

DRAFT

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, April 9, 2024, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

Present: Chairman Neil Whitmore; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Catie Brown, Lenna Ojure, Kathy Burant; Superintendent Phillip Thompson, Clerk Rhonda Humphries.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Ms. Lindsey Flint, Coordinator for Gifted Programs provided information on the Destination Imagination program in Rockbridge County Public Schools. The students participated in the Virginia State Affiliate Tournament Competition on March 16, 2024, which was held in Mechanicsville, Virginia. Destination Imagination is a STEAM based creative problem-solving competition for kids and teens. Students work to turn their ideas into reality through hands-on problem-solving and collaboration. The Fairfield Elementary School DI Team competed in Scientific Challenge, “Blast from the Past”, where they created a story about a character whose discovery of an artifact leads to a finding. The Maury River Middle School DI Team completed in the Improve Challenge, “SO Extra”. They used their improvisation skills to create a 2-act improvisation-skit based on a specific scenario. The Destination Imagination Teams for both Fairfield Elementary School and Maury River Middle School placed first in their challenge divisions and became eligible to compete in global competition in Missouri but because of logistics, the teams will not participate this year.

Fairfield Elementary Destination Imagination Team 2024:

Ben Brown
Jack Chapman
Lillian Chapman
Jaelynn Hite
Ella Sorrells
Abel Via
Charlotte Whitmore
Team Manager – Ms. Cathy Whitesell

Maury River Middle Destination Imagination Team 2024:

Dasha Billias
Rachel Feldman
Levi Poulin
Olivia Poulsen
Lillian Roeder
Daniel Sheller
Logan Wood
Team Manager – Ms. Sarah Schultz

Ms. Melanie Camden, Principal, Mountain View Elementary School, provided information on “Making Connections for Our Students at Mountain View Elementary”. The following are highlights of her presentation:

- Connections with the Mountain View Elementary School Family includes morning announcements, morning meetings, presentation of flags, school store, celebration of attendance, celebration of honor roll.
- Connections of families to the school day includes through PTO events such as Fall Festival, Winter Bingo, Spring Cake Walk; School events such as Read Across America Day, Talent Show, SCA Elections, Grateful for Grandparents Day, and Title I Reading Night. These are all opportunities to connect to each other beyond school family into the community.
- Connecting with Community Stakeholders includes Boxerwood, Veteran, Greenhill Garden Club, Rockbridge Regional Library, PBL Guest Speakers, SRO Deputy Fitzgerald and Rockbridge County Sheriff’s Department, Safari Park, local nursing homes, and many others.
- Connecting Beyond Rockbridge County through field trips such as third graders visiting Monitcello, fourth graders visiting Jamestown and Williamsburg, and fifth graders visiting Washington D.C.

Ms. Camden summarized that Mountain View Elementary School is building a bridge for a brighter future.

CONSENT AGENDA

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board approved the following items on the Consent Agenda:

- Minutes: 1) February 29, 2024 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]; 2) March 12, 2024[Regular Meeting]; 3) March 21, 2024 [Discipline Committee Meeting]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Applications for Use of Facilities
- Surplus Vehicles
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Gabriella Richards, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Madison Russell, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Olivia Fox, Teacher, Central Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Sabrina Coffey, Reading Specialist, Fairfield Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Bethany Rhodenizer, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Amy Henson, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Jennifer Houck, Teacher, site to be determined, effective 2024-2025 school year

Professional Staff

Resignation

Lindsay Wiedrich, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Christina Trombetta, Teacher, Central Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Kiersten Donahue, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Jennifer Nelson, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Kelly Rapoza, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Professional Staff

Retirement

Jennifer Balkey, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, retiring effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Amy Sholes, Teacher, Central Elementary School, retiring effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Support Staff

Retirement

James Hickman, Bus Driver, Transportation, retiring effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

- Business Items
 - Approved Monthly Financials for April 9, 2024 in the amount of \$4,776,214.79.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One person addressed the board expressing concern about the lack of communication to Rockbridge County High School students and parents when there is an incident.

One person addressed the board expressing continued concern with psychological readiness and safety of our children in regards to LGBTQ+ books and materials, as well as LGBTQ+ education and influence of our youngest children ages 4-10. The patron expressed appreciation for the written responses received on this matter and commended the board for being exceptionally responsible about the safety, protection, and happiness of all our children, specifically grades K-5. The patron previously addressed board about the high risk side of suicide by LGBTQ+ children. The patron stated that the pro LGBTQ+ research group, The Trevor’s Project, in the 2022 survey, found that 45% of LGBTQ+ youth seriously considered attempting suicide. The patron offered in previous presentations and letters to provide further evidence as to the risk of presenting LGBT+ materials to grades K-5. The patron stated that the school division is doing a fantastic job, but rather looking forward, believes that the full and final evidence is necessary because LGBTQ+ influence

continues to grow in many school districts. The patron asked that the further analysis not impair the proper and equal love and respect and protection of the LGBTQ+ children in our schools, that discrimination would be very unfair.

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson stated that school divisions are still waiting to officially hear from Richmond. The good news from Richmond is that it seems that the Governor and General Assembly seem to be talking with one another about some sense of negotiating to try and come to a resolution. The ultimate goal is to get a FY25 state budget in hopes that we don't end up waiting until June or July like last year. As the division continues to wait for hopefully positive news out of Richmond, our administrators are continuing to find ways to cut costs across the school division that also do not degrade anything that we need for our school division for our students and for our staff. He stated that health insurance is one of the ways that we have always tried to keep in check and that for the past several years, it has been a huge expense for our school division at more than two million dollars, which is well worth it. There have been some erratic years in the last decade and reflected that he has never seen health care costs actually decrease; there has always been a fairly large increase. Aetna is the current provider and came back for next year with a 20% quote of \$600,000 increase over top of what was paid last year in order to get the same service. The administrators tried to negotiate a better deal with Aetna but they were not willing to come to the table as much as we would like. We went out, looked for other options, and did obtain a few more quotes. At this point, it looks as though an opportunity has arisen in the local choice of Virginia, which is basically a pool of many different entities, whether it is school divisions, governments, small businesses, or whomever. Rockbridge County Public Schools has 500 employees but is still a relatively small employer, and even if there are even a few catastrophic illnesses, sometimes it makes a huge difference in health care costs. When you are able to pool with a lot of other people, hopefully that tends to level and make it a little less of a roller coaster ride from year to year in respect to the increases that are coming in. We will still have an increase with local choice at 10% but this will cut our cost in half for next year. Superintendent Thompson stated that he is hesitant to call it a savings but not as much of an increase. Rockbridge County Public Schools will be under the umbrella of Anthem Blue Cross Blue Shield again, which also includes a dental premium. The downside to this is that it is a change again and sometimes change is difficult. The switch will help to keep health care costs where they are, which is at a minimum, trying not to have any increase to our employees. They will continue to look at other ways as well. The process will begin this week in starting that conversion and likely within the next week or two will begin communicating with our employees about what that will look like.

- Trustee Burant inquired when this change will become effective.
 - Superintendent stated that it is effective July 1, 2024. Health care is one of the things that is tied to the budget and school divisions do not know how much money we will get for our budget, which makes it difficult for us to decide if we can afford our health insurance.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired who the broker would be.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that we will remain with the same broker. Our broker was critical at finding this opportunity.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the good news is that early negotiations in Richmond do not look as negative as it could look.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT: None

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, stated that with December 2024 being the completion target date, the project is about seven and half months away and remains on schedule. He stated that according to KNA's progress chart, the project is ahead of schedule.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that both projects, both the Rockbridge Innovation Center and the Transportation Office, are coming along nicely.

ACTION ITEMS:

Superintendent Thompson stated that in October 2023, the Rockbridge County School Board adopted and approved the Capital Improvements Plan for FY 2024-2030. The plan included for FY25 was an auxiliary gymnasium for Rockbridge County High School and an auxiliary gymnasium for Central Elementary School. The need is present for our schools, our students, and our community. However, over the past several weeks, there have been ongoing conversations surrounding the impending renovation of Rockbridge County High School proper and the need to

have a more serious conversation with the Board of Supervisors. This renovation is included in the CIP for FY29. It was determined by the Rockbridge County School Board that it may be better to postpone the auxiliary gymnasiums until there are more conversations about what it will look like for the FY29 overall for renovation at Rockbridge County High School proper. He stated that this board has always been extremely diligent in trying to make sure the board is doing well with the taxpayer dollar and making sure that the board is saving as much money as possible while getting our students everything they need. He stated that while it would be great to have these auxiliary gymnasiums right now, he understands the need to make sure they are doing it wisely. The other changes in the CIP are a few updated cost figures reflecting the increase in cost of items, which ensures the Board of Supervisors are in tune with what the costs are when they, hopefully, vote to approve some of the projects.

- Chairman Whitmore reflected that when they were approaching the RIC project, they began to focus more closely at more of the architectural engineering fine points. He stated that it is good to begin looking at that and what can be conceptualized.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that once this budget season is finalized, at the next Joint Meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors, it will be a great time to begin serious conversations about what that might look like over the next several years to prepare for that in FY29.
- Trustee Ojura inquired if there may be grants available for the gymnasium projects.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that he is hopeful there may be available resources. Rockbridge County is not the only school division who has some needs for building and construction. The General Assembly did include a construction line last year; it was not a grant but it was a line dedicated to construction. This line was used for HVAC for Mountain View Elementary School. RCPS also received a 2.4 million dollar competitive grant from the state that went towards Rockbridge Innovation Center to help lower the localities cost. Those types of resources seem to be coming out a little more often as there are more schools who have a need across the Commonwealth. He is hopeful that this may continue.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Capital Improvements Plan FY 2024-2030, as presented, which includes moving auxiliary gymnasiums for Central Elementary School and Rockbridge County High School to FY29.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojura, the board voted 5-0, to approve the application for the Carl Perkins Grant, as presented.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Ojura, seconded by Trustee Burant, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Rockbridge Area Special Education Council 2025 as presented.

- Trustee Ojura stated that she was pleased to see that all localities work on the council.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojura, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Special Education Annual Plan and Applications for Federal Funds, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS: None

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, May 14 9, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:23 p.m.

Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman

Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board