

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Thursday, December 5, 2024. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge County School Board Office.

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

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 where we are currently and to confirm priorities for the FY26 budget cycle preparation.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer presented the following information on Fiscal Year 2026:

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
2024-2026 -- .4847

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. Rockbridge County, for this biennium, had the fourteenth largest increase in LCI and the thirtieth highest LCI of the 134 localities in Virginia.

- Trustee Ojure inquired if the LCI will be changing.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the LCI formula will not be changing, as this is the second year of the biennium but that conversation is taking place.
 - Chairman Whitmore stated that the LCI is set through 2026.

RCPS Average Daily Members (ADM)

The RCPS FY25 budget is based on a projected ADM of 2200. The ADM for September 30, 2024 was 2222.

- Trustee Ojure inquired if the downward trend began with Covid.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that he feels it is a downward trend that is fairly consistent in our area. ADM will rise and fall fairly consistently over each 10-15 years. There is currently a large graduating class and a large kindergarten class this year.

FY26 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.

RCPS FY26 Budget Considerations (Revenue/Cost)

- **Second Year of the Biennium built in 3% raise - \$810,000**
Because we are in the second year of the biennium, a 3% raise has been approved for the upcoming year barring any changes. There is a built in compensation supplement of \$658,230 (based off of 2170 ADM). If we are not able to provide a 3% raise, we would forfeit a portion or all of this funding.
- **Additional State Funding- \$66,282 (2170), \$280,243 (2200)**
Using the estimated ADM of 2170, we would receive this additional amount from the state over what we received in FY25. This amount could be used to go towards the school board priorities for FY26. We will continue to monitor our ADM trends and work to hone this number in as we move through the budget cycle.

RCPS FY26 Potential Priorities

- Employee Salaries
- Health Insurance
- Non-Personnel Expenses
- Potential Positions (Early Career Teacher Mentors, Math Specialist (NBES), Licensure, Admin Interns, Mental Health Others)

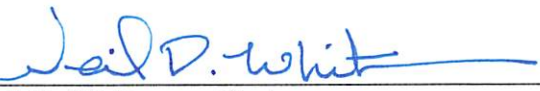
Other Potential Priorities

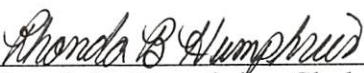
- Recruitment and Retention of Classified Employees
We are still losing ground to other local employers who have already moved to \$17 per hour or more. While we were very excited to be able to move our classified employees to a minimum of \$15 per hour, we now have very flat salary scales for many positions. We are currently working through cost models such as shortened scales and skill based pay increases. We did shorten the scale for Food Service this year to allow for some separation in the scales, which has been successful to this point. Ex.- A Food Service employee who becomes ServSafe certified would be eligible for an increase in their hourly rate.
- Salary Increases for All RCPS Contracted Employees
As we plan for the 2025-2026 Fiscal Year, our analysis reveals that we remain behind 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 higher burnout rate and increased workloads for our staff. With our current state budget including a 3% 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.
- Health Care Premium - Increase TBD
We are currently looking at claim data for the current year and have begun discussions with both The Local Choice and OneDigital to plan for the upcoming year. We are hoping to have a rate in place by February to help with budget planning.
- Non-Personnel Expenses
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.

Superintendent Thompson received consensus from the Board that they are in agreement with the priorities, as presented. The priorities will be presented at the next Joint Meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors, which will be held in January 2025.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:26 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board