

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, January 12, 2021. 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

Superintendent Thompson called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the first order of business would be the Board's re-organization for the year 2021 and asked for nominations for Board Chairman. Trustee Berkstresser nominated Trustee Lovell for Chairman and passed by a 5-0 roll call vote, with Trustee Lovell being elected as Chairman.

Trustee Berkstresser	- Yes
Trustee Burant	- Yes
Trustee Hostetter	- Yes
Trustee Lovell	- Yes
Trustee Whitmore	- Yes

Chairman Lovell asked for nominations for Vice-Chairman. Trustee Whitmore nominated Trustee Hostetter for Vice-Chairman, and passed by a following 5-0 vote roll call vote with Trustee Hostetter being elected as Vice-Chairman:

Trustee Burant	- Yes
Trustee Hostetter	- Yes
Trustee Lovell	- Yes
Trustee Whitmore	- Yes
Trustee Berkstresser	- Yes

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board appointed Rhonda Humphries as Clerk for the calendar year 2021.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board appointed Haywood Hand as Deputy Clerk for the calendar year 2021.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board named Haywood Hand as Superintendent's Designee through January 31, 2022.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, Phillip Thompson, Superintendent; David Daniels, Director of Financial Services; and Haywood Hand, Assistant Superintendent were appointed as School Board Fiscal Agents with the authority to approve the payment of bills if the School Board is unable to meet.

Chairman Lovell announced that committee assignments would remain the same.

- Discipline Committee: Trustee Berkstresser, Trustee Burant, Trustee Whitmore
- Ad Hoc Committee: Trustee Lovell, Trustee Hostetter
- Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation: Trustee Berkstresser

Chairman Lovell announced that the Board will continue to conduct their regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month beginning at 5:00 p.m.

Superintendent Thompson stated that School Board Members will sign the School Board Member Code of Conduct.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Superintendent Thompson read the Proclamation from Virginia Governor Ralph S. Northam that Virginia School Principals Appreciation Week will be recognized January 24-30, 2021.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the school division partnered with the Virginia of Health to navigate the health crisis and has worked closely with Dr. Laura Kornegay, District Director, Central Shenandoah Health District, during the pandemic.

Dr. Kornegay provided an Area COVID Data Update. She stated that this virus was novel in the beginning and that new knowledge shows that masks are now commonplace and that it has been proven that masks provide protection for the wearer as well as protecting others. She stated that school administrators have been able to gather data from other school divisions to learn their safety mitigations. She emphasized that there will be strict mitigation measures at school in-person with the wearing of masks, social distancing, and hand washing; adding that classrooms seem very safe in regards to transmission of Covid. She noted that the transmission route typically is outside of the classroom setting. There will be new guidance documents available on the Virginia Department of Health website soon. She noted that the Virginia Department of Education and the Virginia Department of Health continue to share a goal to get students in-person for their education. The database for both VDOE and VDH support in-person learning is the best environment. She stated that consequences of students not being in the classroom include lack of social interaction, receiving healthy nutrition, maintaining student personal safety, and also noted also that some parents are struggling. She stated that hybrid instruction opens up space for social distancing for students and staff. She focused on the fact that students are safe in the classrooms despite community transmissions.

- Trustee Whitmore asked for clarification of why the school division was advised to close in November, when the community spread was not as high as now; and is now advised it is ok to open despite extreme the local high spread.
 - Dr. Kornegay responded that the VDH relayed the best advice available to them at the time. There is now data that the school environments are at low risks.
- Trustee Berkstresser asked for confirmation that the VDH is relying on specific data.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that they are referring to K-12 data; low number of outbreaks; as well as recommendations from the CDC for K-12. Data also supports transmissions outside of school setting being the primary source of spread within the community.
- Chairman Lovell stated that she and other board members have received communication from constituents who are concerned regarding student mental health issues, anxiety and depression.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that the social isolation has had an effect on an increased suicide rate nation-wide, with deaths of despair such as drug overdose. Some students struggle with the virtual instruction, which may lead to students feeling more anxiety and depression. She also noted that students mirror the adult population in that social isolation over time really can take a personal toll.
- Chairman Lovell inquired about the new strain of coronavirus in the UK and the status in Rockbridge County.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that it is not been detected in Virginia yet. The vaccine blocks spike production and is effective for other COVID variants.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if there is any guidance for students upon returning that will ensure the safety of their family.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that the same mitigation strategies are in place – the 3 W's: Watch your social distancing at six feet, Wear your mask, and Wash your hands for protection of getting and spreading the virus, which helps with the transmission, and monitoring health status at home before sending students to school. She expressed her sentiments that students may be more at risk when out playing with friends than in the school setting. The school staff will be monitoring health and enforcing mitigation. She stated that the outbreaks tend to be in congregant living facilities such as nursing homes, colleges, and jails. Most local outbreaks have been traced to weddings, funerals, parties, and family gatherings. The large surge of outbreaks linked now to post Thanksgiving and Christmas travel, which pushes the mitigation strategies even higher.
- Trustee Burant expressed her sentiment that all are concerned about children and their anxiety and stress. She is also worried about anxiety for all staff as they may be concerned with students back in the buildings with high rate of cases. She inquired how to help ease the anxiety of staff.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that the staff will continue with mitigation strategies, which she feels, may be safer than some of the stores that we enter. In the school setting, everyone wears a mask, practices social distancing, and the environmental cleaning measures are in place.

- Trustee Burant inquired on the process to get a vaccine.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that the process has been built as the local health department and hospitals try to protect the healthcare infrastructure to keep the integral factors of hospitals safe. She explained the different phases of the vaccine release and how the process will work when people receive their vaccine. She noted that there are 300,000 people in this district. She stated that the employees of the Rockbridge County Public Schools will have the opportunity to take the vaccine the week of January 25, 2021. The school vaccine effort is being scheduled by the Rockbridge Emergency System and will be monitored in their management system. She stated that there will be a statewide registration tool but it is not yet available.
 - Trustee Burant inquired if substitute teachers are included in the division count for the vaccine.
 - Dr. Kornegay replied that they are included, along with all staff.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the dates for the vaccination clinics are January 28 and January 29, 2021 and further added that substitutes and ERIP staff are included. A survey to staff was released on January 12, 2021 to determine how many staff members will be taking the vaccine.
 - Trustee Whitmore inquired if persons must be showing no symptoms in order to receive the vaccination. In other words, if they are showing symptoms, they will not be able to receive the vaccine.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that one must be healthy in order to receive the vaccine. If the person is recovering from Covid, it must be past the ten-day window and be having no medical issues.
 - Trustee Whitmore asked for confirmation that the risk of spread in classroom is low.
 - Dr. Kornegay stated that the mitigation measures are in place in the classroom. The best guidance is given to school divisions and the school district makes the decision of hybrid versus virtual.

Chairman Lovell stated that following Dr. Thompson's communication to employees on January 8, 2021, Trustee Whitmore rightfully suggested that the school board meeting take place in person. The consensus of board members was to meet in person, but that the quick turn-around time along with the meeting previously being advertised as virtual, and in the interest of time, Chairman Lovell recommended that the meeting remain virtual. She stated that moving forward, it is anticipated that all board meetings will be in person.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron submitted a comment to the board with a request to continue with live lessons when students return with the hybrid schedule.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) December 8, 2020 [Regular Meeting]
- Fund Raiser Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Resignation

Professional Staff

Jamie Brett, Teacher, Central Elementary School, resigning end of the 2020 - 2021 school year

Support Staff

Ashley Kerr, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective January 11, 2021

- **Business Items**

The Board approved additional funding for MRMS practice field upgrade from the Rockbridge County Government Escrow account in the amount of \$50,300.

The Board approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$2,679,871.77.

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson stated that Governor Northam released his budget on December 17, 2020, as well as the calc tool for FY22. The General Assembly returns January 13, 2021. The budget will be discussed in more detail at the Rockbridge County School Board budget work session of January 20, 2021.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None**INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Mr. Tim Martino, Director of K12 Curriculum and Instruction, provided information on the Summer Recovery Program. He stated that the tentative summer program offers the following insights for the division:

- Academic flow of teaching and learning has been severely disrupted since March 2020.
- During the 2020-2021 school year it has been a challenge to engage all learners to participate on a daily basis.
- A number of learners need additional instruction to address learning gaps.

Mr. Martino provided detailed information on the focus and what will be available for high school, middle school, and elementary schools and offered the following instructional points:

- The road to full academic recovery is far from a summer endeavor.
- Teaching and learning will need to look different during the 2021-2022 school year.
- Pacing guides will need to be revised to include larger inclusion of spiral review.
- The primary focus will continue to be reading and math while ensuring the integrity of our other academic offerings.
- During the 2021-2022 school year, all teachers will have to become reading teachers to ensure the critical reading skills are integrated across the written and taught curriculum.
- Chairman Lovell inquired if it is anticipated that there may be a lot of participants for the program and what the budget cost may be. She expressed her sentiment that the School Board can work with the Board of Supervisors to secure funding, if needed.
 - Mr. Martino stated that it will determine on the layout of the program once final. It will depend on if internal staff is utilized or if Virtual Virginia will be used. The cost of Virtual Virginia per child is \$175, and there would still be the cost of a proctor to be present with the student(s).
- Trustee Burant stated that she appreciates the teacher interaction with the students. She inquired if the only way a student can obtain a verified credit is to go through Virtual Virginia.
 - Mr. Martino stated that ideally, the student will obtain a level of proficiency by the end of the year.

Mr. Martino stated that there is a concern of staffing for summer and securing certified teachers.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, provided information on the Rockbridge County High School Program of Studies 2021-2022 and provided a summary of changes that have been made.

- Trustee Burant inquired if the threshold of ten students was used to eliminate a course.
 - Dr. Craft stated that elimination of courses is evaluated on an individual basis. He also stated that very few courses are being eliminated but that some courses may be combined.
- Trustee Burant reflected that there has not been a theater course since the theater teacher left. She inquired if there is a new course for theater and drama.
 - Dr. Craft stated that the staff had tried to offer theater through the extracurricular activities. There is now a licensed teacher on the Rockbridge County High School staff. There is hope is that the program will grow and be invigorated.
- Trustee Burant inquired about the CTE Marketing Co-Op not having a class and inquired if it is monitored by the Business Department.
 - Dr. Craft stated that the Marketing Course is linked to the Co-Op Program and will be offered to more students with the intent to expand the Profile of Virginia Graduate and other initiatives and feel the Co-Op is a good way to expand outreach to the community.
 - Ms. Rhonda Pedigo, School Counselor, Rockridge County High School, stated that the Marketing Co-Op does have a classroom portion in which a student can receive a credit as well as additional credit for work done in the community.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired how many students receive home instruction in Rockbridge County.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that there are approximately 150 students who receive home instruction.

Dr. Craft stated that the RCHS staff realizes they must be creative and to help students meet the content and feels that the Program of Studies is comprehensive and will offer options needed to graduate. This will be presented as an Action Item at the February meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board.

- Ms. Pedigo shared that the Virtual Curriculum Night will take place that will allow students to explore classes online via available videos, and meet teachers via Google Meet.

Mr. Billy Thomas, Principal, Maury River Middle School, provided information on the Maury River Middle School Program of Studies, which has a minimal amount of changes. He also noted that as data is collected in the division this year and areas of concern are discovered, there may be more changes to come for the Program of Studies.

- Trustee Burant inquired if MRMS is working with Lylburn Downing Middle School in providing opportunities for their students and merging programs.
 - Mr. Thomas stated that he has communicated with Lexington City in the past and will do so again.
 - Ms. Candi Kinkaid, School Counselor, Maury River Middle School, stated that in past years MRMS has partnered with RCHS to cover any gaps with language teachers at MRMS to ensure that students got the classes needed and to have the opportunities open to them.
 - Chairman Lovell expressed her appreciation for the increased coordination in working with RCHS which makes a big difference for MRMS students as they move into RCHS.
 - Mr. Thomas expressed his appreciation to Mr. Martino for his work the past couple of years with classes that are taught jointly at MRMS and RCHS to make sure the course line up which leads to a successful transition and continued growth at the high school level.

Superintendent Thompson provided a brief overview leading to the January 19 Student Return to Hybrid Instruction.

- March 13, 2020: Governor Northam ordered all K-12 school divisions in Virginia closed for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year in response to the continued spread of COVID-19
- September 8, 2020: The first day of school for the 2020-2021 school year amended for post-Labor Day [Pre-K, K, and first grade 4 days/week in-person and virtual]
 - [All other grades virtual]
- November 10, 2020: Staggered Hybrid Plan
 - Pre-K, K, and first grade 4 days/week in-person and virtual
 - Add grades 2, 3, 6, 9 (AABBV Model)
- November 30, 2020: Full virtual learning for Pre-K through 12th grade at recommendation of Virginia Department of Health.
- January 19, 2021: Staggered Hybrid Plan
 - Pre-K through grade 1 in-person instruction 4 days/week
 - Grades 2 through 12th grade hybrid 4 days/week (AABBV Model)

Superintendent Thompson stated that the CARES Act provided funding to aid with PPE, sanitizer, shields, MERV 13 HVAC filters, and Bi-Polar Ionization Technology for HVAC units to make the schools and buildings so that parents, staff, and students feel safe. He stated that many students may be struggling with academics and reinforced that administration and teachers are working with students to provide assistance. He stated that there are other factors of concern such as the mental health of students. The school division is on schedule for employees to receive the vaccine January 28 or January 29, 2021. The FFCRA (Families First Coronavirus Response Act) Employer Paid Leave act expired on December 31, 2020. Superintendent Thompson stated that Rockbridge County Public Schools will continue the policy through June 30, 2021 so that an employee's sick leave will not be depleted due to Covid.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the challenges of Hybrid Instruction are:

- Ensuring there is no transmission of staff, students, and teacher transmission in building.
- Greatest risk is if staff/group need to isolate because of exposure or positive diagnosis, may need to revert to virtual learning for a classroom as opposed to reverting to virtual learning for the entire division.
- 100% virtual will remain a possibility if needed.
- Primary goal and need is for students to be back in school, in-person.
- Athletic practices and workouts will resume at Rockbridge County High School.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the Rockbridge community has been touched by Covid and experiences have been different for all. He stressed that all concerns are important and that Rockbridge County Public Schools are fortunate that our staff is working hard to do more than their part for the children of Rockbridge County. He noted that all options are on the table and asked that families have a contingency plan in place in case it is needed.

- Trustee Burant reflected that the safety measures are in place for students and the division to ensure the safety of teachers as well. She inquired if the division could work towards a rollout date for vaccine and then bring students back, giving February 1, 2021 as a possibility date.
- Trustee Whitmore stated that he had also received comments from the community and inquired if it would be wise to wait until after vaccinations since the date has now been established, possibly February 1, 2021.
- Chairman Lovell stated that she understands the feeling regarding the vaccine but it will still take time for it be effective and that she supports the plan to move forward with return to school on January 19, 2021.
- Trustee Berkstresser expressed his sentiment that he has the same concerns for family members in that that it is bad for all, but supports the plan to move forward with return to school on January 19, 2021.
- Trustee Hostetter expressed her sentiments that other industries have successfully coped and figured out how to make it work safely, and supports the plan to move forward for return to school on January 19, 2021.
- Chairman Lovell stated that she realizes not all of the community are on board with measures that need to be taken and extended a request to educators that when students walk in the doors, they must follow rules that have been put into place for mitigation; this will help to build community respect for one another and will serve to educate our students regarding physical measures and the level of interacting, for both teachers and staff.
- Trustee Burant requested confirmation that if she were to make a motion to move the re-opening date to February 1, 2021, if it would not reach a vote.
 - Chairman Lovell inquired if the comments made by board members would provide enough support to continue with the plan for re-opening on January 19, 2021.
 - Superintendent Thompson concurred that there are three board members who are in support of continuing with the plan for re-opening on January 19, 2021, and it would not need to go to an official vote.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board approved the 2021-2022 School Calendar.

NEW BUSINESS:

SCHOOL BOARD

There will be a special meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board on Wednesday, January 20, 2021 at 4:00 PM for the purpose of conducting a budget work session. The meeting will be held at Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

There will be a joint meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board and the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, January 21, 2021 at 5:00 p.m. for the purpose of discussion. The meeting will be held at Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

There will be a Public Hearing for the hearing citizen input for the Fiscal Year 2022 school budget needs on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 / 4:30 PM / Location: to be announced

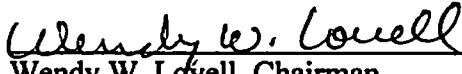
The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be on Tuesday, February 9, 2021 / at the conclusion of the Public Hearing / Location: to be announced.

Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation for those from the community who reached out to board members and reiterated that the school board is trying to do what is best for all.

- Chairman Lovell stated that it is wonderful to have community input, as it is a hard for all. She expressed her sentiment that we are a strong community and that she looks forward to the day when the school board is talking about education and not Covid.
- Trustee Whitmore reflected that there is no good answer but it is good to work with good people.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Burant, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:10 p.m.



Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman



Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board