NICHOLAS COUNTY SCHOOLS

Learn • Grow • Belong • Succeed



BIRCH RIVER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL



ZELA ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CLOSURE HEARING

MONDAY, OCTOBER 26, 2026



SUMMERSVILLE PREK – 8

IMPACT STATEMENT AND SUPPORTING DATA

FOR THE

CLOSURE AND CONSOLIDATION OF

BIRCH RIVER ELEMENTARY
AND
ZELA ELEMENTARY
INTO
SUMMERSVILLE PRE K-8
LOCATED AT THE
SUMMERSVILLE ACADEMIC COMPLEX

NICHOLAS COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION

Prepared Pursuant to

W. Va. Codes §18-5-13 and §18-5-13a and
WVBE Policies 6200 and 6204.

Nicholas County School
Under the direction and authority of
The West Virginia Board of Education (WVBE)

Public Hearing Dates
Birch River Elementary School – October 26, 2026
Zela Elementary School -October 26, 2026
Summersville Pre K-8 – October 26, 2026

County Board Approval
Nicholas County Board of Education Meeting on November 10, 2026

Table of Contents

3.1. County Procedures 3
3.2. Executive Summary and Impact Statements 4
3.2.a Student Enrollment 12
3.2.b. Facilities 18
3.2.c. Finance 26
3.2.d. Personnel 31
3.2.e. Student Transportation 35
3.2.f. Student Educational Program 38
3.2.g. Community 40
3.3. & 3.4. Public Notices and Hearings 41
3.6. County Board Actions 44
3.6. Superintendent Verification of Board Actions 46
Appendix of Supporting Data 47

3.1. County Procedures

Nicholas County

Closure and Consolidation of Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary School into Summersville PK-8 located at the Summersville Academic Complex

Scheduled Date of Hearing for Birch River Elementary School: October 26, 2026
Scheduled Date of Hearing for Zela Elementary School: October 26, 2026
Scheduled Date of Hearing for Summersville PK-8 School October 26, 2026
Scheduled Date of County Board Vote: November 10, 2026

County Procedures

This template shall be used to accumulate and present the data that is requested in Policy 6204 and W.Va. Code 18-5-13a to support the closure or consolidation of a WV public school.
Checkmark each completed section and sign below:
The county shall prepare and submit an impact statement and supporting data concerning proposed school closings or consolidations to the WVBE for approval in accordance with this policy and W. Va. Code §18-5-13a. The impact statement and supporting data shall:

- ☐ *be available for public inspection in the office of the county superintendent during the 30 days preceding the date of the public hearing; and*

Be delivered in duplicate to the:

- ☐ *principal of a school that is proposed to be closed or consolidated, and of any school which the county designates to receive the students who are relocated as a result of the closure or consolidation; and*
- ☐ *chair of the local school improvement council (LSIC) representing a school that is proposed to be closed or consolidated, and any school that the county designates to receive the students who are relocated because of the closure or consolidation.*
- ☐ *A copy of the notice shall be posted at all schools, bus garages, and maintenance areas in the county in conspicuous working areas, for all professional and service personnel to observe.*

Scott Cochran

Signature of the County Superintendent verifying the completion of these deliveries and postings.

Superintendent _____ Date: _____

Pages requiring signatures may be printed, signed, and inserted in the appendix section of this document.

Enrollment 3.2.a.

Nicholas County Schools student enrollment has decreased by 20.7% in the last ten years. This represents a loss of 789 students from 2016-2017 to 2025-2026.

The student enrollment at Zela Elementary School has decreased 16.9% in the last ten years, from 89 students to 74 currently enrolled students. Enrollment is expected to continue to decrease over the next eight years. This data is from Zoomwv.

The student enrollment at Birch River Elementary School has decreased by 45.7% in the last ten years, from 105 students to 57 currently enrolled students. Enrollment is expected to continue to decrease over the next eight years. This data is from Zoomwv.

By closing and consolidating Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School into the Summersville Pre K-8, students will benefit from improved facilities and resources, decreased operational expenses and expanded curriculum opportunities. They will also have the advantage of moving into a newly built complex.

Facilities 3.2.b.

Current enrollment and projected enrollment data supports the merger into the newly constructed Summersville PK-8 School facility.

Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary are both in need of repairs. Birch River Elementary is not currently ADA compliant.

The newly constructed Summersville PK-8 School has been designated as the receiving school and is projected to open in the fall of 2027-2028. The Summersville PK-8 School will contain adequate physical space and academic infrastructure to fully support specialized student populations, including Pre-Kindergarten, Kindergarten, Exceptional Student Education and Middle School programming. The new Summersville PK-8 facility is designed to ensure that instruction meets or exceeds the West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives.

Finance 3.2.c.

The decline in student enrollment throughout Nicholas County has forced the county to evaluate our expenses and determine which must be decreased to meet our budget yet still provide a quality education for our students. The small enrollment numbers at Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary, when compared to the basic administrative and maintenance expenses necessary to operate those schools, clearly show the inefficiency of keeping those schools operational. The average cost, per student, of operating those schools is far greater than that of our other elementary schools in the county, therefore creating inequities among our student population. Consolidating Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary students into the Summersville Pre K-8 facility will save the county roughly $1,850,760.00 each year, which can be better utilized in educational programming and opportunities. Staff employment countywide would be reduced but dispersed more efficiently. This consolidation would ultimately result in the students attending a brand new, state-of-the-art facility at the new Summersville Pre K-8 beginning in 2027-28 school year, which will be a great opportunity for these students. The elimination of the need to repair and upgrade the current facilities of Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary will also be a huge financial relief to the county.

Personnel 3.2.d.

The Nicholas County Board of Education has attempted to reduce staff due to a loss in student enrollment. However, with several small schools and required staff limited staffing reductions have taken place. This consolidation will allow for better utilization of staff and services. These closures will allow for a reduction in staff, both professional and service. Nicholas County will continue to follow the WVDE recommended guidelines for professional and service personnel and maintain the required staffing levels to deliver quality educational programs.

Student Transportation 3.2.e.

It is anticipated that travel times could be extended for students at Zela Elementary by 20 minutes and 20 minutes for students currently enrolled at Birch River Elementary. The number being transported by buses at both schools is minimal, which will allow for less stops to be made in route to the new location.

Student Educational Program 3.2.f.

The mission of Nicholas County Schools is to educate students for success in life. The Nicholas County Board of Education believes this mission is achieved through the collective efforts of students, families, educators, and the community. The goals of the school system are to: (1) engage students in excellence; (2) provide a safe, healthy learning environment that promotes citizenship, wellness, self-discipline, personal responsibility, and character; and (3) prepare all students for success after high school graduation.

Nicholas County Schools is committed to providing an engaging educational environment that supports the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of all students. The proposed consolidation of Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School into Summersville Pre K-8 at the Summersville Academic Complex will enhance educational opportunities while ensuring compliance with all state, federal, and local requirements. Students will benefit from expanded curricular and extracurricular opportunities that are difficult to provide in smaller schools. The consolidated school will offer consistent access to specialized staff in areas such as art, music, counseling, wellness, and student support services. Students will also have access to innovative instructional programs, enhanced technology resources, and learning environments designed to support college, career, and lifelong readiness.

The consolidation will strengthen instructional delivery by providing multiple teachers at the same grade levels, allowing for collaborative planning, professional learning communities, vertical teaming, and greater curriculum consistency across grades. These opportunities will help ensure that instruction is responsive to student needs and supports continued academic growth.

In addition, students will have access to comprehensive health and wellness supports through school nurses and the on-site Wellness Center, providing convenient access to medical and dental services. The larger educational setting will also create opportunities for increased social interaction, collaboration, and community building among students.

By consolidating students into a centrally located, modern facility, Nicholas County Schools will be better positioned to provide equitable access to resources, specialized programming, and support services while maintaining an efficient educational system that meets the evolving needs of students.

Community 3.2.g

Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School are important parts of the community. Each of these schools provides vital services for the community, serving as a focal point. Elementary schools provide parent engagement activities to involve parents in the education of their children. Each of these communities has strong relationships with the schools. Each school supports the community connection and will continue to develop a strong community connection.

With the closure and consolidation of these schools' new relationships with the community can grow and develop. A bigger sense of community through relationships with parents, community, and business members can be cultivated. Additional resources will be available to assist students, families, and the community.

Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School have long been integral parts of their respective communities, serving as important focal points for parent engagement and community involvement. Both schools foster strong connections with families and the broader community, providing vital services and support.

The proposed closure and consolidation of these schools into the Summersville Pre K-8 will inevitably impact these established relationships. While the closures may bring emotional challenges, they are driven by the goal of improving health, safety, and overall educational experience for students. The consolidation offers an opportunity to build new, stronger connections across a larger community.

With the creation of a larger school community at the Summersville Pre K-8 Complex, new relationships with parents, community members, and local businesses can flourish, enhancing collaboration and engagement. The expanded resources, including additional support services for students and families, will benefit the entire community. The consolidation aims to cultivate a broader sense of community while continuing to support and strengthen the ties between schools and the local population, ultimately benefiting the students and their families.

3.2.a Student Enrollment

Enrollment and Population Table

Trends in student population growth or decline in the county for the previous 10 years.

Year	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Total	3795	3738	3693	3587	3444	3447	3448	3342	3195	3006

Enrollment Table 1
Source ZoomWV
Second Month Enrollment FY26

Trends in student population growth or decline in the attendance area of Zela Elementary School for closure or consolidation for the previous 10 years.

Year	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Total	98	89	89	94	102	88	80	80	67	74

Enrollment Table 2
Source ZoomWV
Second Month Enrollment FY26

Trends in student population growth or decline in attendance area of Birch River Elementary Schools for closure or consolidation for the previous 10 years.

Year	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Total	105	90	94	88	82	72	75	72	64	57

Enrollment Table 3
Source ZoomWV
Second Month Enrollment FY26

1. HISTORICAL ENROLLMENT BY GRADE

Enter actual October headcount for each grade and year (pale-blue = input).

Grade	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26
PreK	159	166	180	164	167	166
K	243	234	242	228	185	188
1	202	250	240	238	219	180
2	240	196	258	232	232	219
3	236	236	210	249	223	224
4	257	248	233	193	236	226
5	269	271	250	239	183	230
6	246	268	276	243	227	173
7	268	250	255	272	246	224
8	295	273	253	265	264	235
9	283	286	277	241	273	251
10	248	288	287	260	229	260
11	240	247	277	277	254	203
12	258	234	229	241	251	227
Total PreK–12	**3,444**	**3,447**	**3,467**	**3,342**	**3,189**	**3,006**

2. GRADE PROGRESSION RATIOS (calculated)

Ratio = students in the higher grade this year / the grade below last year. >1.00 grows, <1.00 shrinks.

Transition	→ 2021-22	→ 2022-23	→ 2023-24	→ 2024-25	→ 2025-26	5-Yr Avg	Applied Ratio
PreK → K	1.472	1.458	1.267	1.128	1.126	**1.290**	1.290
K → 1	1.029	1.026	0.983	0.961	0.973	**0.994**	0.994
1 → 2	0.970	1.032	0.967	0.975	1.000	**0.989**	0.989
2 → 3	0.983	1.071	0.965	0.961	0.966	**0.989**	0.989
3 → 4	1.051	0.987	0.919	0.948	1.013	**0.984**	0.984
4 → 5	1.054	1.008	1.026	0.948	0.975	**1.002**	1.002
5 → 6	0.996	1.018	0.972	0.950	0.945	**0.976**	0.976
6 → 7	1.016	0.951	0.986	1.012	0.987	**0.990**	0.990
7 → 8	1.019	1.012	1.039	0.971	0.955	**0.999**	0.999
8 → 9	0.969	1.015	0.953	1.030	0.951	**0.984**	0.984
9 → 10	1.018	1.003	0.939	0.950	0.952	**0.972**	0.972
10 → 11	0.996	0.962	0.965	0.977	0.886	**0.957**	0.957
11 → 12	0.975	0.927	0.870	0.906	0.894	**0.914**	0.914

3. PREK & KINDERGARTEN DRIVER (births-based)

Projected K = births five years earlier x birth-to-K ratio. Projected PreK = births four years earlier x birth-to-PreK ratio.

Birth year	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	2030	2031
Live births (county)	229	198	198	197	197	197	197	197	197	197	197
Birth-to-K capture ratio	0.820	• applied to every projected K year									
Birth-to-PreK capture ratio	0.780	• applied to every projected PreK year									

Birth years above map to entry in projected school years (birth year + 4 = fall of PreK year; birth year + 5 = fall of K year)

4. PROJECTED ENROLLMENT BY GRADE (10-year horizon)

Grade	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36
PreK	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
K	188	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162	162
1	187	187	161	161	161	161	161	161	161	161
2	178	185	185	160	160	159	159	159	159	159
3	217	176	183	183	158	158	157	157	157	157
4	220	213	173	180	180	155	155	155	155	155
5	226	221	214	174	180	180	156	156	155	155
6	225	221	216	209	169	176	176	152	152	151
7	171	222	219	214	207	168	174	174	151	151
8	224	171	222	219	213	206	168	174	174	150
9	231	220	168	219	215	210	203	165	171	171
10	244	225	214	164	213	209	204	197	160	167
11	249	234	215	205	157	203	200	195	189	154
12	186	228	214	197	187	143	186	183	179	173
Total PreK–12	2,900	2,819	2,700	2,597	2,515	2,444	2,414	2,343	2,277	2,217

5. SUMMARY — GRADE BANDS & TREND

Level	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28	2028-29	2029-30	2030-31	2031-32	2032-33	2033-34	2034-35	2035-36
PreK	159	166	180	164	167	166	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154	154
Elementary (K–5)	1,447	1,435	1,433	1,379	1,278	1,267	1,216	1,144	1,078	1,019	1,000	974	949	948	948	948
Middle (6–8)	809	791	784	780	737	632	620	615	657	641	589	550	518	500	477	452
High (9–12)	1,029	1,055	1,070	1,019	1,007	941	910	906	811	784	772	766	794	741	699	664
Total PreK–12	3,444	3,447	3,467	3,342	3,189	3,006	2,900	2,819	2,700	2,597	2,515	2,444	2,414	2,343	2,277	2,217
Year-over-year change		0.1%	0.6%	(3.6%)	(4.6%)	(5.7%)	(3.5%)	(2.8%)	(4.2%)	(3.8%)	(3.2%)	(2.8%)	(1.2%)	(2.9%)	(2.8%)	(2.6%)

Zela Elementary School

Year	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031	2031-2032	2032-2033	2033-2034	2034-2035
K	15	10	14	9	9	9	9	9	9	9
1St	13	15	10	14	9	9	9	9	9	9
2nd	16	13	15	10	14	9	9	9	9	9
3rd	14	16	13	15	10	14	9	9	9	9
4th	10	14	16	13	15	10	14	9	9	9
5th	6	10	14	16	13	15	10	14	9	9
Total	74	78	82	80	70	66	60	59	54	54

Birch River Elementary

Year	2025-2026	2026-2027	2027-2028	2028-2029	2029-2030	2030-2031	2031-2032	2032-2033	2033-2034	2034-2035
Pre-K	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
K	7	3	2	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
1St	5	7	3	2	7	7	7	7	7	7
2nd	8	5	7	3	2	7	7	7	7	7
3rd	11	8	5	7	3	2	7	7	7	7
4th	11	11	8	5	7	3	2	7	7	7
5th	12	11	11	8	5	7	3	2	7	7
Total	57	45	36	32	31	33	33	37	42	42

Projection Method

Nicholas County Schools utilized a comprehensive analysis of historical and current enrollment trends to project student enrollment over the next ten years. The district's methodology included a review of second-month enrollment data, demographic information, and live birth statistics reported by the West Virginia Office of Vital Statistics. Historical data was analyzed to determine the percentage of children born to Nicholas County residents who subsequently enroll in Nicholas County Schools. This percentage was then applied to available birth data to estimate future kindergarten enrollment.

To develop projections for individual schools, the district considered the most recent available U.S. Census data, historical second-month enrollment figures, and applicable vital statistics records, with consideration given to each school's established attendance area.

For years in which official vital statistics were not yet available, the district kept the projected enrollment numbers the same for the next school year starting in 2029-2030 for kindergarten.

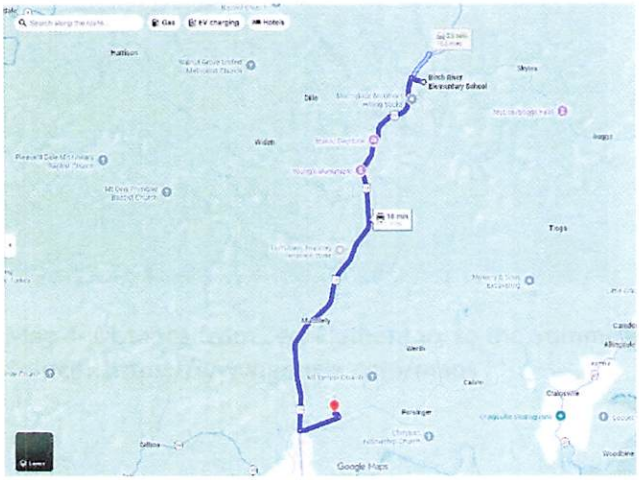
These multiple data sources were used collectively to provide a consistent, data-informed basis for both districtwide and individual school enrollment projections.

3.2.b. Facilities

Descriptive Maps



Map 1 – Location of Birch River Elementary
Source: https://www.google.com/maps



Map 2-Distance from Birch River Elementary to the Summersville Pre K-8 Complex
Source: https://www.google.com/maps

Written Facility Condition Description

Zela Elementary

Zela Elementary School was constructed in 1978 and is configured as a K-5 school with 16,010 sq ft of space. There have been 2 additions completed (1990 and 1994). The building structure is load bearing masonry with a steel framed bituminous roof and VCT tile throughout much of the building. The windows and doors are a mixture of steel and aluminum frames. The school is currently being utilized at 28%. The facility does not have a sprinkler system. The building is in compliance with ADA standards. The sidewalks and roadways have minor cracks and trip hazards, but some repair is needed. Many of the exterior doors, including the main entrance, need to be replaced. The building has rooftop units to heat and cool the school, and it is fueled with both electricity and propane. The electrical service has a 480 service. The school's lighting is mostly T-8 bulbs. The facilities' EUI is 68,317.

The site provides adequate parking and is accessible to the population. Approaches are free from traffic hazards. The site plan separates the various types of transportation. The school site is in a rural area with 10 actual acres and 10 usable acres.

The following improvements have been identified:

- Safe Schools Entry
- Circulation
- Sprinkler System
- Outdoor Classroom
- Cost Estimates for Recommendations: $638,632.78

Birch River Elementary

Birch River Elementary School was constructed in 1952 and is configured as a K-5 school with 22,450 sq ft of floor space. There have been 2 additions completed (1990 and 1994). The building structure is load bearing masonry with a wood framed metal panel roof and VCT tile throughout much of the building. The windows and doors are a mixture of steel and aluminum frames. The school is currently being utilized at 30%. The building does not have a sprinkler system. The facility is not ADA compliant in parts of the building. It is difficult for a handicap student to access the cafeteria from the main floor without travelling around the building to a second entrance. The sidewalks have had some major repairs, but they need additional paving to eliminate cracks and trip hazards. The doors are older and seem to be working. The facility is heated with a gas boiler and uses radiant heat, and the school is cooled with window unit air conditioners. The electric service is original to the school. The lighting is T8 bulbs. The school's EUI is 68,670.

The location of the school site next to a busy highway creates noise pollution and safety issues. As a result, parking is not adequate and approaches to the building are not free from traffic hazards. The school site is in a rural area with 6 actual acres and 6 usable acres.

The facility is an older facility, so it needs several improvements. The following improvements have been identified:

- Floor Covering
- Plumbing
- Heating/Ventilating
- BAS Controls
- Safe School Entrance
- Circulation
- Sprinkler System
- Cost Estimates for Recommendations: $1,773,664.84

Construction Work Required for the Proposed Action

The newly constructed Summersville Pk-8 School which is projected to be completed by the fall of the 2027-2028 school year and will require no additional square footage for these closures.

The Future of Closed Facilities

Zela Elementary School will be permanently closed with ownership of the property to remain with the Nicholas County Board of Education for future consideration. If the Nicholas County Board of Education were to dispose of the property it would be done according to W.V. Code requirements.

Birch River Elementary School will be permanently closed with ownership of the property to remain with the Nicholas County Board of Education for future consideration. If the Nicholas County Board of Education were to dispose of the property it would be done according to W.V. Code requirements.

School Building Authority of WV (SBA)

The proposed closing of Zela Elementary School is not contingent upon receiving funding from the SBA.

The proposed school closing of Birch River Elementary School is not contingent upon receiving funding from the SBA.

The proposed school closings have received FEMA and SBA funding to fund the project. The anticipated completion of the Summersville Pre K-8 is school year 2027-2028.

Closures Contingent Upon SBA Funding

N/A

3.2.c. Finance

Itemization of Anticipated Cost and Savings

Closing School(s) Annual Current Cost

Birch River Elementary

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 32,481
Personnel	$ 848,781
Maintenance	$ 3,956
Transportation – Curricular	$ 886
Other	$ 138,876
Total	$1,024,980

Finance Table 1

Zela Elementary

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 37,000
Personnel	$ 932,074
Maintenance	$ 13,172
Transportation – Curricular	$ 512
Other	$ 95,807
Total	$1,078,565

Finance Table 2

Receiving School(s) Annual Current Cost

Summersville PK - 8

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 267,727
Personnel	$7,329,156
Maintenance	$ 76,744
Transportation – Curricular	$ 8,567
Other	$ 823,867
Total	$8,506,061

Finance Table 3

Anticipated Annual Cost after Action of Closing Both Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary Schools

Summersville Pre K-8 School, including Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary Students

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 267,727
Personnel	$7,482,257
Maintenance	$ 76,744
Transportation-Curricular	$ 8,567
Other	$ 923,550
Total	$8,758,845

Finance Table 4

Net Cost or Savings After Action of Closing Both Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary Schools

Summersville Pre K-8, including Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary Students

Item	*Cost or Savings*	*Amount*
Utilities	Savings	$ 69,481
Personnel	Savings	$1,627,754
Maintenance	Savings	$ 17,127
Transportation-Curricular	Savings	$ 1,398
Other	Savings	$ 135,000
Total		$1,850,760

Finance Table 5

Anticipated Annual Cost after Action of Closing Only Birch River Elementary

Summersville Pre K-8, including Birch River Elementary Students

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 267,727
Personnel	$7,329,156
Maintenance	$ 76,744
Transportation-Curricular	$ 8,567
Other	$ 889,769
Total	$8,571,963

Finance Table 6

Net Cost or Savings After Action of Closing Only Birch River Elementary

Summersville Pre K-8, including Birch River Elementary Students

Item	*Cost or Savings*	*Amount*
Utilities	Savings	$ 32,481
Personnel	Savings	$ 848,781
Maintenance	Savings	$ 3,956
Transportation	Savings	$ 886
Other	Savings	$ 72,974
Total	Savings	$ 959,078

Finance Table 7

Anticipated Annual Cost after Action of Closing Only Zela Elementary

Summersville Pre K-8, including Zela Elementary Students

Item	*Amount*
Utilities	$ 267,728
Personnel	$7,329,155
Maintenance	$ 76,744
Transportation-Curricular	$ 8,567
Other	$ 874,527
Total	$8,556,721

Finance Table 8

Net Cost or Savings After Action of Closing Only Zela Elementary

Summersville Pre K-8, including Zela Elementary Students

Item	*Cost or Savings*	*Amount*
Utilities	Savings	$ 37,000
Personnel	Savings	$ 932,073
Maintenance	Savings	$ 13,172
Transportation-Curricular	Savings	$ 512
Other	Savings	$ 45,148
Total	Savings	$ 1,027,905

Finance Table 9

Anticipated Construction Cost to Accommodate Action

Birch River Elementary
No additions, renovations, or replacements are required by the county for the proposed closure.

Zela Elementary
No additions, renovations, or replacements are required by the county for the proposed closure.

Summersville Pre K-8
No additions, renovations, or replacements are required by the county for the proposed addition of students from Birch River Elementary and Zela Elementary.

County Expense Fund History

Year	*Unrestricted General Current Expense Fund Balance*	*Approved Levy Estimate*	*Percentage of Approved Levy Estimate*
2025	*$26,546,448*	*$44,498,601*	*59.66%*
2024	*$22,617,449*	*$46,128,343*	*49.03%*
2023	$19,619,217	$39,640,065	49.49%
2022	$18,710,988	$37,859,016	49.425
2021	$16,720,591	$39,366,622	49.42%
2020	$14,873,061	$39,904,205	42.47%

Finance Table 10

3.2.d. Personnel

The Nicholas County Board of Education has attempted to reduce staff due to a loss in student enrollment. However, with several small schools and required teacher: pupil ratios, limited staffing reductions have taken place. This consolidation will allow for better utilization of staff and services. These closures will allow for a reduction in staff, both professional and service. Nicholas County will continue to follow the WVDE recommended guidelines for professional and service personnel and maintain the required staffing levels to deliver quality educational programs.

Analysis of Anticipated Personnel Changes

Zela Elementary School – Current School Personnel Data Chart				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
number professional personnel currently employed at the affected school(s);	.5	6.5	.10	.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
number service personnel currently employed at the affected school(s);	1	3	1	1

Personnel Table 1

Birch River Elementary School – Current Before Proposed Action				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
number professional personnel currently employed at the affected school(s);	1	5	.10	.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
number service personnel currently employed at the affected school(s);	1	2	1	1

Personnel Table 2

Zela Elementary School – Anticipated Net Change After Proposed Action				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
the anticipated net change in professional personnel due to the proposed closure or consolidation	-.5	-6.5	-.10	-.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
the anticipated net change in service personnel due to the proposed closure or consolidation	-1	-3	-1	-1

Personnel Table 3

Birch River Elementary School – Anticipated Net Change After Proposed Action				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
the anticipated net change in professional personnel due to the proposed closure or consolidation	-1	-5	-.10	-.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
the anticipated net change in service personnel due to the proposed closure or consolidation	-1	-2	-1	-1

Personnel Table 4

Zela Elementary School – Attrition and Reduction in Force Summary - Professional				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
decrease that will occur through attrition *This represents positions that will not be filled after retirement, etc.*	0	0	0	0
decrease that will occur through a reduction in force *This represents positions that will be cut during the yearly staffing process.*	.5	6.5	.10	.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
decrease that will occur through attrition *This represents positions that will not be filled after retirement, etc.*	0	0	0	0
decrease that will occur through reduction in force *This represents positions that will be cut during the yearly staffing process.*	1	3	1	1

Personnel Table 5

Birch River Elementary School – Attrition and Reduction in Force Summary - Professional				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
decrease that will occur through attrition *This represents positions that will not be filled after retirement, etc.*	0	0	0	0
decrease that will occur through a reduction in force *This represents positions that will be cut during the yearly staffing process.*	1	5	.10	.10
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
decrease that will occur through attrition	0	0	0	0

This represents positions that will not be filled after retirement, etc.				
decrease that will occur through reduction in force This represents positions that will be cut during the yearly staffing process.	1	2	1	1

Personnel Table 6

Summersville PK-8 School – Projected staffing				
Professional Personnel	Administration	Teachers	Counselor	Nurse
	4	58	4	1
Service Personnel	Cooks	Aides	Custodians	Secretary/Accountant/Clerk
	9	24	8	3

Personnel Table 7

3.2.e. Student Transportation

Analysis of Anticipated Transportation Time Changes

Current and Differences of Travel Times

Birch River Elementary

Route	*Community*	*Current Travel Time*	*Estimated Time after Closure or Consolidation*	*Net Increase or Decrease*
Route Bus #133 AM & PM	Birch River, Mill Creek Northern Birch River	30 min.	50 min.	+20 min.
Route Bus #141 AM&PM	Birch River Road and Anthony Creek	30 min.	50 min.	+20 min.
Route Bus 146 AM&PM	Birch River, Widen-Dille	30 min.	50 min.	+20 min.

Transportation Table 1

Zela Elementary

Route	*Community*	*Current Travel Time*	*Estimated Time after Closure or Consolidation*	*Net Increase or Decrease*
Route Bus #156 AM & PM	Dixie to Zela	50 min.	60 min.	+10 min.
Route Bus #156 AM	Little Elk Mountain to Zela	20 min.	40 min.	+20 min.
Route Bus #145 AM	WhitewaterRd.	10 min.	30 min.	+20 min.
Route Bus #145 PM	WhitewaterRd. & 129	30 min.	45 min.	+15 min.
Route Bus #145 PM	Woodstone	15 min.	25 min.	+10 min.

Transportation Table 2

Anticipated Routes and Waiver Requests

Birch River Elementary

Route	*Community*	*One-way Travel Time*	*Amount Exceeding Recommended Travel Times*	*Is a Waiver of W. Va. 126CSR92, Policy 4336 Required (Yes / no)**
Route Bus #133	Location	50 min.	20 min.	YES
Route Bus #141	Location	50 min.	20 min.	YES
Route Bus #146	Location	50 min.	20 min.	YES

Transportation Table 3

Zela Elementary

Route	*Community*	*One-way Travel Time*	*Amount Exceeding Recommended Travel Times*	*Is a Waiver of W. Va. 126CSR92, Policy 4336 Required (Yes / no)**
Route Bus #156	Location	60 min.	30 min.	YES

Transportation Table 4

*A waiver of WVBE Policy 4336 is only required for elementary school routes that have a one-way transportation time greater than 45 minutes.

Travel Time to Neighboring County Public School

Students that currently attend Birch River Elementary could alternatively attend schools in Braxton County. Little Birch Elementary School is approximately 8 miles or 13 minutes of travel time.

There are no neighboring county public schools where the travel time is less than or equal to the designated receiving school for Zela Elementary.

3.2.f. Student Educational Program

The mission of Nicholas County Schools is to educate students for success in life. The Nicholas County Board of Education believes this mission is achieved through the collective efforts of students, families, educators, and the community. The goals of the school system are to: (1) engage students in excellence; (2) provide a safe, healthy learning environment that promotes citizenship, wellness, self-discipline, personal responsibility, and character; and (3) prepare all students for success after high school graduation.

Nicholas County Schools is committed to providing an engaging educational environment that supports the academic, social, emotional, and developmental needs of all students. The proposed consolidation of Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School into Summersville Pre K-8 at the Summersville Academic Complex will enhance educational opportunities while ensuring compliance with all state, federal, and local requirements. Students will benefit from expanded curricular and extracurricular opportunities that are difficult to provide in smaller schools. The consolidated school will offer consistent access to specialized staff in areas such as art, music, counseling, wellness, and student support services. Students will also have access to innovative instructional programs, enhanced technology resources, and learning environments designed to support college, career, and lifelong readiness.

The consolidation will strengthen instructional delivery by providing multiple teachers at the same grade levels, allowing for collaborative planning, professional learning communities, vertical teaming, and greater curriculum consistency across grades. These opportunities will help ensure that instruction is responsive to student needs and supports continued academic growth.

In addition, students will have access to comprehensive health and wellness support through school nurses and the on-site Wellness Center, providing convenient access to medical and dental services. The larger educational setting will also create opportunities for increased social interaction, collaboration, and community building among students.

By consolidating students into a centrally located, modern facility, Nicholas County Schools will be better positioned to provide equitable access to resources, specialized programming, and support services while maintaining an efficient educational system that meets the evolving needs of students.

Analysis and Assurance of Consideration

Zela Elementary School
Birch River Elementary School

In the preparation of the documents regarding the closure and/or consolidation of the above referenced school, the following codes and policies have been considered:
Please check each item that was considered.

- ☐ *W. Va. 126CSR16, Policy 2419, Regulations for the Education of Students with Exceptionalities,*
- ☐ *W. Va. 126CSR42, Policy 2510, Assuring the Quality of Education: Regulations for Education Programs,*
- ☐ *W. Va. 126CSR44 et al., Policy 2520, Content Standards and Objectives for West Virginia Schools,*
- ☐ *W. Va. 126CSR172 Policy 6200- Handbook on Planning School Facilities,*
- ☐ *Policy 6204-School Closings or Consolidations*

Signature of the County Superintendent assuring consideration of the above codes and policies.

_____ _____
Superintendent Date:

Pages requiring signatures may be printed, signed, and inserted in the appendix section of this document.

3.2.g. Community

1. The known relationships that exist between the affected schools and their communities.

Zela Elementary School is an important part of the community, and a strong relationship exists between the school and the community. Zela serves as a hub of social gatherings and activities for the community. The playground and walking track are accessible for the community. Zela serves as a focal point for community activities. Zela Elementary School supports community connectedness and a sense of belonging.

Birch River Elementary School is an important part of the community, and a strong relationship exists between the school and the community. Birch River is a gathering place for social activities and addresses the social and recreational needs of the community. Birch River Elementary supports community connectedness and a sense of belonging.

2. How the existing known relationships could be impacted by the proposed action.

The relationship between Zela Elementary School and the Community could be affected by the closure of Zela Elementary School. The property would remain with the board for future consideration by the school board and the community. The building could be considered for a community center if the community and or the Nicholas Building Commission would be interested in presenting a proposal to the Nicholas County Board of Education.

The relationship between Birch River Elementary School and the Community could be affected by the closure of Birch River Elementary School. The property would remain with the board for future consideration by the school board and the community. The building could be considered for a community center if the community and or the Nicholas Building Commission would be interested in presenting a proposal to the Nicholas County Board of Education.

3. The potential for new relationships that could be developed under the proposed action.

With the closure of Zela Elementary School, the potential for new relationships could be developed. The community of Zela could develop a community center to meet the needs of the community by utilizing the closed school. The community can also create new relationships with the community of Summersville and utilize additional resources for students and families.

With the closure of Birch River Elementary School, the potential for new relationships could be developed. The community of Birch River could develop a community center to meet the needs of the community by utilizing the closed school. The community can also create new relationships with the community of Summersville and utilize additional resources for students and families.

3.3. & 3.4. Public Notices and Hearings

Notice of Public Hearing(s)

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS ON A PROPOSAL TO CLOSE AND CONSOLIDATE ZELA ELEMENTARY AND BIRCH RIVER ELEMENTARY INTO THE NEW SUMMERSVILLE PRE K-8 COMPLEX THE BOARD OF EDUCATION OF THE COUNTY OF NICHOLAS

WV 18-5-13a
Board of Education Policy 6204

The Nicholas County Board of Education will hold three public hearings, as follows, on the Superintendent's recommendation to close Zela Elementary and Birch River Elementary to consolidate them into the new Summersville Pre K-8 to take effect at the end of the 2026-2027 school year.

- **Summersville Pre K-8 School Public Hearing**
  LOCATION: Nicholas County High School
  DATE AND TIME: October 26, 2026, at 4:30 P.M.
  Sign in between 3:50 P.M. and 4:20 P.M.

- **Birch River Elementary School Public Hearing**
  LOCATION: Nicholas County High School
  DATE AND TIME: October 26, 2026, at 5:00 P.M.
  Sign in between 4:20 P.M. and 4:50 P.M. to speak.

- **Zela Elementary School Public Hearing**
  LOCATION: Nicholas County High School
  DATE AND TIME: October 26, 2026, at 6:30 P.M.
  Sign in between 5:50 P.M. and 6:20 P.M. to speak.

ALTERNATIVE DATES AND TIME:

Should the hearing be unable to be held on the scheduled date due to inclement weather or other factors beyond the control of the county, the hearing(s) will be held on the following dates at the same location and time's listed below:

Birch River Elementary October 28, 2026, beginning at 4:30 P.M.
Zela Elementary October 28, 2026, beginning at 5:00 P.M.
Summersville PK-8 October 28, 2026, beginning at 6:30 P.M.

If for any other reason the meeting cannot be conducted on an alternative date or time, the board of education shall determine a date or time. Should the hearing require additional time beyond 11:00 P.M., it will be recessed and will be reconvened at the same location as the recessed hearing at 4:00 P.M. on the next business day on which no other hearing is scheduled.

PLACE: The hearing location is subject to change if, at the time the meeting is called to order, it is determined there is insufficient room to accommodate all those who wish to attend. The hearing shall be recessed and moved to a new location of sufficient size to accommodate those who wish to attend. If that happens, the new meeting location shall be posted at the original meeting location.

PROPOSED ACTION OF THE NICHOLAS COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION: Closure and consolidation of Zela Elementary and Birch River Elementary and consolidate into the new Summersville PK-8 School at the end of the 2026-2027 school year.

SUBMISSION OF WRITTEN MATERIAL: Six copies of written material intended to be reviewed by the county board of education must be submitted to the Office of the Superintendent, 400 Old Main Drive, Summersville, West Virginia 26651 by the end of the public hearings on October 26, 2026.

HEARING PROCEDURES: A representative of Nicholas County Schools will provide an oral summary of the reasons and supporting data in connection with the proposed action of the Board. For a period of thirty minutes prior to the commencement of the public hearing, people may sign a register for the purpose of making statements, offering testimony, and questioning school officials. Persons wishing to speak about the effects of the proposed closure of Zela Elementary and Birch River Elementary and consolidation into the new Summersville Pre K-8, as well as those who wish to speak as members of the general public, will be recognized in the order in which they have signed the register. Each person shall be limited to three minutes. Written statements may be submitted in lieu of oral statements or testimony and must be submitted prior to the conclusion of the hearing. Any written statement will be given full consideration before the board takes any final action.

REASONS AND SUPPORTING DATA AVAILABLE FOR PUBLIC INSPECTION: Written reasons and supporting data in connection with the proposed action of the Board are available for public inspection on weekdays when school is in session by September 21, 2026, at the Nicholas County Board of Education, Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School through October 23, 2026, between the hours of 8:00 A.M. and 3:00 P.M.

Scott Cochran
Superintendent
Nicholas County Board of Education
September 21, 2026

Zela Elementary School, Birch River Elementary School, Summersville Pre K-8

First Run: October 5, 2026
Second Run: October 12, 2026
Third Run: October 19, 2026

Qualified Newspaper Name(s):

The Nicholas Chronicle

Proof of Public Hearing(s) Notice

See Appendix for this Documentation

Public Hearing(s) Documentation and Formal Vote on the Closure(s) or Consolidation(s)

See Appendix for this Documentation

3.6. County Board Actions

County Board Vote(s)

After the vote and following compliance with sections 3.4 and 3.5, and prior to the implementation of any school closure or consolidation and following compliance with all statutory and regulatory provisions, the county must file a request for school closure and/or consolidation with the WVBE for approval and this request must contain:

- *A letter from the county superintendent providing the date the action was taken by the county board.*
- *The signed assurance pages are contained in this template.*
- *Justification as provided by the impact statement and supporting data in section 3.2.*
- *Documentation of all hearings, motions, written public comments, a synopsis or transcript of verbal public comments, and any other related actions.*
- *Proof of proper Class III legal advertisement*
- *Below CEFP statement*
- *Below SBA statement*

Comprehensive Educational Facilities Plan (CEFP)

The proposed closing of Zela Elementary and Birch River Elementary Schools consolidation into the new Summersville Pre K-8 was not in the 2020-2030 CEFP. The Nicholas County Board of Education will amend the 2020-2030 CEFP. The county will submit a request to the CEFP to the West Virginia Department of Education Office of School Facilities for consideration by the West Virginia Department of Education along with the School Building Authority. This will include the impact statement and supporting data.

School Building Authority of WV

The proposed closing of Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School and consolidating into the new Summersville Pre K-8 is not contingent upon receiving funding from the School Building Authority.

Closures Contingent Upon SBA Funding

N/A

3.6. Superintendent Verification of Board Actions

Date(s) of public hearings:
Date of Public Hearing for Zela Elementary School: October 26, 2026
Date of Public Hearing for Birch River Elementary School: October 26, 2026
Date of Public Hearing for Summersville Pre K-8 School: October 26, 2026

County Board Approval Date: November 10, 2026

Nicholas County requests the West Virginia Board of Education to approve the following.

Nicholas County Requests the West Virginia Board of Education to approve the following.

Closure and Consolidation of Zela Elementary School and Birch River Elementary School into the new Summersville Pre K-8.

Checkmark each section and sign below:

- ☐ *The county assures that the applicable sections of the W. Va. Codes §18-5-13 and §18-5-13a, and WVBE Policies 6200 and 6204 have been addressed.*
- ☐ *This action is justified by the provided supplemental data and information pertinent to the following subjects: enrollment, facilities, finance, personnel, transportation, and educational programs.*
- ☐ *Documentation of all hearings, motions, written public comments, a synopsis or transcript of verbal comments, and other actions concerning the proposed school closings and consolidations were provided in this document.*
- ☐ *All hearings were properly advertised with a class III legal advertisement.*

Scott Cochran

Signature of county superintendent attesting to the completion of all requirements as stated in W. Va. Codes §18-5-13 and §18-5-13a and WVBE Policies 6200 and 6204.

Superintendent _____ Date: _____