

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Thursday, November 9, 2023. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge County School Board Office.

Present: Chairman Wendy Lovell; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Catie Brown, Neil Whitmore; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Clerk Rhonda Humphries.
Absent: Trustee Kathy Burant.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 5:00 p.m.

BUDGET WORK SESSION

Superintendent Thompson stated that the goal of this meeting is to determine priorities and ensure that the focus is in the right direction.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer presented the following information on Fiscal Year 2025:

RCPS School Board Mission, Vision, and Goals

RCPS Local Composite Index (LCI)

The state determined Rockbridge County to have a higher ability to pay for education when compared to the last biennium. Over the most recent four biennia, the LCI for Rockbridge County has been as follows:

- 2016-2018 -- .4522
- 2018-2020 -- .4498
- 2020-2022 -- .4506
- 2022-2024 -- .4530

It has not yet been determined what the LCI will be for the 2024-2026 biennium, but we should have this by December 2023. The RCPS School Board continues to advocate with our representatives in the General Assembly in hopes they would support revisiting how the LCI is calculated to ensure a more fair distribution of state funds to areas of true high need such as Rockbridge County.

RCPS Average Daily Members (ADM)

The RCPS FY24 budget is based on a projected ADM of 2212. This ADM is slightly different than the 2220 we originally used, but we wanted to use the latest information since we received the budget and calc tool in October this year. The state projected our ADM at 2145 for FY24 and we will see what the state projected ADM is for RCPS in December.

FY25 Budget Considerations

- **Worker's Compensation:** [Increase TBD] Much like health insurance rates, each year we must reassess and negotiate with worker's compensation carriers for favorable rates.
- **Property & Casualty Insurance:** [Increase TBD] Each year we also reassess and negotiate with our property and casualty insurance carriers for favorable rates.
- **Virginia Retirement System Changes:** [Potential Decrease TBD] There is a recommendation from the VRS Board to change the employer contribution percentage from 16.62% to 14.21% in addition to other slight decreases on other VRS controlled items such as Group Life Insurance and the Health Insurance Credit. There was also a recommendation from VRS to lower this percentage for the current biennium as well but it was not adopted by the General Assembly.

RCPS FY25 Potential Priorities

- **Classified Employee Salaries:** We are still losing ground to other local employers who have already moved to \$16 per hour or more. The move we are making January 1st to go to \$15 per hour at a minimum for all classified employees will help, but we are still losing qualified applicants and current employees to other local businesses and institutions. While we are very excited to be able to move our classified employees to a minimum of \$15 per hour, we now have very flat salary scales for those positions. We are currently working on different ideas and potential scenarios to try and provide some separation for our employees who have been with us for some time or who have gained extra skills in their position.
 - Trustee Berkstresser inquired if existing employees are already making \$15 an hour; are they on scales?
 - Mr. Kirby stated that it is currently based on years service.
 - Trustee Brown inquired if majority of employees are on the newer status or been with us longer.
 - Mr. Kirby stated that there has been lots of turnover the last several years. Administrators have told them that more help is coming just need more time to development plan for increase. There is a shortage of classified employees.

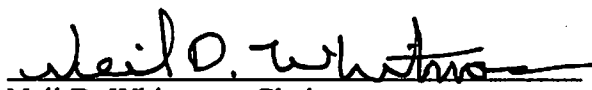
- Trustee Lovell stated that if RCPS does not invest in long term, employees will leave and expressed her sentiment that incentive layers need to be added to retain them.
- Teacher Salaries: As we plan for the 2024-2025 Fiscal Year, our analysis reveals that we have unfortunately fallen behind once again significantly in relation to our region. Teacher salaries must be maintained and improved in Rockbridge County in order to attract and retain highly qualified staff members. This is even more critical at this time due to the many teachers who are leaving our classrooms due to stress and increased workloads caused by the pandemic as well as retirements. With our current biennium budget including a 12% teacher salary increase, we will need to be ready to keep pace with surrounding school divisions as they will be prepared to continue to increase teacher salaries again this year. Many of our surrounding divisions had already provided the 2% raise that we are implementing beginning January 1st. Each year that we cannot maintain pace with teacher pay, we will begin to fall farther behind other school divisions as we compete not only for the best teachers, but also to simply fill needed teacher and staff positions.
- Health Care Premium [Increase TBD]: We are currently looking at claim data for the current year and have begun discussions with both Aetna and OneDigital to plan for the upcoming year. We will not have a credit or a rate cap moving forward for the upcoming year from Aetna so we will do our due diligence and look at all options to help control costs for both the division and our employees.
- Inflation/Rising Costs of Supplies and Materials: Our costs for items such as fuel, maintenance supplies and materials, technology hardware and software, and instructional materials continue to rise at substantial rates. We continue to look for ways to cut costs as well to offset these increases including negotiating costs, analyzing processes, staff analysis, and trying to maintain our equipment to extend its life, but it is difficult to cover these increasing costs.
 - Trustee Lovell stated that it is impressive with all that is being done to make ends meet, while feeling the impact of inflation.
 - Mr. Kirby stated that he feels the budget should not have a majority of the budget focused on people.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that it is the consensus of the board that the priorities are the same and are still need for FY25.

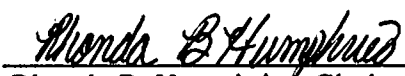
Superintendent Thompson stated that in regards to Rockbridge Innovation Center, there are change orders that are being dealt with. The RCPS Maintenance staff found an existing sewer line issue that needs to be fixed now so that there are not problems in the future.

- Trustee Brown asked for and received confirmation that the project is still on schedule.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 5:51 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board