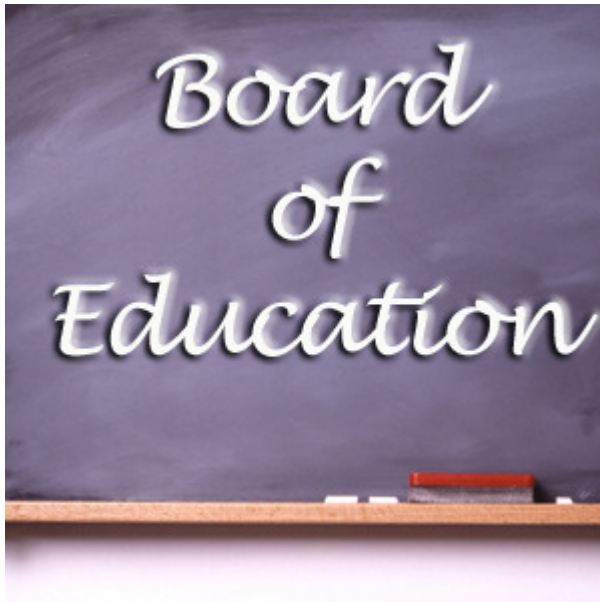


# Webster County Board of Education Debates Decision to Cancel Classes

---

Dennis Beard

Feb 01 | 11:08 AM



WEBSTER COUNTY, KY (2/1/12) – At the end of a more than three hour meeting of the Webster County Board of Education Monday night, board member Jeff Pettit expressed his disappointment in the decision to cancel classes for Thursday and Friday because of the boys' basketball opportunity to participate in the state championship tournament.

Pettit read a page-long prepared statement as he raised the issue.

"I want to take this opportunity to clarify my position on the decision this past week to dismiss school," Pettit said as he began to read the statement. "First off, I congratulate the players and coaches on their hard working in making it to the class A state tournament."

He then turned his attention to the decision to cancel classes.

"Not until after the call was made by our notification system was I informed of the decision to automatically go ahead and dismiss for Thursday and Friday without knowing the outcome of Thursday's game," he said. "It was also at that time I was made aware of the fact that administrators and some central office staff had assessed the amount of faculty that would be absent due to attending the tournament and determined that we had sufficient substitutes with remaining staff to allow us the option of keeping school in session, allowing students to be excused for attending the tournament and not having to make up any days of school."

"But to my knowledge this board was not given the opportunity to hear or consider this as an option," he continued. "So with the decision being made as it was, we now have two days of school that have to be made up, one of which was a total waste of instructional opportunities."

"As far as the make-up days go, I have been told that February 6 and 20 will be used as make up days. Given the fact that we operate this district on a four-day school week and Mondays are our specified off days, then we as a district have the opportunity to allow our faculty and students the privilege of honoring the great leaders of this nation on Presidents Day, but due to the decision of this past week, then that day has been specified to be used as a make-up day, and with that decision I once again do not agree."

Pettit concluded his letter by stating, "I accept responsibility for the fact that I took what information I was given as the whole story and the facts."

"My fault," he said. "I can assure you that in the future I will do more fact finding on my own before giving my answer. For this, I apologize to the faculty, students, and parents of this district."

Pettit then asked Webster County School District Superintendent James Kemp and Webster County Board of Education Chairman James Nance to address specific points he raised in his letter.

"Why was this board not informed of the plan that was developed by the administrators and central office staff?" he asked them. "Why were the board, administrators, and faculty not informed of this decision prior to it being released to the public, allowing everyone to be informed and on the same page?"

Nance responded first, but didn't immediately answer Pettit's questions.

"I am not going to apologize for the part I played," Nance said before adding that he had discussed the situation with Pettit and determined the two of them apparently had a miscommunication. "I would encourage Dr. Kemp (to cancel classes) if the same thing happened next week. I'm not going to apologize."

Kemp said he accepted responsibility for the breakdown in communication with the rest of the board members, but that he "used the best information I had at the time" to make the decision regarding cancelling of school for Thursday and Friday of last week.

Pettit agreed with Nance, that the issue between them was a "misunderstanding." He then restated his questions about the decision.

"Why did the board not hear about the plan that was devised?" he asked Kemp. "Why weren't we notified before it went out on One Call?"

(One Call is a Webster County alert system that contacts residents about a range of county related issues, including school cancellations.)

"I accept blame for that," Kemp said. "I felt I was following the wishes of the board."

Kemp also said the administration didn't have a specific plan, but had looked at several options to allow students the opportunity to travel to the championship tournament in support of the basketball team. Those options weren't

discussed during the meeting.

Webster County Board of Education member E Carolyn Tucker said based on her experience as a teacher, she doubted holding classes on Friday would have been more productive in terms of instructional services. She recalled a similar incident years ago in which school was held the day after the tournament, and that it was chaotic.

Earlier in the meeting, Kemp blasted the state as he presented a tentative budget for the 2012-2013 school year, which he had sarcastically labeled "A Work of Fiction."

"I'm so doggone mad at the state that I can hardly see straight," Kemp said as he presented board members with copies of the proposed budget. "It's more a work of fiction than reality."

Kemp said the budget for the coming school year is projected to include about half a million dollars less than the current year budget, a trend the district has been struggling with for the last few years. Part of the issue, Kemp explained, is continued declining enrollment and the subsequent loss of per-pupil, or SEEK, funding. Kemp said the proposed \$16.4 million budget is balanced, however.

Despite the attendance projections, Kemp said student population numbers have leveled out, and even increased in some schools over the current year.

"We gained 10 back in one week," Kemp said. "Should this condition persist, that's about \$40,000."

Board members followed Kemp's lead in making sarcastic jabs of their own as they unanimously approved board vice chairman Tim McCormick's "real motion that we accept this fiction."

The board also heard an update regarding ongoing development of a new energy plan for the district, and agreed informally to proceed with action on the plan at its meeting Thursday, Feb. 9, following review of materials that are expected to be completed in time for that meeting.

The meeting began with a joint dialogue session with the Dixon Elementary Site Based Decision Making council, during which Dixon Elementary Principal Eric Wheatley and SBDM members talked with the board about the ongoing efforts within the school to improve student test performance. Dixon Elementary's Tiffany Logsdon gave a presentation on a so-called "Singapore Math" program students are taking part in. She said the highest scoring class in the district last year was the one who used the format.

Webster County Board of Education Assistant Superintendent Alan Lossner told the board about the district's implementation of a new "Project Operation" program, in which community members who complete online training and pass criminal background checks, can work one-on-one with students this spring to help them perform better on testing, serve as mentors for education path choices, and help them do better in other curriculum subject areas. Lossner said the program, which will kick off within the next four to six weeks, needs about 30 volunteers to serve the approximately 300 students in the district who would be served by it.

In other business, the Webster County Board of Education approved:

- a school nutrition plan, after the plan was presented in a public hearing a half hour before the board meeting;
- acceptance of a state offer of assistance;
- participation in a Next Generation Learners initiative;

- a State Facility Construction Commission offer of assistance for bonding potential; and
- action items by consent, including standard monthly reports.

The board then reviewed a personnel list, which included the employment of Laura Epley and Michael Gipson, substitute teachers; the resignation of Webster County High School English teacher Robin Vaughn; and the employment of WCHS tennis coach Kendra Childress.

The board went into closed session at the end of its meeting to discuss an ongoing lawsuit it filed against Webster County Clerk Valerie Newell regarding a construction tax the board adopted last year. The tax was petitioned, and Newell certified the petition committee's signatures. The board disputed several aspects of the process and filed a lawsuit in Webster County Circuit Court. A hearing on a motion Newell filed to dismiss the case due to an alleged violation of the open meetings act is set for Thursday, Feb. 2, at 1 p.m.

Copyright © 2012 **SurfKY** News Group, Inc. all rights reserved. **SurfKY.com** is an eNewspaper providing local news FREE to Kentucky 24/7. Read Statewide Kentucky News, Sports, Obituaries and more for Kentucky covering: **Christian, Daviess, Henderson, Hopkins, McCracken, Muhlenberg, Warren, and Webster** Counties as well as the **Kentucky Lakes Area**.