

Subject: Re: Request to Delay Flemington Elementary Closure
Date: Monday, October 12, 2026 at 3:18:02 PM Eastern Daylight Time
From: Jay Taylor
To: Michelle Gallo, John Taylor, Leslie Beltner, Rodrick Summers, Stewart Whitehair, John Stallings
Attachments: image001.jpg

Dear President Gallo,

Thank you for your response. I understand the financial challenges and statutory deadlines facing Taylor County Schools. However, I remain deeply concerned that the Board is moving toward closing Flemington Elementary before fully investigating the alternatives. Regarding your suggestion of a special legislative session, I do not anticipate one being called to address school funding. Our opportunity will be the 2027 regular legislative session, and I intend to make protecting small rural schools a priority.

I also believe we need to recognize that Taylor County's financial situation isn't solely the result of declining enrollment or the state funding formula. Past spending, staffing, and administrative decisions have to be part of this conversation. We cannot simply blame Charleston while overlooking decisions made here at home.

Since sending my original letter, several additional concerns and possibilities have come to my attention.

First, the School Building Authority investments in Flemington. According to SBA records, approximately \$1.87 million in building improvements have been approved for Flemington, including nearly \$1.48 million in state funding.

More importantly, I reviewed Taylor County's 2020–2030 Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan. That plan specifically called for no school closures or consolidations during the ten-year period and recommended continuing Flemington's use as an elementary school.

The Board subsequently approved substantial building improvements, including an approximately \$849,850 purchase order in 2025 for roof and building renovations. The district was still soliciting bids for HVAC improvements in 2026.

SBA guidelines state that Major Improvement Plan funding should not be used for schools identified for closure in the county's facilities plan.

Has anyone consulted the SBA about these investments and the implications of closing or repurposing Flemington? How much of the funding has actually been spent, and has the county's facilities plan been formally amended to reflect a proposed closure?

What has changed so significantly that a school we were investing in just months ago is now being considered for closure?

Second, the use of existing facilities. The county has invested substantially in its new transportation facility, which includes plans for office space, conference facilities, and significant parking.

I have also heard discussion, although I cannot verify it, about potentially using Flemington as a future board office because of problems with the current facility.

If relocating administrative functions is being considered, shouldn't we first determine whether the transportation facility or another existing building could meet those needs? I would hate to see us close a functioning elementary school only to turn around and use the building for administrative purposes.

In fact, WVBE Policy 6204 specifically requires the district to address the future use or disposal of a school proposed for closure. I believe that information deserves to be made public before the Board moves forward.

Third, the Barbour County students. At the Flemington community meeting, I learned that approximately 20 students reportedly attend Flemington from Barbour County. My understanding is that many would return to Barbour County schools rather than transfer to West Taylor if Flemington closes.

That could represent a substantial loss of enrollment-related funding. Has that possibility been accounted for in the financial projections?

I also believe the Board should explore whether a formal cooperative arrangement with Barbour County might provide an additional option. State law permits adjoining counties to jointly establish and maintain schools, and this deserves investigation.

Fourth, the Innovation School option. West Virginia Code §18-5A-3 provides a process through which a school improvement council may propose alternative operating arrangements and seek certain waivers.

Rather than simply acknowledging this possibility, I would like to know whether anyone has contacted the State Department of Education to determine what flexibility and potential savings might actually be available to Flemington.

The alternatives outlined in my original letter, including grade restructuring, classroom configurations, and administrative savings, also remain worthy of serious examination.

There is another concern I hope the Board will consider: **public confidence in our school system.**

Taylor County Schools depends upon community support, particularly when it comes to excess levies. The district has already faced considerable public criticism over spending and administrative decisions. Moving toward a school closure without clearly demonstrating that every reasonable alternative has been explored risks further undermining that trust.

We need to be mindful of what that could mean when the county next asks voters to support school funding.

President Gallo, my greatest concern remains tomorrow's vote.

I have seen school closure processes unfold repeatedly across West Virginia. Once the formal process begins, my concern is that closure becomes the presumed outcome and the discussion shifts away from finding ways to keep the school open.

The statutory timeline explains when certain steps must be completed if the Board intends to close a school in 2027. It does not require the Board to pursue that closure in the first place.

Closing a school may be the easier answer to a difficult financial situation. The harder work is finding a way to preserve it. I believe that harder work needs to come first.

I am respectfully asking the Board not to approve tomorrow's proposed action. Instead, I

ask that you direct the administration to develop a genuine school-preservation plan, with documented financial comparisons, before initiating closure proceedings. That plan should examine the true net financial impact of closure, including any loss of enrollment-related revenue, and compare it with the savings available through alternatives. The public deserves to understand what has been evaluated and why any proposal has been rejected.

I am asking the Board to stop the closure process before it begins and instead spend the coming months doing the difficult work of finding a way to keep Flemington Elementary open. That includes thoroughly evaluating every reasonable alternative, pursuing available flexibility through the State Department of Education, and giving the Legislature an opportunity during the 2027 session to address the funding formula and the challenges facing small rural schools.

We should not be spending the next several months working toward closing Flemington. We should be spending that time working toward saving it.

I am willing to work with the Board, the Department of Education, the SBA, and my legislative colleagues to help identify solutions. But we need the opportunity to do that before starting down a path that may be very difficult to reverse.

Once Flemington closes, reopening it will be extraordinarily difficult. We owe it to these students, their families, and the community to exhaust every reasonable alternative first. Thank you for your consideration. I hope we can work together toward a solution that protects both Taylor County's financial future and Flemington Elementary.

Respectfully,

Jay Taylor

President Pro Tempore

West Virginia Senate

From: Michelle Gallo <michelle.gallo@k12.wv.us>

Date: Monday, October 12, 2026 at 8:32 AM

To: Jay Taylor <Jay.Taylor@wvsenate.gov>, John Taylor <john.taylor@k12.wv.us>, Leslie Beltner <leslie.beltner@k12.wv.us>, Rodrick Summers <rodrick.summers@k12.wv.us>, Stewart Whitehair <stewart.whitehair@k12.wv.us>, John Stallings <john.stallings@k12.wv.us>

Subject: Re: Request to Delay Flemington Elementary Closure

Dear Senator Taylor,

Thank you for your attention and suggestions to address the current potential for funding loss due to overall enrollment decreases.

Fiduciary responsibility and operating within the current formula require decisions to be made exactly according to code and done so in a specific time frame. With the pending certification of October enrollment totals that will determine funding totals for FY28, it is likely that many West Virginia school districts will be facing similarly tough financial decisions and many more potential closings and consolidations. To start the process to

determine if closing a school is a potential option , the process must be introduced so that all required steps can be completed within the timeframe required by code.

With great respect to the West Virginia Legislature and Governor, **NOW** is the time to introduce a Special session that would freeze school funding amounts to FY27. This would protect schools at risk of closure and employed professionals and service personnel that also must be assessed and done according to code and within a specified time frame.

I am hopeful that an alternative can be reached along with your work with your Legislative colleagues so that funding that places smaller enrollment schools at risk during this current turbulent time in public education.

Thank you once again for your willingness to assist going forward.

Best regards,

Michelle Gallo

michelle.gallo@k12.wv.us

Taylor County Board of Education Member

President

CONFIDENTIAL: This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you have received this email in error, please notify the sender immediately.

From: Jay Taylor <Jay.Taylor@wvsenate.gov>

Sent: Saturday, October 10, 2026 8:05 PM

To: Michelle Gallo <michelle.gallo@k12.wv.us>; John Taylor <john.taylor@k12.wv.us>; Leslie Beltner <leslie.beltner@k12.wv.us>; Rodrick Summers <rodrick.summers@k12.wv.us>; Stewart Whitehair <stewart.whitehair@k12.wv.us>; John Stallings <john.stallings@k12.wv.us>; Angela Latta <alatta@k12.wv.us>

Subject: Request to Delay Flemington Elementary Closure

[EXTERNAL SENDER]: Do not click links, open attachments or reply to this email unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

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

Attached is a letter expressing my concerns regarding the proposed closure of Flemington Elementary School and offering several alternatives I believe deserve serious consideration.

Unfortunately, I will be unable to attend Tuesday evening's meeting, but I wanted to make sure my concerns and suggestions were shared with each of you.

As outlined in my letter, my primary request is that the Board slow this process and allow time for the Legislature to revisit West Virginia's school funding formula during the upcoming 2027

session. Protecting small rural schools is one of my legislative priorities, and I believe we should exhaust every reasonable alternative before making such a permanent decision.

I recognize the financial challenges facing Taylor County Schools, and I am willing to work with the Board to explore possible solutions.

Angie, I would appreciate your assistance in distributing the attached letter to all Board members and ensuring it is included in the materials considered at Tuesday's meeting.

Thank you all for your service to Taylor County and for your consideration of this request.

Much Appreciated,

Senator Jay Taylor

Senate President Pro Tempore

14th Senatorial District

State Capitol, Room W-229

1900 Kanawha Blvd., East

Charleston, WV 25305

Phone: (304) 357-7914

Cell: (304) 319-2327

Email: Jay.Taylor@wvsenate.gov



PTL