spring break for Blue Ridge Community College. Transylvania County Schools' spring break is scheduled for April 10-14, 2023. Spring break for BRCC is scheduled in March.

Board members discussed potential legislative changes regarding virtual instruction. Dr. McDaris reported that at this time Transylvania is able to meet the state's instructional hours requirement and still use virtual days during inclement weather. Approval of the 2022-2023 school calendar will be requested at the next regular meeting.

2. Pre-K Update

Director Audrey Reneau gave an update on the pre-K program. Transylvania County Schools currently provides four pre-K classrooms:

- The Ranger Station at PFES - 18 students
- The Bee Hive Learning Center at BES - 12 students
- The Cub House at RES - 18 students
- The Cubs Den at TCH - 16 students

All four centers are fully licensed with 4-star and 5-star programs and inclusive with 3- and 4-year olds. The program provides a 1:6 ratio of staff to student. The centers use the "High Scopes" educational curriculum which emphasizes direct, hands-on learning experiences with people, objects, events, and ideas. Parents are kept apprised of their child's progress through parent/teacher conferences and regular progress reports. The program meets all state and federal requirements. Mrs. Reneau emphasized that there is an overwhelming need for more pre-K services in our county. There are waiting lists at all four TCS preschools.

Mrs. Reneau shared research that shows children who participate in high-quality preschool programs have better health, social-emotional skills, and cognitive outcomes than those who do not participate. The gains are particularly powerful for children from low-income families and those at risk of academic failure, who may start kindergarten 12-14 months behind in pre-literacy and language skills. Children who participate in high-quality early learning are more likely to graduate from high school, go on to college, and succeed in their careers. Preschool provides society with a return on investment of \$8.60 for every \$1.00 spent. About half of that return on investment comes from increased earnings for children when they grow up.

Mr. Kiviniemi asked about funding sources. Mrs. Reneau reported that TCS used federal ESSER II funds to get the new pre-K classroom at PFES up and running. ESSER III funds paid for a pre-K teacher and two teacher assistants. Other pre-K salaries are paid from regular state teacher funds. Funding also comes from NC Pre-K, Smart Start and grants. Some parents are private pay. Chairman McCoy asked about the ability to pay pre-K salaries once the ESSER money ends in 2024. Dr. Weaver stated that the administration evaluates staffing needs each year and puts available funding where it is needed most. Mr. Griffin asked if the state legislature is looking at the need for additional pre-K funding. Mrs. Reneau reported that in order to teach pre-K, one must be certified in Birth to Kindergarten (BK). All of our pre-K teachers are highly qualified and plus we have more teachers in the pipeline if we are able to add more classrooms. We are licensed for 18 children maximum per center.

Mr. Kiviniemi asked about the difference between 4-star and 5-star ratings. Mrs. Reneau explained that 4-stars means the teacher is working on BK licensure. When the centers were initially opened, it was acceptable for a teacher to be working on the BK certification. Now that our pre-K teachers are fully licensed in BK, we will receive all 5-stars on the next review.

Mr. Jackson asked what a preschool progress report entails. Mrs. Reneau reported that it covers the five learning domains and is designed to give parents an assessment of their child's cognitive and social-emotional development.

3. Curriculum Update

Director Carrie Norris (attending remotely) gave an update on elementary and middle school proficiency scores over the last three years. She reviewed the tools and programs that have been put in place to target reading proficiency, including the addition of four new reading specialist positions. Mrs. Norris also presented EOC and ACT growth data for the high schools, reviewed "steps to grow" for elementary, middle and high schools, and gave an update on LETRS training for Spring 2022 though Fall 2023.

4. Mental Health Update

Mrs. Norris gave a report on mental health initiatives in the schools:

- We have hired a high school crisis counselor using ESSER funds. The crisis counselor serves BHS, DRS, and RHS.
- QPR (Question, Persuade, Respond) Gatekeeper Training is a suicide prevention initiative. Missy Ellenberger and Courtney Owen are now trained instructors and certified to deliver QPR training to staff. RHS and RMS staff will receive QPR training on February 24. BHS, DRS, and BMS staff will receive QPR training on February 25.
- The CARE Coalition Behavioral Health Survey was administered in fall 2021 to students in grades 6-12. Results are expected in a couple of weeks.
- The Youth Mental Health Mobilization Collaboration (introduced at the December 6, 2021 meeting) is a partnership between TCS, The Family Place, and the Transylvania Public Health Department. The steering committee for TCS includes district and school administrators, educators, and student delegates from BHS, RHS, and DRS. Work has begun to define strategies and action steps to support the youth in Transylvania County.

Mr. Kiviniemi asked if it would be possible for students to download "See Something, Say Something" as an app on their phones. Alan Justice reported that training on "See Something, Say Something" is given to all 6-12 graders each year. He will look into an app for cell phones. Dr. McDaris cautioned that the school system cannot require downloads to students' personal phones, but an optional app would be permissible. Chris Whitlock stated that he would look into an app for student Chromebooks.

Board members asked questions about reading scores and how proficiency is measured. Mrs. Norris reviewed the statistical measures and standards that determine growth. Mr. Kiviniemi asked how the ACT test aligns with state curriculum. Mrs. Norris reported that the ACT is a college entrance exam that measures general knowledge in certain subject areas. It is not closely aligned with state curriculum; however, it is required by the state legislature in determining letter grades for high schools. Dr. Weaver noted that the SAT and ACT tests were waived during COVID. This may be a continuing trend.

5. Capital Projects

Alan Justice gave a status report on capital outlay projects. He reported that all of the projects on the list should be done by the end of summer. Principals are beginning to create their lists for next year. Mr. Jackson asked if any of the projects could be done with ESSER funds. Mr. Justice reported that ESSER money can only be used for

COVID-related improvements such as air handlers and duct work—projects that improve air quality.

Mr. Justice reported that approximately \$168,000 in FEMA funds will be available to repair damage to the RHS baseball field resulting from flooding in August 2021. He hopes to have all of the repairs completed by next spring. A temporary fence will be installed during the repairs. Mr. Justice commended all of the community volunteers who helped clean up the field after the floodwaters subsided.

Chairman McCoy stated that the board would like to resume the two-day school facility tours this spring to evaluate capital needs across the district. (The annual tours were paused during COVID). Ms. Hunter will poll members for available dates.

Mr. Jackson asked if the school bond projects include any new classrooms for the pre-K program. Mrs. McCoy explained that the bond projects are designated for construction and renovations at BHS, RHS, and RMS. The pre-K classrooms are located in the elementary school buildings, which are not part of the bond.

Chairman McCoy expressed appreciation to Plant Operations Supervisor Jason Merrill and his maintenance team for all they do to address school facility needs.

6. Strategic Considerations

Dr. Jeff McDaris discussed strategic considerations and opportunities for the future.

Computer Science

Occupations in computer science are the number one source of all new wages in the U.S. and one of the most in-demand college degrees, with artificial intelligence and cybersecurity becoming the fastest growing fields. Nevertheless, only 51% of U.S. high schools teach any computer science courses and only 11% of bachelor's degrees are in computer science. The number of computer science graduates is not keeping up with demand.

Transylvania County Schools has AP Computer Science as part of its Career and Technical Education curriculum. We also offer coursework in partnership with the NC School of Science and Mathematics, Blue Ridge Community College, and NC Virtual Public School. Currently, the state of North Carolina requires 22 credits for graduation. Transylvania County Schools requires 28 credits (including electives). Consideration for computer science as a requirement for graduation would fit well with our mission and vision. Dr. McDaris proposed that the board consider making computer science a graduation requirement beginning in 2022-2023 or 2023-2024. Coursework could be completed via a traditional course or an online option. Current opportunities for enhanced computer science would continue in all grades, including coding. Students could begin in middle school and have 4-6 years to complete the requirement.

FAFSA

Dr. McDaris reported that 46% of North Carolina's high school class of 2021 did not complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). As a result, \$126 million in Pell Grant awards was left on the table. Under the MyFutureNC initiative, by 2030 two million North Carolinians will have a postsecondary degree or credential to meet the demands of business and industry. Completing the FAFSA is a critical and complicated step in the process of going to college, especially for students who need financial aid, students who would be the first in their family to attend college, students

who did not have college on their radar, and students who have circumstances that make the steps to college difficult. To increase opportunities:

- Counselors are actively encouraging students to complete the FAFSA.
- We are working on an initiative to provide graduation cords as an incentive.
- Career counselors and college coaches with the community college system and Appalachian State University are working with high school seniors.
- FAFSA is being considered as a graduation requirement in the state. Locally, it is one that would be relatively easy to meet.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MR. GRIFFIN, SECONDED BY MR. KIVINIEMI, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary