

**Minutes
Transylvania County Board of Education
August 10, 2020**

Call to Order/Welcome

Topics for Discussion:

- School Re-entry Preparedness Update

Adjourn

The Transylvania County Board of Education held a work session at 6:00 p.m. on August 10, 2020 at the Morris Education Center. The purpose of the work session was to receive an update on preparedness for re-opening schools on August 17. 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>. 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

TRANS. PUBLIC HEALTH:
Elaine Russell, Director*

MEDIA:
John Lanier, Transylvania Times*

STAFF:

Dr. Jeff McDaris, Superintendent
Jenny Hunter, Administrative Assistant
Dr. Brian Weaver, Assistant Superintendent*
Norris Barger, Director, Business Services*
Missy Ellenberger, Director, 9-12 Curriculum/Instruction*
Carrie Norris, Director, K-8 Curriculum/Instruction*
Kevin Smith, School-Community Relations Coordinator*
Chris Whitlock, Director, Technology Services
Blake Tesnow, Technology Specialist
Ray Owen, School Resource Officer

Elaine Russell, Director of Transylvania Public Health, gave an update (remotely) on the status of COVID-19 cases in our county. She reported that the number of positive cases rose from 23 to 128 during the month of July. That rate has since slowed, with only 5 new cases since then for a total of 145 cases overall. At this time, the county has seen 12 hospitalizations and one death. There has not yet been significant community spread, but that could come. Ms. Russell reported that the most consistent trend behind the July increase was travel (visiting/hosting family, vacations, and business trips). Testing has become somewhat more accessible.

Ms. Russell commended the school system's re-entry plan, screening procedures, and the A/B schedule for this fall. She stated that she feels confident that good procedures are in place to serve remote and in-person learners. She reported having an excellent in-service session with school administrators last week, and noted that the health department has provided flowcharts on handling exposures and guidelines on cleaning and disinfecting. She reported that our school nurses are prepared for the months ahead. She and her staff are committed to providing flu shots to students and staff this fall and will do outreach for remote learners. Chairman McCoy opened the floor for questions.

Wellborn: If there were a positive case in the schools, would the health department come in and handle it?

Russell: If a child or employee tests positive, that person would be sent home on a quarantine order. Once we have test results, we start the investigation process. It takes a collective 15 minutes of being within 6 feet of someone for it to be an exposure. Seating charts are important

as they will give us a view of the risk in a case investigation. If we determine there was a breakdown in protective measures, we would look at doing a larger group testing.

Domokur: Are we going to allow volunteers in the school at this time?

McDaris: Yes, but they must adhere to the same protocols as staff. Our volunteers are an integral part of what we do.

Wellborn: What would trigger closing down a school?

McDaris: We would work with the health department on that decision.

Russell: There is not a single number or threshold that would trigger a shutdown. We must balance communicable disease control with the psychological and emotional well-being of kids. If the outbreak were contained to one classroom or group, we may not have to close the entire school. The more people involved, the harder it would be to remain open. A limiting factor will be the depth of the teaching bench.

Kiviniemi: Are 3-ply masks still the recommendation?

Russell: 2-ply and 3-ply masks are both good barrier methods for all individuals. N-95 masks should be reserved for medical staff.

Wellborn: Do we have the same number of school nurses as before? Is it enough?

McDaris: Yes, we have three school nurses. We would love to have more, but we will make it work.

Russell: The school nurses do not have to handle all of this on their own. They have the backup and collaboration of our entire health organization. We will provide as much help as we can to the nurses. We are all in this together.

McCoy: Right now, our county's positive rate is 3%, which is below the goal for the state, correct?

Russell: Yes.

McCoy: To reiterate, you have reviewed our plan and feel it is a good one?

Russell: Yes, you have developed a thoughtful approach and accommodated those who want all-remote learning and those who want in-person learning. I am thankful to work with such an engaged school system.

McCoy: Thank you for speaking with us tonight, meeting with the administration, and all that you and the health department are doing for our community.

Ms. Russell exited the meeting.

Dr. McDaris reported that approximately 71% of Transylvania County Schools students have opted for in-person learning and 29% have selected the online learning path. There is a waiting list for those who missed the window to sign up for online. We anticipate that some online slots will open up as families decide to change back to in-person learning once school starts. Consideration for the available slots will be given to those with specific health issues and to balancing class loads. Some teachers have elected to retire this fall and some have been granted leaves of absence. As of today, there has been no word on an ADM adjustment for online learning.

Mrs. Ellenberger stated that as terrible as the pandemic is, the response of our teachers and administrators has been phenomenal. Mrs. Wellborn asked for the breakdown of online learners. Mrs. Ellenberger reported that 32% of those signed up for the online learning path are at the elementary level, 34% are middle schoolers, and 23% are high school students.

Dr. McDaris reported that transportation is ready to go. There are contingency plans for bus driver coverage if needed. At this time, we do not plan to run multiple routes. There will be fewer bus riders due to online learning. We may combine some routes if necessary.

Mr. Kiviniemi asked about temperature screening stations. Dr. McDaris reported that automated screening kiosks donated by Dogwood Trust are on the way. Our system will receive eight free units and purchase four more. The kiosks will facilitate more efficient hands-free screenings in our buildings now and during flu season this fall.

Mrs. Domokur asked if there are enough people on the list of approved substitute teachers. Dr. Brian Weaver reported that we do not have enough subs even in a normal year. We currently have 15 fewer substitutes than what we had last year at this time. Fortunately, very few of our substitutes have indicated they do not want to work this fall. We will not be sending teachers to workshops and conferences, and with some teachers doing online instruction only, there may be less absenteeism. We hope to see a reduction in the usual seasonal illnesses among staff due to more handwashing, masks, and distancing.

Chairman McCoy asked for an update on EOG testing. Dr. McDaris reported that the legislature is requiring schools to test fourth graders' reading ability in person within the first few weeks of school. Mrs. Norris added that third-grade EOG tests will be given to students who have been seated on site for 20 days. The fourth-grade test is an ordinary diagnostic tool to ensure that students are where they need to be on reading.

Mrs. Wellborn asked about mask requirements. Dr. McDaris reported that all staff, volunteers, and visitors must wear masks. All students must wear masks. We will work with medical providers to address any challenges for students with severe disabilities.

Mrs. Wellborn asked how the high schools would handle class changes. Dr. McDaris reported that hallways have been marked with distancing guides and arrows. Staff supervision will increase. He anticipates that students will rise to the challenge.

Mrs. Domokur asked about school HVAC systems. Dr. McDaris reported that our HVAC systems are old and susceptible to breakdowns; however, filters will be cleaned regularly. Students will not be allowed to use water fountains. Water bottle filling stations will be provided instead.

Mrs. McCoy asked about cleaning procedures. Dr. McDaris reported that custodians are doing deep cleans to get the buildings ready, and there will be more frequent cleaning throughout the school year. We have been able to procure the cleaning materials that we need.

Mrs. Wellborn asked whether preschools would open at the same time as K-12 schools. Dr. McDaris reported that Pre-K is governed by the NC Department of Health and Human Services, and has different rules regarding distancing and masks because of the age group. There will be a remote meeting tomorrow with DHSS on this subject. Preschools may start remotely if necessary, but must go to face to face within a defined time frame. We have purchased clear fac masks for teachers who are working with Pre-K children on speech and language skills.

Mrs. Wellborn asked if there has been any decision on the ADM hold harmless issue. Dr. McDaris reported there would be no decision until state legislators return to session in September.

Mrs. Wellborn asked about students sharing materials and textbooks. Dr. McDaris reported that sharing would be avoided.

On behalf of the board, Chairman McCoy thanked everyone who worked on the re-entry plans, students, parents, community members, and central office staff for their efforts in preparing the schools for re-opening.

Dr. McDaris thanked Officer Owen for securing the meeting and Ms. Russell for presenting an update. He also recognized bus drivers, central office staff, cafeteria workers, maintenance staff, and custodians for the remarkable job they have done.

There was no further business, and ON A MOTION BY MRS. DOMOKUR, SECONDED BY MRS. WELLBORN, the meeting was adjourned at 7:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Chairman

Secretary