

WEST VIRGINIA BOARD OF EDUCATION

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

MINUTES

December 10, 2025

I. Call to Order

The meeting opened with the Pledge of Allegiance led by Mrs. Justice. President L. Paul Hardesty called the meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) to order at 9:00 a.m. on December 10, 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, F. Scott Rotruck (via remote), Debra K. Sullivan, Dr. Christopher A. Stansbury, Nancy J. White (via remote), Gregory F. Wooten (via remote), 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, Mrs. Sullivan seconded, that the agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

III. Delegations

Ms. Bobbie Clendening and Ms. Mariah Hamrick talked about Barbour County school closures. Mr. Billy Reeves and Victoria Adams talked about Logan County school closures. Ms. Trish Bucher, Mr. Dan Ducher, Ms. Judy Bucher, and Mr. Phil Perrine talked about Randolph County school closures. Ms. Velvet Nichols, Ms. Ranessa Nichols, Mr. Keith Smith, Mr. Justin Shears, Ms. Tiffany Raines, Mr. Gabe Boggs, Ms. Jackie Higginbotham, and Mr. Jeff Mace talked about Roane County school closures. Ms. Abigail Jeffries and Ms. Amber Anderson talked about Upshur County school closures. Mr. Ben Shew, Mr. Dan Doyle, Ms. Rebekah Bailey, and Ms. Gail Bellamy spoke about the importance of upholding the vaccination statute established in West Virginia law. Ms. Susan Parks read from the Bible. Mr. David Gladkosky, Executive Director, West Virginia Professional Educators, discussed the association's legislative priorities. Mr. Bryan Daughtery with Teachers for Students and Better Public Schools expressed concerns about teacher retention. Lastly, Mr. Dale Lee, Co-President of EducationWV talked about the education leaders being the true experts in education.

VI. President Hardesty addressed meeting attendees

President Hardesty thanked the public for their remarks and respectful behavior. President Hardesty explained that there wasn't very much the Board could offer them regarding the proposed school closures due to the difficulty of operating traditional public schools under a tremendous weight of regulation. He explained that not only are the public schools hemorrhaging enrollment, but also the failure to adjust the Public School Support Formula since 1982 has exacerbated the issue. President Hardesty informed them that the current funding formula is based solely on population, and at some point, someone will have to factor in that West Virginia has several rural counties with large square mileage and a small number of students, to prevent the closure of public schools in rural communities.

V. School Safety Report

Mr. James Agee, one of the WVDE school safety liaisons with the School Safety Unit, updated the members on the availability of the Safe Schools helpline. Mr. Agee said that they have received 278 helpline reports since August. The reports have included student behavior issues, such as bullying occurrences in schools or on buses. Mr. Agee also informed the members that there have been some more serious threats, like possession of guns, which are always addressed quickly between the school safety unit, regional officers in the area, and the appropriate county superintendent. Some of the threats have involved private schools. Mr. Agee said that the helpline initiative has been a great success in maintaining safe schools. Dr. Stansbury inquired about what can be done to educate students so they don't become victims of sextortion attempts. Mr. Agee explained that victims of sexual crimes are often reluctant to come forward because they feel embarrassed and ashamed and agreed that everyone can and should be doing more to keep the students safe while using technology. Superintendent Blatt informed the members that after the West Virginia Legislature passed the SWAT bill (Safety While Accessing Technology), the WVDE worked with former United States District Attorney Will Thompson and an organization that has an online platform they had recently completed. According to Superintendent Blatt, the interactive platform is currently being rolled out in the public schools and can be accessed by students on both cell phones and computers. She is hopeful that the platform will be rolled out quickly so that the tool is in the hands of students.

VI. Superintendent Reports

Superintendent Blatt informed the members that the WVDE hosted its 3rd Annual Country Roads Codes at the Capitol event on Monday, December 8, 2025. She reported that despite the snow accumulation throughout the state, several schools participated and demonstrated their computer science and robotics programs. Additionally, the students enjoyed participating in a mock floor session, where they debated and voted on a bill in the House of Delegates Chamber.

Superintendent Blatt also informed the members that she visited Mt. Nebo Elementary School (Nicholas County) and West Teays Elementary School (Putnam County) to celebrate the students for exceeding standards in all academic indicators on the Balance Scorecard.

Next, Superintendent Blatt provided an update on the Third Grade Success Act. Specifically, she informed the members that there is a decline in the number of students needing targeted intervention in reading and math, which means that more students are meeting the beginning-of-the-year benchmarks than the beginning of School Year (SY) 2024-2025

Lastly, Superintendent Blatt announced the graduation rate for the four-year students was 92.8%, the highest graduation rate ever achieved in West Virginia. Superintendent Blatt pointed out that when the 2025 graduating class started Kindergarten in 2012, the graduation rate was 81.4%, more than eleven percentage points less than when those students graduated from high school. The graduation rate for five-year students, which includes several special education students, remained steady at 93.4% for SY2024-2025. There were also substantial increases in the special education and economically disadvantaged subgroups.

VII. Mrs. Sullivan’s remarks regarding school closures

Mrs. Sullivan said that she was reminded of the difficult decisions that the county school systems must make several times while reading through the school closure documents and thanked the meeting attendees for sharing their thoughts and ideas with the members. She said no one would just choose to close a school, causing heartaches and headaches for everyone involved. Mrs. Sullivan said that she is encouraged to hear that there may be positive movement with legislators in making changes that support public schools. She reported that more than 70 schools have been either closed or consolidated over the past eight years and that while these schools are small, their impact is huge. She stressed the importance of finding a way to maintain public schools.

VIII. Consent Agenda

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the Consent Agenda. Dr. Stansbury moved, Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that the Consent Agenda be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote approving the following:

- Approved the WVBE minutes from November 12, 2025.
- Approved the employment of substitute teachers in areas of critical need and shortage policies for Mercer and Wood counties.
- Approved the employment of retired bus operators as substitutes in areas of critical need and shortage policies for Mercer County.
- Approved Berkeley County Board of Education's request to amend their 2020-2030 Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan (CEFP).
- Approved Mason County Board of Education's request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP.
- Approved Clay, Grant, Jackson, Kanawha, Monongalia, and Wyoming counties to operate a certain number of electric buses manufactured by GreenPower Motor Company with a 39-inch left rear seat, as specified in the agenda attachment.

IX. Amendment of Barbour County Schools’ 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Micah Whitlow reminded the members that there are two components to each school closure. The first component is the amendment to the CEFP, which is the planning portion of the proposed closures/consolidations, followed by the actual closure/consolidation component. Mr. Whitlow then explained that the proposed amendment to the CEFP for Barbour County Schools reflects the closures and grade reconfigurations as defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Mr. Dunley moved, and Dr. Stansbury seconded, that Barbour County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

X. Barbour County Schools – Closure of Belington Middle School, Kasson Elementary/Middle School (Grades 6-8 only), and Philippi Middle School, and their consolidation into Philip Barbour High School. Closure of Junior Elementary School and its consolidation into Belington Elementary School. Mergers of Grade 5 students from the closing middle schools to their respective elementary schools

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Barbour County Board of Education's request includes approval to close Billington Middle School, Kasan Elementary Middle School, grades 6-8, and Philippi Middle School, and to consolidate them into Phillip Barbour High School beginning with the SY 2026-2027 school year. Additionally, Grade 5 students from Philippi Middle would be merged into Phillip Elementary School, and Grade 5 students from Billington Middle would be merged into Billington Elementary School beginning with SY 2026-2027. Junior Elementary School would close at the end of SY 2026-2027 school year, and those students would be merged into Billington Elementary School into the vacated Billington Middle School building beginning with the SY 2027-2028 school year. After which, Mr. Dunley moved, and Dr. Stansbury seconded, that Barbour County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students, to which Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XI. Amendment of Logan County Schools' 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Board of Education in Logan County had requested approval to revise Logan County's 2020-2030 CEFP to reflect the closures and grade reconfigurations defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding and subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Mr. Wooten moved, and Vice-President Gabriel seconded, that Logan County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XII. Logan County Schools – Closure of Verdunville Elementary School and its consolidation into Omar Elementary School

Mr. Whitlow explained that Superintendent Blatt, acting in her capacity as the Board of Education in Logan County, had requested approval to close Verdunville Elementary School and merge it into Omar Elementary School. The proposed closure was not contingent on any other actions and is proposed to occur at the end of the SY 2025-2026. After which, Mr. Wooten moved, and Mr. Gabriel seconded, that Logan County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students, to which Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XIII. Amendment of Randolph County Schools' 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Randolph County Board of Education's request includes approval to revise its 2020-2030 CEFP to reflect the closures and grade reconfigurations defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding and subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Mr. Dunley moved, and Vice-President Gabriel seconded, that Randolph County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XIV. Randolph County Schools – Closure of Harman K-12 School and its merger into Jennings Randolph Elementary School, Elkins Middle School, and Elkins High School. Closure of North Elementary School and its merger into Jennings Randolph Elementary School

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Randolph County Board of Education had requested approval to close Harmon K-12 School, and merge it into Jennings Randolph Elementary School, Elkins Middle School, and Elkins High School, and close North Elementary School and merge it into Jennings Randolph Elementary School. After which, Dr. Stansbury moved, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that Randolph County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students to which, Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XV. Amendment of Roane County Schools' 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Roane County Board of Education's request includes approval to revise its 2020-2030 CEFP to reflect the closures and grade reconfigurations defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding and subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Vice-

President Gabriel moved, and Dr. Stansbury seconded, that Roane County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XVI. Roane County Schools – Closure of Geary Elementary Middle School and Walton Elementary Middle School, their consolidation into Spencer Elementary and Spencer Middle School, and the consolidation of county PreK students into a defined space at Roane County High School

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Roane County Board of Education's request includes approval to close Geary and Walton Elementary Middle schools and consolidate them into Spencer Elementary grades K-5 and Spencer Middle School grades 6-8. They had also requested to consolidate all Roane County PreK students into a defined space at Roane County High School. After which, Vice-President Gabriel moved, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that Roane County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students, to which Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would be. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XVII. Amendment of Upshur County Schools' 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Whitlow explained that Superintendent Blatt, in her acting capacity as the Board of Education in Upshur County, requests approval to revise its 2020-2030 CEFP to reflect the closures and grade reconfigurations defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding and subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Dr. Stansbury moved, and Vice-President Gabriel seconded, that Upshur County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XVIII. Upshur County Schools' – Closure of Rock Cave Elementary School and its consolidation into French Creek Elementary School

Mr. Whitlow, Michele Blatt, State Superintendent of Schools, and her acting capacity as the Board of Education in Upshur County, had requested approval to close Rock Cave Elementary School and consolidate it into French Creek Elementary School. After which, Vice-President Gabriel, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that Upshur County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students, to which Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XIV. Amendment of Wetzel County's 2020-2030 CEFP

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Wetzel County Board of Education's request includes approval to revise its 2020-2030 CEFP to reflect the closures and grade reconfigurations defined in the agenda attachment and the corresponding and subsequent closure proposal on the agenda. After which, Vice-President Gabriel moved, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that Wetzel County Schools' request to amend their 2020-2030 CEFP be approved. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XV. Wetzel County Schools – Closures of Magnolia High School, Valley High School, Short Line School (Grades 6-8 only), New Martinsville School (Grades 6-8 only), and Hundred Heritage School (Grades 6-8 only), and their consolidation into a newly constructed school in Porter Falls, West Virginia

Mr. Whitlow explained that the Wetzel County Board of Education's request includes approval to close Magnolia High School, Valley High School, Shortline School, grades 6-8, New Martinsville School, grades 6-8, and Hundred Heritage School, grades 6-8, and consolidate them into a newly constructed school in Porter Falls, West Virginia. After which, Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Mr. Wooten seconded, that Wetzel County Schools' proposed school closures, consolidations, and all necessary policy waivers be approved. President Hardesty recognized Vice-President Gabriel, who asked Mr. Whitlow if the county had adhered to all procedural statutory and policy requirements that must be met to close and consolidate schools, to which Mr. Whitlow confirmed that the county had done so. Vice-President Gabriel then asked Superintendent Blatt if the proposed closures and/or consolidations would continue to ensure the delivery of a thorough and efficient education to the affected students, to which Superintendent Blatt confirmed that it would. Upon the call for the question, the motion carried on a voice vote.

XVI. Discussion of Legal Matters

Mr. Gabriel moved, and Mr. Dunley 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 M (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 10:39 a.m. The Board returned from executive session at 11:05 a.m. without taking any action.

XVII. WVBE and WVDE Personnel Matters

President Hardesty called for a motion to approve the WVBE personnel matters included in the agenda attachment. Dr. Stansbury moved, and Vice-President Gabriel 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. Mr. Dunlevy moved, and Vice-President 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.

XVIII. WVBE Member Updates and Requests for Information

Mrs. Sullivan reported that she had attended the Educator Rising Board Meeting, sat on a panel hosted by the West Virginia Center on Budget and Policy, and attended a seminar sponsored by the Education Alliance. Mr. Rotruck attended the County Board Member Training Standards Fall Meeting at Stonewall Resort. Mrs. Justice talked about her personal knowledge of Ms. Brooke Bailey, the Milken Educator Award winner, currently teaching at Mullens Elementary. Mr. Dunlevy, the Board's representative on the West Virginia Secondary Schools Activities Commission, reported that the 2025 High School Football Season was successful. Mrs. White said she attended the West Virginia Educational Broadcasting Meeting and the Education Alliance Meeting. President Hardesty wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and requested everyone to remember and pray for the family of WVDE employee Carrie Christy, who had passed away suddenly on Tuesday, December 9, 2025.

XIX. Future Meetings

President Hardesty announced that the next regular meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education would be on January 14, 2026, at 9:00 a.m. in Charleston, West Virginia.

XX. Adjournment

President Hardesty called for a motion to adjourn. Dr. Stansbury moved, and Mr. Dunlevy seconded, that the meeting be adjourned. Upon the call for the question, the meeting was adjourned at 11:10 a.m. on a voice vote.

Minutes approved by the Board on December 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:

Tina Payne, Board Secretary

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