

**RITCHIE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION
MINUTES OF SPECIAL MEETING
RITCHIE COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION OFFICE
HARRISVILLE, WV
MARCH 2, 2021 – 6:00 PM**

The special meeting of the Ritchie County Board of Education was called to order on Tuesday, March 2, 2021, at 6:00 PM by President Dr. Torie Jackson.

PLEDGE TO THE FLAG

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America.

ROLL CALL

Present: Dr. Torie Jackson, President
Mrs. Betsy Wells, Vice-President
Mrs. Misty Ingram-Keen
Mr. Ryan Reed
Mr. Denver Nelson

Administrative Staff Present: Mr. James G. Brown, Superintendent

*All Board Members and Administrative Staff remained six feet apart to meet social distancing requirements.

President Jackson read a letter from Craig and Jenny Mullen commending Superintendent Brown and all Employees of Ritchie County Schools for their efforts put forth during this COVID-19 pandemic.

SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT

Superintendent Brown reviewed the following information:

COVID-19 Status Report

Mr. Brown presented the Board with a copy of the West Virginia Board of Education Motion Adopted Regarding In-person Instruction for West Virginia Schools. In particular he reviewed the section that states: Counties that are utilizing classroom teachers to teach both in-person students and full-time students participating in locally designed virtual programs may submit a waiver request to the State Superintendent to request the ability to conduct in-person instruction four (4) days per week to allow sufficient time to support full-time virtual students. Parents will continue to have the ability to choose a virtual learning option for their children. We have submitted a waiver and will continue with the 4 day in-person blended learning model.

COVID-19 Quarantine and Contact Tracing Protocol

There has been a growing concern over the number of students who are being quarantined. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention exposure was considered to be 15 minutes of continuous contact with a person who tested positive. The CDC now defines exposure as 15 minutes of contact over a 24-hour period. This makes contact tracing considerably more complicated and time consuming. Many factors come into play when considering who should be quarantined; bus routes, daily absences, class schedules, congregate groups, etc. We believe we have been successful in keeping transmission down because we have been conservative.

Mr. Brown compared the current Ritchie County Schools Contact Tracing Protocol for the 2020-2021 school year to a new proposed Ritchie County Schools Contact Tracing Protocol. During the first semester we only had the option to quarantine for 14 days. In December new guidelines were released that say those exposed can isolate for 5 days and if test negative and are symptom free on day 7 the isolation ends. Or they can isolate for 10 days symptom free. With the new proposed contact tracing protocol elementary school students will still be quarantined for 14 days because their exposure far exceeds the 15 minutes or more within a 24-hour period. The middle / high school and school bus protocol looks different in that procedures will be in place to determine which students were not exposed for 15 minutes or more in a 24-hour period and were outside the six foot radius.

School Nurses Alisa Shepler, Leandra Parsons and Jamie Molina were in attendance remotely to give guidance and answer questions regarding COVID-19 quarantine and contact tracing.

Nurses: We are committed and passionate concerning safety of the students, staff and community. The new protocol sounds great but unfortunately with the lack of adequate staffing and all the different variables to consider we will not confidently be able to quarantine all who should be quarantined. Following this protocol will be a daunting task. There is not enough staff to implement it in a time effective manner. According to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention "Persons can continue to be quarantined for 14 days without testing per existing recommendations. This option maximally reduces risk of post-quarantine transmission risk and is the strategy with the greatest collective experience at present."

Dr. Jackson asked the nurses: Am I understanding that you are not in favor of the new protocol that we are considering where we quarantine less in the middle / high school and on the school bus, keeping the elementary schools the same?
Alisa Shepler: That is my professional opinion. We have done a remarkable job this school year keeping the number of positive cases in our school system down. I do not have a high degree of confidence that if we change now that we will have as good as results as we have had.

Dr. Jackson asked: Let's say we quarantine some students and they never get sick. That is actually what we hope, that we have less students sick, which is one of the reasons we have quarantine. What does quarantine do to their emotional wellbeing when they are not allowed to be around their friends and they have to miss athletic games? Are you seeing results of that in the school system that cause you any alarm?

Alisa Shepler: I do have a high degree of sensitivity to that issue. I do think that is why we have had a lot of push to get kids back in school. We look at what can we do to keep kids safe at this time so they can be productive adults in the future. We hope to keep them or their family members out of ICU, multi system failure or attending the funeral of a loved one as these are very difficult for a student to overcome as well. We are trying to protect students this moment in time so they will have many moments in time with their families.

Dr. Jackson asked: If some students end up missing some games, is there the possibility of rescheduling some of those games? Mr. Brown stated that there are 65 out of 71 days with athletic events scheduled. Right now the gym is being used every night. Spring sports season will begin soon. The window to reschedule is going to be very difficult.

Mr. Reed asked: Would it result in a forfeit if there were not enough players to play the game due to quarantine? Mr. Brown said that yes, it would be considered a forfeit. Mr. Reed said he knew sports was a very important part of life for many kids.

Upon recommendation of the superintendent, Mr. Reed moved, seconded by Mrs. Wells, that the Board enter executive session for the purpose of discussing various matters regarding the COVID-19 pandemic and its effect on personnel of the Ritchie County School System, students of the Ritchie County School System, and the larger community of Ritchie County Schools including parents and our communities. Motion passed unanimously and the Board entered executive session at 7:35 PM.

Mr. Nelson moved, seconded by Mrs. Wells, that the Board re-enter regular session. Motion passed unanimously and the Board resumed regular session at 8:43 PM.

President Jackson read a statement prepared by the Board. "As a Board we are going to request that the new proposed policy of contact tracing be attempted for Ritchie County Schools. We know that everything is relative to the conditions of the time and we do feel a great obligation to keep everyone safe as possible, however we are going to attempt a different process of quarantining groups".

NEXT REGULAR MEETING DATE

The next regular meeting will be held on Monday, March 8, 2021 at 6:00 p.m. at Ritchie County Board of Education Office. Individuals who wish to attend this meeting virtually must request a link by emailing rcsboardmeeting.ritchie@k12.wv.us by Friday, March 5, 2021 at 4:00 PM.

MEETING ADJOURNED

Mr. Reed moved, seconded by Mrs. Ingram-Keen, that the meeting be adjourned at 8:44 PM. Motion passed unanimously.