

The Senate of West Virginia
Charleston

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October 9, 2026

Taylor County Board of Education
71 Utt Drive
Grafton, WV 26354

RE: Request to Delay Proposed Closure of Flemington Elementary School

Dear Members of the Taylor County Board of Education and Dr. Stallings:

I am writing regarding the proposed closure of Flemington Elementary School. Unfortunately, I will be unable to attend the October 13 board meeting, but I wanted to express my serious concerns about moving forward with this process and offer several alternatives that I believe deserve consideration.

My primary request is simple: Please wait.

I recognize the financial challenges facing Taylor County Schools. Declining enrollment, rising personnel costs, and the limitations of West Virginia's school aid formula have placed tremendous pressure on our county school systems. I appreciate the difficult decisions that must be made to maintain fiscal responsibility.

However, I strongly believe we should avoid making permanent decisions based on a funding system that we are actively working to change.

During the 2026 legislative session, we came very close to passing significant reforms to West Virginia's school aid formula. As we approach the 2027 session, one of my personal priorities is ensuring that our funding system better protects small rural schools. The current formula does not adequately recognize the fixed costs, transportation challenges, and geographic realities that make educating children in rural communities different from educating them in larger population centers.

It would be unfortunate to close a school today, only to change the funding formula tomorrow in a way that might have helped preserve it.

I also believe there are alternatives to closure that deserve serious consideration.

First, we should examine returning fifth grade to our elementary schools. Taylor County currently places fifth graders at the middle school. Returning those students to the elementary level, whether countywide or through a carefully developed restructuring plan, could increase enrollment at Flemington and improve the utilization of existing classrooms.

We should also consider greater flexibility in grade-level configurations. I understand there may be a classroom with as few as 12 students. If accurate, that warrants examining whether appropriate classroom reorganization, multigrade instruction, or other legally permissible arrangements could reduce costs without closing the school.

In Grant County, Union Educational Complex in Mount Storm serves a small rural population while maintaining educational opportunities from Pre-K through 12th grade. It demonstrates that there are different approaches to structuring schools in rural communities. We should be learning from these examples rather than automatically assuming consolidation is the only answer.

Second, I believe we must look seriously at administrative expenses before closing neighborhood schools.

Taylor County operates just five public schools, yet maintains both a superintendent and an assistant superintendent, along with several central-office administrative and supervisory positions.

I recognize that these individuals perform important functions, but when we are discussing closing an elementary school because of financial pressures, every level of administration must be subject to the same scrutiny.

West Virginia law requires a county superintendent. It does not require every county to employ an assistant superintendent. With the current superintendent's contract scheduled to expire in June 2027, the Board has a natural opportunity to examine whether these responsibilities could be consolidated into a leaner administrative structure.

I would strongly encourage a comprehensive review of central-office positions, salaries, benefits, and opportunities to combine responsibilities before considering the permanent closure of a school.

If we are asking students, parents, and teachers to make sacrifices, we must be willing to examine whether those sacrifices can begin at the administrative level.

Third, I would encourage the Board to develop and publicly present several alternatives to closure, including staffing adjustments through attrition, shared services, revised grade configurations, and a temporary financial stabilization plan.

I would also request a detailed accounting of the actual net savings expected from closing Flemington, including transportation, personnel, facility modifications, and other associated costs. Those projections should be compared directly with the savings available through alternative approaches, including central-office restructuring.

Flemington Elementary has also demonstrated meaningful academic improvement, including its removal from the state's Comprehensive Support and Improvement designation in 2025. That progress should not be overlooked in evaluating the school's future.

I respectfully ask the Board to delay advancing the formal closure process until after the 2027 legislative session. That does not mean ignoring current financial challenges. It means continuing the necessary financial analysis, evaluating alternatives, and allowing time to determine whether legislative changes could provide additional options.

I am willing to work with the Board, the Department of Education, and my legislative colleagues to explore solutions, including any statutory flexibility that may be necessary to better serve small rural schools.

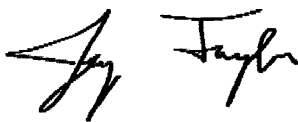
Once a school closes, reopening it is extraordinarily difficult. We owe it to the students, families, educators, and community of Flemington to exhaust every reasonable alternative before taking such a permanent step.

Our rural schools are more than buildings. They are part of the identity and future of the communities they serve.

Please slow this process. Let's find out what can be done before deciding what cannot be saved.

Thank you for your service and consideration. I respectfully request that this letter be shared with each Board member and made part of the materials considered at the October 13 meeting.

Sincerely,



Jay Taylor
President Pro Tempore
West Virginia Senate
14th Senatorial District