

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, June 8, 2021. 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 5:00 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

RECOGNITION / SPECIAL PRESENTATION:

Moment of Recognition for 2021 Retirees: Nancy Baker, Theresa Bishop, Eddie Brown, Ellen Campbell, Elizabeth Camden, Davina Copsy, Constance Donald, Julia Dudley, Patricia Dudley, Nancy Hamilton, Haywood Hand, Debra Hanson, Kimberly Huffman, Joanna Irby, Lynn McCrady, Susan Petriella, Wanda Ramsey, Jackie Riley, Carolyn Slagle, Davida Staton, Lori Teague, Frances Tomlin, and Lisa Vassar

VSBA Policy Updates and Clarifications:

Dr. Phillip Thompson, Superintendent, provided information on the VSBA Policy Manual Updates, which per previous board action, are now in effect.

He also provided clarifications of policy updates that have three primary areas of focus:

Policies Concerning the Treatment of Transgender Students.

- During its 2020 session, the VA General Assembly passed Section 22.1-23.3 – Treatment of transgender students; policies
 - A. The Department of Education shall develop and make available to each school board model policies concerning the treatment of transgender students in public elementary and secondary schools that address common issues regarding transgender students in accordance with evidence-based best practices and include information, guidance, procedures, and standards relating to:
 1. Compliance with applicable nondiscrimination laws;
 2. Maintenance of a safe and supportive learning environment free from discrimination and harassment for all students;
 3. Prevention of and response to bullying and harassment;
 4. Maintenance of student records;
 5. Identification of students;
 6. Protection of student privacy and the confidentiality of sensitive information;
 7. Enforcement of sex-based dress codes; and
 8. Student participation in sex-specific school activities and events and use of school facilities. Activities and events do not include athletics.
 - B. Each school board shall adopt policies that are consistent with but may be more comprehensive than the model policies developed by the Department of Education pursuant to subsection A.
- There is a legal requirement that all school boards in Virginia adopt policies to address these eight categories prior to the start of the 2021-2022 school year.
- The Virginia Department of Education released the final version in April 2021.
- Pursuant to Section A, Number 8 of Section 21.1-23.3, the table of contents from the VDOE created model policies includes “Access to Activities and Facilities”
- Virginia law (22.1-23.3), Federal law (Title IX), and the U.S. Constitution (Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment) all require the nondiscriminatory treatment of transgender students
- Rockbridge County Public Schools will follow the law (School Boards are required by law to “See that the school laws are properly explained, enforced, and observed.” Va. Code § 22.1-79(A)(1)).
- In order to provide accommodations to ensure ALL students feel more comfortable in their learning environment, starting next school year, ANY student may request to utilize a single person bathroom within the school.

Equity in Rockbridge County Public Schools

- Equity is all about “leveling the playing field” for every student in our community
- Race (Black, Asian, Latinx, etc.); Socio-Economic Background (Zip Code & Pay Checks); Gender Identity (Cisgender, LGBTQ+); Educational Interests (Academic, Career and Technical)
- Every child in Rockbridge County deserves to be afforded every opportunity we can provide them to be successful through a well-rounded public education.

- The Virginia Board of Education has revised its teacher performance standards and evaluation criteria to add a standard on culturally responsive teaching and equitable practices.
- As a result, Rockbridge County Public Schools has undertaken an equity initiative that is focused on helping our educators overcome explicit or implicit biases so that they can be effective in the classroom and a more effective source of support to all of our students.

Curriculum and Instruction – Critical Race Theory

- Critical race theory is an academic framework centered on the idea that racism is systemic, and not just demonstrated by individual people with prejudices. The theory holds that racial inequality is woven into legal systems and negatively affects people of color in their schools, doctors' offices, the criminal justice system and countless other parts of life.
- While Rockbridge County Public Schools believes in instruction and curriculum that honestly and fairly addresses America's history in context, consistent with VDOE approved curriculum,
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools does not teach children "self hatred" based upon skin color:
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools does not believe children should be labelled as victims or oppressors.
 - The Virginia Board of Education has not included Critical Race Theory in any of its approved curriculum or Standards of Learning and the teaching of Critical Race Theory is not part of the Rockbridge County Public Schools approved curriculum; and
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools aligns its instructional materials and curriculum with those endorsed by the Virginia Department of Education.
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools has not adopted any policy or curriculum that endorses the teaching of Critical Race Theory.
 - The Virginia Department of Education has not directed any school division to teach Critical Race Theory and Rockbridge County Public Schools is not teaching Critical Race Theory
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools values diversity and character in our division and expects our students to always treat each other with respect regardless of differences.
 - Because Rockbridge County Public Schools values diversity, inclusion, and equity in providing all students with a level playing field does not mean Rockbridge County Public Schools is teaching Critical Race Theory.
 - However, while there may be issues on which individual families may not agree with us, our teachers, our counselors, our staff members, and our administrators always work hard to help every child find success.
 - Rockbridge County Public Schools is a public school system and willingly accepts every child who comes through the doors.
 - Students come from different backgrounds and bring different life experiences with them into our schools and our classrooms. This diversity is a strength for our school division.
 - Every year, in every classroom, we try to provide our students with factual information and teach them how to analyze and develop their own thoughts. By teaching students how to think critically in any situation....we believe we are setting every student up for success in an extremely complex and diverse 21st century world.

Chairman Lovell requested clarification regarding equity in that it is a statewide initiative sounding similar to what has been heard for a couple of years and that this initiative is not new.

- Superintendent Thompson referenced the timeframe of eight to nine years ago when addressing teachers in a convocation, diversity was discussed, not racial diversity, and it was discussed as a strength not a weakness. He stated that he feels that because of the diversity that exists in Rockbridge County, students learn to get along with one another with other students who are not necessarily like them.

Trustee Burant inquired how to get information to people who have different sources of information, noting that the school board and administrative staff are the basis of what people have to understand and learn from and wants the information to make sense to people.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that this is the first step, to learn of the concerns of people within the community, and to continue to address the concerns publicly. He stated that he is willing to speak with patrons while cautioning that he will not be able to tell patrons everything they want to hear. He confirmed that he will do what is in the best interest of the students of Rockbridge County Public Schools.

Chairman Lovell stated that there are reports of other states passing a law to outlaw Critical Race Theory. She reflected that social studies teachers may be concerned how to teach, which resources to use, etc., and inquired how the administrative team can support teachers as they face questions they possibly have not had before. She reflected that students sometimes ask hard questions, and their questions cannot be controlled and it may have the potential to make the classroom richer.

- Superintendent Thompson suggested that teachers are starting to shy away from CNN and Fox News, citing that it may be difficult to find resources to support teachers.
- Trustee Burant stated that it is key to teach students to think critically for themselves. Teachers lay out the information and provide them with opportunity to reason out, knowing that students may have bias from home, news, or friends, or where they work, but as long as school staff stays neutral, the students can develop their own opinion.
- Superintendent Thompson noted that it is a skill in learning how to have open dialogue, being reasonable, being respectful, no civil discourse on social media, even though individuals may not agree with one another, which is all part of learning and growing. He stated that he is adamant that teachers remain as neutral as possible.

Trustee Whitmore inquired if the school division is expecting more input/policy to come from Virginia Department of Education, noting that the model policies were received in April.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that equity is a huge topic and feels there will be more information forthcoming from the Virginia Department of Education, possibly evolving for many years. He stated that he believes that the policy on treatment of transgender students from the General Assembly, Virginia Department of Education, and school divisions, is complete, for now.
- Chairman Lovell reflected that as she reviewed the changes that have been put into the policies, the policies themselves have not changed.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that changes being done now are required legally, primarily regarding non-discrimination statements, which are now in alignment with Virginia law, federal law, and the constitution.

Trustee Whitmore clarified that the maintenance of student records and identification of students uses broad language and asked if there will be narrowing of language.

- Superintendent Thompson clarified that the language is broad but that this is done for all students and was already addressed in policy.

Trustee Berkstresser inquired if there has been a decision made regarding sports participation.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that it will be a VHSL decision, not a school level decision.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if there will be a new VHSL policy.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the VHSL policy that is in place is several years old and may need updating by VHSL; however, that is a VHSL decision.

Trustee Burant inquired if there will be a teacher evaluation next year which includes cultural competency.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that it will be hard and unfair to hold teachers accountable when expectations are not known; that part of the evaluation will not take place for the 2021-2022 school year, which will allow a year to work with the equity initiative and to get teachers more comfortable with expectations.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron addressed the board with opposition to the mandating and teaching in classrooms of Critical Race Theory.

One patron addressed the board expressing sentiments that the presentation by Superintendent Thompson was a watered down version of what is being implemented by the Virginia Department of Education in regards to Critical Race Theory.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) May 11, 2021 [Regular Meeting];
- Field Trip / Bus Use Requests
- Fundraising Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities

- **Appointments and Resignations**

APPOINTMENTS

Professional Staff

Lauren Fauber, Principal, Fairfield Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year
Courtney Jarvis, Teacher, Division, 2021 – 2022 school year
Emmalyn Wiberg, Teacher, Division, 2021 – 2022 school year
Taylor McMichael, Teacher, Central Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year (one year contract)
Julie Tyree, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year
Haley Roberts, Instructional Technology Resource Teacher, Division, 2021 – 2022 school year
Jean Ramsey, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year
Olivia Fox, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year
Stacey Crawford, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, 2021 – 2022 school year

Support Staff

Emily Jenkins, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, 2021 – 2022 school year

RESIGNATIONS

Professional Staff

Pamela St. Clair, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning end of the 2020 – 2021 school year
Tracey Hall, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, resigning end of the 2020 – 2021 school year
Stephanie Tyree, Teacher, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning end of the 2020 – 2021 school year
Kimberly Troise, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning end of the 2020 – 2021 school year
Amanda Bell, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning end of the 2020 – 2021 school year

RETIREMENT

Support Staff

Jackie Riley, Custodian, Rockbridge County High School, retiring June 30, 2021

LEAVE OF ABSENCE

Professional Staff

Skyla Mendenhall, Teacher, Central Elementary School, requesting one year leave of absence for the 2021 – 2022 school year

Superintendent Thompson announced that, as part of the Consent Agenda, Ms. Lauren Fauber has been named as the Principal of Fairfield Elementary School.

- **Business Items**

- Approve debt service payment due June 1, 2021, to US Bank for Rockbridge County Public Schools lease for Energy Performance Contract at RCHS in the amount of \$413,813.80.
- Approve debt service payment due July 15, 2021 to US Bank for RCPS VPSA bonds in the amount of \$2,478,618.71.
- Approve new grant appropriations to Fund 50 in the amount of \$212,175.00.
- Approve expected National Forest Reserve funds in the amount of \$56,165.00.
- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$3,692,486.50.

- **Declaration of Surplus Vehicle**

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT: None

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Mr. Tim Martino, Director of K12 Curriculum and Instruction, provided information on Curricular and Non-Curricular Groups. The highlights of the presentation are as follows:

- **Equal Access Act:**
 - If a public school division allows at least one “non-curriculum related” student group to use school facilities (including but not limited to rooms/buildings, PA systems, bulletin Boards, other school media, funding), the division cannot deny other non-curriculum related groups similar use of the facilities on the basis of the groups’ views.
 - Differential access between “curriculum related” and “non-curriculum related” groups is permissible.
 - A group is “curriculum related” if at least one of four statements is true:
 1. The subject matter of the group is actually taught or soon will be taught in a regularly offered course;
 2. The subject matter of the group concerns the body of courses as a whole;
 3. Participation in the group is required for a particular course; or
 4. Participation in the group results in academic credit.
 - Any student groups that do not fall within one of the four categories above are non-curriculum related.
- The presentation also defined adult roles in curriculum related and non-curriculum related groups, the application and permission process, and rationale as follows:
 - Curriculum Related Group: A division level employee is an active participant in the group.
 - Non-Curriculum Related Group: A division level employee is a monitor of the the group. An adult cannot schedule gatherings or have a participatory role in the group
- **Applications and Permission:**
 - All curricular and non-curricular groups must submit an application for approval on a yearly basis to the principal of the school they attend for approval.
 - All learners participating in a curricular or non-curricular group must submit a signed parental permission form.
 - Non-curricular groups are not permitted to meet during school hours.
- **Rationale:**
 - Many curricular and non-curricular groups are already active at Rockbridge County High School (RCHS) and having an application process helps the school keep track of all the active groups.
 - Having a policy in place clarifies the roles of division employees, students, and all other parties.
 - By securing parent permission for each group member it ensures the safety of our learners. It also communicates to families their child's participation in a specific group. Annual parent permission is required for non-curricular groups.
 - This policy applies to all schools in the division.

Trustee Burant inquired if this will be an action item at the next meeting.

- Mr. Martino stated that the School Board attorney is working on the policy and the goal is to have a clear statement before action is taken, anticipating action prior the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year.

ACTION ITEM:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve for the school division to apply for individual and consolidated state and federal entitlement grants.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Board approved for the request of Heritage Hall to extend the current agreement through June 30, 2022 to use Maury River Middle School as an evacuation shelter.

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Burant recognized the graduates of Rockbridge County High School, Dr. Craft, Principal, teachers, and staff for a wonderful graduation event.

Trustee Berkstresser addressed the issue of changing the time of the monthly school board meetings to 5:30 p.m. to be in coordination with the Board of Supervisors meeting time.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, to approve the change of the meeting time for the monthly school board meetings to 5:30 p.m.

Chairman Lovell stated that there will not be a monthly meeting for July.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Lovell, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the board approved authorization for the Superintendent/Designee to process grant payment and other accounts payables as necessary at the end of July 2021. A final report summarizing these actions will be presented at the August monthly meeting. All transactions will require signatures of two of the following three staff positions: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, or Director of Financial Services.

Trustee Hostetter requested an update on the current plan to return to school for the 2021-22 school year.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that it is the intent for all students to be in attendance at all school buildings on the first day of school, which is August 17, 2021. He stated that masks are still currently being worn for summer school. He stated that the mask mandate will be determined at a later time dependent on the recommendations of the CDC and Virginia Department of Health.

Trustee Burant inquired on the status of the summer remediation program.

- Mr. Tim Martino stated that this was day 2 with a good turnout of 60-65 students. He added that breakfast and snacks are provided. The goal of this program is to offer remediation and have students in better academic shape at the beginning of the school year.

Trustee Hostetter inquired if there is a plan for virtual learning for next school year.

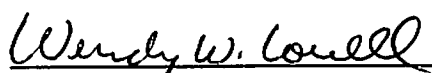
- Mr. Martino stated that a survey had been released with very little interest reflected for grades K-12. Administrative staff is working with families who have showed interest for grades 9-12 who will utilize Virtual Virginia, which is an asynchronous program. The option will be different than used for 2020-21 as Rockbridge County Public Schools is not staffed to teach a virtual team. He stated that staff is being very clear that the program will be different for the school year 2021-2022.

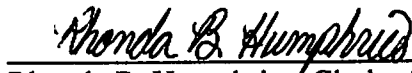
SCHOOL BOARD:

The next regular monthly meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, August 10, 2021 at 5:30 p.m. The meeting will be held at Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Hostetter, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:18 p.m.


Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board