

**IMPACT STATEMENT AND SUPPORTING DATA  
AGAINST THE CLOSURE AND CONSOLIDATION OF  
PICKENS K-12 SCHOOL  
INTO  
GEORGE WARD ELEMENTARY AND  
TYGARTS VALLEY MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL**

**PREPARED BY  
PICKENS LOCAL SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT COUNCIL**

**December 1, 2024**

## Table of Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| 1.0 Introduction .....  | 2  |
| 2.0 Lack of Community Involvement in Proposal .....                       | 3  |
| 3.0 Responses to <i>RCS Impact Statement For Closure</i> by Section ..... | 4  |
| 3.1 Enrollment.....   | 4  |
| 3.2 Facilities.....   | 7  |
| 3.3 Finances and Personnel.....   | 11 |
| 3.4 Student Transportation.....   | 16 |
| 3.5 Student Educational Program.....                                      | 20 |
| 3.6 Community.....  | 24 |
| 4.0 Conclusion .....  | 26 |
| Appendix of Supporting Documents .....                                    | 28 |

## **1.0 Introduction**

The Pickens Local School Improvement Council (LSIC) respectfully presents this report and data in response to the *Impact Statement For Closure and Consolidation of Pickens School into George Ward Elementary and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School* prepared by Randolph County Schools. We, the community and Pickens LSIC, present support and data to demonstrate why closure is not legal or financially viable and emphatically request that the Randolph County Board of Education vote against the closure proposal.

The American public school system is at an inflection point. Across the United States, schools are facing a crisis that may dismantle the very fabric of our education system. But among legislative pressures to privatize our schools, an economies of scale vision that disproportionately targets rural and low-income environments, fall-out from a reliance on Covid-relief monies, and over-simplified funding formulas, our schools are failing to balance budgets and provide high-quality education to all of our children.

This national crisis has taken hold here in West Virginia's Randolph County Schools, where we are facing a proposal that would lead to swaths of school closures and consolidations. In fact, in October 2024 alone, three schools were voted for closure in Kanawha County. While we could look at this with great concern, we have an opportunity to lead by example and suggest creative, positive, systemic changes that will improve trust in our public school system, increase student engagement, and ultimately improve the education of our youth—the central mission we all agree is critical to a strong and resilient society. What we do in Randolph County will have a ripple effect on not only our students and county, but on our state and country.

On September 30, 2024, Randolph County Superintendent Dr. Shawn Dilly recommended the closure of Pickens School to the Randolph County Board of Education. Pickens School, located in Pickens, WV, is serving isolated communities that largely exist today due to a few small businesses and local public services like a volunteer fire department, rural post offices, Department of Highways, and most-importantly, Pickens School, a public school that conveniently and effectively serves the families that are the backbone of these historically and culturally rich communities.

Upon making his proposal for closure, Superintendent Dr. Dilly prepared an *Impact Statement For Closure* of Pickens School and later presented the Randolph Board of Education with a 5-year strategic plan that drastically reorganizes Randolph County Schools. The 5-year plan requires seven schools to close, consolidating all students in a county roughly the size of Rhode Island (over 1,000 sq. miles in area), and busing them to Elkins or Tygarts Valley, nearly two hours one way for some students. There are many glaring problems with the proposal to close Pickens School, including but not limited to:

1. A lack of community, school faculty and staff involvement in discussing and implementing a feasible plan for the county's roughly 3,600 students;

2. Safety concerns for children riding extremely long bus routes across dangerous mountain roads;
3. A student transportation plan that violates West Virginia state law;
4. The potential erosion of our culture and historically rich, rural communities across Randolph County, a significant reason West Virginia boasts a vibrant \$9 billion tourism industry<sup>1</sup>;
5. Short-term, small financial savings will likely be outweighed by additional costs to Randolph County Schools; and
6. A decreased quality of education that relies too heavily on virtual programming or burdensome charter-school administration.

Please carefully consider our community's concerns in this report and vote against the proposal to close Pickens School.

## ***2.0 Lack of community involvement in the proposed plan***

As concerned citizens, we would like to voice our concern about the proposal to close Pickens School and the larger 5-year Proposal. We, Randolph County, must demand a democratic, strategic plan created with community input that provides realistic, balanced solutions that we can work toward together. It's unfair to all of us, including Superintendent Dr. Dilly and the Randolph Board of Education, to create a 5-year plan that impacts 3,600 students in so little time and without going through a tried-and-true strategic planning process. Nor is it fair to cut the least expensive, rural schools as symbolic, ineffective relief to a larger problem. A careful county-wide investigation of expenditures, education services, staff, and facilities must be completed, ideally with outside, unbiased support from specialists. District leaders need to develop deliberate and detailed plans with abundant community input.<sup>2</sup> When poorly handled, research shows that closures can compound racial inequities,<sup>3</sup> impede student achievement,<sup>4</sup> and often fall short of generating necessary savings.<sup>5</sup>

On behalf of the Pickens LSIC, we implore every community in Randolph County to strengthen state-mandated LSICs, which exist "to represent the voice of the community's education stakeholders."<sup>6</sup> Our school-based LSICs can create a coalition of community leaders, principals, staff, faculty, students, and education specialists that can work with Superintendent Dr. Dilly and the Randolph County Board of Education to create a robust and feasible plan--one that our great grandchildren can hang their hats on; one that can be duplicated across the state and potentially the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> [Latest data shows tourism is breaking records, 2024](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Education Week: Pressure to Close Schools is Ramping Up. What Districts Need to Know, 2024](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Education Week: Race is a Big Factor in School Closures, 2023](#)

<sup>4</sup> [Education Week: School Closings and Student Experiences and Academic Outcomes, 2018](#)

<sup>5</sup> [Education Week: Study of School Closings in Six Cities, 2011](#)

<sup>6</sup> [LSIC Frequently Asked Questions](#)

An effective strategic plan can save our schools and improve education for each of our children. But such a plan requires patience, openness, kindness, vision, and trust. Ideally, each of our schools and communities would develop their own plan and bring their ideas back to the larger county-wide plan. We write this in preface to more details that will demonstrate why closure of Pickens School is not viable. We suggest the county move beyond closure proceedings and into robust strategic planning for improving education efficiently across all of our schools.

### ***3.0 Responses to Randolph County Schools Impact Statement For Closure***

This *Pickens LSIC Impact Statement Against Closure* replies to each section of the *Impact Statement For Closure* document, including enrollment, facilities, finances, personnel, student transportation, student educational program, and community.

Misleading and inaccurate information is peppered throughout the *Impact Statement For Closure*, which must be reviewed carefully. Furthermore, an economies of scale argument for closure of Pickens School is unsound and unfair. We strongly disagree with how the cost per student is arrived at, and find this analysis to be incorrect. The deficit the county faces must be analyzed more carefully and alternatives to closure of Pickens School should be considered. Furthermore, a closure will result in:

- a. Little to no financial savings for the county;
- b. New, significantly longer bus rides that violate West Virginia state law;
- c. Risks to academic performance; and
- d. Increased loss of population in Randolph County and potentially in West Virginia.

While Pickens School is one of the smallest public schools in the United States, the school's merits and efficient use of funds should be modeled rather than admonished or destroyed by closure.

### ***3.1 Enrollment***

According to the *Impact Statement For Closure*, Randolph County population and student enrollment have reduced since 2010. While these are unfortunate trends in our county and state, choosing to close the school will exacerbate the population loss to Pickens, Helvetia, Czar, and the surrounding areas that the school serves as well as reduce the student population of Randolph County Schools overall. Pickens School students and families are among the most vulnerable of our state's population and require even more resources to overcome their challenge.

If remote schools, like Pickens School, are closed, families will have to look to other reasonable options for educating their children. The option to bus students to Tygarts Valley, for reasons identified below in *Section 3.4* of this statement, is unreasonable. If closure proceeds, families

will have to consider programs that take money from the public school system (e.g. homeschool) or move away from the immediate area, county, or state to find schools that can serve their children. Future families will be deterred from staying or returning to the area to raise their children because the burden to educate will be too significant.

The population analysis in the *Impact Statement For Closure* is defeatist and biased toward encouraging closure of Pickens School, along with many schools across the county and state. Specifically, projections of enrollment by grade and school are inaccurate for Pickens School. In the chart below, pulled from *Section 3.2a* of the *Impact Statement For Closure*, enrollment projections suggest that Pickens School will only have two students enrolled across the entire K-12 school in 2033-34.

*Projections of enrollment, by grade and school, in the affected attendance area, for the next ten years.*

**Pickens K-12 School**

| Year     | 2024-2025 | 2025-2026 | 2026-2027 | 2027-2028 | 2028-2029 | 2029-2030 | 2030-2031 | 2031-2032 | 2032-2033 | 2033-2034 |
|----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Grade K  | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 1  | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 2  | 2         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 3  | 3         | 3         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 4  | 4         | 4         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 5  | 3         | 3         | 3         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 6  | 5         | 5         | 2         | 3         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 7  | 0         | 0         | 4         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 8  | 2         | 2         | 0         | 3         | 3         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 9  | 1         | 1         | 2         | 0         | 3         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 0         | 0         |
| Grade 10 | 6         | 6         | 1         | 1         | 0         | 2         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 0         |
| Grade 11 | 0         | 0         | 5         | 4         | 1         | 0         | 2         | 1         | 1         | 1         |
| Grade 12 | 0         | 0         | 0         | 4         | 3         | 1         | 0         | 1         | 1         | 1         |

Enrollment Table 6 Data from RCS 2<sup>nd</sup> Month Report Data utilizing cohort survival ratio projections.

Chart extracted from the *Impact Statement For Closure* of Pickens School, 2024

This chart is misleading. For example, the projections remove Pickens School's current student population assuming none of them will progress within the school or graduate. Case in point, the 2024-25 4th grade class, composed of four students, is not projected to graduate in 2033 per this chart, which lists only one student in the senior class. Pickens School boasts a 100% graduation rate, and many students attend the school from kindergarten through graduation proving this chart is deceiving. Furthermore, this chart assumes no more children will be born or move into the local Pickens School communities over the next ten years.

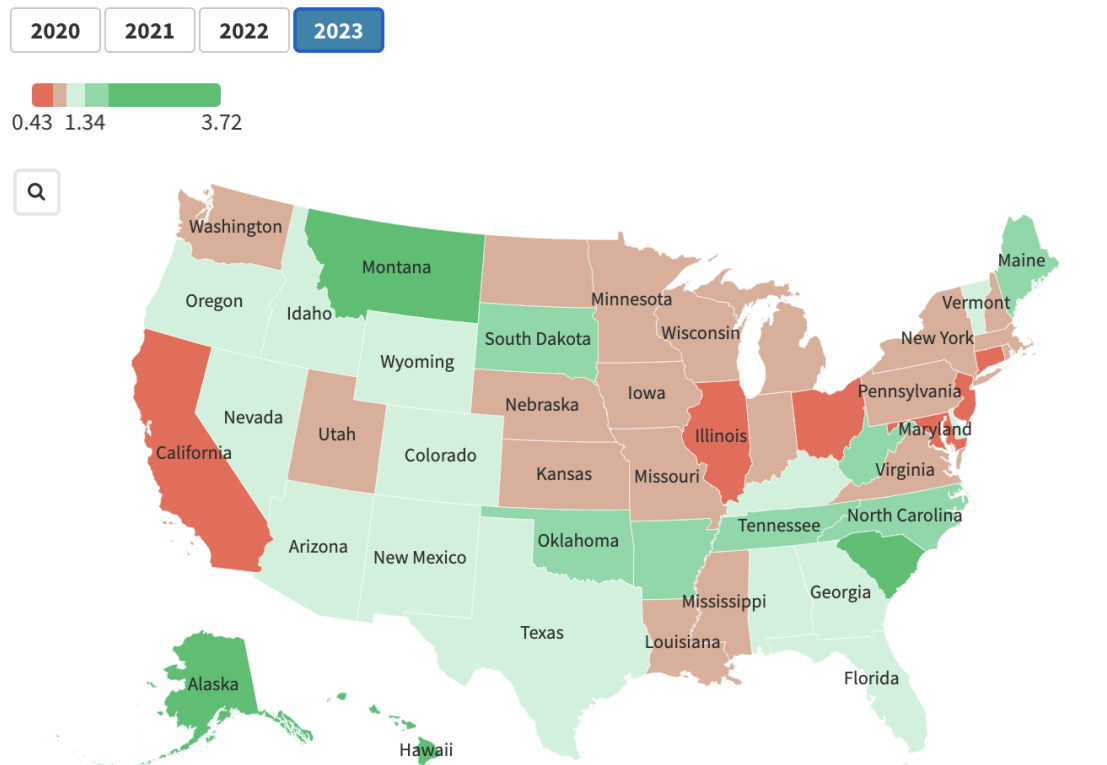
To counter the population analysis presented in the *Impact Statement For Closure*, please see the graphic below that identifies the in-to-out ratio by state cited by [Ascend WV](#), a program that offers financial incentives to encourage individuals to move to West Virginia.

## Which states have seen a rush of moves in?

And which have seen large swaths of moves out?

Since 2020, we've tracked searches for moves from state to state.

Using an in-to-out ratio, (searches for moves in ÷ searches for moves out = in-to-out ratio) shows us which states have gained or lost the most due to move inflow and outflow. *An in-to-out ratio greater than 1 indicates higher inflow than outflow.*



Source: [moveBuddha Moving Cost Calculator](#), [Click here for browser view and embed code](#).

Most recent update: 12/4/23

The **in-to-out ratio** can also be expressed as: 2.11-to-1 or 211-to-100.

Example: South Carolina saw 211 moves in for every 100 out in 2023

moveBuddha

According to the analysis above, West Virginia saw the highest percentage increase in mover search interest, with a percentage change of +60% from 2022 to 2023.<sup>7</sup> States with the highest ratio of moves in-to-out include West Virginia — with a ratio of 162 in to 100. Taking the in-to-out ratios from 2022 and 2023 to calculate the percentage change in ratio from year to year, West Virginia had a +60% change from 2022 to 2023.<sup>8</sup> West Virginia, especially unique and remote

<sup>7</sup> [Where Are People Moving to in 2024?](#)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

places like Randolph County, need to be ready to welcome and encourage population growth. Programs like Ascend WV and public and private efforts to encourage tourism and economic development are vibrant across West Virginia. Our public schools are a part of that vibrant impact and are key indicators for success.

While we recognize there is a *chicken or the egg* dilemma in this situation, investment in ourselves will always be worthwhile and will encourage more authentic and lasting growth, which is a central mission of West Virginia's agenda and priorities. Our schools, especially unique rural ones like Pickens School, are a pillar toward that mission.

### **3.2 Facilities**

Pickens School, located in Pickens, West Virginia was built in 2006. The gymnasium, a 1954 structure, was renovated and brought to code at that time. Pickens School is the newest school in Randolph County.

In the Impact Statement For Closure, the estimated cost to bring Pickens School up to code is \$632,754.81. Meanwhile, it mentions that the receiving Tygarts Valley Schools will need a total of \$18,525,200.50. This speaks volumes to the excellent condition of Pickens School and also the significant investment the other schools require.

The statement mentions various maintenance needs including lift repairs for ADA accessibility, poor drainage around the building, HVAC replacement, and eventual gymnasium maintenance. These seem like normal and manageable needs for a building erected in 2006. Many of these repairs can likely be accomplished at a more reasonable fee through partnerships with the community and local businesses. Furthermore, grants, like the [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) or [IDEA's Discretionary Grants](#) can be written specifically for the lift, given there are many ADA accessibility initiatives that may support this need.

If closure is stopped, the Pickens LSIC will continue to support the school's efficient operation, and we will support fundraising efforts that relieve reasonable financial burdens.

In *Section 3.2b Facilities of the Impact Statement For Closure*, the enrollment, building capacity, and utilization of Pickens School are shown in a copy of the table below. Several errors exist on this table.

### School Enrollments, Capacities, and Utilizations

| <i>School</i>  | <i>Enrollment</i> | <i>Building Capacity</i> | <i>Utilization %</i> |
|--|-------------------|--------------------------|----------------------|
| Pickens School<br>(Closing)                                | 28                | 195                      | 14%                  |
| George Ward<br>Elementary<br>(Receiving School)            | 315               | 436                      | 72%                  |
| Tygarts Valley<br>Middle/High School<br>(Receiving School) | 402               | 850                      | 47%                  |

Facilities Table 2 Date pulled from September 2024 enrollment reports and RCS's CEFP

Table extracted from the *Impact Statement For Closure of Pickens School, 2024*

First, the building capacity listed at 195, inappropriately adds the capacity of the library (25). According to the School Building Authority of West Virginia's Building Program Utilization Worksheet, the formula should "not include library/media, cafeteria, itinerant spaces, resource rooms, or optional academic classrooms such as art, music and computer labs that act as pullout programs to support the core curriculum" (see the *Building Program Utilization Worksheet* below). Second, the Enrollment for Pickens School is 29 students, not 28.



Third, the calculations for maximum pupils/class capacity rely on the West Virginia School Building Authority's (SBA) guidelines, which assume that each classroom is constructed to new standards that accommodate one teacher with maximum pupils for each grade, which are identified as 20 (Kindergarten), 25 (1-5 grades), 25 (Secondary), and 50 (Gymnasium). Pickens School classrooms, constructed in 2006, are smaller and cannot accommodate the maximum pupil outlined in the newer SBA guidelines without state code violations. According to WV Code §126CSR172 subsections 403 through 509, classroom capacity is measured by the allotment of square feet per child by grade level, which takes into account fire code, safety, and other best practices by grade level. The Pickens LSIC measured each classroom to verify Pickens School's capacity.

**Pickens School Classroom Capacity  
Per limits set by West Virginia §126CSR172**

| Grade                | Pickens School Classroom Area (sq ft) | Required Square Footage / Student <sup>9</sup> | Maximum Pupils (SBA)   Classroom Capacity (State Code) |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| <b>K-2 (Scott)</b>   | 556                                   | <b>50</b> sq ft (kinder)                       | 20 MAX   <b>11</b>                                     |
| <b>3-5 (Tiffner)</b> | 504                                   | 28- <b>30</b> sq ft                            | 25 MAX   <b>17</b>                                     |
| <b>6-12 (Morgan)</b> | 481                                   | 28- <b>30</b> sq ft                            | 25 MAX   <b>16</b>                                     |
| <b>6-12 (Hudok)</b>  | 618                                   | 28- <b>30</b> sq ft                            | 25 MAX   <b>21</b>                                     |
| <b>6-12 (Long)</b>   | 400                                   | 28- <b>30</b> sq ft                            | 25 MAX   <b>13</b>                                     |
| <b>Gymnasium</b>     | 5056                                  | <b>77</b> sq ft                                | <b>50</b> Max   66                                     |
|                      |                                       |  | <b>128</b>   |

*Formula for Program Utilization:*

Enrollment (**29**) divided by Total Program Capacity (**128**) multiplied by 100 = 23%

With this corrected data, we calculate Pickens School's program utilization is not 14% but rather 23% when considering limits set by state code for classroom area/capacity. While Pickens School's utilization is below the SBA standards, it is important to correct the *Impact Statement for Closure*. With support from the community and the Pickens LSIC, we feel there are means to increase utilization.

<sup>9</sup> [Guidelines for Sq. Footage per Student is outlined in WV Code §126CSR172 subsections 403-509](#)

### 3.3 Finances & Personnel

The operating budget for all of Randolph County Schools is \$43,207,267.00 in FY 2024-25.<sup>10</sup> It is worth noting that the entire operating budget of Pickens School makes up only 1.4% of the overall Randolph County School budget. The *Impact Statement For Closure* identifies that Pickens School closure and consolidation would “save the Randolph County Board of Education \$550,898.49 annually.”<sup>11</sup> This number is inflated and inaccurate. After the Pickens LSIC met with the Randolph County Superintendent and the Director of Finance, some omissions and errors were found that brought that savings down significantly. Simultaneously, with help from the board office, the Pickens LSIC conducted an in-depth analysis of the school’s finances to get a more accurate financial projection if Pickens Schools should close. Through these collaborative efforts, we discovered that closure of Pickens School will likely cost the county more than it will save.

The savings figure mentioned above is misleading and overestimated for a few reasons. First, the figure (\$550,898.49) was reanalyzed by Randolph County Director of Finance Brad Smith with our support and questions. Mr. Smith confirmed that the original figure did not account for WV Code §18a-2-7 and 18a-4-8b, which speak to seniority of staff. These laws say that “any reassignment, demotion, or change to faculty will start with the least senior staff.” This means that more senior staff are given priority and are moved to other schools in the event of a closure. At Pickens School, all staff are considered “senior,” none have submitted requests for retirement, and they will be the first to be absorbed in other schools (replacing staff who are paid less). A large portion of Pickens School’s personnel costs would not be removed from the Randolph County School system. With our financial review, confirmed by the Randolph County Director of Finance, the personnel costs had to be reduced by \$149,467.13. As a result, the Pickens LSIC acknowledges the amount of personnel costs for this analysis is \$401,431.35.

Additionally, the Pickens LSIC believes the Randolph County Board of Education’s cost savings excludes the real-world implications of the following variables that must be included in its calculations:

- Exit of students from the Randolph County School system after closure;
- Building ownership, maintenance, and utilities will continue for some time after closure;
- Some school supplies expenses will follow the students as they move to the receiving schools; and
- Bus depreciation and expenses will increase with the longer bus route.

Furthermore, the Director of Finance confirmed that the savings in the *Impact Statement for Closure* does not mention or account for the \$150,000.00 Pickens School receives from the West Virginia State Legislature. Every year, House Bill 4025 sends Randolph County Schools an Education Program Allowance (also known as the “School of Isolation” funding) to help cover

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<sup>10</sup> [Randolph County Board of Education Budget Fiscal Year 2025](#)

<sup>11</sup> [RCS Pickens Closure Application. 2024](#)

Pickens School's costs. This money is earmarked for Pickens School, meaning that with a closure of Pickens School this allowance will no longer be given to the county.

The WV House Bill 4025 grants \$150,000 of state funding to Pickens School for the Education Program Allowance. This funding is earmarked for Pickens School meaning a closure of the school results in the \$150,000 not going to Randolph County any longer. However, this allowance of \$150,000 has never been adjusted since the bill was enacted in 1991. We have already been in communication with our representatives and are asking for an increase for Pickens School. We anticipate being able to increase the allowance total here to cover a similar percentage of costs that the \$150,000 covered in 1991. To conservatively estimate what the increase may be, we applied the cost of funds over time from 1991 to 2024 (65.2%) and allocated that to the current Pickens School personnel cost. We then compared that number with \$150,000 to determine how much of the estimate the allowance covers. We believe it is reasonable to assume this \$150,000 funding should be worth \$247,720.89 for the purposes of the estimation in the table above. It's worth pointing out that this 65.2% adjustment is conservative.

With the allowance increase, the Pickens School deficit could reduce by 50% or more next year, and it would be significantly less than the deficit created by closure. The Pickens LSIC will continue to support the financial health of the school if closure is avoided. The percentage savings reflected in the Impact Statement presented by Randolph County Schools is not large enough to be considered an effective solution to achieve the Board of Education's goal of lowering the deficit the board is facing.

Please see the table below for an analysis of Pickens School's FY 2024-25 savings gained and lost based on conversations and documents obtained from Randolph County Schools. Please note that all 5-Year Averages shown below are from 2020 to 2024.

| Savings Category                                     | Pickens<br>LSIC |                     | Randolph County<br>BOE |                     |
|--|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|---------------------|
|  | Savings<br>Lost | Savings<br>Gained   | Savings<br>Lost        | Savings<br>Gained   |
| Personnel Costs Cut                                  | --              | \$401,431.35        | --                     | \$401,431.35        |
| Transportation Costs Cut<br>(5 yr. avg.)             | --              | \$652.69            | --                     | \$3,156.38          |
| Gas, Power, Sewage & Trash<br>Costs Cut (5 yr. avg.) | --              | \$22,652.49         | --                     | \$32,652.49         |
| Maintenance Costs Cut<br>(5 yr. avg.)                | --              | \$0.00              | --                     | \$33.14             |
| School Supply Costs Cut<br>(5 yr. avg.)              | --              | \$0.00              | --                     | \$2,600.25          |
| Loss of State Funding from<br>Student Exits          | \$64,894.24     | --                  | \$0.00                 | --                  |
| Education Program Allowance<br>House Bill 4025       | \$247,720.89    | --                  | \$0.00                 | --                  |
| <b>Total Net Cost Savings Estimated</b>              |                 | <b>\$102,696.16</b> |                        | <b>\$439,873.60</b> |

Please see descriptions for each category below, excluding the aforementioned personnel costs and Education Program Allowance categories, to clarify cost savings calculations above:

**Transportation Costs Cut:** These expenses include work-related travel for staff as well as payment to parents in lieu of transportation available by attending Pickens School. We believe that not all transportation-related costs can be cut due to continued travel of staff that are kept on after the closure as well as parents taking their children to school in lieu of available bus transportation. While we are avoiding speculation as much as possible in our numbers, we want to point out that the payment to parents in lieu of transportation would most likely be an increased cost, opposed to a cost savings, due to increased length in the travel route for the Pickens School students.

**Gas, Power Sewage & Trash Costs Cut:** Admittedly, this calculation has the most assumptions due to our limited access to Randolph County documents such as utility bills. However, it is incorrect for the Board of Education to assume this is a 100% cost savings measure because the Pickens School building will still be owned by Randolph County Schools. As a result, these costs will not completely be eliminated with closure.

**Maintenance Costs Cut:** Similar to the prior section, we are not accounting for any cost savings in the maintenance category because Randolph County Schools will continue to own the school building after proposed closure.

**School Supply Costs Cut:** The Pickens LSIC sees no way Randolph County Schools can justify any cost savings in this category due to students continuing to be in the county. While we

believe there will be student exits in this analysis, we believe that extra supplies for the remaining students will be needed due to logistical concerns such as longer transportation routes resulting in a larger risk of school supplies being lost.

**Loss of State Funding from Student Exits:** The Pickens LSIC expects three current Pickens School students, who live in Upshur County, will leave the Randolph County School District. We also estimate five additional students will exit the Randolph County School District due to the logistical nightmare of the proposed bus transportation plan. We estimate eight students will leave Randolph County Schools, which translates to \$8,111.78 state funding per student lost from the WV Basic State Aide Allowance.

**Education Program Allowance House Bill 4025:** Please see the prior paragraph detailing how this calculation was calculated.

Lastly, it should be noted we are excluding accelerated depreciation of the school bus and property tax costs from the above analysis. This is due to a lack of information provided by the Randolph County Board of Education that would guide us to a reasonable estimate. As a result, we cannot include these items in our analysis. However, we want to take the time to acknowledge that both of these costs would drive our estimated cost savings measure lower than what is currently presented.

It is important to note that this financial analysis created an undue burden on the community and the Pickens LSIC. Randolph County Schools uses an outdated DOS system for bookkeeping. The system leaves room for human error and cannot run reports by school/location. As a result, we had to analyze raw data from the entire county (not just Pickens School), spent numerous hours analyzing an enormous amount of figures, recreated spreadsheets, and had to rely on the Finance Director, who very kindly helped us uncover errors and omissions. We highly recommend that Randolph County Schools invest in a modern, robust accounting system that can create more accurate and immediate reports. An outdated system discredits the system's cost saving calculations. This may assist the county in analysis of its funds, potentially offering alternative areas for saving rather than focusing on closures and consolidations.

In a presentation given to some of our members by Superintendent Dr. Dilly, it was shown that the Randolph County Schools calculated the cost per student at Pickens School to be \$22,387.49. However, this calculation continues the trend seen throughout this closure process wherein the county has provided incorrect numbers. First, this analysis states Pickens School has 26 students, but there are currently 29 students. Secondly, it does not account for any state funding that would be lost from the closure of Pickens School. Below is a summary of each school in the Randolph County School System cost per student calculations. We have included two different Pickens scenarios. One, labeled "Pickens Today," includes the loss of state funding from eight students exiting Randolph County Schools (\$64,894.24) and the original earmarked state funding provided to Pickens School (\$150,000). The "HB Adj." scenario includes the previously discussed adjustment to HB4025 funding (\$247,720.89).

| School                          | Student Population | Student / Teacher Ratio | 22-23 Cost per Student |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| <b>Pickens School (HB Adj.)</b> | <b>29</b>          | <b>6.4:1</b>            | <b>\$9,291.71</b>      |
| EHS                             | 743                | 15.2:1                  | \$10,857.24            |
| EMS                             | 573                | 12.2:1                  | \$12,110.04            |
| <b>Pickens (Today)</b>          | <b>29</b>          | <b>6.4:1</b>            | <b>\$12,661.40</b>     |
| George Ward                     | 311                | 12.0:1                  | \$12,692.55            |
| TVMHS                           | 398                | 11.7:1                  | \$13,102.29            |
| Beverly                         | 242                | 11.5:1                  | \$13,194.90            |
| Jennings                        | 218                | 12.1:1                  | \$13,352.33            |
| North                           | 197                | 10.4:1                  | \$13,528.86            |
| Colton                          | 158                | 11.7:1                  | \$13,642.73            |
| Third Ward                      | 307                | 10.6:1                  | \$13,671.79            |
| Midland                         | 156                | 11.1:1                  | \$15,021.97            |
| ALC                             | 12                 | 12.0:1                  | \$15,725.88            |
| Harman                          | 116                | 8.9:1                   | \$16,214.65            |

From a financial viewpoint, Pickens School is not a good candidate for closure as a means to get the Randolph County Board of Education out of a deficit; in fact, by our estimation a vote for closure will put the county into a deeper deficit. When considering this along with the other points in this statement, closure is ill-advised.

### 3.4 Student Transportation

The *Impact Statement For Closure* cites the following table to indicate that the new bus route transporting children to Tygarts Valley will be 86 minutes. However, this is inaccurate.

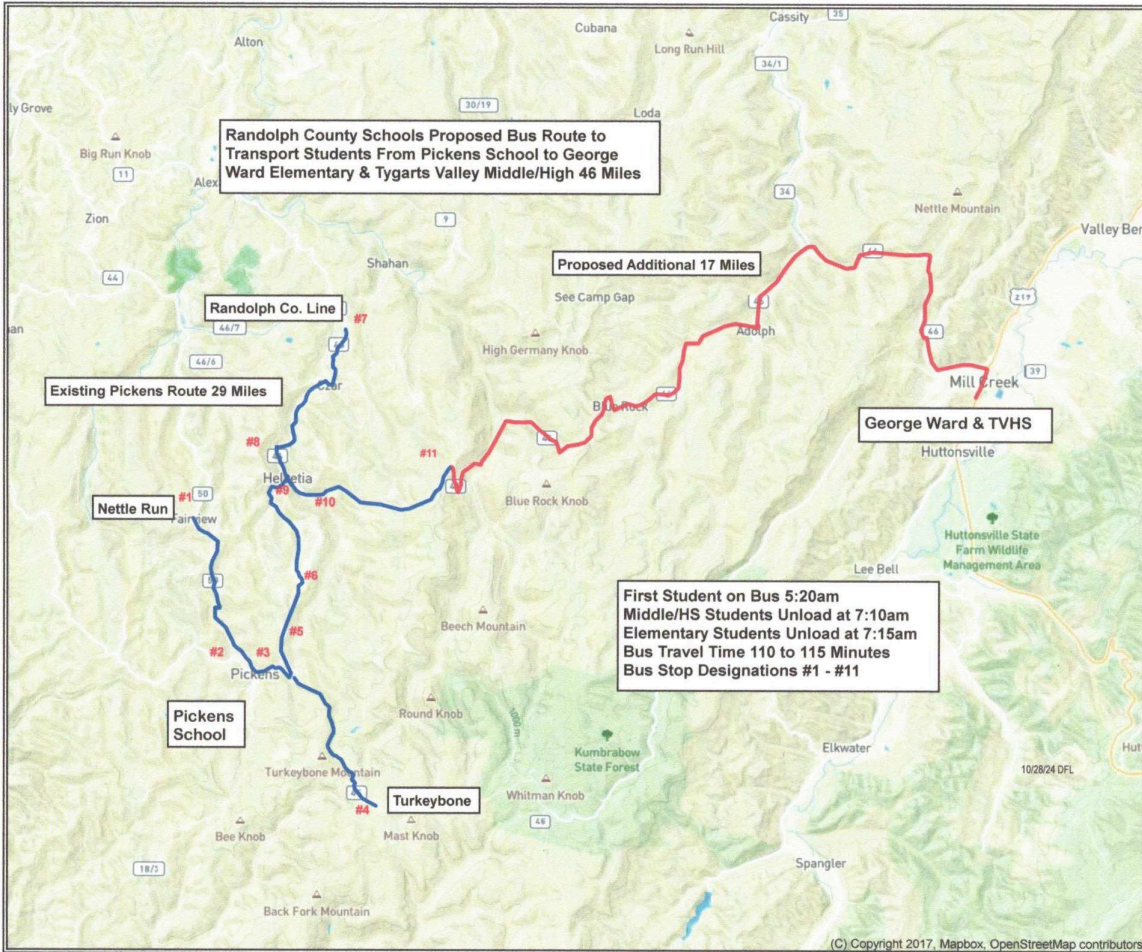
#### Pickens School

| Route      | Community | Current Travel Time | Estimated Time after Closure or Consolidation | Net Increase or Decrease |
|------------|-----------|---------------------|---|--------------------------|
| Route 87 A | Pickens   | 51 Min              | 86 Min  | 35 Min                   |

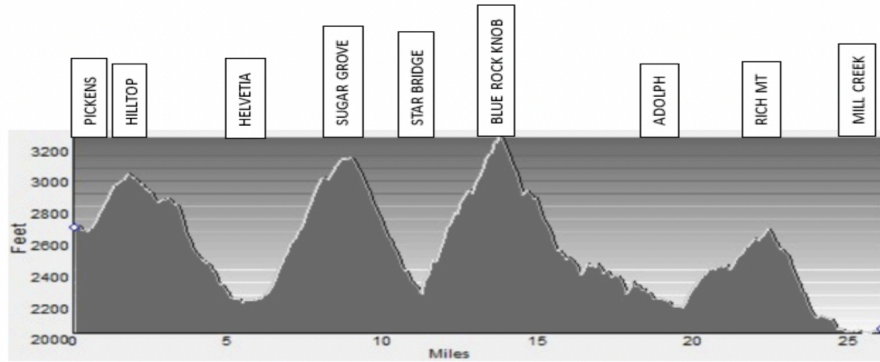
Extracted from the *Impact Statement For Closure* of Pickens School, 2024

The Pickens Locals School Improvement Council conducted an independent study of the route and designed a carefully, cross-examined schedule and map of the journey from Pickens to Tygarts Valley. The study was prepared by Randy Long (retired Randolph County Director of Transportation), Jerry Hull (Pickens School Bus Driver), Daniel Lehmann (expertise in mapping), and Kevin Betler (expertise in mine safety and state code).

Only one bus will transport all elementary, middle, and high school students to Tygarts Valley. In careful analysis of the route, the new bus route is 102 minutes for elementary and 115 minutes for high school. The route identified by this LSIC analysis is the shortest route. Please see the Pickens LSIC Transportation presentation [here](#) and see the maps and table below that accurately identifies the time and location of each stop along the new route.



## Profile of County Routes 47, 45 and 46, Pickens to Mill Creek



### School Bus Time & Mileage Report Relative To The Proposed Consolidation Of Pickens K-12 School Into George Ward & Tygarts Valley Middle / High School

Randy Long, former Randolph Transportation Director, Daniel Lehmann, Kevin Betler 11/4/2024

| Bus #87A Morning Run          | Bus Stop | AM Run Time   | Cum Mins Middle+High | Cum Mins Elementary | Cum Miles |
|-------------------------------|----------|---------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| Bus Leaves Terminal           |          | 5:10          | x                    | x                   | 0         |
| Nettle Run - Fairview         | 1        | 5:20          | 0                    | x                   | 3.8       |
| Pickens Depot                 | 2        | 5:31          | 11                   | x                   | 7.2       |
| Pickens #2                    | 3        | 5:33          | 13                   | 0                   | 7.6       |
| Turkeybone Rd.                | 4        | 5:45          | 25                   | 12                  | 11        |
| State Road Garage             | 5        | 5:56          | 36                   | 23                  | 14.2      |
| Hilltop                       | 6        | 6:00          | 40                   | 27                  | 16        |
| Randolph Co. Line             | 7        | 6:13          | 53                   | 40                  | 21.7      |
| Czar                          | 8        | 6:18          | 58                   | 45                  | 23        |
| Hutte Restaurant              | 9        | 6:22          | 62                   | 49                  | 25.3      |
| Metzner Hollow Rd.            | 10       | 6:25          | 65                   | 52                  | 26        |
| Sugar Grove Rd.               | 11       | 6:33          | 73                   | 60                  | 29        |
| TVHS & Middle unload          | 12       | 7:10          | 110                  | 97                  | 46        |
| George Ward Elementary unload | 13       | 7:15          |                      | 102                 |           |
| <b>Bus #87 Evening Run</b>    |          | <b>PM Run</b> |                      |                     |           |
| TVHS & Middle Load            |          | 2:35          | 0                    |                     |           |
| George Ward Elementary Load   |          | 2:43          | 8                    | 0                   |           |
| Sugar Grove Rd.               | 11       | 3:17          | 42                   | 34                  |           |
| Metzner Hollow Rd.            | 10       | 3:25          | 50                   | 42                  |           |
| Hutte Restaurant              | 9        | 3:28          | 53                   | 45                  |           |
| Czar                          | 8        | 3:32          | 57                   | 49                  |           |
| Randolph County Line          | 7        | 3:37          | 62                   | 54                  |           |
| Hilltop                       | 6        | 3:50          | 75                   | 67                  |           |
| State Road Garage             | 5        | 3:54          | 79                   | 71                  |           |
| Turkeybone Rd.                | 4        | 4:05          | 90                   | 82                  |           |
| Pickens #2                    | 3        | 4:17          | 102                  | 94                  |           |
| Pickens Depot                 | 2        | 4:19          | 104                  |                     |           |
| Nettle Run - Fairview         | 1        | 4:30          | 115                  |                     | 46        |
| Bus Returns to Terminal       |          | 4:40          |                      |                     |           |

Below are a few facts about the transportation plan proposed:

- A *new* bus route is proposed due to Pickens School closure and consolidation
- Speed limits range from 25 mph to 45 mph along the route
  - Buses must travel 5 mph below posted speed limits
- No cell phone reception exists along the bus route until the Mill Creek area
  - Very intermittent bus radio reception
- Extreme mountainous areas prone to severe weather conditions exist on the *new* route
  - Weather in Tygarts Valley and Pickens areas is often drastically different particularly in the winter season.
  - Annual snowfall in Mill Creek/Tygart Valley averages 55.8 inches. Pickens, on the western front, receive an average of 168.1 inches of snow.
  - According to the National Weather Service the most snow ever recorded in West Virginia in 24 hours was in Flat Top, Mercer County. On Jan. 27-28, 1998, the community experienced 35 inches of snowfall. However, the state's biggest recorded snowstorm was Nov. 24-29, 1950 with 57 inches of snow dumped on Pickens, Randolph County.
- Entire bus route with students aboard will be 115 minutes (1 hr 55 min)
- Elementary student will be on the bus 102 minutes (1 hr 42 min)
  - First students board the bus at 5:20am and last students exit the bus at 4:30pm
- Time away from home for some students including travel and instructional time equals approximately 11 hours 10 minutes
- The bus leaves the terminal at 5:10am, but the Randolph County bus garage does not open until 5:15 a.m.

According to WV Code §18-2E-5d, which lists standards for duration of school bus transportation times for students to and from school, the recommended duration for a one-way bus trip should not exceed 30 minutes for elementary, 45 minutes for middle school, and 60 minutes for high school.

The Superintendent has requested a waiver of state codes that limit bus ride caps to make a proposal for closure sound. However, according to part (c) of WV Code §18-2E-5d,

“A county board may not create, nor may the state board permit, the creation of a new bus route for the transportation of students in any of the grade levels prekindergarten through grade five to and from any school included in a school closure, consolidation or new construction project approved after July 1, 2008, which exceeds by more than thirty minutes the recommended duration of the one-way school bus transportation time for elementary students adopted by the state board in accordance with subsection (a) of this section.”

Despite this waiver language, the new routes proposed in the *Impact Statement for Closure* are in violation of state law. A new route cannot exceed more than thirty minutes of the

recommended duration (Elementary 30+30=60 minutes maximum). The new route is 42 minutes (70%) beyond the legal recommended duration for elementary.

|                             | <b>Actual Duration (min)</b> | <b>Max. Duration per State Code with waiver (min)</b> | <b>Beyond Legal Limit (min)</b> |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|---|---------------------------------|
| <b>New Route Elementary</b> | <b>102</b>                   | 60  | 42                              |

Pickens School new route analysis prepared by the Pickens LSIC, 2024

The waiver and the new bus route, in violation of state law, should be denied.

Forcing children to ride a bus for nearly four hours a day (away from home for more than eleven hours) is immoral, and we cannot ignore the safety concerns, added risks to academic performance due to fatigue, and increased chances for mental and physical health issues that could arise with extremely long bus rides. In fact, a study found that a one-minute increase in school commute times was associated with a 1.3 minute reduction in sleep, meaning that if a given student had a commute 15 minutes longer than another student, they would be sleeping almost 20 minutes less on average.<sup>12</sup> The same study also found that students with shorter commutes got more exercise relative to those with longer commutes.<sup>13</sup> Given that sleep and exercise have well-established relationships to educational outcomes, students with longer commutes may face greater academic and overall health challenges as a result of their longer commute.

“Researchers at Temple University and Syracuse University tracked data from 2011 to 2017 on the morning commutes of 120,000 bus riders in the 3rd to 6th grades in New York City, where families can apply for their students to attend public schools other than the ones in their neighborhoods, to explore the link between commuting and academic outcomes. The study found an absenteeism rate of 12 percent among students with exceptionally long rides—those that are more than an hour long.”<sup>14</sup>

According to Attendance Works, being chronically absent from school can lead to students having difficulty in reading as early as the 3rd grade or achieving important educational milestones, like graduating high school. Currently, chronic absenteeism is affecting more than 7.5 million students across the country, the organization’s research has found.<sup>15</sup>

“Chronic absence is a leading indicator and a contributor to educational inequity,” said Hedy Chang, Attendance Works executive director. “And if you have lots of kids who are chronically absent, it can be a sign that there are some systemic barriers that need to be addressed.”<sup>16</sup>

<sup>12</sup> [How Distance To School Affects Student Wellbeing, 2019](#)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> [How Students’ Transportation Options—or Lack Thereof—Affect Educational and Health Outcomes, 2023](#)

<sup>15</sup> [The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement Reducing Chronic Absence, 2014](#)

<sup>16</sup> [Study Links Longer School Bus Rides to Chronic Absenteeism, 2022](#)

It should be noted that in the Fall of 2024, Randolph County celebrated Pickens School for a 95% or higher attendance for the first nine weeks. Pickens Schools was one of four schools in the county to achieve this record.

Furthermore, these already long bus rides will be susceptible to increases in length due to accidents, road hazards, and weather delays that will be more likely due to the distance, mountainous terrain, lack of cell/radio reception, and limited access to emergency services. Based on WV Code §18A-2-8, a county board of education has the duty and authority to provide a safe and secure environment in which students may learn and prosper. School officials are responsible for student safety, welfare, and behavior from the time a student boards the school bus until the student returns home or to their designated bus stop. The *Impact Statement For Closure* offers no plan should students be unable to return home from school due to weather, accident, or road hazard. With the need for staff or chaperones with students, this could become a costly and burdensome requirement thus reducing the cost-savings the county is hoping to incur with the closure of Pickens School.

Common road hazards that could create transportation issues may include downed trees, flooding, reckless drivers, and heavy snowfall. Specifically, snowfall in the area between Adolph and Pickens can be sudden and heavy. And despite an early dismissal at George Ward and Tygarts Valley, the road conditions may be significantly worse and unpassable by bus. If the bus cannot pass the worst part of the route, it would have to back up a long, twisty, mountain road to turn around given a lack of turnaround space that can accommodate a bus in the area. Furthermore, if there is a road closure between Mill Creek and Pickens, the bus may need to go to Buckhannon or Monteville, a much longer distance than the route identified.

To demonstrate the hardship of the bus route proposed by the *Impact Statement For Closure*, the Pickens LSIC hosted, at no cost to the county, a bus ride from the Tygarts Valley bus stop to Pickens, including expected bus stops along the route. Board member Edward Daniels and Superintendent Dr. Dilly attended the bus ride alongside twelve Pickens, Helvetia, Czar community members. The media declined an invitation to ride along the route citing motion sickness concerns. The immense pressure this route put upon adults, who only had to do it once, was significant. The new route robs many hours of a person's day, includes risk, and induces nausea. We cannot ask our children to commit to this route two times a day for 180 days for 13 years—beginning at the age of five.

### **3.5 Student Educational Program**

In considering the closure proposal for Pickens School, attention needs to be given to formal assessments at each school. Historically, Pickens School students do very well on formal tests. Below is formal assessment information for Pickens School and for the receiving schools in Tygarts Valley taken from the West Virginia Department of Education website for the school year 2023-2024.

According to i-Ready scores provided by Superintendent Dr. Dilly on October 15, 2024,<sup>17</sup> the following table lists math and reading diagnostic scores for Pickens School, George Ward Elementary, and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School.

**Fall 2024 i-Ready Scores**

|         | Pickens School | George Ward Elementary | Tygarts Valley Middle High School |
|---------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Math    | 78%            | 58%                    | 27%                               |
| Reading | 71%            | 58%                    | 24%                               |

\* i-Ready combined scores listed in tier 1 (green) and tier 2 (yellow) placement.

The table below showcases scores for the West Virginia General Summative Assessment<sup>18</sup> across Grades 3-8 at Pickens School, George Ward Elementary, and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School.

**FY 2023-24 West Virginia General Summative Assessment Scores**

|         | Pickens School | George Ward Elementary | Tygarts Valley Middle High School |
|---------|----------------|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Math    | 38%            | 34%                    | 13%                               |
| Reading | 54%            | 34%                    | 24%                               |
| Science | 20%            | 17%                    | 9%                                |

\*Scores indicate the percentage of students at desired proficiency rate for Grades 3-8.

Transferring Pickens School students to George Ward School and Tygarts Valley School places our students at lower performing schools. The Center for Research on Education Outcomes completed a study that found if students in an academically stronger school are placed in an academically lower performing school, test scores for the transferred students decline.<sup>19</sup> This will be a risk for Pickens School students who will be forced to leave an environment of higher academic performance to one of lower performance and will reduce the overall county performance

<sup>17</sup> [Superintendent's Updates, October 15, 2024](#)

<sup>18</sup> [West Virginia General Summative Assessments](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Lights Off: Practice and Impact of Closing Low-Performing Schools, 2017](#)

The small class enrollment at Pickens helps teachers identify students' strengths and weaknesses and allows time for remediation and growth. Repeatedly, research demonstrates major positive results that emerge from smaller student-teacher ratios.<sup>20</sup> Putting Pickens students in larger classes at George Ward and Tygarts Valley Middle and High School will hinder their educational development, along with the consideration of the daily long bus ride, the length of time away from home, and lack of homework time.

Throughout the years, Pickens' students continue to excel in academics. To demonstrate their exemplary status please review the list of some of the awards, recognition, and achievements of Pickens School students.

- In the 2023-24 School year, one fourth grade student received first place in our county writing contest and attended the *West Virginia Young Writers* ceremony and *Young Writer's Day* in Charleston.
- Another fourth grader received second place in the *West Virginia PBS Writing Contest* and attended the PBS Kids Day ceremony.
- Pickens elementary students received the *i-Ready Randolph County Award* for math in January and April 2023.
- A 2024 senior from Pickens received first place at the *Randolph County Social Studies Fair* as well as first place at the *Regional Social Studies Fair*. He then competed at the state level in the spring.
- A seventh grade student was selected to attend the Governor's STEM Institute for a week, in Morgantown, summer of 2024, due to her mathematics achievements and her interpersonal skills and maturity.
- Eighth grade students were the Fifth Place State Team winners in the 2022-2023 Nationwide Middle School Math Program MathCounts Competition Series.
- Middle School Students achieved The Silver Level Award each year since 2015 in the MathCounts Foundation program, sponsored by Northrop Grumman Foundation, National Society of Professional Engineers, 3Mgives, Texas Instruments, Inc., and Art of Problem Solving.
- Pickens School is a 2023–2024 National Showcase School for the Capturing Kids Hearts Program.
- A Pickens School archery team was established in 2011 through the *National Archery in Schools Program*. The team members are students in fourth through twelfth grades. Since it began, the *Pickens Panther Archery Team* has competed regionally and statewide each year and have had archers compete and win in the *West Virginia Bullseye Archery Tournament*. All Pickens archers have competed in the first-ever *West Virginia National Archery in Schools 3D State Tournament* and an archer advanced to the *Eastern National 3D Tournament*. Since the team's conception in 2011, archers have

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<sup>20</sup> [Benefits of Small Class Size, 2010](#)

competed at the national competition in Louisville, Kentucky eleven times. In 2014, a Pickens School archer competed in the *World Archery Competition* in Madison, Wisconsin. The Pickens School Archery Team is the only archery team in Randolph County. The closure of Pickens School would prevent students from pursuing their passions.

- Pickens School families and staff, along with community support and donations, raised \$89,137.00 to purchase a playground. The playground project will be completed early spring 2025. The children will enjoy many years of climbing, sliding, jumping, swinging and spending time outdoors with friends.
- Pickens School students are involved in working in their high tunnel, Plant the Seed project daily. The students plant, care for, and harvest vegetables and berries to be used each day at the school's lunch salad bar. As part of their science and biology lessons, the students have learned how to germinate seeds, transplant, and care for the plants throughout the growing process. Over the summer they share vegetables with the community. See a video celebrating their efforts [here](#).

Randolph County Schools Superintendent Dilly has developed an ambitious theme for Randolph County Schools, which asks all of us to “Lead with Purpose” and he has said he believes our primary function is to make sure kids are ready for society, having identified future-ready competencies that include emotional intelligence as a key-predictor for readiness. Specifically, the Superintendent noted that “social intelligence, emotional intelligence, and soft skills should be taught to our students” especially in this technologically advancing era. We couldn't agree more!

According to the Harvard Review, businesses ensure success when they hire people with soft skills—skills that technology cannot replace. While advances in artificial intelligence, robotics and machine learning are making it possible for an increasing number of human tasks to be automated, machines still lack emotional and social skills as well as higher cognitive skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, systematic decision making and so on. These skills will continue to be in demand, perhaps even in higher demand in the job market of the future.

Pickens School offers these skills in spades. In fact, Pickens School participated in the Capturing Kids' Hearts program. This program's mission is to help teachers and administrators transform classrooms and campuses into high-achieving learning centers by building relationships, creating a positive school climate, improving academic performance, and preparing students for the future. Last year, Pickens was awarded the Capturing Kids' Hearts nationwide honor as a Showcase School. Capturing Kids' Hearts Leadership Strategist David Johnson said, “Pickens [School] has an atmosphere that every school in the nation should strive for. It is such a warm, caring, and stimulating place that consistently impacts students, staff, and community for good...for greatness.”

### 3.6 Community

The closure or consolidation of rural schools like Pickens will negatively impact West Virginia history and culture and will cause the communities it serves to dwindle and eventually die. Consolidating Pickens School’s students to George Ward Elementary and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School will create huge traveling burdens on families. And without the convenience of a local school, families with children will move away or become too busy to be active in Pickens, Helvetia, and Czar. This will harm our communities, effectively homogenizing our population, and we will see further population loss, closure of small businesses, and increased distrust in our public schools.

The *Impact Statement For Closure* states that there are “no nearby grocery stores or other essential services” in the communities that Pickens School serves. This is not true. In the communities that Pickens School serves, here are some of the businesses and services available to the community and its visitors:

|   |               |
|---|---------------|
| Burki Enterprises                       | Helvetia, WV  |
| Coat of Arms                            | Helvetia, WV  |
| Czar Haus                               | Czar, WV      |
| Greenway Excavating                     | Czar, WV      |
| Heavenly Heritage Winery                | Pickens, WV   |
| Helvetia Mercantile                     | Helvetia, WV  |
| Helvetia Public Library                 | Helvetia, WV  |
| Helvetia Restoration & Development Org. | Helvetia, WV  |
| Helvetia Timber Works                   | Helvetia, WV  |
| Helvetia United States Post Office      | Helvetia, WV  |
| Hilltop Honey                           | Helvetia, WV  |
| Hofer Construction                      | Helvetia, WV  |
| Hull’s Store (diesel, gas, lp)          | Pickens, WV   |
| Ice’s Farm                              | Blue Rock, WV |
| Little Meadow Health Clinic             | Helvetia, WV  |
| Pickens Baptist Church                  | Pickens, WV   |
| Pickens Department of Highways          | Pickens, WV   |
| Pickens Historical Society              | Pickens, WV   |
| Pickens Volunteer Fire Department       | Pickens, WV   |
| Pickens United States Post Office       | Pickens, WV   |
| Pine Grove Methodist Church             | Czar, WV      |
| Richter’s Maple Syrup                   | Pickens, WV   |
| Sacred Heart Catholic Church            | Pickens, WV   |
| Streamline Seamless Gutter              | Helvetia, WV  |
| Swiss Mountain Creations                | Helvetia, WV  |
| Swiss Roots General Store & Inn         | Helvetia, WV  |
| The Beekeeper Inn                       | Helvetia, WV  |
| The Hütte Restaurant                    | Helvetia, WV  |
| Zion Presbyterian Church                | Helvetia, WV  |

If all local students are transported to the Tygarts Valley campuses, fewer friendships and mentorships will take place close to home, weakening neighborly relationships and local community involvement. This plan divides student allegiance and focus, fracturing the understanding of home, and destabilizing the foundations of communities. This plan robs rural communities of its most treasured asset, its youth and its families.

In rural neighborhoods especially, schools are often the anchor of the community, providing key local employment opportunities, a gathering space for social and cultural events, and a key facilitator in neighborly connection and goal-oriented action. Community festival events, archery tournaments, school/community concerts, graduation, and school alumni events are just a few of the community events that would just “go away” with school closure. “Closed school buildings often languish for years, falling into disrepair or eventually getting sold to a private company that changes its purpose.”<sup>21</sup>

Furthermore, traveling educational programs like ArtsBank, Augusta Heritage, and other initiatives will have less reason to visit these rural areas in support of history, culture, art, and music. According to multiple research projects between 2012-2018 students who face long bus rides, especially in rural areas, “become less involved in afterschool clubs and sports, even if the number of extracurricular options expands.”<sup>22</sup>

In addition, research shows that parent involvement diminishes after school closures. According to Research Associate Kathleen Cotton, “a consequence of district consolidation is the replacement of parental and student input by ever increasing layers of bureaucracy, which leads to increased apathy.”<sup>23</sup> Apathetic parents are less likely to monitor district costs or student performance. Smaller schools result in greater involvement by teachers and parents, which increases performance and reduces per pupil costs. Vibrant and healthy schools need parent and student involvement in the school district. We don’t want to be robbed of our obligation to support our district and Pickens School.

Helvetia, which is served by Pickens School, is on the National Register of Historic Places. Pickens and Helvetia contribute to tourism in Randolph County with cultural events that take place annually like the Pickens Maple Syrup Festival, Fasnacht, the Helvetia Community Fair, Follow Your Bliss, Helvetia Hoot, and more. All of these directly and significantly impact the local economy and small businesses in the area.

Recently, Governor Jim Justice asked West Virginia Tourism and County Visitor Bureaus to focus tourism efforts toward the many unique, “hidden gems” available to visitors across the state. This includes places like Beverly, Coalton, Harman, Helvetia, and Pickens. Extracting the youth and families from these already fragile, rural places will erode their ability to exist. Compounding this across all rural communities, the negative economic impact on tourism and

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<sup>21</sup> [Education Week: As Enrollment Declines, Districts Consider Closing Schools. 2024](#)

<sup>22</sup> [Rethinking the School Closure Research. 2019](#)

<sup>23</sup> [Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling. 1996](#)

small businesses across the state will be devastating. But perhaps most importantly, part of our unique identity in West Virginia will be lost.

According to school closure expert and Bates Associate Professor Mara Tieken, “Rural schools have tremendous value. They are the heartbeat of a town. Beyond the education they provide, they are an integral part of the local economy and serve as a gathering place for the greater community. Consolidating a school district impacts not only students but the community as a whole.”<sup>24</sup> As noted in *Section 3.3* above, the county will not save money by closing Pickens School, and in fact it may increase costs by pursuing closure. We also estimate closure will create millions of dollars of loss for businesses in Pickens, Helvetia, Czar and the surrounding communities, severely damaging our ability to exist.

#### **4.0 Conclusion**

The crux of the argument for the closure of Pickens School is based on the economies of scale theory that the West Virginia Board of Education and West Virginia School Building Authority encourage Superintendents and County Boards of Education to abide by. In economies of scale, unit costs are relatively high for a small volume of output, but as an enterprise increases in size, its production cost per unit declines. This theory works well for manufacturing cars but is problematic when dealing with human beings. School consolidation, as a means to exploit economies of scale and reduce per pupil costs, has an extensive history. Economies of scale can be biased against rural schools because rural schools often can't take advantage of the same cost-saving benefits as larger schools.

On the surface, the economic arguments against rural schools are overwhelming. Rural school expenses are disproportionately higher than metropolitan areas. But the higher cost of maintaining even a very small school is irrelevant because the West Virginia constitution mandates equal and quality educational opportunities for all students.<sup>25</sup> The State has a legal duty to ensure that school systems with greater educational needs and costs receive sufficient educational resources to meet those needs so that all children are treated equally and receive a high quality education. Just as physically and mentally disabled children cost more to educate than abled children, a reasonable education in isolated areas will remain relatively more expensive, but a worthy investment.

As a stopgap to the Pickens School closure proceedings, the Pickens LSIC was prepared to launch a fundraising campaign. However, the fundraiser was put on hold pending an agreement, in writing, from the Superintendent that promised to honor closure abatement if a mutually agreeable dollar amount was raised. The promise in writing was not received so we could not pursue this creative option. If closure is stopped, the Pickens LSIC will continue to support the school's efficient operation, and we will support fundraising efforts that relieve reasonable financial burdens on the school and enrich programming for the students of Pickens School.

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<sup>24</sup> [Rural Schools Matter: The Community and Economic Impact of Public Schools](#)

<sup>25</sup> [WV Constitution: Section 1 of Article XI](#)

If given the chance to remain open, the Pickens LSIC and community members are prepared to continue to advocate for an increase of the Pickens School Educational Program Allowance earmarked in WV House Bill 4025, which will be a part of the 2025 legislative session in February. In 1991, the West Virginia Department of Education overturned closure and the West Virginia State Legislature awarded Pickens School the Education Program Allowance (also known as the "School of Isolation" funding), which is earmarked in West Virginia House Bill 4025 in the amount of \$150,000 annually. The Local School Improvement Council is requesting an increase to the \$150,000 allowance, which has not increased in decades and does not proportionally cover the costs it did decades ago. The allowance pays a percentage of the total cost from the Pickens School teachers' employment. An increase to this allowance should be proportional to current Pickens School budgets and cover the same percentage of costs that the \$150,000 funded when the bill was first approved over 30 years ago.

We will also build upon strategies to increase enrollment at Pickens School and offer support to Principal Long and the staff and faculty for continued efficient operation. To support enrollment the LSIC will focus on adding quality programs at Pickens School and offer support within the classrooms. We will encourage our community and parents to engage with the school in positive and additive ways and will actively promote the qualities of the school to the surrounding area as well as offer workforce development opportunities. If we remain open, the Pickens LSIC will brainstorm on creative ways to increase retention and boost enrollment at Pickens School.

Public schools are vital for our country, especially rural public schools like Pickens School. When we consider that "the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members," we believe Pickens School should be imitated and duplicated across Randolph County, not closed. Please let us continue to 'lead with purpose.'

Respectfully submitted by the Pickens Local School Improvement Council, 2024

## **Appendix of Supporting Documents**

### **Footnote links throughout the statement:**

1. <https://wvmetronews.com/2024/09/15/latest-data-shows-states-tourism-industry-is-breaking-records/>
2. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/pressure-to-close-schools-is-ramping-up-what-districts-need-to-know/2024/01>
3. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/race-is-a-big-factor-in-school-closures-what-you-need-to-know/2023/11>
4. <https://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/school-closings-chicago-staff-and-student-experiences-and-academic-outcomes>
5. <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/about/news-room/press-releases-and-statements/2011/10/19/study-of-school-closings-in-six-cities-provides-lessons-for-philadelphia>
6. <https://wvde.us/accountability/local-school-improvement-council-lsic/#lsic-frequently-asked-questions--faqs->
7. <https://www.movebuddha.com/blog/migration-moving-report/>
8. Ibid.
9. [https://regulations.justia.com/resources/v2024073000/wv/admin/2024/126\\_172\\_3\\_1.pdf#:~:text=School%20facilities%20are%20an%20integral%20and%20expensive,programs%20evolve%20to%20respond%20to%20students'%20needs](https://regulations.justia.com/resources/v2024073000/wv/admin/2024/126_172_3_1.pdf#:~:text=School%20facilities%20are%20an%20integral%20and%20expensive,programs%20evolve%20to%20respond%20to%20students'%20needs)
10. [http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/fy25\\_budget.pdf](http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/fy25_budget.pdf)
11. [http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/rcs\\_pickens\\_closure\\_application\\_2024-25sy\\_impact\\_document\\_.pdf](http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/rcs_pickens_closure_application_2024-25sy_impact_document_.pdf)
12. <https://www.nerdwallet.com/calculator/inflation-calculator>
13. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-07/how-distance-to-school-affects-student-well-being>
14. Ibid.
15. <https://housingmatters.urban.org/articles/how-students-transportation-options-or-lack-thereof-affect-educational-and-health-outcomes#:~:text=A%20study%20found%20that%20a,their%20peers%20with%20shorter%20commutes.>
16. <http://attendanceworks.org>
17. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/study-links-longer-school-bus-rides-to-chronic-absenteeism/2022/06>
18. [http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/superintendents\\_update\\_october\\_15\\_2024.pdf](http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/superintendents_update_october_15_2024.pdf)
19. <https://zoomwv.k12.wv.us/Dashboard/dashboard/7301>
20. [https://credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/closure\\_final\\_volume\\_i.pdf](https://credo.stanford.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/closure_final_volume_i.pdf)
21. [https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2014/fs\\_classsize\\_2010.pdf](https://www.aft.org/sites/default/files/media/2014/fs_classsize_2010.pdf)
22. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/as-enrollment-declines-districts-consider-closing-schools/2024/01>
23. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1233167>
24. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED401088>
25. <https://www.urbanexodus.com/post/rural-schools-matter-the-community-and-economic-impact-of-public-schools>
26. [https://www.wvlegislature.gov/wvcode/wv\\_con.cfm#articleXII](https://www.wvlegislature.gov/wvcode/wv_con.cfm#articleXII)

### **Body copy links throughout the statement:**

1. Ascend, WV - <https://ascendwv.com/the-offer/program-overview/>
2. Grant Opportunity 1 - <https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2023/2023-challenge.html>
3. Grant Opportunity 2 - <https://sites.ed.gov/idea/discretionary-grants/>
4. Pickens LSIC Transportation Analysis Presentation - <https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LI02mOXXufZztiO3oJeoWdmlaC6LyFcHbNkIFiz0Ngc/edit?usp=sharing>
5. Pickens LSIC Support Pickens School Video - [https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCcd\\_btOVIZ/?utm\\_source=ig\\_web\\_copy\\_link](https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCcd_btOVIZ/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link)

### Speeches and letters of support

1. [Diane Betler](#) - Former Pickens School principal, Pickens LSIC chair  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kPq5i7rS4hXTwETGalSmeecZXAB48H7x/view?usp=sharing>
2. [Parker Curry](#) - 10th Grader at Pickens School  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/11NduXidmh5YAIM13\\_tEhPRWD5fFfNXKs/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/11NduXidmh5YAIM13_tEhPRWD5fFfNXKs/view?usp=sharing)
3. [Lucy Lacocque](#) - 5th Grader at Pickens School  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LOXloMM-RcFaPCO1ilyhPg1Wjev8Ap-p/view?usp=sharing>
4. [Jonathan Lacocque](#) - Parent and Pickens LSIC member  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1W1vLBan5K2N-j75sAALfio4KMLEP8NN9/view?usp=sharing>
5. [Daniel Lehmann, Kevin Betler, & Randy Long](#) - Pickens LSIC members  
<https://docs.google.com/presentation/d/1LI02mOXXufZztiO3oJeoWdmlaC6LyFcHbNkIFiz0Ngc/edit?usp=sharing>
6. [Mark Allen](#) - Pickens School Counselor and LSIC member  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1RsTukdhQyhUFN5XsDaSh69eVcJXRorRIT/view?usp=sharing>
7. [David Johnson](#) - Capturing Kids' Hearts Leadership Strategist  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1LKvzTF0-9zP3wan7ovwWhD64IEUHMDqd/view?usp=sharing>
8. [Lisa Koerner](#) - Former Pickens School student  
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1ZuQ2btXCi6aFnSPgAyvD5V6pj4ZkrFsX/view?usp=sharing>
9. [Will Ross](#) - Financial Analysis  
[http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/pickens\\_school\\_closure\\_presentation\\_-\\_11.19.24\\_vf.pdf](http://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/uploads/2/8/7/7/28778923/pickens_school_closure_presentation_-_11.19.24_vf.pdf)
10. [Emily Huguenin](#) - Ascend program  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jrX7hixeNLAUq724ixYy0NN6wY\\_0fGvT/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jrX7hixeNLAUq724ixYy0NN6wY_0fGvT/view?usp=sharing)
11. [Norma Woody](#) - Adrian PSD  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hsgDLf3eN1NPI2Tn7GtluN\\_qvZ7KjbW3/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hsgDLf3eN1NPI2Tn7GtluN_qvZ7KjbW3/view?usp=sharing)