

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, October 10, 2023, at Maury River Middle School.

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

CALL TO ORDER

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

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Superintendent Thompson provided information on the incident that took place today at Rockbridge County High School. Staff at Rockbridge County High School received a telephone call around noon regarding a bomb threat. This event happened at several schools across the Commonwealth. The Rockbridge County Sheriff's Department, Virginia State Police, and bomb dogs assisted with the incident at Rockbridge County High School. Superintendent Thompson expressed his appreciation to the students, teachers, and staff for cooperating with the initial Code Red, then evacuating to the stadium. He also expressed appreciation to the Transportation Department and all bus drivers who quickly assisted in getting students home in a calm manner. He emphasized that this incident was a hoax and that there were no injuries in evacuating the building. He stated that he understands the concern of parents and community members who were anxious and worried. He emphasized that information cannot be released unless factual. The main priority is always to make sure that students are safe, and then contact parents. If parents were contacted first, it could potentially cause a messy situation if parents were to begin arriving to pick up students as the evacuation was taking place. Students were using cell phones to contact parents before information was released. The Facebook post and instant messenger calls all were released at the same time; he noted that a large portion of the community is on social media. There were several separate incidents in the area at the same time which may have caused an impact on the communication lines. He stated that he will continue to ask parents to be understanding of faculty and staff and to understand that the protocol in place is in the best interest of our students and to keep them safe. Superintendent Thompson stated that the incidents would be investigated to the full extent of the law with hopes that it never happens again.

- Trustee Lovell reflected that if it had been an actual bomb and if parents were in the parking lot, the impact would have been much greater. Trustee Lovell stated that she sympathizes with parents and students, and asks that they trust what the administration of Rockbridge County Public Schools is doing.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that there could have been thousands of persons flooding the area which could greatly detain the help of emergency personnel reaching the school. He stated that he was not able to get to Rockbridge County High School as he was stuck on route 11, parking at a nearby business and walking to the school. He stated that the Central Office Team will be meeting with Sheriff Funkhouser for a debriefing next week to discuss the protocol in place.
- Chairman Whitmore emphasized that the first priority is the safety of students with the safety measures and protocol that is in place, while noting that other divisions were affected also. He stated that it is important to look at all angles; the incident, aftermath, and how to prepare if there were to be another incident.
- Trustee Burant expressed her sentiment of thankfulness that students were safe. She further stated that the students are safer with us than with parents coming and going to pick up students during an active situation.
- Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that physical safety as well as emotional safety is important and reminded all that students are processing the event now.

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) September 12, 2023 [Regular Meeting]; 2) September 20, 2023 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Applications for Use of Facilities
- Religious Exemption Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Support Staff

Kristan Youngblood, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School,
effective October 11, 2023

Bradford Doremus, Custodian, Central Elementary School, effective October 11, 2023

Food Service

Sandra Montgomery

In-House Substitute

Tom Taylor

Professional Staff

Resignation

Amanda Guerdat, Social Worker, Division, effective October 7, 2023

Support Staff

Retirement

Elise Johnson, Bus Driver, Transportation, effective January 1, 2023

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriations for School Safety Equipment in the amount of \$358,490.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$4,370,581.18

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson stated that the Governor has signed a budget three weeks ago but the calc tool has not yet been released. He stated that he was in a virtual meeting with Dr. Coons, Superintendent of Public School Instruction, and the calc tool for FY24 should be available by the end of the week. He reflected that not so long ago, the calc tool was released with an error; they are ensuring that there are no errors this year.

- Trustee Burant stated that she also listened to the virtual meeting with Dr. Coons. She stated that she knows that parents struggle with doctor appointments and wonders how many hours students are actually away from school/instructional time and the impact. She reflected that she feels local business understand.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that absences in middle school and high school students reflect chronic absences. He stated that anything parents can do to help with chronic absenteeism is appreciated. He attended the Chamber of Rockbridge Government Roundtable and that business were shocked to hear how chronic absenteeism hurts our students.

Superintendent Thompson stated that he has been meeting with principals for their budget priorities input. The first budget work session has been tentatively set for November 9, 2023 with the information that is known. The calc tool is typically available in December. The intent for the budget work session is to share new thoughts, recommendations and discussion and to have priorities at the end of the work session.

- Chairman Whitmore inquired about the health care standpoint.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the one year credit has been used. There was a cap of 13% last year and it came in under which allowed for a good year.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, provided a Fall Instructional Update with all schools being fully accredited. The following are highlights of his presentation:

- SOL Results, Spring 2023 / Results for all learners grades 3-12:
 - Reading: 71%
 - Writing: 59%
 - History and Social Science: 64%
 - Math: 64%
 - Science: 66%

- Focused and Targeted Improvement:
 - Expand and enhance PBL experiences
 - Use of the Comprehensive Instructional Plan for BMA's and data collection / Benchmark window opened October 10, 2023.
 - Two LETS Cohorts
 - UFLI implementation
 - Targeted reading PD for special education teachers
 - Questioning PD delivered in August for grades 6-12
 - Data team meetings
 - Updated School Improvement Plans
 - Professional Learning Community in place at Rockbridge County High School
 - Team meetings
 - Number Talks are being rolled out (builds number sense)
- ALL IN VA:
 - ALL IN VA is Governor Youngkin's action plan to ensure students get the academic support they need to recover from learning loss. The three key elements are:
 - Attendance:
 - Launch a Chronic Absenteeism Task Force to make recommendations on how to reduce chronic absenteeism, which will be led by Dr. Matthew Crossman, Director of School Services
 - Literacy [began as K-3 and is now K-8]:
 - Accelerate the expansion of the Virginia Literacy Act through 8th grade
 - Provide PD to secondary reading specialists (elementary reading specialists have already participated in the PD)
 - Provide high-quality instructional materials.
- Trustee Lovell inquired as to what materials that we do not have.
 - Mr. Martino stated that it is not the desire to put more on teachers with developing assessments. The division is currently waiting on high-quality, research-based, materials that contain assessments and then will determine what they student needs. The software will customize for reading and math.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the research-based software will come from the state and is valuable in that it prevents teachers from having to create their own assessments.
 - Learning:
 - High dosage tutoring
 - Flexible tutoring time for maximum results
 - Personalized session guided by standardized recommendations

Mr. Martino stated that it is a requirement to have a tutoring system and that plans are being finalized to have it during the school day. A tentative date for a begin date is November 6, 2023 for grades 3-9. Mr. Martino stated that it is the hope to pay teachers to provide tutoring during the day, with time built in.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that the intent is to use our own folks as they are the best in the business. It is the hope to find tutors in our buildings, business community who value education. He noted that parents have the responsibility to make sure that their child is in school and for parents to be involved.
 - All in Spending Plan.
 - The total amount provided by the state: \$728,015
 - 70%: Tutoring/learning acceleration with focus on grades 3-8 / \$509,610.50
 - 20%: Preparation for and implementation of the Virginia Literacy Act / \$145,603
 - 10%: Student attendance recovery / addressing chronic absenteeism / \$72,801.50
 - Category 4: Additional operating and infrastructure support expenditures

Superintendent Thompson provided a report on Vaping Education. He stated that big topics for discussion in the school division is chronic absenteeism and the renovations at the Rockbridge Innovation Center. Another big topic is on vaping, which is prevalent in society and in our community. If an adult chooses to vape, it is their decision. The administration is concerned about the health effects on young people and have taken steps to prevent it. Vape detectors were put into use at the high school and middle school a couple of years ago and had an immediate impact on students being caught vaping, which results in a stiff discipline situation. The school division can control vaping when students are at school. He stated that Trustees Brown and Lovell attended a meeting last summer to discuss what can be done to stop vaping at school. He stated that most are high school students, some are middle school students who do it; elementary school students, at a much lower level, with very few known cases. The division has initiated conversations and initiatives regarding unhealthy habits.

1. Students complete modules with videos, pre-tests and post-tests, which have initiated conversations at home to aid students in making better choices.
 2. Elementary school counselors incorporate anti-vaping lessons, work with librarians which guides story time and also helps with literacy and topics.
 3. Rockbridge Area Community Services will be providing four 40-minute presentations for fifth graders and five 40-minute presentations for seventh graders on healthy choices and specifically why vaping is bad for you.
 4. Updated school websites for tool age-specific tools to offer parents and community members.
 5. Public service announcements on Facebook on why vaping is bad to educate families.
 6. Meeting with principals.
- Mr. Martino stated that the Sheriff's Office provided a presentation at a summer Administrative Retreat and showed how students may hide the vaping items.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided an update on the Rockbridge Innovation Center. He stated that it is now 2.5 months into the project and that it is beginning to look like a new structure. There are new walls up and being formed which reflect the new lay out of the building. There are more windows to show case each program. The primary of the work is being done is on the infrastructure with an open canvas. He stated that construction meetings take place on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month and reported that the project is on schedule with very little change.

- Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, stated that a lot of time has been spent to do under-concrete work before beginning inside work.

ACTION ITEMS:

Mr. Randy Walters provided the Capital Improvements Plan FY 2024-2030, with the intent that it will be approved at this meeting and then presented to the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors at the next Joint Meeting. The CIP reflects the following changes:

- FY24 Projects: Addition to Replace Fire Safety Panels at MVE, FES, CES, NBE, RCHS, and Central Office
- FY30 Projects: Addition for Resealing All Parking Lots at all facilities
Addition for Track Resurfacing at MRMS

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation to Central Elementary School and Fairfield Elementary School for the invitation to board members to participate in the fourth grade PBL activities.

Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation to the Chamber of Commerce for the Government Roundtable event on September 26, 2023.

Trustee Burant expressed her appreciation to Rockbridge County High School for their Athletic Hall of Fame event. [She announced that she has nominated Coach David Miller as Educator of the year in the 2023 People's Choice Awards.]

Trustee Burant offered a tribute to Sarah Jane Deacon, former member of the Rockbridge County School Board. Ms. Deacon passed away on September 24, 2023. Ms. Deacon served as a trustee for the South River District from 2006-2012. Ms. Deacon was a former Board Chair and was present through a number of school renovations as well as served on the discipline, capital improvements, and finance committees. Ms. Burant expressed appreciation for her service to Rockbridge County Public Schools.

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, November 14, 2023 / 5:30 PM / Location: Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Lovell, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:57 p.m.



Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman



Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board