

WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

Capitol Building 6, Suite 600
1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East
Charleston, West Virginia

MINUTES

August 13, 2025

I. Call to Order

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance. President L. Paul Hardesty called the meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) to order at 9:00 a.m. on August 13, 2025, in Capitol Building 6, Suite 600, 1900 Kanawha Boulevard, East, Charleston, West Virginia.

The following members were present: President Hardesty, Vice President Victor L. Gabriel, Robert W. Dunlevy, Cathy L. C. Justice (via remote), F. Scott Rotruck (via remote), Debra K. Sullivan, Dr. Christopher A. Stansbury, Nancy J. White, Gregory F. Wooten, and ex officio member Michele L. Blatt, State Superintendent of Schools, West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE). Sarah Armstrong Tucker, Chancellor, West Virginia Higher Education Policy Commission and West Virginia Council for Community and Technical College Education, was absent.

II. Approval of Agenda

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the agenda. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Dr. Stansbury seconded, that the agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

After approval of the agenda, President Hardesty addressed the Board and meeting attendees concerning the importance of allowing the judicial process to play out regarding the immunization issue. He stressed the need to maintain decorum and behave professionally as the matter progresses through the West Virginia court system.

III. Delegations

Mr. Charles Daugherty spoke about the importance of teacher retention and recruitment. Mr. Charles Zinn, Ms. Mary Ellen O'Farrell, Mr. Robin Godfrey, and Sharon Lewis spoke about the importance of upholding the vaccination statute established in West Virginia law. Ms. Melissa Lane spoke in favor of upholding Executive Order 7-25 allowing a religious exemption to the vaccination statute. Ms. Tara Raymo read from the Bible. Mr. Billy Reeves addressed the board regarding the emergency closure of Verdunville Elementary School in Logan County. Mr. Mickey Blackwell, Executive Director, West Virginia Principals Association, talked about the start of a new school year, employee concerns, and accomplishments.

IV. West Virginia Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (WVSDB) Update

WVSDB Superintendent Clayton Burch explained the improvements that have been made to better serve students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, have low vision, or are deafblind. Superintendent Burch specifically discussed changes implemented to improve operations, facilities, outreach, programs, and services. Superintendent Burch introduced two students who are a part of the post-secondary transition cohort. One of the students is working toward a career in carpentry and will be receiving on-the-job training from local carpenters who are also deaf. The other student will be attending Potomac State College and is a member of the WVSDB goalball team.

V. Superintendent Reports

Dr. Vaughn Rhudy presented the 2025 Summative Assessment Results. He explained that the results are based on the performance of students who were enrolled for a full academic year (at least 135 days) and present at the end of the year. West Virginia had a 95% student participation rate which is required under federal law. Dr. Rhudy informed the Board that the results showed improvement in every content area with the highest improvement in English Language Arts. There were also proficiency improvements in every grade level except for third grade where the state experienced a slight drop from 46% to 45%. However, Dr. Rhudy explained that there was a 6% increase in this group last year so even with the 1% drop, those students have still increased 5% over where they were in 2023. After the presentation, the members asked questions and made comments regarding the 2025 Summative Assessment Results.

Next, Superintendent Blatt informed the Board that the 2026 Teacher of the Year and the School Service Personnel Employee of the year had been selected and that they would be recognized on September 9, 2025, at the West Virginia Cultural Center. Additionally, she announced that the WVDE had provided guidance on implementing Senate Bill No. 199 (relating to elementary behavior intervention and safety) enacted during the 2025 Regular Session that included written assistance and participating in various meetings with county superintendents, administrators, and principals.

VI. Consent Agenda

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Mrs. White moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that the Consent Agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote approving and/or accepting the following:

- Approved the WVBE minutes from July 2, 2025, July 9, 2025, and July 14, 2025.
- Approved the employment of substitute teachers and/or bus operators in areas of critical need and shortage policies for Braxton County, Cabell County, Fayette County, Hampshire County, Jackson County, Logan County, Pleasants County, Ritchie County, and Taylor County.
- Approved the West Virginia Licensure Testing Directory.
- Approved the appointment of Pocahontas County Superintendent Leatha Williams and Katie Morris to serve a term on the West Virginia Commission for Professional Teaching Standards.

- Accepted notification that Bethany College’s educator preparation program is no longer operational.

VII. Annual Appointment of WVBE Statutory Units/Liaisons

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the annual appointments of members to statutory units and liaisons. Mrs. Sullivan moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that Cathy L. C. Justice be appointed to the West Virginia Educational Broadcasting Authority; Gregory F. Wooten be appointed to the School Building Authority of West Virginia; Christopher A. Stansbury be appointed to the School Building Authority of West Virginia (unexpired term of L. Paul Hardesty); Robert W. Dunley be appointed to the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission Board of Directors; F. Scott Rotruck be appointed to the Commission on Holocaust Education; and Nancy J. White be appointed to The Education Alliance. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

VIII. County School System Reports

Pocahontas County Schools: Mrs. Alexander Criner, Director of Accountability, presented an update on the Pocahontas County Schools State of Emergency. Mrs. Criner reminded the Board that the state of emergency was based on findings related to leadership, grading practices, and counseling at Pocahontas County High School, and special education services. Over the past six months, the WVDE comprehensively monitored the administration of special education services and identified systemic issues that will take time to address but the county administrators are progressing toward resolving the issues. Members also heard from Pocahontas County Superintendent Leatha Williams and WVDE Support Liaison Deirdre Cline regarding various changes made to address deficiencies.

Logan County Schools: Mr. Jeffrey Kelley, Assistant State Superintendent, Division of Accountability Programs, provided an overview of the special circumstance review that led to the Board’s decision to intervene in Logan County Schools that included a multitude of complaints surrounding board governance and central office leadership. Logan County Schools Superintendent George Aulenbacher informed the Board that they will continue to focus first and foremost on academic achievement, student attendance, and school-based discipline.

Upshur County Schools: Mr. Kelley provided the Board with an overview of the special circumstance review that led to the intervention in the Upshur County school system. After which, Upshur County Schools Superintendent Christy Miller explained that they are currently in the process of implementing a robust tiered system of support in academics, attendance, and behavior. Additionally, they have been implementing professional learning communities across the county school system that includes a review of student data.

Roane County Schools: After Mrs. Criner provided a brief overview of the circumstances that led to the state of emergency declaration in Roane County Schools, she introduced Roane County Superintendent, Michelle Stellato, to provide an update on the progress that has been made to correct identified deficiencies. Superintendent Stellato reported that they had made significant progress in addressing the board’s concerns regarding the financial deficit. Specifically, she stated that they have

been working on a comprehensive corrective action plan designed to restore sustainability, stability, and long-term educational outcomes for the students. Superintendent Stellato acknowledged that the county had a low utilization rate of school facilities and that is the reason that they have reengaged in school consolidation discussions. The county leadership team is currently analyzing several factors that will be considered when developing a comprehensive corrective action plan that will be designed to mitigate the budget deficit and restore the fund balances within three to five years.

IX. Executive Session

Mr. Gabriel moved, and Mrs. White seconded, that the Board enter executive session under the attorney-client privilege exemption, authorized by W. Va. Code §6-9A-3 for discussion of item F (Discussion of Legal Matters) on the agenda. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote. President Hardesty announced that the Board was entering executive session at 11:25 a.m. The Board returned from executive session at 12:27 p.m. without taking any action.

President Hardesty then asked members if there was a motion that needed to be addressed after consultation with the Board's legal counsel. Mrs. Sullivan moved the Board instruct their general counsel to draft a letter to the West Virginia Professional Charter School Board to ensure that West Virginia public charter schools are in compliance with the Board's directive to comply with the compulsory vacation laws pursuant to W. Va. Code §16-3-4 and W. Va. Code §18-5G-3(c)(3) which does not recognize religious exemptions. Mrs. White seconded the motion. President Hardesty requested a roll call which resulted in the motion being adopted on a vote of 8-0 with Mrs. Justice not registering a vote due to technical difficulties.

X. WVBE and WVDE Personnel Matters

President Hardesty then called for a motion to approve the WVBE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Mr. Wooten seconded, that the WVBE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote. President Hardesty then called for a motion to approve the WVDE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment. Mrs. White moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that the WVDE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XI. WVBE Member Updates and Requests for Information

Mrs. Sullivan reported attending several West Virginia Educational Broadcasting Commission meetings and the SAIL Conference. She also requested a list of higher education institutions offering a teacher preparation program. Mrs. White sat on the 2026 Teacher of the Year selection panel. Several members took the opportunity to thank President Hardesty for his comments and leadership on the immunization issue.

XII. Adjournment

President Hardesty called for a motion to adjourn. Mr. Wooten moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. Upon the call for the question, the meeting was adjourned at 12:51 p.m. on a voice vote.

Minutes approved by the Board on September 10, 2025

L. Paul Hardesty, President

Victor L. Gabriel, Vice President

NOTE:

All agendas, attachments, materials distributed during the meeting, and audio recordings are available through the WVBE website or office pursuant to Policy 1241, Notice and Conduct of Meetings.

Minutes were recorded by:

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