

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, October 13, 2020. The meeting was held at Maury River Middle School.

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lovell called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

Moment of Recognition for 2020 Retirees: Michelle Ferguson, Rick Lollis, Anita McGugan, Peggy McCormick, Valerie Mikels, James Rice, Sue Seaman, Linda Shybunko, Lori Thomas, Donna Wallace, Sherry Wilhelm, Paul Williams, and Molly Woody

Superintendent Thompson expressed his appreciation for working with Dr. Laura Kornegay, District Director, Central Shenandoah Health District, during the pandemic. Dr. Kornegay continues to work closely with the school system in determining mitigation strategies to make Rockbridge County Public Schools as safe as possible.

Dr. Kornegay provided an Area COVID Data Update. She stated that she works with ten different localities, which include ten public school systems, private school systems, universities and colleges. She offered the following observations:

- Recent cases have been driven by higher education such as colleges and universities, who are in close congregate settings, and generally in good health. The disease is transmitted fairly easily at colleges as students are living in close quarter dorms and barracks.
- School systems are utilizing mitigation strategies such as mask wearing, social distancing, hand washings, conducting health screenings. These basic strategies are being successful and do work.
- She noted that large industries are a bit more difficult because employees work shoulder to shoulder and it is more difficult to social distance but they are trying to incorporate mitigation into their strategy.
- She noted that schools are conducting environmental cleaning, wearing masks, social distancing, which continue to make schools a setting safe.
- The history of COVID-19 is being built as information is learned during the pandemic.
- She noted that a majority of schools are doing well and that the cases within school divisions are typically transmitted from outside of the classroom; i.e. linked to outside of the school setting.
- She feels that the school division is doing what can be done to get students back in the classroom. Plans cannot be set in stone and can change on a daily basis. Environmental sanitizing is needed and is taking place.
- Rockbridge County benefits from the surrounding school districts who are bringing back their students to the classrooms with no large outbreaks and are learning from their experience.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her concern that mental health issues are impacted as well.
 - Dr. Kornegay reflected that humans are social animals by nature and that social interaction cannot be replaced at home. There is an ongoing stress to introduce normality to lives, to make sure there is a provision of nutrition when needed, and reminded that school is sometimes being a safe haven for some students.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if there is capability to get tests for staff members, if needed.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that there are multiple local sites that do the testing. The testing enables contact tracing, which allows a history to be developed during the infectious period. She emphasized that those who are less than 6 feet distance for more than 15 minutes or more without a mask are at risk.
- Trustee Burant inquired if there are resources that can be shared with staff, parents, and students to offer reassurance of safety and to reflect what is taking place to prevent the spread of the virus.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that COVID-19 education courses have been developed for teachers and students, which includes 15-20 minute videos. She stated that a Public Health Nurse has been assigned to the district for K-12.

- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation to Dr. Kornegay for the information and collaboration with the school division.
 - Dr. Kornegay echoed that this is a very challenging time for all, including non-health care providers.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- Seven patrons addressed the board and shared their experiences with virtual instruction and their support of allowing students to return to school.
- One patron addressed the board with concern of the views of employees influencing students and curriculum.
- One patron addressed the board with a reminder that the school board are elected officials by citizens and should take the position with responsibility and integrity and stand up for what is right for the school system as a whole, not just a few people.
- One patron addressed the board and expressed that the Rockbridge County NAACP has concerns that Rockbridge County Public Schools has not hired educators of color.
- Two patrons addressed the board with concerns of the lack of diversity and concerns about anti-racism curriculum not being taught in Rockbridge County Public Schools.
- One patron addressed the board on the need and urgency for efforts to hire more diverse faculty, including persons of color, at Rockbridge County High School.
- One patron addressed the board with concern of teachers and administration using their political influence in the classroom and organizations asking teachers to display stickers in their classrooms to represent certain groups. Patron requested that the school board develop a policy for school administrators for when these questions come up.
- One patron addressed the board with concern of keeping group affiliations out of the school systems.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, the board voted 5-0, the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes: 1) September 8, 2020 [Regular Meeting]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraising Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- **Appointments and Resignations**

Appointments

Support Staff

Tiffany Crookshanks, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School,
effective October 14, 2020

Food Service Substitutes

Gloria Clemmer
Elaine Higgins
Amy Shumate-Clark

Coaches

Rockbridge County High School

Boys' Basketball

Jeff Templeton – Boys' Assistant Basketball Coach (Split position)
Jeff Blalock – Boys' Assistant Basketball Coach (Split position)
Andy Coffey – Boys' Volunteer Coach

Girls' Basketball

Misty Armstrong – Girls' Head Basketball Coach
Penni Allen – Girls' Assistant Basketball Coach
Keston Pelter – Girls' JV Basketball Coach

Wrestling

Aaron Bruce – Head Wrestling Coach
Chris Skretzwitz – Assistant Wrestling Coach
John Campbell – Volunteer Coach

Swimming

Morgan Richter – Head Swimming Coach
Elle Boyd – Assistant Swimming Coach

Winter Cheer

Tasha Polly – Head Winter Cheer Coach
Karlie Swisher – Assistant Coach
Shannon Bryan – Volunteer Coach

Indoor Track

Jennifer Showalter – Head Indoor Track Coach
Julie Tisone – Assistant Indoor Track Coach

Destination Imagination

Ashlee Payne

Maury River Middle School

Boys' Basketball Coach

Ron Clark – Boys' Basketball Coach

Girls' Basketball Coach

Rebecca Stratton – Girls' Basketball Coach

Wrestling

John Campbell – Head Wrestling Coach
Joshua Holton – Volunteer Coach
Stuart Brown – Volunteer Coach

Resignations

Support Staff

Autumn Jenkins, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective October 2, 2020
Theodore van Ravenswaay, Custodian, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 15, 2020.

Retirement

Support Staff

Frances Tomlin, Food Service Worker, RCHS, retiring effective December 31, 2020
Nancy Hamilton, Teacher Assistant, RCHS, retiring effective September 30, 2020

• **Business Items**

- Approve new grant appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$1,206,394.00.
- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$2,698,761.12

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson presented information on the status of the current FY21 budget. The COVID health crisis in early spring led to economic crisis as well. The school division was slated to receive approximately \$15,000,000 from the state when the state budget was approved. The pandemic caused a drop in the state budget that the school division was looking to receive based on two primary reasons:

- Average Daily Membership (ADM) is down 46 students from what was budgeted; there are various reasons why these students are not enrolled in RCPS to include a transition to homeschooling for some due to COVID-19, transfer to other school divisions that may currently have in-person learning, and some simply moved to other localities. The current decline in students equates to \$225,000 deduction in state revenue budget.
- Sales tax is a factor. Businesses were shut down in the spring and tax dollars stopped coming into Rockbridge County. Rockbridge County Public Schools is currently slated to lose \$215,000 due to the decrease in sales tax revenues. The total revenue reduction from the state side is \$439,000.

Superintendent Thompson stated that school divisions across the nation are dealing with the same budget issues. The hope had been last year to provide teachers with a raise for all the hard work they had been doing, which was not able to come to fruition last year. The school division continues to closely monitor the budget and continually look how to balance the budget. As of right now, thirteen positions have been reduced across the school division, which is especially significant now when more and more resources are needed to provide instruction for our students. The school division is monitoring what is being spent and ways to save money. He expressed appreciation that the meal benefits for students is continuing but reminded that this leads to additional fuel costs and pay for bus drivers. It is a needed benefit but does have a budgetary impact. Work will begin for establishing Budget FY22 priorities while continuing to monitor FY21 to balance the budget.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None**INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Mr. Paige Owens, Supervisor of Career and Technology Education, provided information on Career and Technical Education During COVID-19.

- He shared that there are currently ten RCHS teachers and two Maury River Middle School teachers using iCEV (CTE Based Online Resource), Home Instructional Kits, and Mobile Classrooms.
- He provided information regarding the safety protocols that are in place for the Career and Technical Education.
- Other CTE News included the completion of the Rockbridge County High School Kitchen Remodel, Summer Industry Credentialing (Certified Nursing Assistant – CNA with 100% pass rate and Veterinary Science with 100% pass rate) , and the completion of #19 Habitat House.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Superintendent Thompson provided information on the First Nine Weeks and Looking Ahead. He stated that throughout the pandemic the school division has been concerned about the health and safety of patrons in our community, including physical, mental, and socio-emotional health of children and families that we serve, as well as our employees. Difficult decisions will be made regarding the next nine weeks and stated that all comments and perspectives are being taken into consideration. Research is being reviewed and RCPS administration is engaging health experts in working to understand fully the full scope of the public health indications of this pandemic.

He reviewed the first nine weeks and expressed his appreciation to staff, parents, and guardians for their patience and grace. He also expressed his appreciation to the Virginia Department of Health for their collaboration and hard work in helping to keep our schools safe.

Highlights of his presentation:

- In spite of COVID-19, learning is occurring.
- Teachers are working harder than ever with in-person and remote teaching and learning taking place.
- Administration has requested that teachers continue with communication with students, and parents.
- Health and safety protocols and practices are ensuring that mitigation practices are working.

Superintendent Thompson acknowledged that some parents/guardians may be experiencing the following:

- Struggling with the advancements of technology.
- Stressed by the volume of the academic workload.
- Finding it difficult to balance work/home/school responsibilities.
- Increasingly requesting to bring their child to school for additional supports.

Superintendent Thompson acknowledged that some students may be experiencing the following:

- Struggling with Technology.
- Struggling to find life/home/school balance.
- Lack of socialization/mental health concerns.

The First Nine-Weeks Safety Overview:

- There have been five cases involving schools, with no other transmission outbreaks taking place. The transmissions likely took place from outside of the schools. Schools may be the safest place to be.
- Mitigation Strategy Success
 - Cloth Face Covering
 - Social Distancing
 - Cleaning of Surfaces
 - Hand Washing
- Ultraviolet Lights
- MERV-13 Filters for HVAC units
- Bipolar Ionization on HVAC units

Conversations and Planning:

- Conversations and communications have been received from parents/guardians, teachers, students, via emails, telephone calls.
- Contact and visits with other school divisions via talking with superintendents, teachers, and staff to hear what is working for them.
- Conversations have taken place with community members and business leaders.

- Conversations and collaboration with health officials, including doctors and nurses from the Virginia Department of Health.

Looking Beyond the First-Nine Weeks:

Superintendent Thompson provided Three Distinct Learning Plan Options for consideration:

Learning Option 1 (current plan):

Modified 100% Digital Learning Plan

Same as First Nine-Weeks

Pre-K, K, and 1 in-person 4 days/week

Grades 2-12 remain virtual

Virtual option will remain available to all

Learning Option 2:

Staggered Hybrid Plan

Same as First Nine-Weeks

Pre-K, K, and 1 continue 4 days/week in-person

Add Grades 2, 6, and 9 at start of 2nd nine-weeks (Nov. 10) in Hybrid (ABABV)

If COVID situation allows, return all other grades to in-person on November 30, 2020.

Virtual option will remain for all

Learning Option 3:

Full Hybrid Plan

Pre-K, K, and 1 continue 4 days/week in-person

All other students (2-12) in Hybrid (ABABV)

Virtual option will remain for all

- Chairman Lovell reflected that all board members have heard comments from patrons who shared their perspective of living with the current situation. She stated that there will be a zoom meeting on Friday, October 16, 2020 at 11:00 AM for the purpose of deciding on the learning option for the 2nd Nine-Weeks.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that if there is a change in plans, he wants to give parents and students time to plan. He stated that after the board makes their decision, the selected option will be posted on the RCPS website and Facebook.
 - Trustee Berkstresser expressed his appreciation to Superintendent Thompson for the hard work put into developing the plans and is in support of bringing students back to school.

Mr. Mike Gale, Rockbridge County High School, Athletic Director, provided an update on Athletic and Academic Activities for RCHS. He provided “Championships +1”, a document from the Virginia High School League (VHSL), which provides anticipated dates for Season 1 – Winter Sports, Season 2 – Fall Sports, Season 3 – Spring Sports, and Academic Activities. He also provided “Rockridge County High School Return to Athletics Phase 3 Action Plan Fall 2020”. This document specifically outlines safety procedures for Rockbridge County High School. He stated that VHSL eligibility requirements remain the same: students must be enrolled in at least five pod classes and pass.

- Trustee Burant inquired how attendance will affect fans when games begin.
 - Mr. Gale stated that per VHSL guidelines, there will be a limited number of people including coaches and players permitted at games. A reality is that tournaments may not happen this year.
- Chairman Lovell asked for clarification that VHSL is setting the rules and school divisions must adhere to those rules.
 - Mr. Gale stated that VHSL is providing guidelines and things to consider, leaving some items up to the discretion of the regions and school divisions.

Mr. Randy Walters, Director of Transportation and Maintenance, provided information on the 2022-2026 Capital Improvements Plan. He noted that the CIP will be presented again as an Action Item at the November meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board and will then be submitted to the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors by November 19, 2020. He highlighted the following changes for each year.

FY22:

- CES and FES HVAC and Associated Parts Replacement, moved back one year at the request of the Board of Supervisors due to COVID-19 revenue losses. (He noted that the ionization units that were installed recently in all of Rockbridge County Schools, can be uninstalled and put into new units.)
- Chairman Lovell stated that the Cares Act Funding was used for the ionization units.

- Division Transportation Office was budgeted for FY22, which is currently housed on property beside Maury River Middle School. There is no timeline on when the Transportation Office must vacate the building but a move should take place as soon as possible.
- Repair of Stadium Concrete – safety issue.
- Updated Telephone System for the Division to improve communication – RCPS part of grand funding.

FY23:

- Update RCHS Stadium Seating – safety issue.

FY24:

- Construction of RCHS Auxiliary Gym
- Replace RCHS Gymnasium Bleachers

FY25:

- Improvements to the RCHS Athletic Facilities
- NBE, MVE, and Effinger Central Office HVAC and Associated Parts Replacement, nearing end of lifespan

FY26:

- Renovation of NBE locker room space to instructional space (Feasibility Study recommendation)

Mr. Walters expressed his appreciation for the conversations regarding the Feasibility Study and the upcoming projects. He stated that projects for FY25 and FY26 are the result of the Feasibility Study.

- Chairman Lovell stated that some of the projects are not new and that it is important to keep the Board on track, while realizing that there may be financial impediments ahead.

Ms. Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, provided background of the Title I Family Engagement Plan, which included the following information:

- Title I is the Largest Federal Program for nation's schools.
- Rockbridge County Public Schools uses the funding to support reading instruction in elementary schools.
- The Rockbridge County Public Schools Title I Program transitioned in 2018 from targeted-assist to school-wide status; funds go to the entire school not just struggling learners but to help the entire reading program.
- The funds provide professional development for reading specialists to serve as coaches, to support classroom teachers, and to support struggling readers.

Ms. Hinty stated that in order to continue receiving federal funds, certain requirements must be met. Rockbridge County Public Schools participated in federal monitoring March 2020, with no non-compliance findings. The Family Engagement Plan provided demonstrates how the division will engage with families in meaningful ways based on feedback from 2020 family survey data. The current committee met via Google Meet on October 5 and 6, 2020 to review family feedback data and to ensure that the document accurately reflects that data. Ms. Hinty stated that she will present the final Title I Parent and Family Engagement Plan for approval at the November meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, the board voted 5-0, to approve the resolution to participate in the Virginia Public School Authority Bond Refinancing [2020C VPSA Refunding Bonds].

NEW BUSINESS: None**SCHOOL BOARD:**

There will be a special meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board on Friday, October 16, 2020 at 11:00 AM for the purpose of discussion of learning plan options for the second nine weeks. Action is anticipated. The meeting will be held via "Zoom" video communications. School Board members and RCPS Staff members will be participating remotely.

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, November 10, 2020 at 5:00 p.m. The meeting location will be determined and advertised.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:23 p.m.

Wendy W. Lovell
Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman

Rhonda B. Humphries
Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board