

Eclipse may delay school start

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The Clay County Board of Education is mulling the possibility of permitting students to start the 2017 fall term one day after the coming solar eclipse on Monday, Aug. 21.

Students would report for classes Tuesday, Aug. 22. Monday would be a teacher work day.

The reason for the possible postponement: safety considerations. Clay County Schools Superintendent Mark Leek and the board

took up the 2017-18 school calendar at the board's regularly scheduled meeting Monday evening.

"If we do have 30,000 visitors on our roads I do not know how we'll get buses on the roads, too," Leek said. He was referring to the number of tourists projected to inundate the mountain towns of western North Carolina to experience the first total eclipse to hit the continental United States in nearly four decades.

Hayesville, Murphy, Andrews and Brasstown are among the locations to ex-



Clay County School Board members, from left, Tony Ellis, Danny Jones, Chairman Robert Caldwell, Superintendent Mark Leek, Jason Shook and Reba Beck discussed the school calendar, annexation and other issues at Monday evening's meeting.

perience the totality of the eclipse for about two and a half minutes on the afternoon of Monday, Aug. 21.

Although only a fraction of North Carolina will be hit by the eclipse shadow, much

of the western end lies in the path of totality. The last total solar eclipse to darken United States mainland soil occurred on Feb. 26, 1979. This coming August will be the first time in nearly a

century that such an event will make an impact coast-to-coast.

Extensive information on the path of the eclipse is available on the Web site: www.eclipse2017.org.

The board took up the eclipse issue during an initial review of the 2017-18 school calendar and is likely to make a final decision at the next board meeting. Also under consideration is ending the first semester of the next school year before the holiday break on Friday, Dec. 22.

In addition to discussing the eclipse, the board heard a report on the 2015-16 school audit by Shawn Long of the Shawn Long Certified Public Accounting firm in Hayesville. The audit was reported

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as good, with no specific negative findings.

School nurse Joanna Atkisson presented the schools' exposure control plan as required by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the United States Department of Labor. The plan covers steps schools are required to take to handle blood borne pathogens and the disposal of contaminated waste and other biohazards, including needles used by insulin-dependent students.

The board voted without dissent to accept the control plan.

Angel Owens of the Exceptional Children's program presented the Academically and Intellectually Gifted Plan, which also was accepted by the board.

Both Atkisson and Owens pres-

ent their plans to the board every year for approval.

Annexation proposal reviewed

The board discussed a proposal from the Town of Hayesville to allow the annexation of some school property. The proposal, as presented to School Board Chairman Robert Caldwell by Hayesville Mayor Harry Baughn, would incorporate all school property into town limits. There is no anticipated cost involved.

The voluntary annexation issue surfaced at the Jan. 9 Hayesville Town Council meeting. One reason is to try to bring some conformity to the town's current boundaries. Part of the Hayesville school campus is in town limits; some school recreation areas remain within county limits.

The board agreed to study the issue more extensively before taking a vote.

Leek gave the board an update on a visit mandated by the North Carolina General Assembly when a consultant group toured the school campuses to look at the condition of facilities and the educational capacity of school buildings.

Several of the lowest-wealth counties in the state were selected for such visits, Leek said. The consultant group is to return around the end of the month, when it is expected to meet with county officials to assess the county's ability to pay, he said.

"I have never known the state to provide money for school buildings," Leek said. "That's a county responsibility. I'm not sure what

the purpose of the visit is."

The group eventually will make a report to the general assembly and the county will be notified of the results after the findings become public record, he said.

The board also briefly discussed the issue of bullying, especially on social media in Clay County schools. The superintendent said he presented the subject as a clarification for the board.

"We all take bullying very seriously," Leek said. "If it is reported, we thoroughly investigate." Bullying is defined as any unwanted, repetitive harassing behavior in school facilities, on school buses or on school property that places a student or employee in fear or harm or creates a hostile environment, he explained.

Any electronic device that uses school e-mail is covered under anti-bullying regulations. Whereas bullying on school grounds in the past tended to be face-to-face, social media and cyber bullying have made the matter a more anonymous threat. The school tracks bullying through a variety of means, Leek said.

The board continued its review of school policy manual updates and later, in closed session, accepted the resignation of Hayesville Middle School language arts teacher Kim Cox and named Marsha Leverette as her replacement.

Board members also named Terry Moore as Hayesville Middle School baseball coach and added several non-certified substitute teachers to the teaching roster.