

**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**

**October 3, 2025**

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## 1.0 Introduction

In January 2025, a blizzard closed every school in Randolph County. Our communities of Pickens, Helvetia, and Czar sat snowed in, huddled around our laptops, trying to follow the hearing for proposed closure of Harman School over Zoom. The audio crackled and cut out, neighbors texted each other to piece together what we had missed, and one friend in Elkins sent live updates from the meeting so we wouldn't be left in the dark.

That scramble to follow the hearing perfectly sums up what it's like to live in Helvetia and Pickens, WV—remote enough that even participating in decisions that shape our children's lives requires persistence, teamwork, and luck with the Wi-Fi.

That night, Harman got good news: its school would remain open. The next morning, we learned that the closure hearing for our school, Pickens, had been canceled and rescinded by the Superintendent. For a brief moment, we breathed easier. Pickens was saved—for a little while.

But Pickens School is once again on the chopping block. And once again, we are not giving up on our school. In fact, our advocacy during the last legislative session helped Pickens School secure an increase to the School of Isolation Allowance totaling \$250,000 annually—an increase by \$100,000. Despite this success, despite improvements in infrastructure, attendance, and student performance, Pickens is once again targeted for closure.

On September 09, 2025, Superintendent Dr. Shawn Dilly recommended closing Pickens School and consolidating students to *George Ward Elementary and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School*. In response, the Pickens Local School Improvement Council (LSIC) presents this statement: evidence and data showing that closure is neither financially viable nor legally sound, and a plea to the Randolph County Board of Education to reject the proposal.

Dr. Dilly's long-term plan proposes closing seven schools across a county the size of Rhode Island (1,000+ square miles) and busing students across mountains for up to two hours each way. Closing Pickens School would mean:

- a. Little to no financial savings for the county;
- b. Bus rides far beyond legal time limits under WV state code;
- c. Unsafe travel conditions across mountainous roads with no cell phone reception;
- d. Declines in academic performance, moving students from a higher-performing into lower-performing schools;
- e. Accelerated population loss for Randolph County and West Virginia; and
- f. Erosion of historic communities that help drive our state's \$9 billion tourism industry<sup>1</sup>.

This report is a response to the September 2025 *Impact Statement For Closure*. We ask that the Board weigh these facts and vote against closure of Pickens School.

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

## **2.0 A Call For Deeper Community Involvement**

As concerned citizens, we oppose both the Pickens School closure and the broader consolidation plan presented by Dr. Dilly. Randolph County does not deserve piecemeal closures but rather it deserves a strategic plan that balances educational equity, fiscal responsibility, and community stability. It is neither fair nor wise to cut small rural schools like Pickens that cost less to operate and consistently outperform larger, more expensive facilities closer to Elkins.

Research shows that poorly handled closures:

- Compromise student achievement,<sup>2</sup>
- Exacerbate inequities,<sup>3</sup> and
- Rarely deliver the promised financial savings.<sup>4</sup>

Instead of top-down closures, the county should collaborate with the state-mandated Local School Improvement Councils (LSICs), designed to represent community voices in education. A coalition of LSICs would unite principals, staff, faculty, parents, students, and education experts to work alongside the Superintendent and Board toward a robust county-wide plan.

Such a plan would be deliberate, transparent, and collaborative. It would ask each community to bring its own strategies forward and would prevent the false efficiencies of across-the-board consolidation. That is the kind of leadership that could make Randolph County a model for rural education reform across West Virginia—and the nation.

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<sup>2</sup> [Education Week: School Closings and Student Experiences and Academic Outcomes, 2018](#)

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

<sup>4</sup> [Education Week: Study of School Closings in Six Cities, 2011](#)

### **3.0 Responses to the Impact Statement For Closure**

The Pickens LSIC offers this reply to the official *Impact Statement For Closure*. Our review finds that the document contains misleading information, omissions, and flawed assumptions in the following sections:

- **Student enrollment:** Projections suggesting only two students will remain by 2033 are patently inaccurate, ignoring actual enrollment trends, local birth rates, and current 100% graduation rates.
- **Facilities:** Pickens is the newest school in the county (built in 2006). Maintenance costs are modest compared to multimillion-dollar upgrades needed at receiving schools.
- **Cost per student:** The “economies of scale” argument is overstated and based on incomplete data. Calculations exclude Pickens School’s State Isolation Allowance funding and underestimate retention costs. When corrected, closure creates no real savings and will cost the county more money than keeping the school open.
- **Transportation:** Bus routes would exceed state legal limits for elementary students by more than 40 minutes, placing children on unsafe, exhausting commutes across mountain roads without access to cell service and emergency services. Proposals to shorten the route by requiring parents to drive students to drop-off points do not solve this problem. Requiring parental transport to a hub doesn’t resolve the constitutional or policy problem — it just pushes cost, time, and safety risks onto families.
- **Academics:** Pickens students consistently outperform George Ward and Tygarts Valley in math, reading, and science. Closure would lower—not raise—educational outcomes.
- **Community:** Closing Pickens would devastate Helvetia, Pickens, and Czar, which are historic communities central to tourism, culture, and the local economy.

Pickens is one of the smallest schools in the United States, but it is also one of the most efficient and highest-performing, especially given its resources. Its merits should be modeled, not dismantled.

The comparison below offers a concise overview of the facts, highlighting why closure of Pickens School would be both financially unsound and educationally harmful.

	<b>Closure Claims</b>	<b>Corrected/Actual Data</b>
<b>Annual Savings from Closure</b>	\$319,014.61	<b>\$0 – closure costs more and will likely put the county in the RED</b> once personnel reassignment, lost state aid, and continued building ownership are included
<b>State “School of Isolation” Funding</b>	Not mentioned	<b>\$250,000 annually</b> (earmarked for Pickens; disappears if school closes)
<b>Cost Per Student (Pickens)</b>	\$22,387 (inflated)	<b>Closer to county average</b> once funding and attrition losses are included
<b>Facilities Costs</b>	\$632,754 (Pickens) vs. \$18.5 million (receiving schools)	Pickens is the <b>newest school in the county (2006)</b> with modest, manageable needs
<b>Enrollment Projections</b>	Only 2 students left by 2033	<b>Ignores</b> enrollment, Pickens’ 100% graduation rate, and consistent K-12 retention
<b>Transportation Times</b>	54 minutes (claimed)	<b>102–115 minutes</b> , exceeding WV legal limits by 40+ minutes for elementary
<b>Academics</b>	Not highlighted	Pickens students <b>outperform</b> George Ward and Tygarts Valley in math, reading, and science
<b>Community Impact</b>	“No nearby services”	Dozens of small businesses, historic tourism hubs (Helvetia & Pickens), festivals fueling WV’s \$9B tourism economy

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 destroyed by closure.

### 3.1 Enrollment

The *Impact Statement For Closure* describes declining population and student enrollment in Randolph County since 2010. While these trends are real, using them as justification for closing Pickens School is nearsighted and ultimately self-defeating. Closing schools in already fragile rural areas accelerates population decline, drives families away, and reduces the overall student population of Randolph County Schools. It creates a downward spiral wherein fewer schools leads to fewer families which leads to fewer students, and more closures.

Pickens, Helvetia, and Czar are remote communities where families face significant barriers to education access. These are not communities that can simply absorb the loss of a school. If Pickens School closes, families will be left with three untenable choices:

- **Subject their children to long, dangerous bus rides** to Tygarts Valley or Upshur County;
- **Withdraw from the public school system entirely** to consider homeschooling, private or charter options—both of which siphon resources away from Randolph County Schools;
- **Relocate**, which furthers the loss of population, small business, and tax base in our county.

The enrollment projections in the *Impact Statement For Closure* shown below are deeply misleading. For example, the county's chart suggests Pickens School will only have two students across the entire K-12 school in 2033-34. This projection is demonstrably false. It assumes current students will not continue through grade levels or graduate (despite Pickens School's 100% graduation rate). In fact the 2025-26 fifth grade class of four students disappears entirely from the county's chart by 2033. The analysis also assumes no new families will move into the area and no children will be born, move, or transfer here in the next decade.

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, 2025*

Such assumptions are not supported by statewide data. West Virginia is actively working to attract new residents. Programs like Ascend WV, which serve Elkins and Randolph County, have already shown strong results, with the state seeing a 60% increase in mover interest in 2022-23.<sup>5</sup> Remote, unique places like Pickens and Helvetia are exactly the kind of “hidden gems” that both state leadership and tourism development efforts are promoting. Public schools are essential to this growth. Without them, families will not choose to relocate here, undermining the very economic development strategies the state has embraced.

Yes, this is a “*chicken or the egg*” dilemma—schools need families, and families need schools. But history shows that investment in schools is what keeps communities alive. Rather than using declining enrollment as an excuse for closure, Randolph County must recognize that rural schools like Pickens School are part of the solution to reversing these trends.

Pickens School should not be seen as a problem to solve, but as a pillar to build on. By keeping our smallest schools strong, we make it possible for families to stay, return, and invest in the future of Randolph County.

<sup>5</sup> [Why West Virginia. Ascend](#)

### 3.2 Facilities

Pickens School, located in Pickens, West Virginia was built in 2006, making it the **newest facility in Randolph County**. Its gymnasium, originally constructed in 1954, was fully renovated and brought to code in 2006. By contrast, the receiving schools named in the closure plan, Tygarts Valley High School and George Ward Elementary, require tens of millions of dollars in upgrades.

According to the *Impact Statement For Closure*:

- Pickens Schools requires \$632,754.81 to be brought fully up to code.
- Tygarts Valley High School requires \$13,913,245.50 in upgrades.
- George Ward Elementary requires \$4,611,946.02 in upgrades.

This comparison speaks volumes: the county is considering closing its newest, best-maintained school while pouring resources into older, less efficient facilities that carry far higher costs.

The specific maintenance items listed for Pickens School include ADA lift repair, drainage improvements, HVAC replacement, and eventual gymnasium upkeep. These are normal, predictable needs for a nearly 20-year-old school building. These are not structural or systemic failures. Many of these issues could be removed with community partnership, volunteer support, and targeted grants. For example, accessibility-focused initiatives like the [AARP Community Challenge Grant](#) or [IDEA's Discretionary Grants](#) could specifically help fund ADA-related upgrades.

If Pickens School remains open, the LSIC is committed to supporting efficient operations and will pursue outside fundraising to offset reasonable maintenance costs.

#### **Errors in the *Impact Statement For Closure* Utilization Data**

In *Section 3.2b* Facilities of the *Impact Statement For Closure*, the county provides a utilization table that misrepresents Pickens Schools capacity. Several errors undermine its credibility.

##### **1. Inflated Building Capacity**

The Building Program Utilization Worksheet in the statement lists a total building capacity of 195, but this figure improperly includes the library (25 seats). According to the West Virginia School Building Authority's own Building Program Utilization Worksheet, libraries, cafeterias, itinerant spaces, and resource rooms should not be counted toward classroom capacity.

##### **2. Inaccurate Classroom Capacity Assumptions**

The county relies on SBA guidelines for maximum pupils per grade (20 for Kindergarten, 25 for grades 1–12, 50 for gymnasium), which assume large, modern classrooms built to new standards. Pickens School's classrooms, constructed in 2006, are smaller than these statewide maximums. Under WV Code §126CSR172 subsections 403–509,

capacity must be measured by actual square footage per child, not generic SBA assumptions.

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

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

*Formula for Program Utilization:*

Enrollment (**27**) divided by Total Program Capacity (**128**) multiplied by 100 = 21%

With an enrollment of 27 students in 2025-26, Pickens School’s actual utilization rate is 21%. This is higher than the county’s reported 16%. While still below the SBA targets, it is important that the Board base decisions on accurate, legally consistent calculations.

Finally, Pickens is the county’s **newest and best-maintained facility**. The county’s own data shows that the true burden of deferred maintenance lies with the proposed receiving schools, not with Pickens. Closing Pickens School to send students into schools requiring **\$18.5 million in repairs** is not fiscally sound, and misrepresenting utilization only further undermines the closure proposal. With community support, modest grant funding, and accurate reporting, Pickens School is well-positioned to continue serving students safely and effectively for decades to come.

<sup>6</sup> [Guidelines for Sq. Footage per Student is outlined in WV Code §126CSR172 subsections 403-509](#)

### 3.3 Finances & Personnel

The *Impact Statement For Closure* argues that closing Pickens School would save the county approximately \$319,014.61 annually. However, our independent review, conducted in partnership with financial professionals, shows this estimate is materially overstated, incomplete, and misleading.

When real-world factors are included, closure of Pickens School would not save money. In fact, it would likely **cost the county an additional \$49,000 per year.**

The Randolph County Board of Education's financial analysis excluded critical realities and is inaccurate for the following reasons:

- **Continued building ownership costs** - Even if Pickens School closes, the county must still maintain, heat, and secure the facility. Utilities and maintenance related costs cannot be reduced to zero.
- **Loss of state "School of Isolation" funding** - Pickens receives \$250,000 annually earmarked by law. If the school closes, that money disappears from Randolph County.
- **Personnel miscalculation** - Pickens staff are senior and, under state law, would replace less-tenured teachers elsewhere. Their salaries remain within the system. The county overstated savings by \$81,619. This is based on the 2025-2026 average Randolph County teacher salary of \$57,947.<sup>7</sup>
- **Transportation and bus amortization** - Longer bus routes means higher costs and faster depreciation, not savings. At minimum, this adds \$2,500 annually based on school bus amortization guidelines provided by other state departments of education.<sup>8</sup>
- **Other hidden costs** - Including reimbursement to parents for travel to bus stops, potential housing of stranded students during winter storms, and unavoidable school supply expenses that follow students.

Please find our full 2025 financial presentation [here](#). Our adjusted analysis finds that Randolph County will experience a net loss rather than savings by closing Pickens School (see detailed table below).

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<sup>7</sup> [Randolph County BOE Teacher Annual Salary Schedule](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Bus Depreciation and Book Value](#)

# Breakdown of Estimated Variables

## Randolph County Current Pickens Costs

Item	Amount
Utilities	\$41,802.72
Personnel	\$371,354.11
Maintenance	\$17,753.12
Transportation	\$28,388.07
Other	\$37,237.03
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$496,535.05</b>

## Randolph County Net Pickens Costs

Item	Amount
Utilities	\$34,321.69
Personnel	\$371,354.11
Maintenance	\$12,454.61
Transportation	-\$36,352.83
Other	-\$62,762.97
<b>Total Costs Cut</b>	<b>\$319,014.61</b>

## Pickens LSIC Current Pickens Costs

Item	Amount
Utilities	\$41,802.72
Personnel	\$371,354.11
Maintenance	\$17,753.12
Transportation	\$28,388.07
Other	\$37,237.03
<b>Total Costs</b>	<b>\$496,535.05</b>

## Pickens LSIC Net Pickens Costs

Item	Amount
Utilities	\$24,321.69
Personnel	\$289,735.00
Maintenance	\$0.00
Transportation	-\$45,858.43
Other	-\$67,199.22
<b>Total Costs Cut</b>	<b>\$200,999.04</b>

**State Funding for Pickens School** **\$250,000.00**

**Adjusted Cost Savings** **-\$49,000.96**

If the closure of Pickens School is supposed to be justified on financial grounds, the numbers simply do not support it. Closing Pickens School **increases costs** to the county and eliminates guaranteed state aid creating a net loss of **-\$49,000.96**.

Last year, when estimated savings were presented as ~\$440,000, the Randolph County Board of Education canceled the closure hearing before we presented findings that defied these findings. Today, the savings claim has shrunk even further, and with correct numbers, closure is shown to be financially reckless.

The FY 2025-26 operating budget for all of Randolph County Schools is \$43,653,164.<sup>9</sup> Pickens School represents about **1% of the total county education budget**, yet provides some of the county's highest academic performance and attendance rates. From a financial standpoint, closing Pickens School is neither sound nor defensible.

<sup>9</sup> [Randolph County Board of Education Budget Fiscal Year 2025](#)

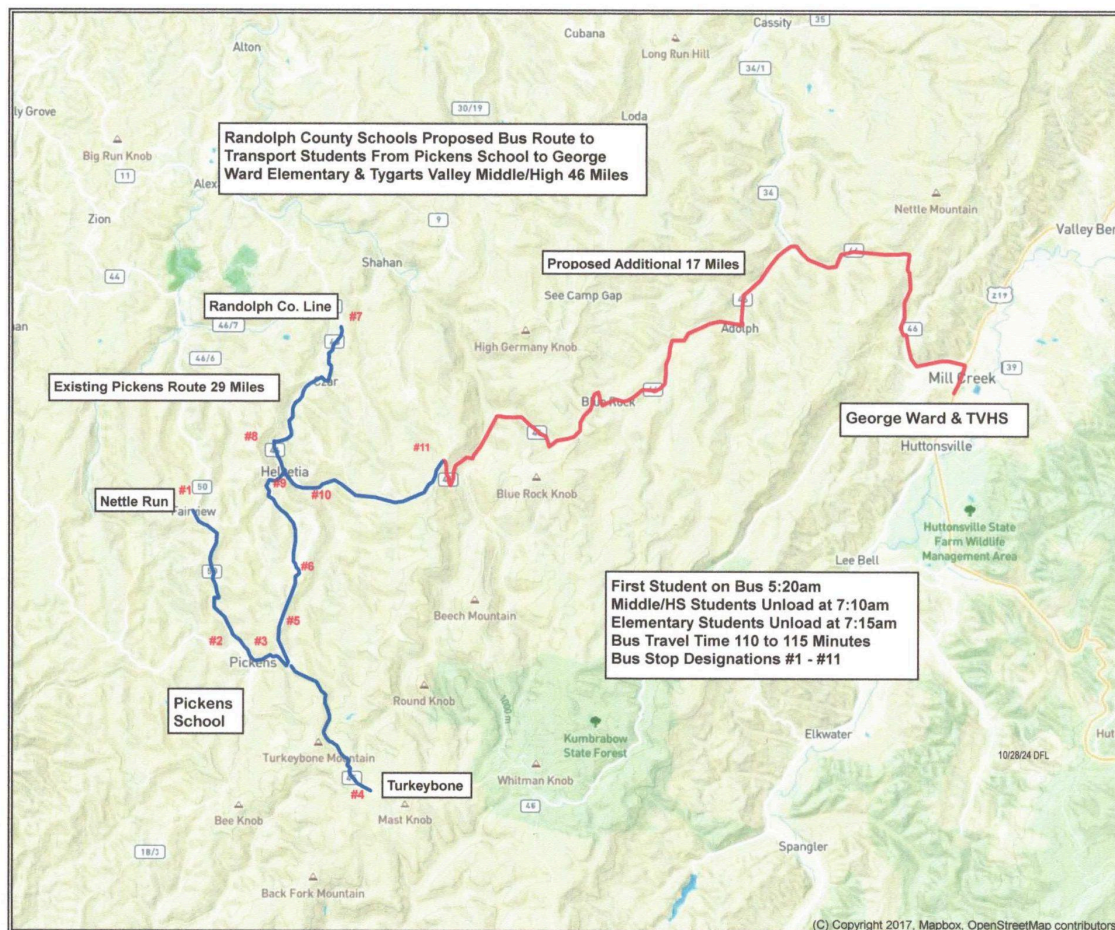
### 3.4 Student Transportation

The *Impact Statement For Closure* claims that the new bus route transporting children to Tygarts Valley will be 54 minutes, and it lists the current travel route as 75 minutes. Both claims are inaccurate.

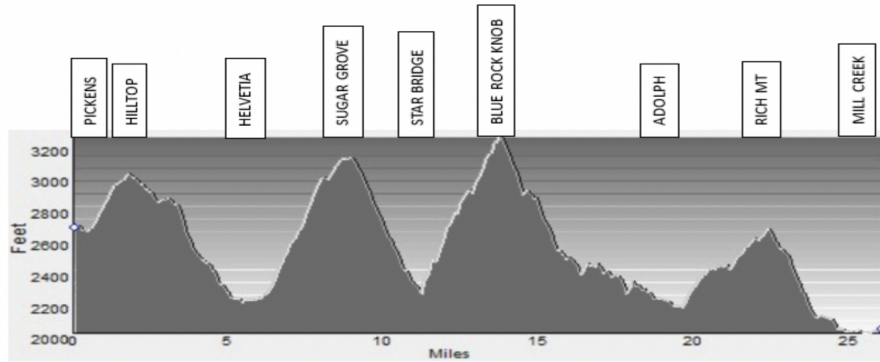
The Statement lists the current Pickens bus route as 75 minutes. Our independent review found this figure is inaccurate, and we will present evidence at the hearing to demonstrate the actual times.

Also, the *proposed* consolidation route to Tygarts Valley is not 54 minutes but **102 minutes for elementary students** and **115 minutes for high school students**, according to an independent analysis conducted by the Pickens LSIC with support from retired Randolph County Director of Transportation Randy Long, Bus Driver Jerry Hull, and subject-matter experts in mapping and state code. The county's official estimate underreports student travel time by **nearly an hour**. The maps and table below accurately identify the time and location of each stop along the new route.

See the Pickens LSIC Transportation presentation [here](#).



## 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			

## School Bus Route Legal Violations

According to **WV Code §18-2E-5d**, the maximum recommended one-way bus rides are:

- 30 minutes for elementary students
- 45 minutes for middle school students
- 60 minutes for high school students

Even with a waiver (which allows up to **30 minutes over the recommended time**), the maximum permitted ride for elementary students is **60 minutes**. The new route is **102 minutes—42 minutes over the legal limit**.

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.”

This language is explicit: **the county cannot legally create the very routes being proposed**.

Furthermore, these are not existing, lawful routes. For example, the suggested reroute over Turkeybone from Monterville is not an established bus route and therefore may not legally be used to transport students. Creating entirely new, excessively long routes is directly prohibited by law.

For these reasons, the waiver request and proposed routes must be rejected as unlawful, not merely inadvisable.

To understand the true burden of the new route, imagine you are a student, even as young as five years old and you are asked to experience the following for thirteen years of education.

You climb onto a school bus in Pickens at **5:20 a.m.** in the dark, mid-winter cold. The route winds over mountain roads where cell phones don't work, bus radios cut in and out, there are no restrooms, and snowfall routinely tops **168 inches a year**—three times what falls in Mill Creek. By the time the bus reaches Tygarts Valley nearly two hours later, that child is already exhausted, expected to sit through a full school day before retracing the same dangerous route home.

The return trip offers no relief. Flooding, downed trees, reckless drivers, logging or coal truck wrecks, or sudden mountain snow squalls can force buses to back down twisting

roads or detour miles out of the way through Buckhannon or Monteverille. For some children, the day ends at **4:30 p.m.**, more than **11 hours after they left home.**

Few adults would willingly accept those conditions for a workday commute. It is unconscionable to demand it of young children.

Last year, the LSIC hosted a demonstration ride from Tygarts Valley to Pickens with Superintendent Dr. Dilly, Board Member Edward Daniels, and community members. Adults who took the ride reported significant fatigue and motion sickness. What was exhausting for adults once would be unbearable for children twice a day, **180 days a year, for 13 years.**

Dr. Dilly may propose a “shortened route” plan that relies on forcing families to drive children to two central pickup hubs in Pickens and Helvetia. This does not actually reduce the commute—it simply shifts part of the burden, cost, and risk onto parents. Children will still spend nearly two hours traveling across the mountains each way, only part of it in a school bus.

Most importantly, WV Code §18-2E-5d sets limits on student commute times by bus in order to protect kids from unreasonable travel times. Shifting part of the burden onto parents does not make the trip legal or equitable—it only transfers cost, time, and risk to families, which violates the *spirit of the law*. The state has a constitutional obligation to provide safe, equal access to education, not to outsource it to families at 5:00 a.m. in winter conditions.

Forcing children to commute 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. Long commutes are not only unsafe but harmful to learning and health for some of the following reasons:

- **Sleep loss:** A national study found each additional minute of commute cuts student sleep by 1.3 minutes. A 40-minute overage could mean nearly an hour less sleep each school night.<sup>10</sup>
- **Attendance:** Research in New York City found absenteeism rose to **12% among students with commutes longer than one hour.**<sup>11</sup> Chronic absenteeism, according to Attendance Works, undermines reading proficiency by 3rd grade and jeopardizes graduation rates.<sup>12</sup>
- **Exercise & health:** Students with long commutes report less physical activity, more fatigue, and higher stress.
- **Academic outcomes:** Sleep deprivation and absenteeism are directly linked to lower test scores and graduation rates.

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<sup>10</sup> [How Distance To School Affects Student Wellbeing. 2019](#)

<sup>11</sup> [How Students' Transportation Options—or Lack Thereof—Affect Educational and Health Outcomes. 2023](#)

<sup>12</sup> [The Attendance Imperative: How States Can Advance Achievement Reducing Chronic Absence. 2014](#)

Pickens students are thriving today. In Fall 2024, Pickens was one of only four Randolph County schools to achieve **95%+ attendance**. Forcing children onto nearly two-hour bus rides will reverse that progress and punish students for living in rural communities.

The proposed transportation plan is **unsafe, unlawful, educationally harmful, and adds significant risk and liability to the county**. It disregards state code, ignores documented safety hazards, and underestimates the profound toll on children's health, learning, and family life. No amount of fiscal justification can outweigh the immorality of asking a five-year-old to spend nearly four hours a day on a school bus.

### 3.5 Student Educational Program

The proposed closure of Pickens School necessitates a close examination of formal academic assessments. Historically, Pickens School students consistently achieve strong results on standardized tests. The data below, sourced from the West Virginia General Summative Assessment<sup>13</sup> across Grades 3-8 at Pickens School, George Ward Elementary, and Tygarts Valley Middle/High School.

**FY 2024-25 West Virginia General Summative Assessment Scores**

	Pickens School	George Ward Elementary	Tygarts Valley Middle High School
Math	82%	65%	35%
Reading	88%	63%	53%
Science	100%	80%	52%

\*Scores indicate the percentage of students at *partially meets, meets, and exceeds* proficiency rates.

These results clearly demonstrate that transferring Pickens School students to George Ward School and Tygarts Valley School would place them in academically lower-performing environments. In fact, Dr. Dilly reported to the Board that Elkins Middle School ranked 154th out of 168; Harman Middle is 167th out of 168; and **Tygarts Valley Middle is 168th out of 168**.<sup>14</sup> One of the receiving schools is ranked last in the state. Research from the Center for Research on Education Outcomes indicates that students transferring from stronger to weaker academic settings experience a decline in test scores.<sup>15</sup> This poses a significant risk for Pickens School students and would negatively impact overall county performance.

#### The Benefits of Small Class Sizes at Pickens School

Pickens School's small class sizes are instrumental in allowing teachers to effectively identify individual student strengths and weaknesses, providing ample opportunity for remediation and growth. Extensive research consistently highlights the positive outcomes associated with smaller student-teacher ratios.<sup>16</sup> Moving Pickens students to larger classes at George Ward and Tygarts Valley Middle and High School, combined with the challenges of extended bus rides and reduced time for homework, would undoubtedly hinder their educational development.

<sup>13</sup> [West Virginia General Summative Assessments](#)  
<sup>14</sup> [Dilly: Randolph school system ranks last in state](#)  
<sup>15</sup> [Lights Off: Practice and Impact of Closing Low-Performing Schools, 2017](#)  
<sup>16</sup> [Benefits of Small Class Size, 2010](#)

## **A Legacy of Excellence: Awards, Recognition, and Achievements**

Pickens School students consistently demonstrate exceptional academic and extracurricular achievements. Below is a selection of their notable accomplishments:

### **2023-24 School Years:**

- Eighth-grade students were the Fifth Place State Team winners in the Nationwide Middle School Math Program: MathCounts Competition Series.
- A fourth-grade student earned first place in the county writing contest and participated in the *West Virginia Young Writers* ceremony and *Young Writer's Day* in Charleston.
- Another fourth grader secured 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.
- A senior from Pickens achieved first place at both the *Randolph County Social Studies Fair* and the *Regional Social Studies Fair*, subsequently competing at the state level.
- A seventh-grade student was selected for the Governor's STEM Institute for a week in Morgantown, recognized for her mathematics achievements, interpersonal skills, and maturity.
- Since 2015: Middle School Students have consistently achieved The Silver Level Award in the MathCounts Foundation program.
- Pickens School was honored with the Capturing Kids' Hearts (CKH) National Showcase School Award

### **2024-25 School Year:**

- Pickens students received Randolph County Young Writers Contest awards across multiple grades: 2nd place (second grade), special award (5th grade), 3rd place (10th grade), and two special awards (10th grade).
- A freshman was selected for the Governor's STEM Institute in Greenbank.
- A sophomore was selected for the Governor's Computer Science Institute in Morgantown.
- A sophomore was selected to attend the WV Junior Nursing Academy.
- Students received multiple i-Ready Mathematics Achievement Awards.
- Pickens School was honored with the CKH National Showcase School Award
  - CKH Leadership Strategist David Johnson commended Pickens School, stating, "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."

### **Pickens Panther Archery Team:**

- The team, comprising students from fourth through twelfth grades, has consistently competed regionally and statewide since established in 2011.
- Archers have won in the *West Virginia Bullseye Archery Tournament* and competed in

the first-ever *West Virginia National Archery in Schools 3D State Tournament*, with one archer advancing to the *Eastern National 3D Tournament*.

- Pickens archers have participated in the national competition in Louisville, Kentucky, twelve times since 2011.
- 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. Its closure would deny students the opportunity to pursue their passion.

Beyond academic and soft skill development, Pickens School fosters strong community engagement:

- **New Playground:** Through the dedication of families, staff, and community donations, Pickens School raised \$89,137.00 to purchase a new playground, completed in Fall 2025. This provides children with years of exercise, outdoor enjoyment, and social interaction.
- **Plant the Seed Project:** Students actively participate in their high tunnel, planting, caring for, and harvesting vegetables and berries for the school's lunch salad bar daily. This hands-on experience integrates science and biology lessons, teaching students about germination, transplanting, and plant care as well as healthy eating habits. During the summer, they share their harvest with the community, as showcased in this video: [here](#).

### 3.6 Community

The proposed closure of Pickens School threatens the historical, cultural, and economic fabric of Randolph County. Pickens, Helvetia, and Czar are small but deeply resilient and important communities. Removing the school that serves these communities risks accelerating population loss, weakening local businesses, and eroding civic trust in public education.

The *Impact Statement For Closure* inaccurately claims that these communities lack essential services. In fact, Pickens, Helvetia, and Czar host dozens of businesses, churches, cultural organizations, and civic institutions that contribute directly to the county's economy and social vitality. From Richter's Maple Syrup and the Hütte Restaurant to Swiss Roots Store, Little Meadow Health Clinic, and the Pickens Volunteer Fire Department, these communities are far from empty. They are active, contributing, and alive.

The following businesses and services are currently available:

#### **Pickens, WV:**

- Heavenly Heritage Winery
- Pickens Baptist Church
- Pickens Department of Highways
- Pickens Historical Society
- Pickens Volunteer Fire Department
- Pickens United States Post Office
- Richter's Maple Syrup
- Sacred Heart Catholic Church

#### **Helvetia, WV:**

- Burki Enterprises
- Coat of Arms
- Helvetia Mercantile
- Helvetia Public Library
- Helvetia Restoration & Development Org.
- Helvetia Timber Works
- Helvetia United States Post Office
- Hilltop Honey
- Hofer Construction
- Little Meadow Health Clinic
- Streamline Seamless Gutter
- Swiss Mountain Creations
- Swiss Roots General Store & Inn
- Swiss Sisters
- The Beekeeper Inn
- The Hütte Restaurant
- Zion Presbyterian Church

**Czar, WV:**

- Czar Haus
- Greenway Excavating
- Pine Grove Methodist Church

**Blue Rock, WV:**

- Ice's Farm

Closing Pickens School would undermine this vitality. Schools are anchors of rural communities. They provide employment, serve as gathering spaces, and sustain traditions that attract new families. Graduation ceremonies, concerts, archery tournaments, alumni events, and festivals all revolve around the school. Once a school closes, research shows that community life declines.<sup>17</sup> Parents become less involved, extracurricular opportunities diminish, and former school buildings often sit vacant, fall in disrepair, or are sold for non-community purposes.

The impact stretches beyond daily life. Helvetia, which Pickens School serves, is on the National Register of Historic Places and hosts world renowned cultural events such as Fasnacht and the Helvetia Fair. Pickens hosts one of the largest events in the county, the Pickens Maple Syrup Festival. These events, and the businesses they support, depend on strong year-round communities. Governor Jim Justice has asked West Virginia tourism to spotlight “hidden gems” like Pickens and Helvetia. Removing their schools undermines this very strategy by driving away families and eroding the base of volunteers, organizers, and small business owners that make these events and rural tourism possible.

Research confirms what our lived experience shows. Between 2012-2018, studies found that students enduring long bus rides, especially in rural areas, become less involved in extracurricular activities, even when more options are offered.<sup>18</sup> Kathleen Cotton, a nationally recognized researcher, observed that school consolidation often replaces strong parent and student input with “layers of bureaucracy,” leading to apathy, lower accountability, and weaker academic performance.<sup>19</sup> By contrast, small schools like Pickens consistently demonstrate higher parental involvement, stronger teacher-student connections, and better attendance rates.

As Bates College professor Mara Tieken, a leading scholar of rural education, explains:

“Rural schools have tremendous value...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>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> [Education Week: As Enrollment Declines, Districts Consider Closing Schools, 2024](#)

<sup>18</sup> [Rethinking the School Closure Research, 2019](#)

<sup>19</sup> [Affective and Social Benefits of Small-Scale Schooling, 1996](#)

<sup>20</sup> [Rural Schools Matter: The Community and Economic Impact of Public Schools](#)

Closure of Pickens School will not save money (as shown in Section 3.3). Instead, it will impose significant costs, including economic, social, and cultural. The loss of even one rural school reverberates far beyond its walls. For Pickens, Helvetia, Czar and surrounding communities, it would mean the slow unraveling of the very fabric that sustains them and fractures their understanding of home. Perhaps worst of all, this plan robs rural communities of their most treasured asset: their youth and their families.

## **4.0 Conclusion**

The proposed closure of Pickens School rests largely on the theory of “economies of scale,” a principle borrowed from manufacturing that assumes costs drop as size increases. While that may apply to factories, it fails when applied to education. Schools are not assembly lines, and children are not products. Decades of research show that consolidation often harms rural communities, creates longer commutes, and reduces academic and social opportunities, while rarely delivering the savings promised.

The West Virginia Constitution guarantees equal access to high-quality education for every child, regardless of geographic location. That constitutional premise carries with it a recognition that some schools, like those in isolated rural communities, will cost more to operate. Just as it costs more to provide education to students with disabilities, it also costs more to provide meaningful education to remote areas. That expense is not wasteful; it is the price of equity.

The Pickens LSIC has worked tirelessly to meet every challenge set before us. We developed a plan to fundraise for the school, but when we asked the Superintendent for a written guarantee that those funds would prevent closure, that assurance was denied. Still we pressed forward. In the 2025 legislative session, our advocacy secured an increase in the School of Isolation Allowance to \$250,000 annually—a \$100,000 increase from prior years. The successful passage of this measure is a testament to the power of community-driven advocacy and its ability to effect positive change in educational policy. But we can only do this and more like it, if our school remains open. And it is important to note that the Allowance, as outlined in WV House Bill 4025, gives Randolph County those earmarked funds only if Pickens School remains open. Furthermore, pending Senate Bill 516 proposes extra state aid for “extremely remote schools” and explicitly prohibits a county board from closing an extremely remote school while receiving this aid. We will advocate for this Bill, which if passed could provide extra state aid to our extremely remote school.

If given the chance, the Pickens LSIC will continue this work: building enrollment, supporting staff and students, fundraising for maintenance, and serving as a model for what high-performing, low-cost rural schools can achieve. Pickens School has shown it is not a burden but an asset, with a 100% graduation rate, award-winning programs, impressive scores, and one of the highest attendance records in the county.

Rural public schools are indispensable. They educate children, anchor economies, sustain cultural life, and provide the very stability needed to attract and retain families. Closing them accelerates population loss, deepens economic hardship, and erodes trust in public institutions. As Bates College professor and researcher Mara Tieken has written, “Rural schools are the heartbeat of a town.” When the heartbeat stops, the community withers.

The true measure of West Virginia's commitment to its people will be found in how it treats its most vulnerable students, those in the mountains, the valleys, and the places harder to reach but no less deserving of opportunity.

Pickens School possesses the potential to serve as a model for rural education across West Virginia and the nation. Its success story should be celebrated, not dismantled. We urge the Randolph County Board of Education to reject the closure proposal, to honor the work our community has already done, and to empower us to continue leading with purpose.

Investing in Pickens School is investing in West Virginia's future. Closing Pickens will harm not only a school, but an entire region. To close Pickens is to choose decline. To keep it open is to choose vibrancy for West Virginia's future.

Respectfully submitted by the Pickens Local School Improvement Council, 2025

## 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://consortium.uchicago.edu/publications/school-closings-chicago-staff-and-student-experiences-and-academic-outcomes>
3. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/race-is-a-big-factor-in-school-closures-what-you-need-to-know/2023/11>
4. <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>
5. <https://ascendwv.com/why-west-virginia/#:~:text=Start%20Your%20Ascent.Meet%20Featured%20Ascenders>
6. [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)
7. [https://core-docs.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded\\_file/5360/RCSD/5157907/PROF\\_Salary\\_Schedules\\_RCBOE\\_26.pdf](https://core-docs.s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/documents/asset/uploaded_file/5360/RCSD/5157907/PROF_Salary_Schedules_RCBOE_26.pdf)
8. <https://www.ksde.gov/portals/0/school%20finance/budget/online%20budget%20packet/bus%20depreciation%20012.pdf>
9. <https://boe.rand.k12.wv.us/documents/departments/finance/budget-for-fy26-school-year/740148>
10. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-05-07/how-distance-to-school-affects-student-well-being>
11. <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>
12. <http://attendanceworks.org>
13. <https://zoomwv.k12.wv.us/Dashboard/dashboard/7301>
14. <https://www.theintermountain.com/news/local-news/2025/08/dilly-randolph-school-system-ranks-last-in-state/>
15. [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)
16. [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)
17. <https://www.edweek.org/leadership/as-enrollment-declines-districts-consider-closing-schools/2024/01>
18. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1233167>
19. <https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED401088>
20. <https://www.urbanexodus.com/post/rural-schools-matter-the-community-and-economic-impact-of-public-schools>

Body copy links throughout the statement:

1. AARP Community Challenge Grant  
<https://www.aarp.org/livable-communities/community-challenge/info-2023/2023-challenge.html>
2. IDEA's Discretionary Grants  
<https://sites.ed.gov/idea/discretionary-grants/>
3. LSIC Financial Presentation 2025  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JRBDW6CdKghotPdP7Y8HM5twbwf2en7b/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JRBDW6CdKghotPdP7Y8HM5twbwf2en7b/view?usp=drive_link)
4. Pickens LSIC Transportation Analysis Presentation 2024 and 2025  
<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/1RsTUkdhQyhUFN5XsDaSh69eVcJXRoRIT/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 2024  
[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. Will Ross - Financial Analysis 2025  
[https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JRBDW6CdKqhotPdP7Y8HM5twbwf2en7b/view?usp=drive\\_link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JRBDW6CdKqhotPdP7Y8HM5twbwf2en7b/view?usp=drive_link)
11. [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)
12. [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)