

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, November 7, 2023, at Maury River Middle School.

Present: Chairman Neil Whitmore; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Catie Brown Kathy Burant, Wendy Lovell; 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:**

Superintendent Thompson stated that Dr. Craft is ill and that he will provide his Instructional Report at the December meeting.

**STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:**

Mr. Rick Bain, Supervisor of Human Resources, introduced employees who received the REDOT Award, [Rockbridge Employees Doing Outstanding Things]. This is an award designed to highlight the great things our employees are doing. This award is given quarterly, with nominations by a co-worker or an administrator. There are fourteen employees to be recognized during the first quarter:

- Hillary Beristain- Fairfield Elementary School
- Cathy Whitesell -Fairfield Elementary School
- Krista McDaniel - Natural Bridge Elementary SchoolS
- Brianna Rogstad -Natural Bridge Elementary SchoolS
- Kerry (Keller) Blackburn- Central Elementary School
- Molly Moore- Central Elementary School
- Kristin Bailey- Mountain View Elementary School
- David Eagle- Mountain View Elementary School
- Amy Woody- Maury River Middle School
- Jack Riley- Maury River Middle School
- Andy (Talmage) Martin- Rockbridge County High School
- Miranda Fitzgerald- Rockbridge County High School
- Jeff Hogge- Maury River Middle School (Maintenance)
- Mark Coleman- Maury River Middle School (IT)
- David Lilly-Central Office (Maintenance)

**CONSENT AGENDA**

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

- Minutes: 1) October 9, 2023 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 2) October 10, 2023 [Regular Meeting]; 3) October 26, 2023 [Joint Meeting with RC Board of Supervisors]; 4) November 2, 2023 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Applications for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

**Appointments**

**Professional Staff**

Robin RiCharde, Special Education Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective November 8, 2023

**Support Staff**

Marshall Conner, Custodian, Rockbridge County High School, effective November 8, 2023

**Food Service**

Mary Blackwell  
Terry Netusil

**Substitute**

Bri Bissell

**Winter Coaches 2023-2024****Rockbridge County High School****Boys' Basketball**

Robert Winfield, Head Coach

Gary Randall, Volunteer Coach

**Girls' Basketball**

Darrell Plogger, Head Coach

Monica Schaus, Assistant Coach

Tyler Falls, JV Coach

Paul Pelter, Volunteer Coach

Ricky Haston, Volunteer Coach

Seth Clark, Volunteer Coach

**Wrestling**

Mike Wood, Head Coach

Garret Shultz, Assistant Coach

Aaron Bruce, Volunteer Coach

**Swimming**

Erica Bisaillon, Head Coach

Leslie Ayers, Volunteer Coach

**Cheerleading**

Shannon Bryan, Head Coach

**Indoor Track**

Jennifer Showalter, Head Coach

Amy Zickafoose, Assistant Coach

Taylor Tyree, Volunteer Coach

Julie Tisone, Volunteer Coach

Mike Brown, Volunteer Coach

Gloria Brown, Volunteer Coach

**Maury River Middle School****Boys' Basketball**

Ron Clark, Head Coach

**Girls' Basketball**

Michael Crouse, Head Coach

**Wrestling**

Daniel Taylor, Head Coach

Josh Holten, Volunteer Coach

Nate Schear, Volunteer Coach

**Cheerleading**

Erin Poulin, Head Coach

**Professional Staff****Resignation**

Jaylen Clark, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective December 19, 2023

Madison Armstrong, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective  
October 19, 2023**Support Staff****Resignation**William LeMert, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective  
December 19, 2023Lisa Coffman, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, resigning effective  
October 11, 2023Makaila Shipman, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective  
November 3, 2023

- Business Items
  - Authorized the Treasurer of Rockbridge to pay debt service for duly appropriated debt service funds in the amount of \$554,375.00.
  - Approved Monthly Financials for November 7, 2023 in the amount of \$3,498,667.24

**PUBLIC COMMENT:** None**BUDGET PLANNING:** None

**COMMITTEE REPORTS:** None

**INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:**

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, introduced Ms. Robyn Sherman, Work Based Learning Coordinator, who began in her position two years ago; this is the third year for her to work with the program. He stated that she has done an amazing job at spearheading work-based opportunities in the community for our students. The Career Fair will be held on November 16 and is a big piece of the work-based learning sector. He invited board members to attend if their schedule will allow.

Ms. Sherman provided information on the upcoming Career Fair at Rockbridge County High School; students begin at 9:00 AM and it will end at 12 noon. She provided a comparison of the 2022-23 Career Fair with this year as noted below:

| <u>2022-2023</u>                                   | <u>2023-2024</u>                                       |
|----------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
| 46 vendors                                         | 70 vendors, with more possibly participating           |
| RGHS 11 <sup>th</sup> and 12 <sup>th</sup> graders | RGHS 9 <sup>th</sup> – 12 <sup>th</sup> graders        |
| PMS students participated                          | PMHS students and Rivermont students are participating |
| February event                                     | November event                                         |

Ms. Sherman stated that the event is being held in November because they are joining with the Chamber of Commerce and Ms. Littleton and her grant to hold a Career Fest in the spring. The Chamber of Commerce staff will be assisting with participant check-in; a Career Coach and Talent Search from Mountain Gateway Community College will assist with student check-in; and Everbrite, LLC donated signs that can be used at various events moving forward. The vendors representing trade schools and colleges are four trade schools, two health science schools, and two community college admission counselors. The business world will be represented by three agriculture businesses, four from the auto industry, ten from the trades industry, two from the business industry, nine from the family consumer science, and fourteen from health sciences and first responders. There are five vendors from the armed forces. Other vendors include five from cyber security, an FBI agent, the HR department from local colleges and universities and Virginia Career Works. There are twenty-four more vendors than last year, thirty-five repeat vendors, and thirty-five first time vendors. She stated that she does expect more vendor confirmations to come in. She stated that she has around seventy interns in the Work Based Learning program.

- Trustee Berkstresser inquired why the event was being held at Rockbridge County High School and not at the Horse Center, as in the past.
  - Ms. Sherman stated that the event will be held in the Rockbridge County High School Commons Area. The Career Fest in the spring will be held at the Horse Center.
- Trustee Brown inquired how the scheduling for students will work.
  - Ms. Sherman stated that each grade level goes at a certain time.

Ms. Sherman expressed her appreciation to the community and stated that there are students who have been hired through this program in our community.

**INFORMATIONAL ITEM:**

Superintendent Thompson provided a report on the Comprehensive Plan 2023-2027. The last adopted plan was in 2017. A comprehensive plan is a fluid, living, ever-changing document that is a roadmap to determine where we are and where we want to go as a school division. The global pandemic caused some of the previous plan not to be accomplished. The need for an updated comprehensive plan was determined in early 2023. A team was established and work began on the plan immediately. A stakeholder survey was developed and was open for responses for approximately thirty days. The public survey was available to staff members, students, parents, and the community via social media. There were nearly 1,100 responses with the following breakdown: 50% staff; 25% students; 20% parents; 5% community members/alumni. Once the survey responses were received, a Development Committee of approximately thirty members were formed. The committee consisted of students, teachers, parents, business leaders, community leaders, and administrators. The committee looked at the past plan and tweaked it considering the survey response. The committee used data gathered from the public survey, made suggestions on priorities, goals, strategies initiatives, and action steps. The committee developed four main priorities, with a goal and strategic initiatives given for each goal. Under each of the strategic initiatives, the committee included more specific action steps that will help ensure that the division remains on the proper path to realizing the priorities that were expressed by all of the school and community stakeholders and are incorporated into the 2024-2027 Comprehensive Plan for Rockbridge County Public Schools. The established priorities are:

- Priority 1: Student Success
  - Trustee Lovell expressed her sentiment that the community involvement is heartening as Covid caused a pause in some of those relationships.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that he and a couple of board members attended the Chamber of Commerce Government Roundtable recently where he spoke with business leaders of different backgrounds who wanted to learn more about the school divisions, wanted to know of issues and how they can help and also how they can help celebrate successes.
- Chairman Whitmore referred to Ms. Sherman's report on the Career Fair as it allows the community to keep their eyes on student likes, interests, and goals.
- Superintendent Thompson reiterated that it is a wonderful situation with community partners coming into our schools to help. He expressed his appreciation to the community as it has helped to make a better school division.
  - Priority 2: Instruction, Leadership, and Support
  - Priority 3: School Safety, Culture, and Climate
  - Priority 4: Communication and Engagement
- Trustee Lovell asked if the list of the committee members could be shared so that appreciation can be extended for the work done.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired if the finished document will be shared with the Virginia Department of Education.
  - Superintendent Thompson responded that school divisions are required to have a Comprehensive Plan and that VDOE may review it. The school division reviews the checklist every few months to ensure that the division is staying on the roadmap for goals and initiatives.
  - Trustee Burant expressed her belief that the action steps are justifiable.
- Chairman Whitmore confirmed that this document will be an action item at the December board meeting.

Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, provided information for the 2024-2025 Calendar. He stated that it is similar to the current calendar. The new teacher workdays remain to be extended to two days. It is also beneficial to have a soft opening for students; the calendar for 2024-2025 reflects a first day for students on Wednesday, which is better for the younger learners. The 2024-2025 calendar is a progression of what we currently have. He stated that encumbered days will be established; days that will be school-based workdays for teachers.

- Trustee Lovell asked the status of August 2 as it appears on the calendar.
  - Mr. Martino stated that this the last Friday that administrative offices and schools are closed for the summer schedule. The consensus was that it is beneficial to bring new teachers, or teachers new to the division, in on Thursday, have a break, and then continue on Monday.
- Trustee Burant stated that she sees it as a positive for the two-hour early dismissal on the day before Thanksgiving Break and two full weeks at Winter Break, as she feels this is important.
  - Trustee Lovell gave a reminder that it sometimes depends on the calendar how days fall and that the formula in practice now produces a good calendar.
  - Mr. Martino stated that there are guidelines that must be followed and parameters that must be met. The calendar reflects a consistent model.

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided information on the Rockbridge Church Lease Renewal. He stated that Rockbridge Church has used Maury River Middle School for ten years as their meeting location and that it remains a positive relationship, as they do a lot for Maury River Middle School. The church continues to grow and expand with additional space being used. The lease has been changed to reflect an increase to \$300 per week. The weekly amount began at \$200, increased to \$225 for several years, and will now be increased to \$300 with the new lease.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that the church members do the cleaning themselves and leave the school in good condition after their weekly use.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if someone comes by to secure the doors.
  - Mr. Walters responded that there is a church committee responsible for the security of the building before they leave.
  - Superintendent Thompson offered a reminder that the building has a security monitoring system and Ms. Stevens will be notified if there is a breach.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired if the church has plans to move in the future.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated the agreement ten years ago was that this lease would be temporary as they planned to become a stand-alone church. It has become a good partnership with Maury River Middle School and the church members are pleased with the agreement.
  - Trustee Lovell offered that it is important that the Maury River Middle School staff be in agreement also.

**ACTION ITEMS:**

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Lovell, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Superintendent/Designee to process November 14, 2023 financials, accounts payable, payroll, fund appropriations, and fund transfers as necessary. A final report summarizing these actions will be provided at the December board meeting. All transactions will require signatures of two of the following staff positions: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Business Officer, Chief Operations Officer, or Director of Financial Services.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, provided a FY24 Budget Update. The highlights are as follows:

| 2023 Special Session 1 General Assembly Budget Category Adjustments |                |        |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|--------|
| CATEGORIES                                                          | FY24 PROJECTED |        |
| INSTRUCTION - 61 (FUND 50)                                          | \$26,546,047   | 71.2%  |
| ADMINISTRATION & HEALTH - 62 (FUND 50)                              | \$2,546,918    | 6.8%   |
| PUPIL TRANSPORTATION - 63 (FUND 50)                                 | \$3,112,774    | 8.4%   |
| OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE - 64 (FUND 50)                             | \$3,319,615    | 8.9%   |
| FACILITIES - 66 (FUND 50)                                           | \$20,000       | 0.1%   |
| TECHNOLOGY - 68 (FUND 50)                                           | \$1,714,248    | 4.6%   |
| FUND 50 SITE OPERATING BUDGET                                       | \$37,259,601   | 100.0% |

- The changes for this budget are all from additional state funds due to the adopted 2023 Special Session 1 General Assembly Budget.
- These funds include the state share of a 2% raise for all contracted employees beginning January 1, 2024, the lowering of the cap on support personnel, and funding from the Governor’s ALL-IN initiative.
- With this funding, we would like to give all contracted employees a 2% raise effective January 1, 2024.
- We would like to also recognize the great work being done by our classified employees by recommending that RCPS go to a minimum hourly wage of \$15 beginning January 1, 2024.
- We are still in the process of finalizing our ALL-IN spending plan but we will have the flexibility to carry over some of that funding for FY25 and FY26 if necessary.
- Chairman Whitmore expressed his sentiment that this is great news and that it is tremendous to be able to do this for our dedicated and new employees.
- Trustee Lovell stated that it is her hope that it can continue to be relayed to the legislators how horrible it is to have to wait until November, especially in public education.

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Lovell, the board voted 5-0, to approve the FY24 Budget in the amount of \$37,259,601.

**NEW BUSINESS:**

Chairman Whitmore requested that Superintendent Thompson provide an update on the Code Red incident at Rockbridge County High School on October 10, 2023.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that he has heard comments regarding the lack of a PA system at Rockbridge County High School on the date of the recent incident. The issue of the non-working PA system was brought to the attention of administration the week before teachers returned in August 2023. The funding source was established and a vendor; however, parts have been difficult for the vendor to get. The vendor now has the parts and is working to get it completely quickly.
- Trustee Berkstresser stated that the issue was discussed with the Board of Supervisors at the Joint Meeting of August 23, 2023 and that the consensus was for the school division to pull funds for payment.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated that it has never been a question of funding but that projects had to be moved so this project could be done now.
- Trustee Burant stated that there were several communication pieces in place and asked Superintendent Thompson to provide that information.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that the key factor to remember is that Dr. Craft and his team had found technology with cell phone applications to be used by staff, if needed, and they were used on that day. All schools in the Commonwealth of Virginia are required to have a certain number of drills, including lockdowns, during the school year to provide practice for all. The app was used and proved to be successful during the bomb threat on October 10, 2023. If the PA system had been in place on October 10, the incident would have been handled in the same fashion with the staff leading evacuation and answering questions. He stressed that practicing for an emergency situation, gives administration, teachers, staff and students a chance to know what the process is. He cautioned that every emergency situation is so very different, there will always be a level of uncertainty and criticism; sometimes rightfully so. He stressed that the school staff and administrators always come back as a team to discuss what happened, what was done well, and how to improve upon and what to do differently if this were to happen again. He met with members of the Sheriff's Office the week after the incident, as well as with staff from VMI as they are in close proximity to RCHS. All principals will be meeting to discuss their Crisis Plans with their staff. One concern that was brought up was questioning if students and staff being evacuated to the stadium is that the safest place. Options have been discussed and Dr. Craft is implementing that in his Crisis Plan. The first priority when the bomb threat was received was to get out all persons out of the building. Rockbridge County Public Schools administration has a good relationship with local law enforcement in working with decisions based upon what is happening at the moment. The job of the school division will always be to get staff and students out to safety and then law enforcement takes over. There has been one meeting at Rockbridge County High School with discussions of protocol and there will be meetings at each RCPS school, as well as Central Office, for the same purpose.
- Mr. Martino offered a reminder that people get emotional; persons assisting with the immediate situation may also be a parent; they may be vested in other ways besides being a teacher. Teachers make sure that students are emotionally okay.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated that he witnessed staff talking with students in the stadium stands and agrees wholeheartedly with Trustee Burant.
- Mr. Martino stated that Superintendent Thompson's response to the situation was that we need to take this apart piece by piece and see what was done well, what needs to be done better, and not to be complacent and just say that things are ok and that we got lucky.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if there has been any luck in finding out who the threat came from, how it came – if it was from a broader range.
  - Superintendent Thompson stated that there has not been an official determination.

### SCHOOL BOARD

There will be a Special Called Meeting [Budget Work Session] / Thursday, Nov 9, 2023 / 5 PM / Location: Rockbridge County School Board Office, 2893 Collierstown Road, Lexington, Virginia.

The VSBA Annual Convention will be held in Williamsburg November 14-17, 2023, with several board members in attendance.

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, December 12, 2023 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

### ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Lovell, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:31 p.m.

  
Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman

  
Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board