

AT A JOINT MEETING OF THE ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
AND THE ROCKBRIDGE COUNTY SCHOOL BOARD HELD AT MAURY RIVER MIDDLE SCHOOL
AT 600 WADDELL STREET, LEXINGTON, VIRGINIA,
ON THURSDAY, OCTOBER 8, 2020 AT 5:00 P.M.

BOARD MEMBERS PRESENT: D. E. LYONS
R. W. DAY
L.E. AYERS
D.B. MCDANIEL

BOARD MEMBERS ABSENT: A.J. "JAY" LEWIS, II.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR: SPENCER H. SUTER

FISCAL SERVICES
DIRECTOR: STEVEN J. BOLSTER

CALLED TO ORDER:

Chairman Lyons called the meeting to order.

Start of School Update:

School Superintendent Phillip Thompson reflected that at the previous Joint Meeting the school division was planning for a hybrid school opening which would involve nearly all of the students being back on different days of the week, with learning virtually on three of those days. A week later, for different reasons, the School Board decided to go with the 100% Modified Digital Learning Plan for the first nine weeks. He provided an overview of how the plan has gone including technology, transportation, and food service. He reported that 75,000 meals have been served on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday since March and, according to USDA guidelines, will continue through December 31, 2020, or until funding runs out. This program allows food to be provided for children up to age 18.

The W & L Backpack Program continues to be delivered on Fridays utilizing the transportation of Rockbridge County Public Schools. In respect to COVID, three Rockbridge County Public Schools staff teachers and one student tested positive with COVID. The administration feels that the mitigation strategies are in place and are working well (wearing of masks, social distancing, and hand washing). CARES Act Funding has helped to provide bi-polar ionization units, MERV 13 filters to be placed in HVAC units, and UV Lights. He stated the administrations continue to worry about when students go home. According to the Virginia Department of Health, the buildings of Rockbridge County Public Schools are safe, along with staff being safe. The first nine weeks will end on November 6, 2020 and a decision for the second nine weeks will be made in the coming weeks.

Supervisor McDaniel inquired if Superintendent Thompson had heard of other divisions utilizing synchronized learning where teachers are live with classroom instruction while some students are virtual.

Superintendent Thompson stated that some synchronized teaching is being done but the school divisions he knows of have not chosen to go that route because there is an issue with bandwidth.

Supervisor McDaniel inquired if the bandwidth at schools is capable of this function.

Superintendent Thompson responded that it is extremely challenging if teachers are synchronously teaching simultaneously.

Jason Kirby, Director of Technology and Human Resources, stated that it depends on how many students are in the building. When there are more students in the building, bandwidth becomes more of an issue.

Ms. Burant stated that larger cities have more availability of internet, which allows for more capabilities.

Ms. Lovell also reminded that there may be situations when parents are working from home with all residents using internet.

Mr. Berkstresser stated his appreciation for the flexibility to watch recorded teacher segments according to student schedule.

Supervisor McDaniel stated that he feels the recorded segment would be very beneficial.

Superintendent Thompson stated that he feels once the division is on a hybrid schedule, there will likely be a mixture of synchronized teaching to best fit student situations.

Supervisor McDaniel requested that the Board of Supervisors be informed of bandwidth restraints. He feels that beyond COVID, virtual learning may continue.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the issue may arise when everyone is doing instruction at once.

Supervisor Ayers inquired if the School Board has considered extending the summer, especially if the winter proves to be tough, so that students can get outside and continue learning.

Superintendent Thompson stated that all options are on the table.

Ms. Lovell stated her sentiment that if there was ever a year that a child needs to be retained, it would be done this year without stigma. She also reflected that extending instruction into the summer would cause teachers to continue without a break.

Mr. Berkstresser stated that there is a week of review at the beginning of the year, allowing teachers to develop a plan, and to provide information from the previous year.

Superintendent Thompson stated that this is a requirement from the Virginia Department of Education this year as a way to measure what may have been lost from last year and fill in gaps. He also stated that typically summer school is run at RCHS, and on a more remedial level at the middle and elementary school levels. There may be some teachers who would be interested in continuing with summer instruction to gain more pay.

Ms. Lovell stated that the 21st Century Community Learning Centers are currently running virtually.

Superintendent Thompson stated that they are trying to be innovative and create field trips to Boxerwood in a safe fashion.

Continued Discussion on RCPS Feasibility Plan:

Ms. Lovell asked for input from the Board of Supervisors on the RCPS Feasibility Plan that was presented to them.

Supervisor Ayers stated that she wanted to ensure that the plan includes outdoor learning space and that it maximizes solar capabilities, which are important to her.

Supervisor McDaniel stated that the School Board needs to decide what can and cannot be done. He reminded all that financial pressure just cannot be placed on citizens at this time. He requested that the School Board determine main issues / projects based on a two-year and five-year timeline and present the determinations to the Board of Supervisors.

Supervisor Day stated that he feels there are too many unknowns right now because of COVID in regards to revenues, the student population. He echoed Supervisor McDaniel and requested that the School Board determine main issues / projects based on a two-year and five-year timeline. He offered caution to obligate funding because of unknown revenue.

Chairman Lyons stated that he felt it was a thorough study and that he does have concerns. There are currently three elementary schools at 50% with one at 90% capacity and inquired if there was a way to accommodate without additions. He expressed his sentiment of not knowing if school will ever return to a five-day week. He felt that the feasibility study reflected heavily on athletics and felt there should have been more on instruction. He also noted that the cost of construction while school is in session was not included. He requested that that the School Board determine priorities in phases over the years as the Board of Supervisors cannot increase taxes at this time for \$52M in projects.

Ms. Lovell stated that the goal is to work on understanding needs and to keep it in the conversation and when projects may happen. The Capital Improvements Plan (CIP) will be discussed in coming months with a phased approach. She stated that a timeline from the Board of Supervisors would be helpful.

RCPS Cares Act / COVID Update / Needs:

Ms. Lovell expressed appreciation for the \$450,000 in CARES Act funding allocated by the Board of Supervisors.

Superintendent Thompson expressed his appreciation to the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors for their tremendous help. The school division also received \$446,000 early on, which helped to purchase PPE, signage, sprays, disinfectants, glass shields, etc. Additional funding is expected in the amount of \$400,000 that will help to purchase bi-polar ionization units, which are now being installed. This has allowed funding to remain in place to use for bus funding. He expressed his sentiment that the School Division is in good shape for the current situation. The coronavirus funds allowed the Rockbridge County School Division to limit the use of local funds for items that were not expected. The hope is if more supplies are needed in the coming months there will be additional funding released again.

Ms. Burant inquired if there is money left over from the CARES Act funding.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the funding has to be used for specific uses with a short turnaround time and that Rockbridge County Public Schools has plans for the entire amount of funding.

Board of Supervisors Budget Schedule:

Mr. Suter provided an overview of the draft FY 2022 budget cycle schedule for the Board of Supervisors. He stated that the schedule is subject to change. He stated that the CIP discussion begins early in the budget process, with county staff seeking Board approval in January. The reason for this approval process for the CIP is that some of the CIP projects could influence the operating budget. The Board of Supervisors are requesting the Estimate of Need from the School Board by mid-March, as

done in previous years. The School Division budget adoption due date is May 1, 2021, pending impact of General Assembly Session.

Additional Discussion:

Supervisor McDaniel stated that after having served as a member of the Rockbridge County School Board for eight years, patrons still contact him regarding school issues. He shared the following communications from his constituents:

- There is a feeling that parents were not properly trained for the use of Chromebooks and that training should be developed.
- There is a feeling that teachers run the classrooms in the way that best works for their environment, citing that that homework is posted in different ways. Patrons want continuity in the way homework is sent and collected in one place.
- There is a concern that there should be more frequent communication from teachers to parents on missing work, suggesting a weekly basis.
- There was a request for links to resources (i.e. video) to be posted within assignments.
- The amount of work seems like a lot of work and hours put in by students at home.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the Technology Department is working hard to create opportunities, that they know what the issues are, are developing training tools, and are answering questions which will allow things to get better. In regards to the amount of work, there is a learning curve of teaching methods taking place. He stated that

conversations are ongoing and indicated that teachers recognize students are stressed because they want to do well and are working on the issues.

Chairman Lyons stated that the Board of Supervisors stands ready to help. He reflected that students are struggling, and with no testing taking place this year, he hopes there is a concentration on reading in the younger grades with periodic evaluations taking place.

Superintendent Thompson stated that Mr. Tim Martino, Director of K12 Curriculum and Instruction, is working on assessments now to catch students who may need additional help.

Supervisor Ayers inquired if the preschool at the YMCA program includes reading in their program. She also inquired if there is help for kids who are in the after- school childcare program.

Mr. Martino stated that the curriculum for preschool students includes 95% interaction and play, noting that learning is a pre-requisite for reading. The preschool students are learning letter recognition, etc. which is in the "toolbox" for reading.

Superintendent Thompson stated that schools are taking care of childcare for teachers. He stated that the YMCA childcare and 21st Century Community Learning Centers is educational and are getting students outside.

Mr. Haywood Hand, Assistant Superintendent, stated that there are 140 students registered for the 21st Century Community Learning Center at Maury River Middle School. He noted that the structure is highly supervised with tutorial help from outside of RCPS teachers. The program is evaluated daily with reflection on how to do things better. He stated that the School Division is leaning heavily on other School Divisions and

leaders for results of their programs and hearing ideas from students for the next steps to become more beneficial for students. He commended the teachers for the hard work they are doing and for making themselves available to deliver a high quality instruction. He shared that he has heard the same comments shared by Supervisor McDaniel when he is out in the community talking with parents and students. He stated that he feels progress is being made and the next steps to be taken by the School Division will be beneficial.

Ms. Burant expressed her sentiment that the learning pods across the county are having an impact on social interaction as well as helping parents who cannot be home with their child.

Mr. Berkstresser expressed his appreciation to the community for working with the development of the learning pods and sees a benefit of having someone there who is familiar with school applications and can be of help to students, as well as the social interaction with other students.

Supervisor McDaniel commended the school board members for visiting the learning pods. He inquired if administration or teachers have visited the sites.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the administration is trying to accommodate requests and to offer help to the learning pods when requested. He shared that Natural Bridge Elementary School's Principal, Mr. Rick Bain, provided guidance to the Natural Bridge learning pod staff in using the Chromebook, etc.

Mr. Hand stated that the Natural Bridge learning pod has created release forms for parents to sign so that they may communicate directly with teachers.

Ms. Burant inquired if there is a way to identify students who attend the pods and how they are progressing.

Superintendent Thompson stated that a majority of the students who attend the learning pods remain enrolled in Rockbridge County Public Schools, and receive their instruction virtually.

The next regularly scheduled Joint Meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board and Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors is scheduled for Thursday, November 20, 2020 with the time and location to be announced.

Adjournment

On a motion by Supervisor Day, seconded by Supervisor McDaniel, the meeting was adjourned by unanimous vote by the Board.