

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Thursday, July 30, 2020 at the Rockbridge County High School

Present: Vice-Chairman Heather Hostetter; Trustee Corey Berkstresser; Superintendent Phillip Thompson; Clerk Rhonda Humphries. Present Via Virtual Location: Chairman Wendy Lovell; Trustees Kathy Burant, Neil Whitmore.

CALL TO ORDER

Vice-Chairman Hostetter called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. and stated that three board members would participate in the meeting via telephone connection.

- Chairman Lovell stated that it is unfortunate that three members could not attend the meeting in person but knowing how much work Dr. Thompson and his team have to do to prepare for the upcoming year, it was determined that it would be best not to wait for discussion.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Vice-Chairman Hostetter, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Chairman Lovell, and by roll call vote because of electronic participation, the board approved the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- **Appointments and Resignations**

- Appointments**

- Professional Staff**

- Shauna Palmer, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, 2020-2021 school year

- Michelle Steiner, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, 2020-2021 school year

- Yolanda Montague, Instructional Technology Resource Teacher, 2020-2021 school year

- Keylea Garrison, Teacher, Central Elementary School, 2020-2021 school year

- Support Staff**

- Chelsea Coffey, Food Service Worker, Mountain View Elementary School,
2020-2021 school year

- Resignations**

- Professional Staff**

- Retiring**

- Linda Shybunko, Teacher, Central Elementary School, retiring end of 2019-2020 school year

- Support Staff**

- Chastity Bowman, Food Service Worker, Rockbridge County High School,
resigned end of 2019-2020 school year

- Pauline Taylor, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School,
resigned end of 2019-2020 school year

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron addressed the board in support of the Superintendent's Recommendation for the Cloth Face Coverings Policy.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the reason for the meeting was, in part, because there has been a lot of conversation regarding what policy the board may choose to enact regarding cloth face coverings. He stated that guidelines that have been reviewed lend themselves to the fact that cloth face coverings (masks) help to mitigate the spread of COVID. The focus of the administrative staff of Rockbridge County Public Schools has primarily been on VDH and CDC and how to move forward with all things health related in respect to the pandemic. The recommendation places emphasis on masks being strongly encouraged at all times, but not 100% of the time. He stated the guidelines and information received from VDH, CDC, and VDOE changes quickly, almost daily and stated that if the policy needs to be changed, the policy will be brought to the School Board again. He shared the following highlights of the recommendation:

- **Students:**

- Students may remove cloth face coverings for eating or drinking; six feet (6') of social distancing to be maintained;
 - Students participating in sporting events and practices do not need to wear a cloth face covering; however, cloth face coverings are required for participants not actively engaged in a game or practice, such as when standing on the sidelines, in a dugout, and off the field of play any time six (6') feet of social distancing measure is not possible.

- Students may remove cloth face coverings when in the classroom when six (6') feet social distancing is in place. The teacher will notify students when proper social distancing has been achieved in the classroom and when students may choose to remove their cloth face covering. This would include when "outdoor" classrooms are being utilized for educational or exercise purposes.
- Students may be exempted from this policy by the school principal due to a documented medical condition or disability of the student;
- Students may be exempted from this policy due to special behavioral or individualized needs as determined by the Director of Special Education.
- Staff:
 - Employees may remove cloth face coverings for eating or drinking; six (6') feet of social distancing to be maintained;
 - Employees may remove cloth face coverings when in the classroom when six (6') feet social distancing is in place, or;
 - Employees may be exempted from this policy by the school principal or the Superintendent/Designee due to a documented medical condition or disability of the employee.
- Visitors or Vendors:
 - Visitors or Vendors will be required to wear a cloth face covering while present in any school building, facility, or other area of a school campus.
- Children and Staff in Child Care Programs:
 - The requirement to wear a cloth face covering in accordance with the terms of this policy shall also apply to all children age two (2) and above and child care providers in child care programs located in RCPS schools, on an RCPS school campus, or other facility in which the RCPS is operating a child care program for the benefit of its employees. There are no childcare programs currently located in RCPS schools but the policy will be in place if needed.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if teachers will determine when masks will be removed and if it will be written in the policy. I.e., if a student(s) is moving around the room, can the teacher state that masks will remain on. He stated that his constituents have conveyed to him the feeling that the educator needs to be able to have control and have the ability to tell students when they can remove the mask.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the policy provides an option of when a student can remove their mask. According to the policy, if safe social distancing of six (6') can be maintained, individual masks may be off, once the teacher has determined that a safe social distance has been achieved in the classroom. He stated that individual teacher policies per classroom would likely cause more issues and put teachers in a difficult position of potentially dealing with upset parents and students. He emphasized his recommendation that the school board adopt a policy which mandates a policy across the board to encourage the wearing of a mask when six (6') feet cannot be maintained, allowing a teacher to request students to keep masks on when needed; likewise, when six (6') feet social distancing has been achieved, a teacher can state that students can remove their mask, however, strongly encourage them to leave the mask on.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her sentiment that the policy makes sense in that if there is a situation in a classroom and it is difficult to hear and understand teacher or student, there is a contingency to remove the mask to respond, if social distancing is achieved, and then to put the mask back on. She stated that the amendments made to the policy allow for more latitude for teachers and is a sound policy making safety a priority. The policy sets expectations for when a student does not abide by the policy and sets expectations for all members of the community about the importance of masks. She requested that the communication to families convey that, in this difficult year, supporting their student's education, encourage participation and understanding as much as possible in support of Rockbridge County Public Schools is greatly needed --- we are all in this together and need everyone's cooperation to be successful.
- Trustee Burant stated that as the infection has increased in the county and that it has been shown that younger adults are active transmitters of the disease. She noted that face masks are now mandatory in all retail stores, which means that the younger adults may be getting used to the idea of wearing masks, if they are out in the community. She reflected that if the cooperation is present in families, it shows a consistent message to normalize the wearing of masks. She inquired if there could be consideration of an additional amendment to the wearing of masks to all the time for middle school and high school (age 10 and up).
 - Vice-Chairman Hostetter stated that the CDC guidelines recommend, but do not mandate, age 2 and over to wear a mask. She expressed her sentiment that it is not the responsibility of the Rockbridge County School Board to set mandate of age 10 and older.

- Chairman Lovell reiterated her sentiment that to strongly encourage at all times is as close as the board can mandate in the recommended policy. She stated that families who do not feel comfortable having their child come to school, can choose to the 100% Digital Learning option. She also stated that she understands that there may be teachers who do not want to come back at all. She inquired what the response is to those teachers who are not comfortable at coming back to school.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the division wants to work with all staff members but that there must be teachers in the building. If a staff member has a medical condition, documentation from the physician would be required and will be reviewed on a case-by-case issue. He stated that there have been hard conversations regarding current anxiety at the division level as well as school level. He also stated that the vast majority of teachers have said that they feel better after discussions have taken place. He emphasized that the decisions to be made are difficult as the RCPS administration are not public health officials and do not have the specific directives in what needs to be done which makes it difficult to make decisions and set policy. The recommended policy leads to try to make it as safe as possible, not outside of the guidelines of the VDH and CDC. Those guidelines all say masks are important in respect to the mitigation factor, along with social distancing and hand washing, and educating students on proper mitigation techniques.
- Trustee Berkstresser stated that the blended model of social distancing, 50% capacity, taking temperatures of the students, and the wearing of masks will help to make a safe return to school.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired what the process is if a staff member has a compromised medical condition, stating that he has been contacted by numerous individuals.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated if a staff member has a medical condition that would prevent them from entering the classroom, the staff member would need to go to their physician and request documentation. The specific condition does not need to be identified. He emphasized that the division will try to work with staff members, will not challenge the physician's medical judgment, and will attempt to assign a position and location to be safe.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if there is an adequate number of plexi-glass shields to be provided. Specifically, in the case of special education if a teacher is working closely with students.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that shields will be placed in the offices and common areas. If a teacher requests a shield for their desk, every effort will be made to obtain one and put in place. Ms. Christine Wood, Director of Special Education, acknowledged that there would be enough plexi-glass shields available for special education staff working closely with students.
 - Chairman Lovell reiterated that if a family does not feel safe to send their child to school, that the 100% Digital Learning may be their option.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if the face shields are considered the same as a mask.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that it is his understanding that the shields do not replace cloth face coverings but that it is an additional protection. Cloth face coverings have been purchased for every teacher, and shields, if they choose to wear it.
- Trustee Burant inquired if lanyards could be provided for the younger students.
 - Superintendent Thompson agreed that this is a good idea and will look into purchasing them. He also stated that the high school and middle school are purchasing the gator masks for students.
- Trustee Burant inquired if the school schedule is flexible enough to allow time for air to refresh during class changes.
 - Mr. Randy Walters, Director of Transportation and Maintenance, stated that he met with TRANE representatives and fresh air will be purged twice every twenty-four hours to allow for the maximum amount of fresh air in the buildings. The current 5 minute between class change does not allow enough time for the purge to take place.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if there will be different or new filters installed.
 - Mr. Walters stated that filters have been ordered. An assessment at each school was completed by TRANE and Riddleburger to determine options.
 - Trustee Berkstresser inquired what the current schedule is for changing filters and if it can be changed to increase the frequency of replacement of filters.
 - Mr. Walters stated that the filters are changed very three months and but can look at an increased frequency of replacement of filters.
- Trustee Whitmore requested clarification on the sick leave policy for employees; i.e., if a spouse is exposed and the family has to quarantine, completely out of their control, how will sick leave be affected.

- Mr. Jason Kirby, Director of Technology, stated that the Families First Coronavirus Response Act is the first line of defense. If any employee has to quarantine via the VDH, an employee will be given 10 days or 80 hours, which will cover the two-week quarantine period. He stated that it is also being researched to see if it could apply to family members if an employee has to quarantine and the spouse is then asked to quarantine as well (emergency sick leave for spouse).
- Chairman Lovell reflected that there is no good answer. She expressed her appreciation to Dr. Thompson and his team for all that has been done in regards to COVID. She expressed her sentiment that there may be some students for whom school is their safe place where they receive their medical attention, meals, care they are desperately in need of, and may experience more danger when not at school. She expressed her hope that those stakeholders will be able to be back in the building.
 - Trustee Whitmore inquired if there is a student who falls in that category and is unable to come to school, will there be food services or resources available to them.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the division will ensure that everyone has the opportunity to eat and to have food, on a case-by-case basis.
- Trustee Burant inquired what the timeline is to make a decision on the educational format for their child.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the deadline is in the making. The adoption of the mask policy was a priority so that families could determine if they choose to send their child to school. A survey will now be sent to determine the decision of parents. The deadline is tentatively set for the third week of August. He reminded that if a family chooses the option for 100% Digital Learning, the commitment must be 100% for the first semester.
- Trustee Burant inquired if masks will be required for professional development for teachers.
 - Mr. Tim Martino, Director of K12 Curriculum and Instruction, stated that all of the professional development, except for one session, will be virtual with teachers either at home or in a classroom.
- Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation for all the work done to help students to keep the learning going, as well as her appreciation for the flexibility for teachers to be able to request a student to keep a mask on.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Chairman Lovell, and passed by a 5-0 roll call vote, the Board approved the Policy on Cloth Face Coverings as presented.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 11:02 a.m.


Heather C. Hostetter, Vice-Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board