

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Thursday, November 10, 2022. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge County School Board Office.

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Lovell called the meeting to order at 4:32 p.m.

BUDGET WORK SESSION

Superintendent Thompson stated

This is the first budget work session for the new biennium. His goals for this meeting were:

- *To bring the board up to speed with the available information concerning the FY23 budget process;*
- *To leave this meeting with priorities of the Rockbridge County School Board members would like to have set as priorities for FY24.*

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, provided an overview of the budget preparation for Fiscal Year 2023-2024. The following are presentation highlights:

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. The current LCI is .4506, with .4530 for the years 2022-2024, which equates to a lesser percentage of state funding for RCPS over the next two fiscal years. The Rockbridge County 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.

- Chairman Lovell expressed her sentiment that the issue is not with our local politicians but it is at the state level.

RCPS Average Daily Members (ADM)

The RCPS FY23 budget is based on a state projected ADM of 2298. As of now, RCPS projected ADM is 2260, a difference of 38 fewer students. If there is no Hold Harmless, there may be a potential loss of \$227,608. The state projected ADM for FY24 is 2287, a difference of 12 fewer students. RCPS will be using this ADM count for budget preparation purposes for FY24. This low ADM count is out of the norm when compared to the last decade and can be attributed to COVID, mask mandates, other issues, and large graduating classes in recent years. Mr. Kirby stated that we do need to begin adjusting for these lower ADM numbers planning accordingly.

Mr. Kirby stated that when budgeting for FY24 and using an ADM of 2287, the estimated increase in state funding revenues will be approximately \$810,877 more than FY23 state revenues. A \$1,023,967 compensation supplement must be used to give staff a five percent pay increase. We must give at least 3% to get any proration of this money.

- Chairman Lovell inquired about the 50 non-compliant students related to home instruction.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that most of our home instruction families do a wonderful job providing a meaningful education for their children and follow the proper legal procedures well but there are many who do not. There are families who provide home instruction because they want something other than a traditional school setting. There is a required annual evaluation component, which is to be provided to his office, but there are many at this point who are legally non-compliant. His office follows-up with letters containing directives with deadlines and then with a visit by the School Resource Officer.
 - Chairman Lovell stated that she realizes that this is only part of the story and is concerned that there are children who are not receiving an education. She feels that the Board of Supervisors need to understand the resulting potential future tax burden.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the burden falls primarily on his office to monitor the home instruction students. The Virginia Code has requirements and provides options for parents to provide year-end evidence of achievement. There are some home instruction parents who seem to believe that they have the right to do what they want in regards to home instruction, but there are requirement directives from the Code of Virginia, as well as the Virginia Department of Education. Parents and guardians are given the deadlines upon approval of the application to homeschool and several reminder letters are also sent.

- Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that again, most parents who choose to homeschool their children do an excellent job. However, there are some previously homeschooled students who have returned to Rockbridge County Public Schools in grade seven but are equivalent to grade three. He emphasized that Rockbridge County Public Schools will take care of and educate all students.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that the ADM and enrollment over the past 10-20 years has remained flat over the long haul. He feels that unless something changes at the state level, it will continue. The division challenges from the dip in enrollment that was precipitated by the pandemic. He is hopeful that the Floyd S. Kay (FSK) renovation and other available high quality programs may bring students back to RCPS.

RCPS FY24 Budget Considerations

- **Worker's Compensation:** The increase is still to be determined. Much like health insurance rates, each year we must reassess and negotiate with worker's compensation carriers for favorable rates.
- **Property & Casualty Insurance:** The increase is still to be determined. Each year we also reassess and negotiate with our property and casualty insurance carriers for favorable rates.
- **Classified Employee Salaries:**
 - RCPS is quickly losing ground to other local employers who have already moved to \$15 per hour or more. RCPS are losing qualified applicants and current employees to other local businesses and institutions.
 - Instructional Assistants in some neighboring localities start at \$21,000 per year or about \$16 per hour. Our entry level Instructional Assistants start at about \$13 per hour. The cost to move our classified staff to \$15 an hour would be about \$243,000 total with \$43,000 of that being in the Food Service area. This move would also cause other issues that would need discussion and there are costs associated with those issues as well.
- **Teacher Salaries:**
 - Salary increases for all RCPS Contracted Employees: The analysis for planning purposes for the 2023-2024 Fiscal Year revealed that RCPS has once again fallen behind 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 Covid as well as retirements. With our current biennium budget including a potential 10% 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. 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. Mr. Kirby emphasized that RCPS are doing all that can be done to have people want to stay here and raise a family.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the revenue also dictates what can be done in those aspects.
 - Compensation Supplement: To receive the total amount, a 5 percent salary increase must be given in FY24. School divisions must provide a minimum 3 percent salary increase in FY24 in order to be eligible for a prorated state payment.
 - Mr. Martino cautioned that it is not guaranteed for next year to maintain.
 - Superintendent Thompson expressed his sentiment that the current Board of Supervisor members understand the base for school funding and that the Board of Supervisors would understand that, it will be part of the budget.
 - Chairman Lovell stated that she is hopeful that Governor Youngkin has indicated that teacher pay is something he will work on.
- **Health Insurance:** The increase is still to be determined.
 - Trustee Brown inquired if there has been any feedback from employees switching to Aetna.
 - Mr. Kirby stated that there were a few minor hiccups just in switching to new insurance but has heard from several employees that the coverage is better on the pharmacy side.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that Aetna provided a caveat to cap out at 13.5% increase for one year.

➤ **School Safety Items:**

Superintendent Thompson stated that safety has always been a top priority with the School Board and the Board of Supervisors and that with the recent events with school shootings in our nation, it continues to be a top priority. The early success of the alternative education program at Rockbridge County High School has led the division in trying to start a smaller scale alternative education program at Maury River Middle School. He expressed his concern in finding the right people with the proper skillset to fill these vital and unique roles.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the division is also asking for a division safety coordinator, which could encompass mental health. He expressed his appreciation to Dr. Angie Wilder, Director of Alternative Education, and Ms. Ashley Rhodenizer, Director of Special Education, as they are both assets to Rockbridge County in knowing what services are available in the community.

- Trustee Brown stated that a transitional program could lead to an opportunity to gain more than education in that the program could lead to forming relationships.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that students who previously disliked attending school now show up for school and go through their routine, confirming the fact that there must be an instructional plan in place to be successful.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if there are plans to expand the program.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the current program is well staffed and keeps busy. The program is not at the point to expand but striving to start at earlier grade levels.

Priorities

Superintendent Thompson requested confirmation of priorities for the Rockbridge County School Board in regards to classified employee salaries, teacher salaries, health insurance, and safety.

Trustee Burant provided an overview of the VSBA Delegate Assembly she attended virtually on November 10, 2022, which included SOQ's and unfunded mandates, safe school environments and in-school services, and the participation of non-public school students in VHSL. She stated that she will provide a summary of discussion to school board members.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that in regards to the non-public school students participating in public school VHSL events, he expects that there will be communication coming from the upcoming General Assembly session in January.
- Chairman Lovell expressed her sentiment that the priorities should remain the same as last year. She also stated that the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors are aware of the challenges that Rockbridge County staff has faced.
- Trustee Berkstresser expressed that the FSK renovations need to remain a top priority. He also stated that the alternative program has had success already and needs to continue.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the funds are already in place for the FSK renovation and that RCPS does not need to advocate for new funding.
- Trustee Brown expressed her sentiments about the alternative education programs at RCHS and MRMS. Currently at RCHS, we have four teachers and one teacher assistant to run their alt. education program. At Maury River Middle School, we currently have one highly trained teacher assistant. She inquired if it may be possible that positions not be tied to specific schools. She also felt there needed to be at least one, if not two more at MRMS in there alternative education program.
 - Trustee Burant stated the teacher assistant and middle school administration are currently handling the alternative education responsibilities at Maury River Middle School.
 - Superintendent Thompson added that Dr. Wilder is also assisting the middle school.
- Chairman Lovell requested that the presentation provided by staff and students of Fairfield Elementary School on "Water Filling Stations" at the November 8, 2022 school board meeting be provided to the Board of Supervisors at a future meeting. She inquired if there are plans for the installation of water filling stations. She also inquired on a timeline.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that this is something the school division wants to do. The cost estimate is \$3,000-\$4,000. He is hopeful that water filling stations may be installed by the end of the year, barring a supply shortage. He also noted that it needs to be done at all schools. Maury River Middle School and Rockbridge County High School currently have this initiative in place.
- Trustee Burant stated that there may be grant funding available from the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:05 p.m.

Wendy W. Lovell
Wendy W. Lovell, Chairman

Rhonda B. Humphries
Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board