

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, September 8, 2020. The meeting was held at Rockbridge County High 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 5:00 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

Superintendent Thompson stated that he anticipates recognizing retirees of Rockbridge County Public Schools at the October board meeting.

Superintendent Thompson provided the following statement:

As all of you are aware, today was the first day of school in which we were able to bring some students back into our buildings.

It has been a long, difficult road that all educators have traveled since schools were closed all across the commonwealth back in March.

When schools closed back in March, teachers and administrators were asked to take on a task that has never been attempted before. They were asked to switch in a matter of hours to a completely online/virtual method of teaching. Our school buildings were closed, but school was still in session. This was also a huge challenge for our students as well as our parents and guardians. While our mission continued to be educating the children of Rockbridge County, following this unprecedented event, we also felt the urgency to ensure our students and families were OK.

Our teachers, counselors, nurses, and administrators went into action by checking in on our families trying to be of service in any way they could. They checked on them to ensure they were physically healthy, but also emotionally. Because we know that so many of our families rely upon schools for the meals we serve, our bus drivers and food service workers never stopped creating and delivering meals. All spring when our school buildings were closed as well as over the summer, these folks prepared and delivered nearly 65,000 meals to the families of Rockbridge County.

At the official conclusion of the school year, Dr. Craft and the RCHS team produced an exceptional celebration for our 2020 graduating class of seniors.

At the conclusion of this celebration, we started thinking about what might school look like in the fall.

Will we be able to return to our buildings? Will we be 100% virtual? Or some sort of hybrid? Working closely with the VDOE and the VDH, using teacher and parent feedback, our administrators went to work creating multiple sets of plans trying to take into account all of the "What If Scenarios".

These plans included:

Continuity of Learning Plans - How will it work if we are in person, 100% virtual, or what will our hybrid look like?

*Review Plans to cover the material that students may have missed from last year
Health Plans to make sure our students and staff were safe in any scenario
Employee Building Reopening Plans / Special Education Plans / Transportation Plans – How are we going to be able to pick up & drop off students and then potentially deliver meals if needed? What about after school programs?
Food Service Plans – What will need to happen in order to make sure our students continue to be fed?*

Teachers have been back in the schools for a little over a month. They have participated in countless professional development sessions, collaborated with their colleagues, studied educational blogs about best practices about how to best deliver effective lessons in a virtual model....They have accepted the challenge of learning how to teach in a whole new manner and I am confident that our students are in good hands.

Needless to say, it has been a ton of work for our staff members in this ever changing environment all summer to prepare for today.

While we still do not have all of our students back in the buildings, it was absolutely wonderful to see so many smiling faces enter our schools today. As I traveled throughout our schools today, it was very obvious that the summer's hard work had paid off. And it was obvious both students and teachers were ready see one another again today as it signaled at least a small bit of a return to some sense of normalcy to the world we knew prior to Covid 19.

While today was an absolute success, much hard work remains ahead of us as teachers are asked to not only teach small groups of students in-person in our schools, but also teach those students who are learning virtually outside of our school buildings. While teachers work hard every year, this year will be like no other.

Knowing that the road ahead will be challenging, I'd like to take a moment to thank so many for what was accomplished today: Teachers, Staff members, administrators, Students, Parents/Guardians, Community Members, Local business owners, volunteers, School Board members....Thank you for your dedication, perseverance, your flexibility, patience, and grace over the past six months. Our work thus far has proved successful, but the work is far from finished. We must take time to celebrate this small victory; however, more hard work remains ahead as we continue to navigate these uncharted waters.

We will need to continue to work together and I would ask for everyone's continued support, flexibility and grace as we try to do what is in the best interest of our students moving forward.

Chairman Lovell provided the following statement on behalf of the Rockbridge County School Board:

Input from students, employees, parents and members of the community at large is important for my fellow board members and me to hear. We recognize the important role our public schools play in this community and that citizens of the county have a stake in our success.

2020 has been a particularly challenging year for our division and for all schools across the country. The staff and faculty of our schools have worked incredibly hard to support our students even when they could not be together, and the load on our employees has only gotten greater as they have had to pivot many times to meet the challenges that this pandemic continues to throw their way.

Managing these challenges has only been made harder as issues surrounding public education have become politicized. My fellow board members and I did not run as part of a party and we do not do our work for political gain. Our staff and faculty are driven by a proven curriculum based in standards that are set at the state level by the Virginia Board of Education. They are not charged with advocating or teaching ideologies on the left or the right. When our schools are pulled into political discourse, it takes our focus away from our mission.

Rockbridge County is comprised of citizens with diverse points of view; we do not all share the same beliefs or political perspectives. As it relates to our schools, what the board hopes our community can focus on is coming together in support of educating our students. That is our priority and diverting from that mission will make an incredibly challenging year that much more so.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

- One patron expressed concern regarding anti-racism and the banning of the confederate flag and hate symbols.
- One patron expressed concern that there be no political foothold in the classrooms in regards to BLM or 50 Ways Rockbridge;
- Four patrons expressed concerns that the education system teach facts and curriculum and not personal opinions or beliefs; that the education system be watchful of the direction of public schools to keep students safe.
- Four patrons expressed their opposition of gender neutral restrooms and BLM in Rockbridge County Public Schools;
- One patron expressed appreciation for the adoption of the non-discrimination statement on behalf of the LGBTQ.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) July 30, 2020 [Regular Meeting]; 2) August 11, 2020 [Special Meeting]

- Application for Use of Facilities

- **Appointments and Resignations**

Appointments**Professional Staff**

Sarah Armstrong, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, 2020 – 2021 school year

Support Staff

David Austin, Contracted Bus Driver, Transportation, 2020 – 2021 school year

Lisa Johnson, Teacher Assistant, time-sheet position, Natural Bridge Elementary School,
2020 – 2021 school year

Tricia Jarvis, Teacher Assistant, time-sheet position, Fairfield Elementary School,
2020 – 2021 school year

Ronald Coffey, Car Driver, 2020 – 2021 school year

Clarence Garrett, Car Driver, 2020 – 2021 school year

Coaches**Rockbridge County High School**

Mike Gale, Boys' Head Varsity Basketball Coach

Robert Winfield, Boys' JV Basketball Coach

2020-21 Club Sponsors**RCHS**

Mary Holton – Newspaper

Brian Hamelman – Yearbook

Amanda Burks – Forensics

Chris McGrath – Academic Team

Patrick Bradley – Academic Team Assistant

Pam St. Clair – SCA

Davina Copsy – National Honor Society

Amy Hinkle – Destination Imagination

MRMS

Sarah Schultz – Destination Imagination

Amber Lewis – Yearbook

Courtney Diette – National Junior Honor Society

Sarah Edwards – Gifted Coordinator

Cyndi Tucker – Special Education Coordinator

Tasha Polly – Activities Coordinator

CES

Elizabeth Schmidt – Gifted Coordinator

Michelle Hughes – Destination Imagination

FES

Tracey Hall – Gifted Coordinator

Cathy Whitesell – Destination Imagination

MVES

Gail Clark – Gifted Coordinator

2020-21 Club Sponsors - continued**NBES**

Beth McElroy – Gifted Coordinator

Resignations**Retirement****Support Staff**

Wanda Ramsey, Bus Driver, retiring effective August 31, 2020

Patricia Dudley, Bus Driver, retiring effective August 31, 2020

• **Business Items**

- Approve new grant appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$36,500.00.
- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$2,540,812.06

BUDGET PLANNING: None**COMMITTEE REPORTS:** None**INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Mr. Tim Martino, Director of K12 Curriculum and Instruction, provided an update on Professional Development. The highlights of the presentation are as follows:

- **Code of Conduct/Restorative Practices:** Maury River Middle School and Rockbridge County High School have a new Code of Conduct based on the Virginia Board of Education's Model Guidance for Positive and Preventative Code of Conduct Policy and Alternatives to Suspension. The new code takes a restorative approach to handling student behavior.
- **Google/Clever Overview:** Staff discussed topics on communication tools, ongoing professional development, and available instructional resource tools. Staff was also given a demonstration of the new secure portal for education applications along with a self-paced course "Distance Learning for Educators".
- **ACES Professional Development:** Staff reviewed research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACES) as they play a tremendous role in developing potential physical, mental and behavioral problems later in life.
- **Hybrid Pedagogy:** Staff learned how to plan a hybrid instructional environment that takes into consideration the unique needs of all learners.
- **Edgenuity Overview:** Edgenuity is an online learning tool that can provide curriculum and supplementary material for 6-12 standards-aligned courses, which can help, remediate, reinforce, and accelerate classroom instruction.
- **"Looking Upstream: Trauma Informed Classrooms":** This course is designed to give teachers information and ideas on how to make this challenging school year successful for each student and manageable for teachers. This course also looked at the different facets of trauma including disaster response and ACES.
- **Rethink, Redesign, Reimagine:** How Access and Opportunity Lead to Equitable Outcomes: Dr. Charles Bartlett provided a keynote address about providing a school structure that provides structure that provides equitable opportunities for all learners. There was also an informal book study on Dr. Barrett's book, "It's Always About the Children".
- **Collaborative Planning Days:** Seven collaborative planning days were designated for the school division to provide teachers with opportunities to work with colleagues to create high-quality lesson plans and assessments, to be delivered both in-person, and in digital format.

- Chairman Lovell inquired what type of professional development teachers may need in the next two to three months.
 - Mr. Martino stated that one challenge will be when a student falls behind and how to provide response to intervention virtually and how to build in remedial sessions when a teacher is working with students and teaching students. He explained that a student could potentially have access to thirty teachers who may assist when utilizing the help desk. There will be assessments delivered the week of September 21 to give an idea of what needs to be addressed.
- Trustee Burant expressed her sentiment that phone communication is important in building a relationship between the school, parent, and student. She also stated that she watched the Virtual Town Hall slides and found it very insightful of what a day looks like for a student.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation to parents and guardians during this time.
 - Mr. Martino expressed his appreciation to parents, guardians, and the parent groups who provided feedback on the new learning plan.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Director of Technology, provided a Technology Update. The highlights of the presentation are as follows:

- Over 2600 Chromebooks were handed out over the past three weeks.
- Chromebook Carts are being placed in the elementary classrooms so students do not have to carry their devices back and forth.
- 586 Staff Help Desk Ticket Requests during a 28-day period beginning August 10, 2020.
- Information provided on parent and student resources such as Google and Clever, the RCPS Parent and Student Help/Resource Page, the Parent/Student Help Desk, which is available through school and district sites and social media. [<https://www.rockbridge.k12.va.us/site/Default.aspx?PageID=539>]
- He provided a summary of internet access challenges and options.
 - It is anticipated that Verizon and Kajeet mobile internet devices will be provided to 60-75 families. The devices were scheduled to arrive by September 4 but the delivery date has been moved to September 18, 2020. These devices will work in areas where reliable Verizon cell signal can be reached, with filtered internet access.
 - BARC continues to expand its network (BARC Connects) through Rockbridge County.
 - Comcast Internet Essentials offers an affordable package for residents who live in the Comcast Service Area.
 - School Parking Lot / School Bus Wireless option was available through BARC from March through August. The Kajeet SmartBus devices will be placed out in the community soon.
- There are approximately 30 learners or less who are without some type of internet solution for their student, and are being provided with a laptop along with a thumb drive exchange. He also stated that paper copies of learning activities are being provided when requested.
- Available resources including webinars, professional development, online support, and office hours for teachers/staff to check in and ask questions are supporting staff.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if the technology needs are financially covered for the year, referencing the CARES Act funding.
 - Mr. Kirby stated that completed surveys reflect that there are enough hot spots and devices for current needs of Rockbridge County Public Schools. He noted that the division will continue to monitor for families who may be in need.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Mr. Matthew Crossman, Director of School Services, provided a Food Service Update. He stated that USDA will extend the summer meal program to continue serving free meals to all children, age 18 years and under, into the fall months three times a week. The program does require assistance from parents to complete the online order form, while ensuring the correct address for food delivery. He continues to encourage parents to complete the meal eligibility form for the first semester. He stated that the program is committed to take care of the community and needs parents to participate in order to obtain funds from the program.

- Trustee Berkstresser inquired about the Pandemic Cards.
 - Mr. Crossman stated that the EBT Cards were distributed by Social Services to the families who were eligible.

Mr. Randy Walters, Director of Transportation and Maintenance, provided an update on Transportation and Operations.

Transportation:

Mr. Walters stated that the Transportation Office is currently located at in the VDOT building next to Maury River Middle School. He noted that he will be working with Kurt Bennett, Teacher, Carpentry/Building Trades/Intro to Construction, in the future to build an office at the Bus Garage. On average, a bus has 5-6 students per bus. There have been numerous bus route sets built and will be utilized as needed. He stated what safety precautions are in place for drivers and riders.

- Chairman Lovell inquired if the 21st Century Community Learning Center Program is on hold at this point.
 - Mr. Walters stated that it is anticipated to begin after October 5, 2020.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that it may take place earlier than other virtual activities.

Operations:

Mr. Walters provided information on cleaning procedures that are now in place.

- Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation for the thorough list.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if the MERV filters are in place.
 - Mr. Walters stated that they are expected within the next 2-3 weeks.

ACTION ITEMS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation to the community as she had heard about local churches and organizations who are helping parents who have to work. She also expressed appreciation for the opportunity for some teachers are who able to have their children stay at school while they teach.

Trustee Berkstresser expressed his wish that more people would become involved. He expressed his sentiments that it is great that communities are coming together to provide help for parents through academic centers and pods, etc. He also expressed appreciation for those who speak at board meetings and get involved in their community. He asked that patrons not let their interest and participation stop once the pandemic is over.

SCHOOL BOARD:

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, October 13, 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 8:03 p.m.


Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board