

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, February 13, 2024, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

Present: Chairman Neil Whitmore; Trustees Corey Berkstresser [arrived at 5:29 PM], Catie Brown Kathy Burant; Superintendent Phillip Thompson, Clerk Rhonda Humphries. Absent: Trustee Lenna Ojure

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 5:17 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Superintendent Thompson recognized the month of February as Virginia School Boards Association School Board Appreciation Month. He stated that choosing to serve as a school board member is so much more than most people will ever know; most people believe that it is a meeting or two a month and it is a lot more than that. The role of a school board reflects long hours with many meetings, community and school events, communicating with families, and advocating for the needs of our school division with whomever will listen; whether it is advocating locally with parents and local businesses, or General Assembly members, or even members of Congress. He stated that this is officially the month that we show gratitude to each of our school board members for their leadership and for their commitment to making decisions with the best interest of students always at the forefront of their minds. He stated that he is very proud to work with the school board members and reflected that there may be differences in opinion amongst the five school board members, but when time comes to do what is best for our students, they get together and do the right thing for our students. This speaks loudly as it does not happen in every school board across the Commonwealth.

- Trustee Burant expressed appreciation, on behalf of all the school board members, to the students from Fairfield Elementary School who sent appreciation cards to the members of the Rockbridge County School Board.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the week of February 12 – February 16, 2024 is School Board Clerk Appreciation Week. He recognized Ms. Rhonda Humphries, Clerk of the School Board, for her professionalism, support, and service to the Rockbridge County School Board and to the Superintendent of Rockbridge County Public Schools.

- Chairman Whitmore stated that the Clerk of the School Board is appointed by law to ensure that the school board is run efficiently and effectively, and expressed his appreciation to Ms. Humphries.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) January 04, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 2) January 9, 2024 [Regular Meeting]; 3) January 29, 2024 [Special Meeting]; 4) February 6, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Applications for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Professional Staff

Hayley Gomez, Teacher, Central Elementary School, effective February 14, 2024

Support Staff

Hailey Irvine, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, effective February 14, 2024

Car Driver

Christopher Milliner

Substitute

Phynely Stores

Elizabeth Gonzalez

Sion Jang

Professional Staff**Resignation**

Teresa Jarvis, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, resigning effective February 2, 2024

Tori Schwartzmann, School Counselor, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Daniel Taylor, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Paul Spangler, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Cynthia Spangler, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Professional Staff**Retirement**

Tamara Cummins, School Psychologist, Division, retiring effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Scott Fleshman, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, retiring effective June 30, 2024

Support Staff**Retirement**

Jane Swartz, Secretary, Fairfield Elementary School, retiring effective June 30, 2024

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for new grants in the amount of \$225,126.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials for February 12, 2024 in the amount of \$5,380,604.67.
- Religious Exemption Request

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Ms. Robin Parker, Principal, Central Elementary Schools, provided a report "Growing with Change". Ms. Parker stated that she and Ms. Kelly Jones, Assistant Principal, met with their School Improvement Team and asked what they wanted to share with the School Board. There have been many changes this year in a lot of different ways. The staff has found the best in the changes with staff and students and have grown as a school. The report focused on six things that are new and happening in Central Elementary School and new across the division. The following have seen positive change this year at Central Elementary School:

- **Conscious Discipline:** Ms. Parker stated that Central Elementary School has a "We are family" theme and these new initiatives fit well for CES without a lot of change which correlates behavior and consequences for students. New initiatives such as well wishes for students who are out to be welcomed back upon their return to school, daily commitments by students of one thing they can accomplish, and safe keepers when there are behavior issues within the classroom and a plan to make sure students feel safe in the classroom. All of these initiatives make students more aware of what is going on around them.
- **Instructional Changes:** Ms. Jones stated that there have been some instructional changes this year which have had a positive impact on students as well as the school as a whole. UFLI and Number Talks were implemented this year. UFLI is a reading program that focuses on Phonemic Awareness. Number Talks is a daily 10-minute activity used to increase number sense in students. This program provides a time during the day for students to sit and talk about numbers. The program is one hundred percent student driven and is showing to be a powerful initiative.
- **Self-Contained Classrooms:** Ms. Parker stated that there have been some new procedural changes as self-contained classrooms has been an initiative for grades 3-5 across our division. Grades 3 and 4 made the transition to self-contained during this school year and it has had a positive impact as teachers are collaborating more together and sharing ideas. It allows a teacher to see a student as a whole person and not just for their subject specific class and make more connections with their students. There are fewer transitions with less students in the hallway. Grade 5 will transition to self-contained classrooms for the 2024-2025 school year.

- **Preschool:** Ms. Parker stated that this year for the first time, Central Elementary School has developed two onsite VPI (Virginia Preschool Initiative) classrooms. The YMCA housed the program last year.
- **Attendance Incentives:** Ms. Jones stated that Central Elementary School has implemented incentives to improve the overall attendance for the school. Incentives to reduce chronic absenteeism include: Wheel of Prizes; "Perfect Attendance" is announced daily; Monthly Attendance Certificates; and nine-week awards for grade levels.
- **Strider Bikes:** Ms. Jones expressed appreciation to the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundations who purchased the Strider Bikes, the helmets, and storage racks for Central Elementary School. Mr. Stuart Brown and Ms. Jackie Gay-Milliken created the idea and worked with Lisa Keesee to write the grant proposal for the Foundation. The Strider Bike program has provided all of their students with the opportunity to learn how to ride a bike. The bikes do not have pedals but focus on balance and coordination and over the course of the unit, a student transitions to using pedals. Students who receive OT and PT services also have full access to the bikes.

Ms. Parker emphasized that even though Central Elementary School has had many changes, there have been many positive things that have come from every change. "Growing with Change".

- Chairman Whitmore inquired if students are aware of the change due to Conscious Discipline.
 - Ms. Parker stated that staff began discussion with students at the beginning of the year with encouraging breathing techniques as well as well wishes to let students know they are missed when they are out.

Superintendent Thompson stated that just prior to the holidays, he and Mr. Tim Martino, Assistant Superintendent, were invited to visit Ms. Valerie Clay, RCHS Teacher/DE Instructor, to view a project in her classroom. The project was ultimately a presentation of collaboration of learning that involved our high school students, University of Virginia, the Brownsburg Museum, and a lot of our local history that has gone untold.

Superintendent Thompson introduced Ms. Clay, Ms. Coleen Cosgriff, a fifth grade teacher at Central Elementary School and Ms. Julie Fox, Director of Brownsburg Museum. The Brownsburg Museum is located in Brownsburg, Virginia.

- Ms. Valerie Clay explained the progression of the project. Highlights of her presentation are listed below:
 - **Participation:** There were seventeen students who participated in the project during the 2022-2023 school year.
 - **Objectives:** The project objectives were driven by the question asked by Ms. Cosgriff: "What would Rockbridge County students want to know about African American History in Brownsburg?" The themes and parameters were developed as 1) Life Before the Civil War; 2) Life After Emancipation; 3) Life of Freedmen; 4) Life of the Enclaved.
 - **Methodology:** The challenge for students was to create and research questions about African American life in Brownsburg. The inquiry included primary sources from Rockbridge archives. This was an authentic project with real world context and connected to student real-world concerns in Rockbridge County. The result was a public product in which researching findings were offered for public consumption. This project is an example of Project-Based Learning. The students initially came up with forty categorized research questions based on statistics, dwellings, culture and daily life of African Americans in Brownsburg.
 - **Analysis and Source:** Students had to analyze and find sources to answer these questions. The students also worked with University of Virginia, graduate historical architecture class, who chose five of the forty questions for our RCHS students to focus on.
- Ms. Julie Fox stated that the Brownsburg Museum has won awards since 2009 for their exhibits, but this is the first time for a diverse group of people helping the museum which led to an even greater collaboration including the high school and graduate students,. The group effort consisted of an international artist from Germany, the story completely told by descendants, and local researchers gave of their time for free for using archives – Historic Lexington Foundation, Washington and Lee's Special Collections, a Richmond graphic artist and graphic designer, a graphics production company, village residents, and local historians and volunteers. The results of the collaborative effort are magnificent. Ms. Fox welcomes all to come see the museum.

- Ms. Coleen Cosgriff stated that as a teacher, it was exciting to be a part of the project as it was an authentic PBL experience unlike any other. The project will engage local schools in Project Based Learning materials that match Virginia's Stand of Learning requirements. These materials will be provided to all visiting groups of students in grades K-12. The goal is to engage all of the six schools in Rockbridge County and eighteen schools in Augusta County in partnerships to help educate students about the history of enslavement in this community. She issued an invitation to the school board, school administrators, and Ms. Clay's students who participated in the project to visit the museum on Sunday, February 25, 2024, prior to the grand opening on Saturday, March 23, 2024.
- Chairman Whitmore expressed his sentiment that it is great to see all people, all age groups, professionals, and students to be involved in this project.
- Mr. Martino stated that the mock-up was beautiful and added that Ms. Clay crafted the project into a class function that continues beyond this project.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Superintendent Thompson stated that there are many people in the business community who contribute great things for our student's enrichment and things that we typically would not be able to provide to our students throughout our normal school day. The Virginia School Board Association Business Honor Roll is a way to honor one or more of those businesses annually. He requested that the school board members think about businesses in our community who may have contributed in some sort of exceptional way to our schools and if there is someone they wish to nominate, to reach out to Superintendent Thompson for discussion. He will present a resolution from the VSBA at the March meeting for action. There has been discussion at the division level of one nomination that is not necessarily a business but an education entity, Mountain Gateway Community College.

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided an update on the Rockbridge Innovation Center and the Transportation Office. He will provide an update again at the Rockbridge County School Board meeting of March 12, 2024.

- Trustee Burant inquired if all of the ductwork will be seen.
 - Mr. Walters stated that some of the ductwork will be exposed and some will not. The new windows will allow for more light that is natural and will allow for students and others to see into classrooms to showcase what classes are doing.
- Chairman Whitmore recognized that both of the projects are on schedule.

ACTION ITEMS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Burant offered condolences to the family of Katherine "Kit" Jones, former teacher of Rockridge County Public Schools, who passed away on January 30, 2024.

SCHOOL BOARD

The Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors will be held on Thursday, February 29, 2024 / 5:00 PM / Location: Rockbridge County School Board Office, 2893 Collierstown Road, Lexington, Virginia.

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, March 12, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Berkstresser, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:16 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board