

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special regular meeting on Wednesday, June 17, 2020. The meeting was held using a virtual format.

Present: Remote participation from individual locations: Chairman Wendy Lovell; Trustees Kathy Burant, Heather Hostetter, and Neil Whitmore; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Clerk Rhonda Humphries. Absent: Trustee Corey Berkstresser

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lovell called the meeting to order at 9:02 a.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Hostetter, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board approved the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- **Appointments**

- **Professional Staff**

- Alexa Castellana, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, 2020-2021

- Theresa Ritter, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, 2020-2021

- Scott Fleshman, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, 2020-2021

- Cynthia Littleton, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, 2020-2021

ACTION ITEMS:

Superintendent Thompson stated that the approved 2020-21 School Calendar has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic and needs to be amended. He expressed his sentiment that staff, students, and parents have done an excellent job and have achieved success in uncharted territory. The division finished out the 2019-20 school year with administrators reflecting on what can be improved, along with guidance from Governor Northam. An online survey has been released inquiring how children are learning and if there are internet issues. A Honeywell message will be sent out to garner more responses. He explained that while parent responses to date have been empathetic and understanding that the staff of Rockbridge County Public Schools did their best in the spring of 2020, parents also expressed that they want more for the fall. He expressed his sentiment that the division wants to help set teachers up for success by allowing more time for professional development. It is the intention to release the information regarding calendar changes to families as soon as possible so they are aware of professional development opportunities for teachers to help them be prepared. The major change in the new calendar is the start date for students moving from August 12 to August 31, 2020. There are a few others changes within the calendar.

- Chairman Lovell reiterated that the calendar change is radical but the change is for a good reason. She reflected that she feels three weeks of training and collaboration is essential to help teachers.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if teachers will be given work days at their individual schools.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the Technology Department is working on professional development plans with possible zoom options.
 - Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation for preparation and training time given for teachers. She inquired how the school division will address the needs that may be determined from the surveys in regards to students getting the needed instruction and if their technology is working for their student.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that there may not be resolution for some in terms of internet access. The school division is still looking at the possibility of making internet accessible to more remote parts of the county, while noting that in some parts of the county, it will be impossible. The focus will be to make sure that all students have access to education. Some options that may be utilized include teachers creating student packets, (which is the least desirable), having teachers upload through Chromebooks with students getting to a wireless access point, whether at their home, at the school, in their community, or if it may mean that a bus will be parked somewhere with a WIFI connection. It may be as simple as utilizing flash drives and getting to students. He stated that an estimated ninety percent have indicated internet access and that the school division will address the other ten percent who do not have adequate internet access. He is in communication with surrounding superintendents in trying to collaborate, gain good ideas, and implement as many as possible.
- Chairman Lovell stated that she has received an email communication from a parent who experienced issues in communicating with her child's teacher; particularly, the child had reached out to the teacher without success. Ms. Lovell expressed her sentiment that a majority of teachers did heroic efforts to teach our students but found that instances the

parent referenced were disappointing. She inquired if the division is developing ways in which teachers will be held accountable for reaching out to students.

- Superintendent Thompson reiterated that a vast majority of our teachers performed heroically in reaching out to their students. He stated that the surveys also conveyed that in some instances there was a lack of communication between teacher and student. He conveyed that there has been conversations with principals that it is unacceptable for there to be no interaction between a teacher and student. The framework and plans have not been finalized for the schools at this point. It may be that schools will designate office hours for teachers to reach out to students. Teachers will be required to keep a log, which will provide documentation and ensure that students are on track, noting that a vast majority of teachers may already be doing this. This format will also ensure that students are on the right educational path as well as emotionally in making sure the students are ok.
 - Chairman Lovell further stated that the log will provide protection for teachers when families are not responsive.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if the CARES Act Funding may provide outside assistance to better utilize the website to provide educational information to families with resources expecting that some of this will be done from home and will need parents to help. She expressed her sentiment that it may be helpful to have outside assistance to help support that.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the division has already been looking at ways to expand the technology capabilities and that communication through our website is part of that discussion. It is the intention to have a "Frequently Asked Questions" link on the County Public Schools website.
- Trustee Whitmore asked for confirmation that the amended calendar information will be released to staff quickly. He conveyed that he feels it is important that principals, teachers, and staff view the changes before it is released to parents.
 - Superintendent Thompson confirmed that the calendar change will be released as soon as possible after the meeting staff and then to families so planning can begin. Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Hostetter, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 4-0 vote, the Board approved the Amended 2020-2021 School Calendar as presented with a student start date of August 31, 2020.

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Whitmore stated that he had heard good things about the graduation and festivities and had several parents comment their desire to do the same thing each year. He said he spoke with others who live outside of the community who live in large and wealthy school divisions who were not able to do anything comparable.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that he has heard similar comments and expressed his appreciation to Dr. Craft for the monumental undertaking by him, his staff, and the community to make it a wonderful celebration for the graduating seniors. He conveyed his sentiment that Rockbridge County is doing good things for our students.

Chairman Lovell inquired if the board would like to pen a letter of appreciation and support to the staff and faculty to thank them in advance.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that it is always good practice for employees to hear support from the school board.
 - Trustee Burant will pen the letter.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Hostetter, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 9:33 a.m.

Wendy W. Lovell
Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman

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