

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Monday, July 29, 2024. The meeting was held at Maury River Middle School.

Present: Chairman Neil Whitmore; Trustees Catie Brown, Lenna Ojure; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Clerk Rhonda Humphries. Absent: Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Kathy Burant.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 4:34 p.m.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Chairman Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Brown, the board approved the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Holly Ferguson, Family and Community Liaison, Division, effective July 30, 2024

Support Staff

Ashlee Frias, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, effective August 15, 2024

Tia Fridley, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School,
effective August 15, 2024

Food Service

Rachel Christian

Kristen Truslow

Ashley Rudine

Transportation

Bruce Jarvis

Lauren Wenger

Professional Staff

Resignation

Veronica Foisy, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, resigning effective July 24, 2024

Support Staff

Resignation

Zeba Naz Zafar, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective July 24, 2024

INFORMATIONAL ITEM

Superintendent Thompson provided a brief overview of a draft of new regulation, JED-BR1, "Attendance Regulation". The preface for this proposed regulation is to accompany policy JED [Student Absences / Excuses / Dismissals] already in the Rockbridge County Administrative Policy Manual. This issue of chronic student absenteeism is an issue primarily at Rockbridge County High School. He stated that Mr. Shaun Sparks, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, will provide information on a "Loss of Credit Form". The administration is proposing this form to be used as a tool for the RCHS administration to use to document efforts that have been put in place to support students and parents. The ultimate goal is to make sure that everything is done according to protocol and to make sure that the student is successful before the student is at the point of even considering loss of credit. He stated that it is recognized that attendance is important for a lot of reasons, the most important reason being that we want students to be successful and if they are not in school, they are not there to learn, and the student cannot get what they need. Absenteeism has been an issue in all of RCPS to some degree, but primarily at RCHS where the students are older who may have a little more freedom at home and that parents aren't quite as quick in making sure that their student is where they need to be; high school students may be able to drive to doctor and dental appointments, etc. Aside from the educational aspect, if students are not in school, it affects the school division's Virginia Department of Education accreditation, as well as ADM [Average Daily Membership], which results in loss of state funding. Rockbridge County Public Schools is being "hit" three different ways in regards to attendance practices. The administrative staff developed ideas on how they may be able to improve attendance by enticing parents and students to understand better the importance of attendance in our school division and try to get students back in school on a consistent basis. Superintendent Thompson stated that this does not reflect the large majority of

our students but it is enough that the VDOE says it is chronic absenteeism. Chronic absenteeism is 10 percent of 180 days, which results in 18 days absent; there are far too many students who are right at or beyond the 18 days absent. He stated that upon approval, this regulation will become part of the Rockbridge County Schools Administrative Policy Manual as JED-R.

- Trustee Ojura inquired as to if this regulation will be in the handbook or will it be translated into a more specific document which may provide sample scenarios. The current document contains text that refers to what “may” happen. Her intent is for the document to be specific for short-term illness or homebound. She stated that she does not want this initiative to affect students who are following protocol but have to be out for a medical reason, such as a chronic illness.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that this regulation will not affect students on homebound instruction. He stated that administration will work with all of our students, especially those students who are trying everything they can to be successful. Rockbridge County High school will offer “after-school classes” to help make-up days missed.
 - Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, stated that a student can recover time missed due to absences by working after school in a controlled environment.
 - Trustee Ojura expressed her sentiment that this information be in the RCHS Handbook. She feels it is important parents understand the importance of avoiding absences.

Mr. Shaun Sparks, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, provided information on the draft documents listed below and stated that these documents will be an appendix to the student handbook:

- Attendance Expectations: informational sheet which reflects what will result in a loss of credit
- Poor School Standing (PSS): informational sheet with a goal of encouraging students to be in school. This sheet provides a consequence chart in relation to absences.
- Loss of Credit Form: This form acts as a Loss of Credit appeal for courses to be signed by the student and parent.
- Attendance Intervention Plan Form: This form is used to reflect all of the interventions implemented that is in the best interest of each student.

Superintendent Thompson stated that in regards to these documents, examples can be provided. This will be an appendix to the handbook.

- Chairman Whitmore inquired how this information will be conveyed to parents.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that administration, teachers, and attendance clerk will communicate to students and parents.
- Trustee Brown expressed her sentiment that there needs to be a campaign to educate parents and students to understand the implication of truancy and chronic absenteeism.
- Trustee Ojura reflected her sentiment that medical appointments do not always work with school schedules and that parents do not have control over appointments. She emphasized her intention that the information needs to be easy for parents to understand while noting that it is not the intention for a sick child to be in school.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that administrators of Rockbridge County Public Schools have good judgement and shall not penalize students with a Loss of Credit unless all efforts have been made to support the student with no success.
- Trustee Brown stated that she would be interested in trends involving siblings who attend all levels at RCPS.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired if there will be more language regarding this issue in the RCHS Handbook.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that there will be more extensive information contained in the RCHS Handbook.
- Dr. Craft stated that it is the ultimate goal for students not to lose credit. He stated that this has been a collaborative effort and that Mr. Sparks gave a lot of effort in comparing other school systems in putting these documents together.
- Mr. Timothy Martino stated that students may remember the grace given during Covid and then there was a culture shift.
- Ms. Amy Henson, Assistant Principal, stated that there are also positive incentives given to underclassman, which could result in no final exam.
- Trustee Ojura inquired for explanation of the eighth period.
 - Mr. Sparks explained that the eighth period could provide a student the ability to earn back instruction time.
- Trustee Brown inquired how this will affect discipline ten-day suspensions and asked that the language be specific.

- Mr. Sparks stated that there will be conversation with the family, and contact with the teacher in assisting the student to transition back into school, possibly utilizing the eighth period.

Mr. Sparks stated that the documents will be mailed home, there will be a tab on the website, and that the PSA will also initiate a campaign.

- Dr. Craft stated that there will be an Instant Messenger alert to all RCHS parents regarding the attendance policy.

Superintendent Thompson stated that he was seeking school board approval because this is an initiative of this magnitude. He stated that with the understanding of making wording revisions to the RCHS documents presented for their review, the regulation itself will be presented to the Rockbridge County School Board at the next monthly meeting of August 13, 2024.

- Trustee Ojure stated that she would like a follow-up at the next meeting as to what went out to parents and the parent responses.
- Trustee Brown inquired and received confirmation, that it is the consensus of the Board to give permission for RCHS to roll out their new attendance campaign.
- Dr. Craft stated that a 10 percent improvement would help the accreditation of RCHS.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 3-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 5:38 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board