

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, November 12, 2024, at the Maury Maury Middle School.

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

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Whitmore called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Ms. Mary Holton, English Teacher and Journalism Adviser for The Prowler, shared that The Prowler it is a hybrid print-online-broadcast news class. The students competed in three categories of the Virginia High School League Media Championship. The students received a second class (good) rating for both broadcast and print, and received a first class (excellent) rating for their online news site. Ms. Holton introduced two students, Addie Flint and Eliot McDonald, who are both Editor-in-Chief. Ms. Flint and Mr. McDonald participated in the event and provided a brief overview of the events.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) October 7, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 2) October 8, 2024 [Regular Meeting]; 3) October 16, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]; 4) November 6, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Support Staff

Appointments

Professional Staff

Melissa Wallace, Media Specialist, Mountain View Elementary School,
effective November 13, 2024
Margaret Clarke, Teacher, Central Elementary School, effective November 13, 2024

Appointments

Support Staff

Diane Heim, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, effective November 13, 2024
Heather Dobbins, Part-Time Grant Writer, Division, effective November 13, 2024
Chelsea Clark, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School,
effective November 1, 2024
Ashley Cornett, Food Service, Mountain View Elementary School,
effective November 13, 2024
Carlie Watterson, Secretary, Fairfield Elementary School, effective November 20, 2024

Substitutes

Roberta Clemons-Jenkins
Laura Holt
Mary Cummins
Jennifer Mask
Kendall Oswald
Tammy Hipes
Richard Derflinger

Bus Drivers Substitutes

Dean Mack Ramsey JR.
James Powers
Terri Hall
Robin Jansen
Kimberly Morris

Car Drivers

Virginia Harris
Larry Floyd

Food Service

Melissa Pence
Stacey Guscastt
Judy Tyree

Professional Staff**Resignation**

Olivia Moore, Teacher, Central Elementary School, resigning effective November 26, 2024
Jennifer Barney, Teacher, Central Elementary School, Resigning effective November 29, 2024

Support Staff**Resignation**

Abigail Higgins, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 7, 2024
Amy Hayes, Secretary, Fairfield Elementary School, resigning effective November 1, 2024
Mary Diane Blackwell, Food Service, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 10, 2024

Support Staff**Retirement**

Patsy Aligood, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, retiring effective January 1, 2024

Fall Coaches 2024-2025**MRMS****Cross Country**

Theresa Bridge

Winter Coaches 2024-2025**RCHS****Boys' Basketball**

Robert Winfield, Head Coach
Ben Kabzinski, Assistant Coach
Gary Randall, JV Head Coach
Mason Schlensker, Volunteer Coach

Girls' Basketball

Darrel Plogger, Head Coach
Monica Schaus, Assistant Coach
Tyler Falls, JV Head Coach
Paul Pelter, Volunteer Coach
Ricky Haston, Volunteer Coach
Seth Clark, Volunteer Coach
Andrew Rowsey, Volunteer Coach

Wrestling

Mike Wood, Head Coach
Logan Davis, Assistant Coach
Aaron Bruce, Volunteer Coach
Garrett Schultz, Volunteer Coach
John Campbell, Volunteer Coach
Hunter Samms, Volunteer Coach

Swimming

Erica Bisailon, Head Coach
Ellie Tomlinson, Assistant Coach
Allison Gigante, Volunteer Coach
Leslie Ayers, Volunteer Coach

Winter Cheer

Shannon Bryan, Head Coach
Ellie Lamb, Assistant Coach

Indoor Track

Jennifer Showalter, Head Coach
Amy Zickafoose, Assistant Coach
Katie Showalter, Volunteer Coach

MRMS

Boys' Basketball

Ron Clark, Head Coach

Girls' Basketball

Misty Armstrong, Head Coach
Penni Allen, Assistant Coach

Wrestling

Daniel Taylor, Head Coach
Josh Holton, Volunteer Coach
Nate Schear, Volunteer Coach

Cheer

Erin Poulin, Head Coach

- Business Items
 - Approved payment of debt service in the amount of \$554,375.00.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for new grants in the amount of \$46,555.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$4,467,632.90

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One patron addressed the board regarding a book dealing with witchcraft, "The Witch Boy". The patron stated that he is not against any persons who practice witchcraft but feels it leads children down a different path. The patron stated that if a book is protested elsewhere, it should be moved to a different section so younger children do not have access. The book is not in Rockbridge County Public Schools libraries or media centers.

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson provided a FY26 Budget Process Update. Rockbridge County Public Schools Administration has reached out to building leaders for their priorities and wish list of their teachers. He stated that he will have their recommendations at the budget work session which will be held at the Rockbridge County School Board Office on Thursday, December 5, 2024 at 5:00 PM. He noted that even though this is the second year of the biennium, things could change. As of right now, the 2nd year of the biennium budget includes a 3% raise for the state's portion of the SOQ funded positions.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, provided information on two upcoming events.

- The Career Fair will be held on Thursday, November 21, 2024 from 9:00 AM to 12:30 PM. There are currently eighty-four vendors, which is nineteen more than last year.
- The CTE Middle School Fair will be held on Wednesday, December 4, 2024 from 9:30 AM to 2:00 PM. Each eighth grade student enrolled at Maury River Middle School and Lylburn Downing Middle School will be able to rotate to see all the Programs of the Rockbridge County High School CTE Program. Each student will have 6-7 minutes per program at an interactive station. This will be the first time since Covid that the CTE Middle School Fair is taking place.
- Trustee Ojura inquired, and received confirmation from Mr. Owens, that Rockbridge County High School students can take a CTE class as an elective even if they are not in the program.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Superintendent Thompson provided information on the 2025-2026 Calendar. He stated that it is a priority to get a calendar draft to the school board for review prior to the budget season. This also allows for families, students, and teachers to plan for the coming year. He stated that he met with Mr. Tim Martino, Assistant Superintendent, Melanie Falls, Director of Testing and Instructional Data, and TAC (Teacher Advisory Committee). TAC is composed of 2-3 teachers per school who were appointed by their principal to serve on this committee. Conversations included what their priorities would be and it was determined what their top five priorities. He stated that the priorities rarely change; starting school as late as possible, get out before Memorial Day, two weeks at Winter Break, a week at Spring Break, and three encumbered workdays. Two different drafts were developed, with the calendar presented was the one unanimously chosen. The calendar presented mimics the 2024-2025 calendar very closely with a change to move some of the Parent Teacher nights because report cards were going out about the same time, which did not leave parents enough time to plan if they needed to schedule a meeting time. The calendar also contains a soft opening on a Tuesday to allow winter break to begin on Monday, December 22. This will be presented as an Action Item at the December school board meeting.

- Trustee Ojure expressed her concern that all of the early release days being on a Wednesday could cause a conflict for families.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that early release days are typically on Parent Teacher Conference Days but administration will review for other specific days. He also stated that certain parameters must be followed.
 - Mr. Martino stated that it also depends on how days fall in a grading period.

Superintendent Thompson provided a presentation on the proposed Cell Phone Policy. He provided statistics which reflect concerns being shared across the Commonwealth that are expressing concern over the alarming mental health crisis and chronic health conditions affecting adolescents, such as depression and anxiety, driven in part by extensive social media usage and widespread cell phone possession among children. He stated that Executive Order #33 was signed by Governor Youngkin to establish Cell Phone-Free Education to Promote Health and Safety of Virginia's K-12 Students on July 9, 2024. The Virginia Department of Education was directed to publish draft guidance for public school divisions to adopt policies and procedures establishing cell phone-free education, through the restriction or elimination of cell phone use during instructional time, on the Virginia Department of Education website for feedback from parents, students, teachers, public school administrators, school board members, and other stakeholders by August 15, 2024.

Superintendent Thompson offered the following timeframe of the VDOE:

- On August 15, pursuant to Executive Order #33, VDOE released draft guidance
- 30 Day Public Comment Period
- Final Guidance for Cell Phone-Free Education released on September 16, 2024
- VDOE set guidance definitions

Superintendent Thompson stated that conversations began with teachers and staff in August. Additional communications have included: faculty meetings; individual teacher conversations; Leadership Team Meetings with department heads at RCHS; conversations with RLEA (Rockbridge-Lexington Education Association); and Teacher/Staff survey at RCHS. Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, had conversations with staff upon their arrival in the fall of 2024. He offered the information below on the proposed "Cell Phone-Free Policy", which will be in effect for all Rockbridge County Public Schools (K-12). Rockbridge County elementary schools and middle school already follows the proposed guidance.

- Cell phones and other personal electronic communication devices must be powered off and stored in the student's backpack/book bag.
- "Bell-to-Bell" including lunchtime and in between classes. ("Bell-to-Bell" means from when the first bell rings at the start of the school day to begin instructional time until the dismissal bell rings at the end of the academic school day.)
- Effective January 6, 2025.

Superintendent Thompson provided the consequences if a student fails to comply, which is new for RCPS. He provided staff expectations and student exemptions with criteria.

Superintendent Thompson provided the following information in relation to emergency communications:

- RCPS understands the desire for parents to directly communicate with students during school.
- However, it is critical that during an emergency situation, students are focused, paying attention, and following the safety directions of their teacher, principal, other school personnel, or law enforcement.
- School and law enforcement personnel can better provide for the safety of students when students give their undivided attention to these authority figures in emergency situations.

Superintendent Thompson provided an overview of communications moving forward, once a policy has been adopted by the Rockbridge County School Board:

- All faculty and staff members will watch the “Commonwealth Conversation: First Lady Suzanne S. Youngkin and Dr. Jonathan Haidt”, which offers great insight into what adults can do to reverse the damage done to students due to the overuse of cell phones and social media;
- Faculty meetings will be held to ensure proper understanding and consistent enforcement;
- Student class meetings will be held to ensure proper understanding of the new policy;
- Notification to parents of the new policy with a copy of the new policy will be mailed to each home.
- Trustee Ojura inquired if there might be a room available that could be used where students can go to check phone for messages. Superintendent Thompson stated that school staff can take telephone messages for students and message will be delivered to students. This is already part of routine.
- Trustee Berkstresser expressed his sentiment that it will be difficult to get in the routine but all will get used to the proposed policy, as he knows Maury River Middle School also has this in place.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired if other divisions are planning for any additional staff for this transition. He also inquired if Executive Order #33 will be reviewed in the summer to gauge success.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that no additional staff would be needed. He further stated that other school divisions are very pleased with the result of no cell phone as students are better focused in the classroom. He stated that there will be a public listing of what all divisions are doing and that there may be a review to see what school divisions are doing.

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided pictures of the Rockbridge Innovation Center and stated that construction is beginning to wrap up for the final month. He stated that signage is complete. He further stated that the color signage matches the color scheme for each program and that most classrooms have furniture. The Joint Meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on November 14, 2024 will be held at the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, provided information on the RCHS Program of Studies. He stated that there are very few changes for the 2025-2026 school year. The EMT program began five years ago and has been very successful. The program of Firefighting has now been added.

- Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, stated that Mr. Shane Watts is the current EMT instructor and will also be the Firefighter instructor, which will allow for consistency.

Dr. Craft stated that the description for Building Management is now in the Program of Studies. He stated that Accounting and Marketing has been removed because RCHS no longer has a certified teacher. There was a change to the Latin Program, which now reflects all Latin levels as Latin AP. It was a mixed classroom for years and it was hard for instruction as there was so many different levels in the classroom.

- Trustee Burant inquired if students will be able to take multiple years.
 - Dr. Craft replied that it is yet to be worked out. The content is the same but taking multiple years may be a conflict.
 - Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that it would depend on the student score on AP tests; the student will earn college credit.

Dr. Craft stated that Strength Training classes have been renamed from “Beginning” and “Advanced”. The program now reflects levels 1-4 and will allow for classification on transcripts.

- Trustee Burant expressed her sentiment of appreciation for all that is offered and the quality of programs.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that Rockbridge County High School is a comprehensive high school. He reflected that it is prevalent in conversations with parents who live in other school divisions and staff who work in other school divisions, that they are amazed at what all is offered at Rockbridge County High School.

Ms. Vicki Stevens, Principal, Maury River Middle School, provided information on the MRMS Program of Studies. She stated that there are little changes to their Program of Study. The Individual Development class has been renamed to 21st Century Life Skills, which is a capstone to sixth grade, seventh grade, and eighth grade Life Skills. A major component that has been added is that students will manage their own school-based enterprise. Ms. Shasta Robertson has been working with seventh and eighth grade students who will manage “Eagles Nest Shop” next year.

ACTION ITEMS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Trustee Burant provided an overview of the sports programs of Maury River Middle School and Rockbridge County High School and expressed her appreciation to our coaches. She also reflected that there are some volunteer coaches who are former players who provide consistency and show a level of commitment in seeing programs succeed.

SCHOOL BOARD

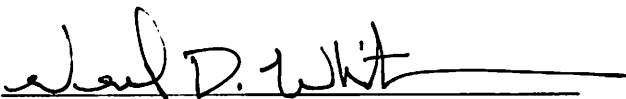
There will be a Joint Meeting of the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, November 14, 2024 / 5:00 PM / Location: Rockbridge Innovation Center, 143 Greenhouse Road, Lexington, Virginia.

There will be a special meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board on Thursday, December 5, 2024 / 5:00 PM / Location: Rockbridge County School Board Office, 2893 Collierstown Road, Lexington, Virginia.

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, December 10, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:46 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board