

# Randolph County Schools Review

## Executive Summary

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### **Purpose**

In response to a request to provide support made by the Randolph County Schools Superintendent, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE) Office of Accountability conducted interviews with Randolph County Board of Education members on April 30–May 1, 2025. The purpose of these interviews was to ascertain the rationale behind recent board decisions and to identify the board members' plans to address operational challenges such as declining enrollment, failure to approve a consolidation plan, personnel overages, and a projected budget shortfall.

### **Background**

- » Randolph County Schools' enrollment has continued to decline steadily. According to ZoomWV, the certified student enrollment has dropped from 4,040 in the 2017-2018 school year to 3,488 in 2024-2025.
- » Most of the facilities owned by Randolph County Schools are nearing or are more than 50 years old and in need of substantial maintenance.
- » Randolph County Schools' Chief School Business Officer (CSBO) reports that Randolph County Schools ended fiscal year (FY) 2024 with an unassigned fund balance of \$5,100,262. However, \$2,868,457 of that amount had to be applied to balancing the fiscal year 2025 budget to cover approximately \$2,000,000 in salaries that had been supported by the expiring American Rescue Plan (ARP) funds.
- » In the fall of 2024, the Superintendent proposed a plan to close Harman School, a K-12 school with an enrollment of 103 students, and Pickens School, a K-12 school with an enrollment of 29 students. When the board voted against the closure of Harman School in January 2025, the Superintendent withdrew the recommendation to close Pickens. Randolph County Schools is staffed beyond the state aid formula for professional, support, and service personnel.
- » At the meeting on March 27, 2025, the board voted to table the Superintendent's proposed personnel plan. The expressed reason for the decision to table the personnel decisions was to allow time for potential alternative funding sources to be identified.
- » During the April meeting, votes were taken on a position-by-position basis. There was evident confusion, including multiple re-votes to clarify outcomes. While the board approved some of the Superintendent's recommendations, others were rejected, resulting in grievance filings from affected employees.
- » On May 15, 2025, the CSBO presented a projected budget shortfall of \$2.8 million for fiscal year 2025. At the same meeting, the board voted to rescind some of the earlier personnel actions based on the advice of legal counsel, thus eliminating approximately \$1.6 million in potential savings generated by those staffing cuts.

### **Scope**

During the on-site visit, the WVDE team interviewed the five board members to obtain their perspective in the following areas:

- Finance
- Personnel
- Roles and responsibilities of county board of education members
- Board's relationship with the Superintendent
- Plans to address operational challenges facing the county

## Key Findings

- » Each member acknowledged the need to consolidate schools but did not vote in favor of the proposed closure of Harman due to the challenges associated with the transportation of students. Several members mentioned that closing some of the schools in the Elkins area would present less of a logistical challenge to the district but would potentially be unpopular. Board members expressed their impression that the consolidation of the in-town schools would require the involvement of the county commission.
- » Members stated they were against some of the Superintendent's personnel recommendations because they did not have an adequate understanding of the rationale behind which positions were eliminated. Some members expressed that legal counsel should have been involved in the personnel proceedings.
- » Board members described communication with the Superintendent as a barrier. They alleged that retaliatory behaviors from the Superintendent and central office staff have deteriorated the working relationship between the board members, the Superintendent, and the central office.
- » Although members expressed concern about the future of the students of Randolph County, no board member articulated a clear path forward in the wake of the looming budget deficit. Some members expressed the perception that state intervention is a "foregone conclusion" based on the challenges they face.

## Recommendations

- » The West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE) declares a State of Emergency in Randolph County Schools.
- » Randolph County Board of Education members and the Superintendent will work with WVBE staff to provide a comprehensive plan to address the deficiency to the WVBE prior to its December 2025 meeting. The plan must include:
  - Training and support for board members and the Superintendent regarding board member roles and responsibilities, including their authority as board members to direct the Superintendent to provide additional information regarding critical issues such as personnel and school consolidation
  - Working with an assigned mentor for the Superintendent and central office staff to create a leadership team to assist in developing a collaborative working environment that keeps the board informed and engaged
  - Action steps the Superintendent and board members will take to ensure a school consolidation plan has been approved before the December WVBE meeting
  - Proposal for a balanced budget

