

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
July 27, 2020**

INVOCATION/PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

CALL TO ORDER/WELCOME

BUSINESS ITEMS:

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comment
3. Re-Entry Plan

The Transylvania County Board of Education met in special session at 5:30 p.m. on July 27, 2020 at the Morris Education Center. The purpose of the meeting was to approve a re-opening plan for the 2020-2021 school year. In accordance with the remote meetings statute from the General Assembly and the Governor's guidelines, the meeting was conducted remotely and public access was not permitted. The public was invited to view the meeting livestream at <https://www.facebook.com/transylvania.schools/live>. Persons wishing to make public comment were invited to email their comments by 1:00 p.m. in order to have them read during the meeting as appropriate within board guidelines. Ron Kiviniemi led in a moment of silence and Tawny McCoy led the Pledge of Allegiance. Chairman McCoy welcomed everyone and called the meeting to order. The following individuals were in attendance (* indicates remote attendance).

BOARD MEMBERS:

Tawny McCoy, Chair
Ron Kiviniemi, Vice Chair
Courtney Domokur*
Marty Griffin
Alice Wellborn

BOARD ATTORNEY:

Chris Campbell

MEDIA:

John Lanier, Transylvania Times*

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent*
Missy Ellenberger, Director, 9-12 Curriculum*
Carrie Norris, Director, K-8 Curriculum*
Kevin Smith, School-Community Relations Coordinator*
Alan Justice, Director, Transportation/Safety/Athletics*
Chris Whitlock, Director, Technology Services
Blake Tesnow, Technology Specialist
Greg Stroup, School Resource Officer

Chairman McCoy announced to viewers that four board members were attending in person using face masks and social distancing. She thanked everyone who had shared their thoughts with the board regarding schools re-opening. She noted that if someone did not get a response, it was due to the overwhelming volume of messages received.

1. Approval of Agenda

ON A MOTION BY MRS. MCCOY, SECONDED BY MR. KIVINIEMI, the meeting agenda for July 27, 2020 was unanimously approved as presented.

2. Public Comment

Dr. McDaris reported that 33 public comments had been received and shared with the board. A majority of the comments were in favor of Plan C (all-remote learning) and the rest favored Plan B (in-person and remote). In addition to the public comments, board members received a number of direct calls and emails.

Dr. McDaris thanked Board Attorney Campbell for attending and Officer Stroup for securing the meeting.

3. **Re-Entry Plan**

Dr. McDaris reported that as of July 27, Transylvania County has a 4% positive rate and has performed 2,700 COVID-19 tests. The school system has developed paths for both Plan B and Plan C (available for review at https://tcsnc.org/district_info.coronavirus). There is a transportation plan in place. There are currently 210 students whose parents have indicated a preference for the online learning path. The deadline to apply for online learning has been extended to July 31. Chairman McCoy opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Kiviniemi reported that board members have used the past week to gather information, speak with health professionals, review CDC guidelines, and visit classrooms. He stated that he was pleased to see how well school administrators have prepared their buildings. He also commended the virtual summer school instruction and preparations that teachers have made for Plan B and Plan C contingencies. Mr. Kiviniemi thanked all staff for their efforts in making the best of this situation.

Chairman McCoy asked Dr. McDaris to share information about both plans. Dr. McDaris reported that under Plan B, students would be divided into 2 groups by last name. Group A would attend school in person on Monday and Wednesday. Group B would attend on Tuesday and Thursday. All students would have virtual classes on Friday. Accommodations will be made for students in the same household who have different last names to attend on the same day. Cleaning materials and other needs are being fulfilled. Face shields and masks have been ordered. Temperature kiosks are being provided. The online learning path (Plan C) will be more robust and engaging than what we had this spring because teachers have had time to plan. Teachers will provide online instruction from their classrooms. Counselors will have opportunities to work with students under Plan C.

Dr. Brian Weaver reported that a great deal of work has gone into finding ways to serve special populations under both plans. One of the advantages of the all-remote day on Fridays will be time for teachers to give individual student support and also dedicated time for planning.

Alan Justice gave an update on transportation plans. He reported that we will have tags on students' chromebooks for parents to verify their child's health status. Students will be temperature tested upon their arrival at school.

Mrs. Wellborn asked about consequences for students who fail to follow safety guidelines under Plan B, saying that teachers are concerned they will have to spend a lot of time on enforcement. Dr. McDaris reported that students who refuse to wear masks will be sent home. The only exception would be for a student who has a bona fide medical condition as diagnosed by a physician.

Mr. Griffin asked if students in the online path would have the same teacher(s) every day. Missy Ellenberger reported that we may designate a teacher per subject. Dr. McDaris reported that a number of teachers are interested in doing the all-remote instruction.

Mr. Griffin asked about the semester-long commitment for the online learning path and whether parents could change their minds halfway through. Dr. McDaris reported that changes could be made during the first five days, but after that they cannot opt out. Carrie Norris reported that online path guidelines are being sent out tomorrow. Mrs. Domokur asked if students in the online path must always be present during the live

instruction. Mrs. Norris reported that anything presented live will be recorded so that students can access it any time.

Mrs. McCoy asked what would happen if we start with Plan B and have to move to Plan C later on. Dr. McDaris reported that instruction would basically stay the same but just move online.

Mrs. Wellborn asked about the availability of elective courses under the online path. Dr. Weaver reported that some electives may be offered at the high school level as needed for graduation requirements. Mrs. Norris reported that elementary art and PE would be offered at least once a week.

Mr. Griffin asked about sick leave for a teacher who has to quarantine or contracts COVID-19. Attorney Campbell reported there are 80 hours of federally-mandated sick leave available. After that, personal sick leave would be used. If an employee uses all their available sick leave, they can be assigned telework. There is also an option for two-thirds pay for child care emergencies.

Chairman McCoy asked about the criteria for returning to school or work after an exposure or contracting the virus. Dr. Weaver reported that the health department is providing detailed flowcharts for employees and students who have (1) been exposed, (2) experienced symptoms, or (3) tested positive for COVID-19. All decisions will be made in coordination with health department guidance and returning to work will require a supervisor's permission.

Mrs. Domokur asked if there are enough substitute teachers to cover classes in the event of an outbreak. Dr. Weaver reported that our substitute roster is limited and many of those on the list are in the high-risk age group. Mr. Justice reported the same challenges with school bus drivers. Staff members who hold CDLs could pitch in as drivers if needed. Principals could pitch in and teach. Mr. Campbell reported that if the board chooses Plan B, circumstances may arise that could require a single school shutdown. An entire school may need to do virtual learning for a time. Parents would need to be aware and prepared for such an event.

Chairman McCoy asked if children would have mask breaks. Dr. McDaris reported that DHSS guidelines on this issue change frequently. The latest version says that students would be required to wear masks all day except at appointed mask break times. Masks would be required for all students in grades K-12. Pre-K students would not be required to wear masks. Mr. Griffin noted that board members have had trouble keeping masks on for the duration of a meeting, so expecting kids to do it for six hours would be hard. He expressed concern about possible difficulties of hearing and understanding through masks.

Chairman McCoy asked if we have enough face shields for all teachers. Dr. McDaris confirmed that we have ordered 400 shields in addition to masks. Mr. Campbell reported that the current position of DHSS is that teachers should wear a face shield in tandem with a mask unless there is a medical condition preventing it. Face shields are not intended to be substitutes for the face mask, but an extra layer of protection.

Mrs. Wellborn asked about the expectation for teachers to be in the school buildings whether teaching in-person or virtually. Dr. McDaris explained that teachers will have more resources available to them in schools. He reported that teachers will be allowed to bring their children to work with them on remote learning days.

Mr. Griffin asked about student meals under Plan B. Dr. McDaris reported that most students will eat breakfast and lunch in their classrooms. Limited cafeteria space in some schools does not support adequate social distancing and cleaning protocols. Eating in classrooms has been done in the past in our schools. We have purchased a number of specialty carts with CARES money to assist with food delivery to classrooms.

MR. KIVINIEMI MADE A MOTION, SECONDED BY MRS. WELLBORN, to re-open Transylvania County Schools on August 17, 2020 under Plan B; to authorize the superintendent to close a school at any time for unforeseen circumstances, including the recommendation of state of local health officials; and with the understanding that moving the school system from Plan B to Plan C would require approval of the board of education. Chairman McCoy opened the floor for discussion.

Mr. Griffin stated that the one thing the board has not talked about is the uncontrollable nature of the coronavirus. He stated we are dealing with the possibility of students, teachers, or family members dying. He added that the first thing we always emphasize is the safety of our students. It impacts everything that we do.

Mrs. Domokur expressed concern as a parent that not all students will get an education at home under Plan C. Many parents have to work and cannot help with online lessons. She stated that she has heard from many elementary parents of student breakdowns because it was so hard to do virtual learning this spring. She wants students back in the classroom because kids need that in-person learning, that friendship, and to have that reliable adult who is there to help them.

Mrs. Wellborn expressed her support for Plan B. As a retired educator, she has spent many years working with special needs children and students who are struggling. She is very worried about the children who are not safe in their homes right now. At least ten percent of our students do not have reliable broadband and would be left behind under Plan C. She stated that her decision does not mean she does not care about the health and safety of teachers, but she feels Plan B is the best choice given what we know right now.

Mr. Kiviniemi stated that all board members are concerned about the safety of students and staff. He reported that members have visited schools and seen the preparations. He feels that Plan B is the best choice. He reiterated that parents do have the option to choose the online learning path under Plan B.

Chairman McCoy thanked everyone who expressed their concerns and gave assurance that the board has listened and does care. She reported receiving overwhelming support for Plan B from parents who did not send in public comments. She also heard from many teachers who want Plan B. She noted that research shows that kids get much more than academics from attending school. School is fundamental to their overall development. She feels it is important to get students back in school to start rebuilding relationships. She also stated that Plan B has an option for online learning if parents feel that is best for their child.

There was no further discussion and the vote was called. ON A MAJORITY VOTE, THE MOTION PASSED 4:1 (FOR: McCoy, Kiviniemi, Domokur, Wellborn; AGAINST: Griffin).

Dr. McDaris thanked the board for their comments and passion. He stated that everyone will be working diligently with the schools to implement the safest environment possible under current circumstances.

Mrs. Wellborn requested that another special meeting or work session be scheduled before the August 17 business meeting for the board to receive another update. Ms. Hunter will poll members for available dates/times.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. WELLBORN, SECONDED BY MRS. DOMOKUR, the meeting was adjourned at 7:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary