

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, August 11, 2020.

Present: Chairman Wendy Lovell; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Kathy Burant, Heather Hostetter, and Neil Whitmore; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Deputy Clerk Haywood Hand.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lovell called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION: None

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 4-0, with Trustee Hostetter abstaining, the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes: 1) July 14, 2020 [Regular Meeting]; 1) July 23, 2020 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]
- Application for Use of Facilities
- **Appointments and Resignations**

Appointments

Support Staff

Sherita Ashcraft, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, 2020-2021 school year

Autumn Jenkins, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, 2020-2021 school year

Emma Kirk, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, 2020-2021 school year

Katelyn Glass, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, 2020-2021 school year

Cole Staton, Technology Assistant, Division, 2020-2021 school year

2020-2021 Bus Drivers, Car Drivers, Substitute Teachers, Food Service Substitutes & Nurse Substitutes

Bus Drivers - Contracted

Curtis Austin

Lewis Austin

Theresa Bishop

John Butler

Brenda Comas

Lonna Dudley

Patricia Dudley

Tracy Dunlap

Larry Garrett

Theresa Harris

Jimmy Hickman

Coleman Hoke

Elise Johnson

Ida Manspile

Annie Marshall

Amy Moore

Janice Moore

Lindley Newcomer

Susan Perry

Donna Powell

Wanda Ramsey

Sabra Richards

Gerald Sampson

Larry Sensabaugh

Kay Smith

Herman Snyder

Paul Truska

Linda Weeks

Eric Wilhelm

Ray Wimer

William Woodward

Bus Drivers – Non Contracted

Lorie Bare
Martha Blalock
Sarah Braford
Donald Campbell
Andrew Chase
Danny Chittum
Roy Alex Clark
Brenda Clements-Campbell
Bucky Hostetter
Dennis Johnston
Clarence McDaniel
Eddie Milliner
JoAnne Moore
Roy Smith
Karla Staton
Golden Terry, Jr.

Bus Drivers – Substitutes

David Austin
Melissa Bryant
Terry Evans
Robert Gay
Sandra Hill
Kimberly Humphreys
Ricky Lollis
Robert McKinney
James Rice
Charles Smith
Brian Tolley
Russell Williams

Car Drivers – Non Contracted

Lorrie Ackerley
Anthony Ayers
Jenny Bane
Rebecca Cruz
Rodney Early
Gail Hamlet
Carolyn Hartless
Brian Hedrick
Iris Jenkins
Sarah Lawrence
John Lewis
Paulette Lipscomb
Galen Lynn
Eric Manspile
Johnny Montgomery
Graham Moore
Renita Nelson
Shenna Nelson
Christina Panko
Edith Petty
Michelle Poindexter
Catherine Radford
Kenneth Ramsey
Eloise Sensabaugh
Calvin Sorrells
David Sorrells
Roxie Sorrells
Yvonne Sorrells
Deborah Staats
Jessie Terry
April Thurman
Alan Tyree
Eugene Wills

Bus Aides – Non Contracted

Elizabeth Chittum
Pamela Harris
Pauline Taylor

Substitute Teachers

Lori Apgar
Christian Becker
Theresa Bishop
Jeffrey Black
Jennifer Brown
Jennifer Bushnell
Sean Capps
Craig Carlock
Alesa Chaffin
Travis Chaplin
Rebecca Chittum Conley
Lynn Clark
Sharon Creamer
Susan Culpepper
Sara Cunningham
Hilary Dalton
Adam Doll-Hennis
James Dotson
Cynthia Duffield
Adrianna Duran
Debbie Fox
Diana Hawes
Lawrence Heatwole
Ashley Hipes
Laura Holt
Joshua Holton
Lamis Hourani
Janet Hyden
Teresa Irvine
Brenda Jackson
Jeffrey "Guy" Jackson
Karl Kimbler
Rhonda Lawson
William LeMert
Joy Lively
Ron Loy
Bridget Marshall
Bryant Mason
Carol Meyer
Amy Moore
JoAnn Morgan
Peggy Nicely
Deborah Perlozzo
Thomas Scott
Shana Shulter
Alexis Slaydon
Charles Smith
Layton Stevens
Rebecca Stratton
Vera Thurman
Jeannie VanNess
Amy Walters
Deborah Weddle
Linda Wood

Food Service Substitutes

Julia Bane
Doris Buchanan
Delores Minter

Substitute Nurses

Stephanie Dameron
Carol Mason
Cynthia Maurice

Resignations**Support Staff**

Michael Goodbar, Maintenance Staff, resigned effective August 5, 2020

- **Business Items**

- Approve carryover grant appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$297,649.00.
- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$960,683.40.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Mr. Haywood Hand, Assistant Superintendent, provided information on the VSBA Policy Manual Updates, which are now in effect.

Superintendent Thompson provided an update on to the Fall Reopening of School. The following are some highlights of the information:

RCPS PPE and Mitigation Strategies

- There is on-going communication with the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) and Centers for Disease Control (CDC).
- Adopted In-Person Hybrid schedule – Reducing student body by ½ at all times in school buildings
- Offered 100% Digital/Virtual Learning option for all students/families
- Collaborated with VDH to develop a Return to School Health Safety Plan
- Custodians continue to be trained in proper sanitation methods
- Planning for Administrator and Staff training in proper sanitizing methods
- Purchased:
 - MERV 13 HVAC Filters for removing COVID-19 from the air
 - Bi-Polar Ionization Technology for HVAC Units for every school
 - Over 16,000 cloth face coverings
 - Over 50 Thermometers for Health Screenings
 - Hand Sanitizer for each classroom and other locations throughout the schools
 - Sanitizing wipes for each teacher/classroom
 - Sneeze Guards (Reception Areas, some Guidance Areas, Food Service, and for individualized instructional needs)
 - Vinyl Gloves
 - High Volume Disinfectant Sprayers – At least two for each school
 - Safety Signage
 - Elementary Playground Sanitation Stations

Students Learn Best in School

The administration is concerned about academic gaps, lack of student nutrition, lack of socialization and physical activity, lack of social/emotional supports from counselors, teachers, administration, physical and emotional safety. He did note that Rockbridge County Public Schools have delivered meals since spring. He also reflected that school is a safe haven for some of our students.

Local Universities

Rockbridge County is fortunate to have the local colleges and universities but students coming back may bring COVID with them noting that it may or may not affect the steady, relatively low COVID transmission trends across the community for most of the summer.

Childhood Spread Risks

Based on available evidence from VDH/CDC children do not appear to be at higher risk for COVID-19 than adults. Symptoms in children are similar to those in adults, but generally present with milder symptoms. There is concern that children could carry the virus to family members who may present with more serious symptoms.

COVID-19 Testing Concerns

COVID19 testing results is a timely process and makes contact tracing difficult. HIPAA and FERPA privacy rules could make it impossible to know who has been infected, only that someone in the division has been exposed. If this were the case, we could be forced to close an entire school or the entire school division. This type of back and forth with opening schools and then closing schools for a period of days would be quite the burden on families needing childcare and also teachers trying to gain some sort of “rhythm” when teaching.

Budget and Finance Concerns

The health crisis and financial crisis has been felt by all, globally, nation-wide, state, local, and schools. Due to COVID, Rockbridge County Public Schools has lost almost \$800,000 for FY21, which made employee raises impossible, and the position of an additional counselor at RCHS was not added as planned.

There are teachers and staff members with documented medical conditions and cannot return to our buildings, which is an additional budget restraint because even if a teacher can effectively deliver instruction from home, RCPS will still need supervision physically in the teacher’s classroom to assist/monitor students in the classroom. The division is already further stretched the thin budget for FY21.

Considerations/Recommendations

Change to the Continuity of Learning Plan for the Reopening of School in the fall to include:

- *Transition from the current adopted plan to a Modified 100% Virtual Plan for at least the first nine-week period.*
- *After Labor Day student start date of Tuesday, September 8, 2020.*
- *Amend the cloth face policy to mandate they be worn at all times with appropriate “breaks”, based on updated and specific guidance from Dr. Kornegay and the Virginia Department of Health.*

Modified 100% Digital Framework PlanRockbridge County High & Maury River Middle

- All Core and Elective Classes will be offered as planned
- Each student will be issued a Chromebook
- Will download/upload lessons & assignments via internet
- Those with absolutely no way to access the internet will participate in a flash drive “exchange”
- A Help Desk will be available for parents/students for technical issues
- Teachers will make student/family connections weekly offering feedback and support as needed to ensure a positive learning experience
- Daily digital lessons provided through Google Classroom and Edgenuity learning platforms
- Office hours will be held daily and teachers will be available throughout the school day via email, google meet, phone, etc.

Elementary Schools & Preschool

- Every student will be provided a Chromebook or alternative device
- Uploading/Downloading assignments process will be the same as RCHS/MRMS including thumb drive exchange if needed.
- A Help Desk will be available for parents/students for technical issues
- Teachers will make student/family connections at least twice per week offering feedback and support as needed to ensure a positive learning experience
- 2nd Grade through 5th Grade will receive instruction in an entirely digital/virtual learning format (No In-Person Learning)
- Students in Preschool, Kindergarten, and 1st Grade will attend school in-person four days per week with Wednesday being a full digital/virtual learning day from home
- Students in Preschool, Kindergarten, and 1st Grade will still have the option of participating in a 100% digital/virtual learning format if their family would like to do so

Conclusions and Looking Ahead

Superintendent Thompson stated that school administrators are being asked to make tough decisions on public health and that the division will make decisions as best they can. He expressed his sentiment of worry about students being away from school for so long, for many reasons, and families who may struggle with childcare. He stated that with all of the unknowns, the legitimate fears expressed by staff members of Rockbridge County Public Schools, the fears about potential for increased community spread, and the budgetary impacts that the school division is already experiencing, this change is the best option for Rockbridge County Public Schools at this time. He stated that administration will continue to evaluate the circumstances, monitor COVID situation in our area, and closely monitor the budget for RCPS over the coming weeks and make a decision about the second nine-weeks at that time. He emphasized that the division is relying on recommendations and guidance from the VDH and other public health officials.

- Chairman Lovell suggested that Public Comment now take place to answer questions.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- One patron addressed the board and expressed appreciation for the receipt of anti-racist materials and stated that the Rockbridge County NAACP supports the hiring of a Chief Equity Officer.
- Four patrons addressed the board regarding the mask policy.
- Two patrons addressed the board with concerns about neutral gender restrooms being housed in the schools of Rockbridge County.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 roll call vote, the Board unanimously approved the Virginia Public School Educational Technology Notes and Resolution.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the Crisis Plans as presented.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the Secondary Code of Conduct as presented.

Superintendent Thompson made a recommendation for a Change to the Continuity of Learning Plan for the Reopening of School in the fall.

- Chairman Lovell inquired who will be in the Rockbridge County Public School buildings.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that the teachers will be in the buildings the majority of the time; some special education students, ESL, students who do not have internet availability. He reminded that teachers will still need to be available and that working from school will be the key. He emphasized that teachers must be able to collaborate with their colleagues to prepare and problem-solve. In addition to instructional supports, they need to be in the buildings to for technical supports.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if PK through grade 1 will attend every day.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the class sizes in Rockbridge County are average to below and allow for all students to attend, allowing that some classes may need to be split into two groups.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired what numbers look like for the younger population.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the numbers are alarmingly down, especially for the incoming kindergarten class.
- Trustee Burant inquired if the school board will have to go back to the drawing board in terms of school choice (virtual versus face-to-face instruction).
 - Superintendent Thompson expressed his sentiment that another survey may be needed.
 - Trustee Burant inquired if telephone calls may be more expeditious.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that staff will make telephone calls.
- Chairman Lovell inquired how the school division, in dealing with COVID and families in crisis, will ensure that we do not lose anyone.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the school division is required to track students. He also stated that it will be difficult to track rising kindergarteners.
- Trustee Burant expressed her sentiment that the school division may lose students due to job situations but the division needs to make sure that parents are informed to make sure they can consider the new recommended Return to School Plan.

- Chairman Lovell inquired what the board and division can do to support the situations of our students.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the division must be empathetic and flexible with families and provide support to the best of our ability. The administrative staff has discussed the feedback received from families regarding the mandated school closings in the spring. Some families felt that the support received from RCPS was great; there were other families who did not feel the same way. He stated that even though the buildings may be closed, Rockbridge County Public Schools must be available --- teachers, administrators, counselors, etc.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired what forms of communication are being utilized by Rockbridge county Public Schools.
 - Superintendent Thompson and Mr. Jason Kirby, Director of Technology and Human Resources, stated that the Honeywell communication system is being utilized as well as google platforms, remind app., for families to call or email the school but also asked for families to be patient while administration, staff, and teachers work to provide answers to their questions.
- Chairman Lovell inquired how the Town Hall meeting is being promoted.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the Honeywell Communication system will be utilized regarding the decision of the board's decision this evening and will include information about the Town Hall meeting.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if the amended calendar means end date changes?
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the last school day would be moved to June 4, 2021.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Hostetter, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the mask policy to mandate they be worn at all times with appropriate "breaks" as presented.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Hostetter, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the change to the Continuity of Learning Plan for the Reopening of School, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved a calendar change to reflect a start date of September 8, 2020.

NEW BUSINESS: None

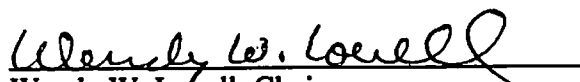
SCHOOL BOARD:

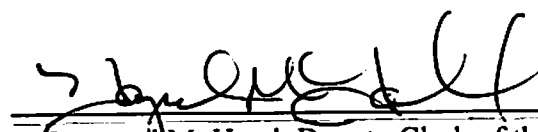
The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, September 8, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting location and format will be determined and advertised.

Trustee Berkstresser asked that the community pray for our leaders, pray for our teachers, and to pray for our students.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Hostetter, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:21 p.m.


Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman


Haywood M. Hand, Deputy Clerk of the Board