

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, December 8, 2020. The meeting was held using a virtual format.

Present: Remote participation from individual locations: 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 5:00 p.m.

**CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:** None

**RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION:** None

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None

#### **CONSENT AGENDA**

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

- Minutes: 1) November 4, 2020 [Special Meeting]; 2) November 10, 2020 [Regular Meeting]; 3) November 19, 2020 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]

- Fundraising Requests

- Application for Use of Facilities

- **Appointments and Resignations**

##### **Appointments**

##### **Professional Staff**

Derek Vanderveer, School Counselor, Central Elementary School,  
effective December 9, 2020

##### **Support Staff**

Robert Sorrells, Contracted Bus Driver, effective November 30, 2020

##### **Substitute Teachers**

Taylor McMichael

- **Business Items**

- Approve grant appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$53,228.00.
- Approve debt service payments due January 15, 2021 to US Bank for Rockbridge County Public Schools VPSA bonds in the amount of \$466,347.71.
- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,077,907.04.

#### **BUDGET PLANNING:**

Superintendent Thompson stated that school divisions are in a wait pattern until the Governor's budget is released around December 15, 2020. Superintendent Thompson is hopeful this will give insight for the current fiscal year, as well as next fiscal year. The budget scenario is not looking great with the loss of tax revenue and loss of ADM. It is anticipated that there may be hold harmless funds placed back into the budget to help with tax revenue and there is hope that there may be hold harmless funds in the Governor's budget, which may help with the ADM loss for this year.

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:** None

#### **INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Ms. Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, provided an update on the Rockbridge County Public Schools CPS Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI).

- A normal year would present 2 classrooms of 18 students each; 1 teacher and 1 teacher assistant per class. For the year 2020, Governor Northam provided more student slots, which would have allowed for 3 classrooms with an enrollment of 45 students. There was new local criteria up to 40%.
- The onset of Covid led to difficulty in getting families to commit to the program, consideration of mask policy / virtual and new Covid considerations for eligibility.

- Eligibility Criteria:
  - 200% above poverty level (example: family of 4 / \$48,000)
  - Homeless
  - Parents did not finish high school
  - SPED up to 350% above poverty level
  - 15% can be local criteria

Ms. Hinty provided the following current data:

- There are currently 43 students enrolled.
- During the 1<sup>st</sup> nine weeks, only 5 students were virtual. In-person students attended school 4 days per week. Beginning the 2<sup>nd</sup> nine weeks, only 4 students were planned to be virtual.
- Students have been issued Google Tablets, email addresses and log-ins for Google Classroom. Teachers have utilized Google Slides, Google Sites, Class Dojo, social media private groups, emails and packets to provide instruction.
- All school divisions with VPI classrooms are required to complete a Self-Study and Review for compliance. Each school division must demonstrate that 5.5 hours of instruction are being provided for students virtually.

Ms. Hinty stated that the positive aspect for the year 2020 is as follows:

- Serving more students overall;
- Serving an additional school population;
- Ability to accept more students on a local criteria;
- Ability to support families of essential workers.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if the program had allowed for 60 students at in the past.
  - Ms. Hinty stated that the state allowed for 36 to 67 students but it was not possible in Rockbridge County, as we have never had enough students to even be on a wait list. She stated that an enrollment of 45 students was a realistic goal and is hopeful that in future years the goal can be increased more. The state has allowed for classrooms of 20 students versus 18 students but it does sacrifice student-teacher ratio with more students.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if the 40% local criteria was due to Covid.
  - Ms. Hinty stated that local criteria has always been in place and was increased prior to Covid. She stated that she anticipates that it will stay in place.
- Trustee Burant stated that she knows there have been a number of preschool programs disappear because of Covid and inquired if this has affected the RCPS program. She also inquired how the virtual instruction was working with the program.
  - Ms. Hinty stated that the RCPS program has gained a few students because of the closing of local preschools. She stated that the VPI teachers have had to meet with some families on an individual basis utilizing different formats as Google Classroom does not work for all and can be different for each teacher and student.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation to Ms. Hinty and her team for all they are doing.

#### **INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:**

Mr. Haywood Hand, Assistant Superintendent, provided information on the 2021-2022 School Calendar drafts. A survey was sent to all employees of Rockbridge County Public Schools the week prior to Thanksgiving, which resulted in 125 responses. The survey gave employees the opportunity to evaluate three draft calendars. He offered the following constraints/guidelines that were used to develop the 2021-2022 Student Calendar Drafts:

- August (Pre-Labor Day) Start
- End 1<sup>st</sup> semester prior to winter break (College Model)
- End school year on or before Memorial Weekend
- 85-95 instructional days per semester that equals to 180 instructional days for the year
- At least one work day at the end of each of the 9-week marking periods
- MLK Day is a holiday for teachers and students
- Minimum of 9 in-service days and one division in-service day
- 3-day Thanksgiving break
- Winter Break
- Spring Break
- 200 day calendar for teachers (10-month employees)
- Trustee Hostetter inquired why teachers prefer a mid-week start.
  - Mr. Hand responded that it seems to be consensus that a soft opening that allows getting students back in the school, giving a weekend of rest, and then backing to full routine is beneficial.
  - Superintendent Thompson also stated that he has heard comments from teachers that a full-week start could be exhausting for both students and staff. He stated that there is a three-day weekend each month throughout the calendar for students.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the Rockbridge Church Lease to run from January 1, 2021 through December 31, 2021.

- Chairman Lovell reflected that given the challenges of Covid, if Mr. Billy Thomas, Principal, Maury River Middle School, feels positively about Rockbridge Church, it is a good sign that this can be handled in these challenging times.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Director of Technology and Human Resources, presented the RIF Policy as an Action Item. The following discussion took place regarding the RIF Policy:

- Trustee Burant stated that she has received communication reflecting how people feel about this policy, even though it is hoped that RCPS will never have to use it. There is concern regarding the assigning of points, or value system, rather than based solely on seniority. She inquired about teachers who have a child or parent at home who cannot be a sponsor for extracurricular activities, which is factored in, if need be. She inquired if all staff members have the same opportunity to receive these points.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated that extracurricular activities sponsorship is open to any staff member.
- Trustee Whitmore expressed his concern and used a scenario that if there are two tenured teachers and one is a coach, the teacher who is also a coach will be given more priority.
  - Trustee Berkstresser stated that even though the teachers would have equal tenure, one teacher is doing more as a coach and reiterated that it was a hard decision to make to include in the policy.
  - Chairman Lovell stated that although she hopes that RCPS are never placed in the situation to need this policy, she expressed her appreciation to the thought and the clear process in which decisions may have to be made.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated that the changes are a huge improvement over what had been in place, which provides for more equity and opportunity for employees to show what they are doing for the school division.
  - Trustee Whitmore expressed his sentiment that the move beyond seniority or service is a positive step.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Hostetter, the board voted 5-0, to approve revisions to the Reduction in Force (RIF) Policy as presented, which includes changes to the following policies:

- GCPA-R [Reduction in Work Force - Professional Staff - RCPS];
- GCPA-P [Reduction in Force Procedure (RIFP) – RCPS – NEW];
- GDO [Reduction in Support Staff Work Force – RCPS];
- GDO-R [Reduction in Work Force – Support Staff – RCPS – NEW]

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Superintendent Thompson provided an update in respect to Covid and how it is affecting our schools and families. He stated that the decision for the school division to go 100% virtual has been an extremely difficult decision on all of our families, faculty and staff members. He stated that it was a hard decision for the school board members to make. He reflected that the school division realizes the need for our students to be in school, as that is where they learn best and school is where we want them to be as long as it can be done safely. There has been constant communication with Dr. Laura Kornegay, Health Director, Central Shenandoah Health District at Virginia Department of Health, and many of her associates who work in Virginia Department of Health. Their expertise has aided immensely in guiding the school division through this pandemic, which is obviously unprecedented for all. Dr. Kornegay has affirmed that the decision to revert to 100% virtual was the correct decision based on the consistent and unfortunate increase of Covid cases in the Rockbridge County area over the past several weeks. Administration is still hopeful for PK-grade 12 to return with the hybrid model on January 19, 2021. Dr. Kornegay is hopeful that the new vaccines will be distributed to the frontline healthcare workers, and hopefully ease some of the load that has been placed on them with respect to all the testing and all of the positive cases they care for; keeping them safe to be able to remain in their positions help the rest of us. Administration will continue to communicate with the Virginia Department of Health and monitor transmissions of the virus in our area with hopes to return to school on January 19, 2021. He asked that parents and the community to be aware that it is not looking too good right now but there is hope for the future. He reflected that it is not easy for our students, their families, our faculty and staff members, during this time.

While it is extremely difficult for them not to have students in schools right now, administration has to be committed to making sure that we are staying safe and making decisions that are based on safety first in all that is done. We want our students back in the school building but have to be sure it is done in such a way that we bring them back into a safe environment. Spiking trends in our area does not lend it self to bringing them back into the buildings now.

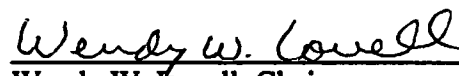
- Trustee Berkstresser expressed his sentiment that with the rising cases in the area, it was the right decision to revert to 100% virtual, with hopes to fill the buildings soon.
- Chairman Lovell expressed that it has not been easy on anyone and expressed appreciation to teachers, staff, and administration and to the families who are bearing it the best they can.
- Trustee Burant echoed the thoughts of Chairman Lovell and added that she is worried about parents who may be frustrated with the virtual learning. She asked that parents reach out to teachers and administrators for help and assistance to make it easier for them.
  - Superintendent Thompson reiterated that teachers are critical, and added that nurses, food service workers, bus drivers, and other staff members working behind the scene are important and have been working hard and expressed his appreciation to all staff.
- Trustee Whitmore reflected that this has been a true example of where everyone is needed and everyone is an important piece including community partners who are offering assistance.

**SCHOOL BOARD:**

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, January 12, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. The location and format of the meeting will be announced.

**ADJOURNMENT:**

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 5:53 p.m.

  
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Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman

  
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Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board