

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
May 21, 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 21, 2013 in the Rosman High School Media Center. The purpose of the meeting was to have the second 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; School Resource Officer Greg Stroup, *Transylvania Times* Reporter Jeremiah Reed; WLOS Reporter Kimberly King; RHS Principal Brian Weaver and approximately 60 guests. Chairman McCoy led in a moment of silence and Mrs. Fox led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy called the meeting to order, welcomed everyone, and introduced the Board members and staff. She explained the purpose of the meeting and emphasized that no decisions have been made about the school calendar for 2014-2015. She invited anyone with additional questions or concerns to feel free to contact Board members.

INTRODUCTION AND PRESENTATION OF INFORMATION

Dr. McDaris gave a brief history of the modified calendar discussions. He reported that parents, teachers and administrators alike have raised questions and offered suggestions about alternative calendar options for the school district for several years. During this school year, the district sought input from stakeholders through interest inventories and questionnaires, discussions during board retreats and regular board meetings, and public comments during meetings. He stated that it is the responsibility of the Board and administration to seek out ideas that will enhance student performance and achievement.

Dr. McDaris explained what 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, extracurricular activities, or to provide additional vacation opportunities for families. Dr. McDaris invited the audience to review the posters that were on display showing the traditional calendar 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 current 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 legitimate 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
- 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 existing 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 also has a growing population of special needs students.
- A recent Senate proposal would assign letter grades to all schools in North Carolina. Under the proposal, both Rosman High and Brevard High School would receive a grade of D. Another Senate proposal calls for raising the cap on class sizes while at the same time doing away with teacher assistant positions. These challenges make it even more important for the school system to look at alternative ways to help students achieve.
- 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.
- An online interest inventory for instructional personnel was available from December 3-7, 2012. Two-hundred thirty-two (232) educators responded to the survey.
- Questions have been raised about possible additional costs associated with a modified calendar. Dr. McDaris reported that no new expenditures would be expected 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 anticipate needing substantial new funds.

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 noted that complete results from all three stakeholder surveys are available 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%).
- 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%).
- 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%).
- 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%).

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 the respondents who took the time to participate in the surveys.

Dr. McDaris gave a final comment regarding the challenges facing our school system. He reported that Transylvania County has approximately 100 students who are homeless. Approximately 62% of students receive free or reduced-price lunches. Many teachers and other school system employees supplement their income with jobs in the recreation industry. In addition to these challenges, the state legislature has implemented a number of hurdles to public education. It is the responsibility of the Board and administration to look at innovative ways to help students succeed in spite of these challenges.

COMMUNITY INPUT

Lana Rhymer - parent and retired teacher assistant, reported that as a 10-month employee she had to work in the summers to provide for her family, and many summers worked at Keystone Camp. If school had started in July or extended later in the summer she would not have had that opportunity. She reported that each of her four children had also worked summers as soon as they were old enough, and that all of their jobs required them to be there for more than a few weeks due to the increased business volume during the summer months. She feels there is no way an employer can hire someone for 3-5 weeks, invest in their training and get scheduling and routines going, only to have them leave to go back to another full time job. She feels that a modified calendar would deprive many children and young people of the programs offered by local camps and organizations in the county. She believes changing that calendar would not be a good thing.

Michelle McCall, parent, said she was not in favor of a modified calendar. She stated that her son, a student athlete, would not be able to enjoy the breaks between sessions because of his athletic schedule. In the summer her son likes to attend camps and volunteer, and she believes a modified calendar would curtail his participation in these activities. She commended the Board members for looking for innovative ideas; however, she feels they should look at other ways to achieve their goals.

Paula Quinn, parent, reported that for her blended, split family, it would cost nearly \$5,000 in legal fees to modify their visitation agreement if a modified calendar is adopted. She stated that her daughter learns by seeing their family members work together. She feels that throwing another variable into the mix would be too hard. She feels that a modified calendar would eliminate opportunities such as the Rotary Summer Leadership Camp. As a community that caters to tourists, she asked why we would shoot ourselves in the foot; if we don't cater to the tourists, they will go elsewhere, leaving only hospitals and retirement homes. She stated that if the school system gets a D rating, we are already doing something wrong. She does not think a modified calendar is a good choice for families.

Sandra Crowe, business owner, spoke against a modified calendar. She feels that many people would opt to home school if a modified calendar is adopted. She stated that the county's recreational opportunities are limited to summer activities, noting, "You can't swim in the winter." She feels that more kids would be inactive (i.e., playing video games) during the intersession breaks.

Parker Platt, Boys & Girls Club board member, reviewed the organization's position statement: "The Boys & Girls Club serves over 400 kids. A modified calendar would increase operational costs by and raise staffing costs by creating a need to provide services during the breaks. Increased costs would mean changes in current operations such as reduction of hours, increased fees, and/or elimination of positions. None of these options is consistent with the Boys & Girls Club mission statement. The Board of Directors opposes the modified calendar."

Jacklyn Neumann, middle school student, stated she is against a modified calendar because summer is a time to reconnect with family. She plans to visit her grandparents in Canada this summer. She feels that memories are educational, and that education is everywhere, not just in school.

Aaron Neumann, rising 9th grader, spoke against a modified calendar. He looks forward to having a summer job. Also, as an athlete who plays sports year round, he would have practices during the session breaks. He feels that year-round school would be inconvenient.

Bianca Quinn and Robin Crowe, rising 9th graders, shared information found on Facebook and other sites. They reported that most schools that try modified calendars end up returning to traditional calendars, and asked whether the Board wants to go through the frustration and disruption of changing calendars twice. They reported that many school districts experienced increased costs under a year-round calendar. They feel this would be a concern for bands and other programs that have limited budgets. If the schools have a D rating, they believe there are other ways to fix that. As band members, they feel they would be pulled out of session breaks for practices and rehearsals when they could be enjoying time with family and friends. Robin reported that she plans to work in her mother's store this summer and during breaks. As a future driver, she is concerned about earning money for a car and other expenses. She would not want the schools to go to a year-round calendar.

Tyler Arant, student, stated that year-round school would be stressful for kids. He feels that students need longer break than two weeks. He stressed the importance of family.

Ryan Anders, student, believes that kids should have the summers off to get outside and do what kids should do. He feels that changing the calendar would make it harder to get summer jobs. He stated that he looks forward to summer.

Tony Meachum, T. C. Henderson Elementary School principal, reported that he had worked in the Greensboro school districts where a number of schools follow year-round and modified calendars. He reported that there was some resistance to changing the calendars at first; however, within two years there was a waiting list for the modified calendar elementary school. From his own experiences there seeing increases in academic progress and less regression over the summer, he feels that some type of modified calendar would benefit students here. He observed that compared to other industrialized nations, American students go to the school the least number of days per year. The United States is no longer the economic powerhouse that it once was, and

education seems to be a factor. He noted that the traditional school calendar is based on an agrarian model that was designed to have youngsters and teens available for farming chores, planting and harvesting. He stated that intersession breaks could help not only the children who are struggling academically, but also the children on the other end of the spectrum, such as the academically gifted. As a 30-year educator, he believes that some type of modified calendar that reduces extended down time is good for the majority of students.

Elizabeth Gentle, parent and camp director, stated that she feels strongly about the calendar issue. She agrees that statistics are mixed. She feels that summers provide many enriching opportunities for children such as camp, Governor's School, and family vacations. She believes that experiences make students eager to learn, and that learning outside of the classroom is just as important as learning in the classroom. She stated that even though the traditional calendar was set up around farming, so many community partners have woven around that schedule that changing it would destroy a delicate framework in the community. She has deep concerns about what would happen during the intersession breaks, and does not believe there will be enrichment opportunities. As an employer, she would not be able to hire students or school system employees because she needs people who can work the entire season. In her opinion, moving to a modified calendar would simply increase the challenges in our county.

Kelly Hobb, parent, sent a statement that was read by her daughter. Mrs. Hobb sees a modified calendar as a huge blow to and lack of support for the summer economy. Her older daughters will be working as camp interns and her youngest will attend five weeks of summer camp. This would not be possible under a year-round calendar. Mrs. Hobb's daughter spoke about the positive experiences she has gained through summer camp. She stated that kids will not give up TV or video games during the two-week breaks, but over the summer they would be more likely to get outside and do active things.

Tracy Reynolds, parent, sent a letter with Mr. Marcus Dodson that he delivered to the Board. *The letter expressed Mrs. Reynolds' opposition to year-round school.*

Renee Martinez, high school student, spoke about her summer internship at RES and plans to visit Mexico this summer. She reported that she would get a job next summer to earn money for her future and feels that two weeks would not be enough time. She questioned why RHS would be a D school when it used to be an A school. *Dr. McDaris clarified that the Senate has proposed a new accountability model that if approved, would rank RHS, BHS and many others as D schools. The proposal has not yet been passed. There are serious concerns about the political reasons behind the proposal and the criteria for the formula being used to determine the letter grades. He called it simply ridiculous to try and classify highly performing schools such as RHS and BHS as D schools.*

BOARD OF EDUCATION COMMENT

Mrs. Fox thanked everyone for their input. She encouraged those present to extend their passion for the calendar issue to other important issues such as budget.

Mr. Kiviniemi gave a special thanks to all of the students who spoke. He stated that he was most impressed with their articulation and preparation.

Mr. Rogers expressed thanks to the speakers and to those who have provided input over the last few months. He gave special commendation to the students who had spoken so well

tonight. He agreed with Dr. McDaris that none of our schools are D schools. He stated that the Board is extremely proud of our schools, our system, and our teachers, students and parents. He stated that Transylvania County is a great place to teach and learn, and that will not change no matter what the Senate passes.

Mrs. Petit thanked everyone for coming and sharing their views on this important issue. She gave a reminder that their door is always open and expressed appreciation for the great community that the Board of Education serves.

Mrs. McCoy thanked everyone for their participation, especially the student speakers who so aptly demonstrated that they are the "leaders of tomorrow." She reported that the Board has been given much to think about as it moves forward in the decision making process.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. PETIT, SECONDED BY MRS. FOX, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary