

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
May 13, 2013**

**INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE
CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME**

1. Introduction and Presentation of Information
2. Community Input
3. Board of Education Comment

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in special session at 6:00 p.m. on May 13, 2013 in the Brevard High School Media Center. The purpose of the meeting was to hold the first of two planned community input sessions on a modified school calendar. Members Tawny McCoy, Chair; Cindy Petit, Vice Chair; Sue Fox; Ron Kiviniemi and Mike Rogers were in attendance. Also present were Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent; Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant; Dr. David Sutton, Executive Director of Human Resources; BHS Principal Jeremy Gibbs, School Resource Officer Mark Ellenberger, *Transylvania Times* Reporter Derek McKissock; and approximately 100 guests. Mr. Rogers led in a moment of silence and Mrs. Petit led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order. She welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the Board members and staff. She explained the purpose of the meeting and emphasized that the Board has yet not made a decision on the calendar issue. She reported that a second community input meeting would be held on May 21, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. in the Rosman High School media center.

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

Dr. McDaris gave a brief history of the modified calendar discussions in the Transylvania County Schools. He stated that while discussion of a modified calendar has gotten much more attention over the past eight months, there is actually a history of interest in alternative school calendars that extends back several years. As interest in a modified calendar option has persisted and increased, it has become a topic that deserves open dialogue and consideration within the school community. To that end, the district has sought input from stakeholders through interest inventories and questionnaires, discussions during board retreats and regular board meetings, and public comments during meetings. Whether or not a modified calendar is appropriate for Transylvania County Schools at this time is something the Board will have to decide.

Dr. McDaris explained what is meant by “traditional calendar” and “modified calendar.” Traditional calendars must include at least 185 student attendance days or 1,025 hours of instruction, and they typically run from mid-August until early June. Modified school calendars must also include at least 185 student days or 1,025 hours of instruction, but they typically run from late July until late May and include two-week breaks for students at the end of the first, second, and third nine-week grading periods. Those two-week breaks may be used to provide special enrichment activities, focused tutorial and remedial opportunities to students who would benefit from them, extra-curricular activities, or additional vacation opportunities for families. Dr. McDaris invited the audience to review the posters that were on display illustrating the traditional calendar model adopted for 2013-2014 and two possible modified calendar models for 2014-2015. He then presented the following information:

- In the interest inventory that was conducted this fall, 47% to 50% of school district employees preferred a modified calendar option for Transylvania County Schools. Dr. McDaris noted, however, that not everyone had answered the survey.

- The interest inventory also showed that the level of interest among parents was high enough to warrant consideration. Within a limited sample of 470 parents, interest in modified and traditional calendar models was almost evenly split.
- Recent school calendar legislation has limited the opportunities of local school districts to create school calendars that support educational interests, such as finishing first semester exams before the Christmas break. Transylvania also has a strong interest in alignment for dual enrollment at community colleges. Over 70 students in the fall and approximately 30 students in the spring are dually enrolled. Some legislators have discussed including dual enrollment in the state report card.
- Research into the effectiveness of modified calendars is mixed, largely because there is great variation in the ways that school districts have conceived and implemented modified calendars. Additionally, many studies have struggled to isolate the calendar itself as a unique variable. While some researchers are not convinced that alternative calendars lead to increased student achievement, others have concluded that they lead to improved experiences and better learning outcomes for students, especially when school districts use intersession breaks to provide different and creative opportunities for student remediation and enrichment. Most research suggests that the greatest benefits of alternative school calendars accrue to students with socioeconomic disadvantages or learning difficulties. Dr. McDaris noted that 62% (nearly two thirds) of all TCS students now receive free or reduced-price lunches. Transylvania County Schools has a growing population of special needs students.
- An online interest inventory for parents was available from October 22 through November 9, 2012. The survey was publicized through a front-page article in *The Transylvania Times*, banner announcements on the district's website and Facebook page, school newsletters and emails from principals to parents of students at their schools, and through direct telephone calls using the instant alert system. Four-hundred seventy (470) parents responded to the survey. Results were presented to the Board of Education at its regular meeting on December 17, 2012.
- An online interest inventory for instructional personnel was available from December 3 through December 7, 2012. Two-hundred thirty-two (232) educators responded to the survey. Results were presented to the Board of Education on December 17, 2012.
- Questions have been raised about possible additional costs associated with a modified calendar. Dr. McDaris reported that no new expenditures would be anticipated as the district would use funds already allocated within its operating budget to create new opportunities for students during the intersession breaks. The district would necessarily use some of its existing funds differently, but does not foresee needing substantial new funds.
- Regarding the impact of a modified calendar on athletic schedules and extra-curricular schedules, Dr. McDaris acknowledged that coaches, players and others would be practicing and playing during some intersession breaks.

Dr. David Sutton reported that during the week of May 6-10, 2013, the district sought additional perspectives through an online questionnaire for all school system employees and high school students regarding summer employment plans and opportunities. He reported that complete

results from all three stakeholder surveys could be found under “Calendars” on the TCS website. Results were as follow:

- 954 people participated in the survey for a rate of nearly 50%, with 559 responses from students and 395 responses from district employees.
- Among students who responded, 55.4% were not employed at all last summer; 28.3% were employed in part-time jobs; and, 16.3% were employed in full-time jobs.
- For those students who did work, family businesses or other self-employment opportunities were most common (30.3%), followed by jobs in the food service industry, including restaurants (19.1%), and jobs in the tourist industry, including camps (14.5%). Least common were jobs in the service industry (5.0%) and manufacturing industry (0.8%).
- Among school district employees who responded, 65.6% were not employed last summer; 21.6% were employed in part-time jobs; and, 12.8% were employed in full-time jobs.
- For district employees who did work last summer, family businesses or other self-employment opportunities and jobs in the tourism industry were most common (22.4% each), followed by jobs in the service sector (19.6%). Least common were jobs in the construction industry (1.9%) and jobs in the manufacturing industry (0.9%).
- Among students, 13.3% do not plan to work at all this summer; 54.6% plan to work part-time jobs; and, 32.1% plan to work full-time jobs this summer. Those planning to work intend to seek employment most commonly in the food service industry (28.0%), retail industry (19.4%), and in family businesses or other self-employment roles (18.1%). Least commonly, students plan to work in the construction (4.0%) and manufacturing (1.1%) industries.
- Among school district employees, 53.1% do not plan to work at all this summer; 34.7% plan to work part-time jobs; and, 12.2% plan to work full-time jobs this summer. Those district employees planning to work this summer intend to seek employment most commonly in the service industry (22.5%), in family businesses or other self-employment opportunities (20.4%), and in the tourism industry (21.1%). Least commonly, district employees plan to work in the construction (2.1%) and manufacturing (0.0%) industries.

When asked about the impact of a modified calendar on their summer work plans:

- 28.1% of students and 63.0% of district employees indicated that their summer work plans would not be affected.
- 24.4% of students and 12.7% of district employees indicated that they would work less during the summer and seek additional employment during the two-week breaks;
- 25.9% of students and 13.0% of district employees indicated that they would work less during the summer and not seek additional employment during the breaks;

- 4.0% of students and 1.0% of district employees indicated that they would stop working entirely during the summer and seek employment during the two-week breaks
- 17.6% of students and 10.3% of district employees indicated that they would stop working entirely during the summer and not seek employment during the two-week breaks
- When asked about the extent to which their summer employment plans influenced their opinions about a modified calendar option, 77% of students reported a mild or significant influence, while 23% reported little to no influence. 33% of district employees reported a mild or significant influence, while 67% reported little to no influence.
- When asked about their preference for either a modified or traditional calendar, 70% of students expressed a preference for the traditional calendar. School district employees slightly preferred the modified calendar (47%) over the traditional calendar (40%).

Dr. Sutton expressed appreciation to everyone who took the time to participate in the surveys.

Dr. McDaris shared a final note. He stated that there are pieces of current legislation and pending legislation that concern boards of education and superintendents across the state. One example is the requirement that all high school juniors take the ACT college entrance exam. Dr. McDaris stated that he has serious concerns about the fairness of administering college entrance exams to special education students and including those scores in a school's composite rankings. Another concern is a proposal in the Senate to assign letter grades to all NC schools. Under the formula that has been proposed, no high school in the state would score above a D, even high performing schools such as RHS and BHS.

Dr. McDaris stated that whatever the Board decides, be it no modified calendar, a modified calendar for just one school, or a modified calendar for the entire district, the school system will continue to work closely with its partner agencies within the community for the benefit of all students and encourage participation in dual enrollment with our local colleges.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Guests were invited to share their perspectives on whether or not the Transylvania County Schools should adopt a modified calendar for the 2014-2015 school year. The following individuals offered comments:

Susan Ashmore, parent, spoke against a modified calendar. She feels that a modified calendar would be disruptive to summer work schedules and extra-curricular activities such as high school band. She feels that a modified calendar would be disastrous for those who depend on summer wages and the students who need extra-curricular activities for college scholarship applications.

Marenda McCall, parent, asked how many North Carolina school districts have adopted modified calendars and what has been the outcome. She expressed concerns about how a modified calendar would impact child care during the intersession breaks. She feels that parents have the responsibility of helping their children to remember what they have learned over the summer break. She feels that a modified calendar would

negatively impact summer jobs and raise poverty in our county. She questioned what it would do to children to change the calendar.

Jane Fuller, parent and teacher, spoke in favor of a traditional calendar. She feels there are educational experiences that the schools cannot provide and that children can only get during the summer. She feels that as a community, we owe it to children to have programs that meet the needs of all children. She does not think that having school in the summer would give kids a balanced education. She spoke about family reunions and children from divorce visiting the other parent during the summer. She suggested that the Board consider trying a modified calendar with one elementary school to see how it goes. She would not change the high school calendar at this time. She stated that of the high school students she had talked with, no one would have changed their summer.

Thomas Dempsey echoed Mrs. Fuller's remarks and said that he wants students to be well rounded.

Jackie Witherspoon, Community Outreach Director for the Boys & Girls Club of Transylvania, read a statement expressing concern that a modified calendar would increase their program's operating costs by as much as 5%. Increased operating costs could result in having to raise fees, reduce operating hours, lower enrollment and/or reduction in staff positions. Under a modified calendar, they would expect to see a negative impact on parents with inflexible work hours and families in poverty.

Lisa Duscio, parent, asked the Board to consider the law of unintended consequences. She gave as an example that the Brevard Middle School Algebra EOC exam is scheduled on May 27, Memorial Day.

Kim Dodson, parent, stated that she had many questions and concerns related to the proposal for a modified school calendar that she had previously sent to board members. She reported the following questions and submitted a copy for the record:

1. What are the concerns within our current school structure that has brought the issue of changing the traditional calendar to the table?
2. What is the specific reason that the school board members and administration are putting forth as the reason for having this discussion?
3. Does the modification of the school calendar address the issues clarified above in meaningful ways and is there significant information and data to support this?
4. Do the advantages of a modified calendar (if they are identified) come anywhere close to outweighing the numerous concerns that have been raised?
5. Bottom line, what REAL issues are being addressed with the introduction of a modified calendar? How does a modified calendar address these issues without raising significant new concerns?

Jessica Webb, teacher at DRS, reported that North Carolina teacher salaries rank the third lowest in the south and the fifth lowest in the nation. She stated that the state salary freeze has made it necessary for many teachers to get summer jobs. She reported earning \$5,000 last summer working in restaurants and camps, or approximately 14% of her annual income. She stated that not being able to work in the summer or working fewer hours would be like taking a pay cut. Regarding the breaks, she stated that many of her students do not have transportation to come to intersession remediation. She is also concerned that students would not be supervised at home during the intersession breaks.

Jennifer Kafsky, parent and teacher at Brevard College, expressed concerns about the shortage of child care in this county and how that problem would be exacerbated under a modified calendar. She stated that having to find additional child care during the intersession breaks would put additional stress on families that are already under a lot of stress. She feels that the system is not set up for short breaks, and worries that without a way to help families during the intersession breaks, many kids would be home alone. She strongly supports dual enrollment, but also wants students to have opportunities to earn money for college during the summer.

Maureen Watkins, parent, expressed support for a traditional calendar. She stated that her child attends summer camp and she does not feel that a modified calendar is a good fit for Transylvania.

Tammy Nye, parent, stated that her child plays in the band and should have summers off for practice. As a church secretary, she feels that the local Vacation Bible School programs would suffer under a modified calendar.

Ben Hardy, parent, stated that as an English teacher at Blue Ridge Community College, he feels that the dual enrollment issue is a minor inconvenience at best and certainly something that could be worked around. Even with larger numbers of dual-enrolled students, he does not see a real scheduling problem. He expressed concern about the impact of a modified calendar on his adult education students during the intersession breaks. He feels that the adult education students who have no child care during the intersession breaks would not be able to attend their classes.

Barbie Harper, parent, spoke in favor of a traditional calendar. She stated that her main concern with a modified calendar is whether it would lead to a multi-track extended year (more than 185 days). *Dr. McDaris responded that was not what was being proposed.* She stated that she would not agree with adding days to the school year, and finds it curious that the state legislature seems to be leaning that way. She recommended the Board research a Finnish educator and his studies regarding a “less is more” approach.

Maggie Dodson, high school student, shared her concerns regarding a modified calendar. She feels that two-week breaks would impact high school band competitions, which she compared to EOCs. She added that band students would have to rehearse during the breaks, so it would not be time off for them. Another concern was sports calendars and athletic meets being held during the session breaks. Her third concern was Governor’s School. She stated that she would not be able to attend Governor’s School next year if the district adopts a modified calendar.

Robert Shuler, parent, echoed the previous comments in support of a traditional calendar.

Marcus Dodson, parent, read a statement from Nancy Richards of the Rise and Shine Board of Directors which stated in part, “The Rise and Shine Board supports a traditional calendar. Afterschool experts have recognized that learning does not end at 3 p.m., and that all children need access to quality, affordable afterschool programs. School-community partnerships matter. Afterschool programs are linked to in-school gains and improvements in students’ social behavior. Changing the traditional calendar to a modified, year-round calendar would have a major negative impact on budget, personnel and volunteers for our program. It cannot be expected to reflect long-term gains. We would request further research on the outcomes.”

Tore Borhaug stated that based on what he has gathered from the statistics, he would have a hard time supporting a modified calendar. He asked what it would do to the sports calendar. Would coaches be expected to volunteer their time? He also asked what effect a modified calendar would have on the working poor. He stated that as an employer, he would not dream of hiring someone for a 2-3 week period. He stated that the recession has been brutal on employers, the working poor and the middle class, and many employers in this county have had to reduce their wages. He urged the Board not to make it more difficult for the local employers that are still here. He stated that he tells his children to use high school as a testing ground to explore what they want to do in college, and summer employment is a big part of that exploration. He feels that kids will miss out on opportunities to explore careers and gain experiential learning during the summer.

Abby Moore, parent, stated that she had been through a similar situation in Wake County. She reported that when the Wake County Schools changed their calendar they saw a mass exodus to private schools. She encouraged the Board not to tamper with the positive community school system that is already in place. She stated that the system is not broken here, and urged the Board not to reinvent the wheel.

Michelle Van Gores stated that her family had moved to this area specifically for the great schools. She stated that she was neither for nor against a modified calendar as long as it would be for the betterment of all. However, she believes that to have a modified calendar, the whole community and all of the support systems would have to change, not just the schools. She stated that colleges and universities don't follow a modified calendar. She feels that trying to force a modified calendar is too "one size fits all." She feels the statistics are too varied. She suggested that instead of changing the school calendar, why not concentrate on summer programs and afterschool programs to bring up disadvantaged children. She feels it would be simpler to improve the structures that are already in place.

Margaret Brown, parent and professor at Brevard College, stated that her summer experiences were what put her through college and helped make her a teacher. She agrees with Dr. McDaris that the research on modified calendars is mixed and non-conclusive. She feels that a modified calendar may be of some benefit to children of lower socioeconomic status if the school provides extra learning opportunities during the breaks. However, she believes those extra opportunities would cost money. She does not believe that the so-called summer "brain drain" is a valid enough reason to have a modified calendar. She feels that most learning loss occurs in the short term. She believes the bottom line must be what best serves the community. She stated that she has not had a raise in six years, but that she stays in her current position because she wants her son to have an outdoor education during the summer, and what better place to do that than right here.

Diane Moore, grandmother, stated that it is not easy for grandparents who are raising children, and that any kind of change can make it even harder. She would not want to see the school calendar change.

Tracy Pace, parent, stated that she is against a modified calendar. She shared that her family lives below the poverty line has given up many material things to enable her to be a stay-at-home mom. She stated that having summers off is very important to her family as is education, and expressed her pride in her son's recent graduation from college with two degrees.

BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENT

Chairman McCoy thanked everyone for sharing their views with the Board. She reported that the Board would not be making a decision on the calendar issue until after the state legislature concludes its session later this summer. She gave a reminder that the next community input meeting is scheduled for May 21, 2013 at 6:00 p.m. in the Rosman High School media center. In the meantime, the Board welcomes any additional comments or questions.

Mr. Kiviniemi thanked everyone for their civility and candor and for sharing their viewpoints with the Board.

Mr. Fox thanked everyone for coming out. She stated that open discussion is healthy and good, and urged the speakers to let their passion for this issue carry over into other important issues. She reported that the Board would be presenting its 2013-2014 budget request to the County Commissioners on May 14, 2014 at 7:00 p.m. in the Rogow Room of the Transylvania County Library. She assured the speakers that the Board is listening to their concerns and has not made up its mind on this matter.

Mrs. Petit commented that this evening's turnout was exactly what the Board had hoped for and thanked everyone for their participation. She reiterated that the Board has an open door policy and welcomes the public's input.

Mr. Rogers thanked everyone for expressing their desires for the school system and the community. He thanked Principal Gibbs and the BHS staff for hosting the event and the administrative staff for scheduling the meeting. He stated that when he came on the Board in February, he was neutral on the calendar issue. As a former Board member, he was very interested in a modified calendar. He stated that what he saw here tonight challenges the Board to think outside the box and to ask, if the Board does not choose a modified calendar, what can be done to improve the calendar situation? He gave a reminder that it was the state legislation eliminating local control over school calendars that has brought us to this point. He stated that as a business owner, he knows what it is like for employers. As for adopting a different calendar for just one school, he stated that he would not be in favor such a move because it could create hardships for families with different school schedules.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. FOX, SECONDED BY MRS. PETIT, the meeting was adjourned at 7:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary