

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, October 8, 2024, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

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 5:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Superintendent Thompson stated that we are closing in on the conclusion of our large renovation project of a year and a half of hard work and noted that it is coming together nicely. Rockbridge County is very fortunate to have the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation that we partner and work closely with, and have for many years. The Foundation has decided to take on a bit of a different challenge in their mission in what they do to try and help the division with the Rockbridge Innovation Center. He introduced Ms. Heather Hostetter and Ms. Debbie Pruett of the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation.

Ms. Heather Hostetter is Chair of the Campaign Committee for the Rockbridge Innovation Center. She shared the mission and the role of the RCPSF in the fundraising campaign for the Rockbridge Innovation Center. The Foundation is not affiliated with Rockbridge County Public Schools nor the Rockbridge County School Board, and is a completely separate 501c3 non-profit entity that provides funds to the schools and to teachers. Teachers can apply for grants to support classroom activities that traditionally are not included in the school budget or provided by state or local appropriations. The Foundation is currently acting as the fiscal agent for the fundraising campaign for the Rockbridge Innovation Center and have set up a completely separate account that will serve as a one hundred percent pass-through of donations to the RIC. The students will be returning to the building in January 2025. The building can open and operate with existing equipment and the new equipment that was already part of the budget. The staff was asked to create a wish list of what would make their program the best hands-on learning experience for their students. A Rockbridge Innovation Center booklet has been created that reflects “teacher-wants” that would take student learning opportunities to the next level. The booklet is part of the discussion that the fundraising committee has with potential donors and also offering other ways donors can make contributions and be community partners.

Ms. Debbie Pruett, is Vice-President, Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation. She shared that inside of the booklet is a letter that is being used as they meet with local businesses and organizations to explain their fundraising campaign. She stated that the letter references four academies and within each of the academies are different programs. The goal of the RCPSF campaign is one million dollars. There are six donor levels based on the amount of contribution. Based on the contribution amount, donors will be recognized throughout the school in some way. The strategic plan is in place to ensure that communication remains consistent and transparent as they meet with potential donors. The amount of \$200,000 has already been raised which has outfitted the firefighter program, filled the cyber security wish list, purchased the furniture for the community room, and the rest of that donation will be used for agriculture. The committee feels as though they can anticipate, and expect, incredible commitment from the community. There is no end-date and the campaign will run as long as needed to reach and surpass the goal, and will continue to evolve as teacher and student needs evolve. She stated that the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation appreciates the opportunity to make this presentation and is excited to partner with Rockbridge County Public Schools and the Rockbridge County School Board, even though they are a completely separate entity.

Superintendent Thompson stated that conversations about the budget for this project had taken place over the past four years which resulted with the current project in the fourteen million dollar range. While that is a lot of money in completely renovating a facility such as the Rockbridge Innovation Center, the funds had to be stretched and spent wisely in order to ensure that we would end up with a quality facility. The decision was made to get the best building out those funds of \$14 million. RCPS knew it could fill the building with the other items needed later on with other funding sources. He expressed his sentiment that it will be a fantastic facility. The Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation is helping to fill it by their fundraising campaign. Furniture has been ordered through the Rockbridge County Public Schools and CTE operating budget lines. It is exciting to have people like Ms. Pruett and Ms. Hostetter who have served our school division and

our students in multiple capacities and who continue to step up for the good of our students. The Foundation is also made up of parents and people in the community who want to help and serve, without monetary pay. He stated that it is inspiring to see people who are passionate about our students in getting the best materials and resources they can. The Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation meets once a month.

- Chairman Whitmore inquired if the ratio of cost is known of internal equipment cost versus a new comparable CTE center in another locality.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that the beginning factor/starting point for other localities is unknown. He stated that he feels great about the building and that the items in the wish booklet come directly from the teachers who know what is best for their programs and what their students need in order to be successful in the real world.

Chairman Whitmore expressed his appreciation to the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation and, on behalf of the board, their excitement of seeing the completed building and then to be able to fill it with needed items to maximize student learning over time.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) September 10, 2024 [Regular Meeting]; 2) September 25, 2024 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Religious Exemption Request
- Disposal of Food Services Department Kitchen Equipment
- Surplus Vehicles
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Support Staff

Kari Hostetter, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, effective October 9, 2024

Professional Staff

Resignation

Adam Kelly, Media Specialist, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 22, 2024

Support Staff

Resignation

Tia Fridley, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 11, 2024

Alyssa Swisher, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective October 14, 2024

Fall Coaches 2024-2025

MRMS

Football

Corey Hall, Volunteer Coach

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriation for Fund 50 for new grants in the amount of \$579,157.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$4,287,558.28.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BUDGET PLANNING:

Superintendent Thompson provided a FY26 Budget Process Update. It is that time of the year when there is a small break between the time that the budget is adopted and when budget season begins again. Typically it is around October that conversations begin about priority lists and wish lists and things for the next fiscal year. We are currently in the first year of the biennium, as Virginia operates on a biennium basis. We will be planning for FY26, which is the second year of a biennium. It is unknown what funding will come from Richmond, even though the budget is

technically in place, but could change. He anticipates that there will be a budget work session in November or early December to establish a priority list and recommendations.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Ms. Lauren Fauber provided a report on the Virginia Literacy Act Implementation. She offered the following facts and information:

- The VLA was passed by the Virginia General Assembly in 2022, and expanded in 2023.
- The VLA focuses on improving literacy outcome for all students.
- The VLA is a multi-year effort.
- The five implications for the 2024-2025 school year.
 1. Every student (K-5) will receive core literacy instruction based in scientifically based reading research and evidence-based literacy instruction. Students (K-8) will receive evidence-based supplemental instruction and intervention, as outlined in an individualized student reading plan, if they do not meet literacy benchmarks.
 2. Every family will have access to online resources to support literacy development at home. Families will be able to participate in the development of their child's student reading plan, if their child does not meet literacy benchmarks.
 3. Every teacher will: use evidence-based literacy curriculum; access student learning using approved literacy screeners; use student level data to inform instruction and intervention; participate in pre-service preparation or training on evidence-based literacy instruction.
 4. Every reading specialist, in consultation with classroom teachers, will coordinate and oversee intervention for students not meeting literacy benchmarks, will develop and monitor student progress on student reading plans, working closely with families and teachers.
 5. Every division will: develop a literacy plan; ensure the use of evidence-based literacy curriculum; staff enough reading specialists to support intervention needs; provide professional development to support teachers, regarding specialists, and principals.
- Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that this is the first connection to the K-12 side.

Ms. Fauber provided the following information:

- Core Literacy Instruction, Amplify CKLA, which is grounded in the Science of Reading, combining robust knowledge-building with research-based foundational skills to develop strong readers, writers, and critical thinkers.
- Information on Supplemental Programs such as UFLI, Heggerty, and Amplify Boost.
- Information on Intervention such as Amplify mCLASS, and Orton Gillingham.
- Information on the Virginia Language and Literacy Screening System, VALLSS.
- An overview of Student Reading Plans.
- Samples of Professional Development Opportunities, which is a requirement from the Virginia Department of Education.
- Resources for Families, which is provided on the Rockbridge County Public Schools website.
- RCPS Division Literacy Plan, which is provided on the Rockbridge County Public Schools website.

Ms. Fauber stated that the 2024-2025 school year will involve:

- High Quality Core, Supplemental, and Intervention Instructional Material Adopted K-5.
- Use of Virginia Department of Education's Sponsored Literacy Screener VALLS.
- Written and Posted Approval Division Literacy Plan 2024-2025 and Family Resources, with a goal date of December 6, 2024.
- State of Literacy Meeting for Fall
- Professional Development for K-8 Teachers
- K-3 Student Reading Plans

Ms. Fauber stated that the next steps are as follows:

- Writing and Implementing K-3 Student Reading Plans (2024-2025)
- Spring State of Literacy Meeting (2025)
- VALLS 4-8 (2025-2026)
- 4-8 Student Reading Plans (2025-2026)
- 6-8 Supplemental and Intervention Instructional Material Adoption (2025)
- Updated Division Literacy Plan to Include Grade 6-8 (2025-2026)
- Continued Professional Development (Ongoing)

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided the Capital Improvement Project Plan FY25-31. He stated that there are two changes to the FY2025 Capital Improvement Plans as stated below:

1. Rockbridge County High School: Replace gymnasium bleachers / estimated cost of \$265,000. Note: Project cost is subject to partial reimbursement from City of Lexington.
2. Natural Bridge Elementary School: HVAC and associated parts replacement / estimated cost of \$3,300,000. Note: Schedule per MOU Agreement between Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors and Rockbridge County School Board.

Mr. Walters stated that he anticipates presenting the Capital Improvements Plan FY2025-2031 to the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors at the next joint meeting in November.

- Trustee Burant inquired about the exterior appearance of Natural Bridge Elementary School.
 - Mr. Walters stated that it was partially repaired over the summer and it will be completed soon.

Mr. Walters stated that the Rockbridge Innovation Center is receiving finishing touches and cleaning. He stated that landscaping and lighting is near complete and looks excellent at night. KNA Contractors and RCPS are generating their individual punch list of items but noted that there is still more work to be done.

ACTION ITEMS: None

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Brown, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Capital Improvements Plan FY 2025-2031, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

Superintendent Thompson stated that Natural Bridge Elementary School was just awarded the 21st Century Community Learning Centers Grant for another three years. The amount of funding for the first year is \$225,000 and could be the same for years two and three, to be determined. This program provides resources of enrichment for our students.

Chairman Whitmore stated that on September 17, 2024, the Virginia Department of Education released the final guidance for school boards regarding Executive Order 33 dealing with cell phone free education. The implementation deadline specified in the Executive Order is January 1, 2025. Rockbridge County Public Schools is currently in the process of examining their existing cell phone policy and listening to feedback from staff, parents, and others as the details of the new policy is established. As part of this process, the school board encourages and welcomes comments and input on this and all policies that impact our school system. The school board plans to present details of the proposed cell phone policy, specific to Rockbridge County Public Schools, at the November meeting in preparation for final review and action prior to the specified January 2025 implementation date.

Trustee Burant stated that she has toured the RIC twice during the past month and was excited to see the progress each time. She expressed her appreciation to all in keeping the progress on time and professional looking during construction.

Trustee Burant stated that she attended the Rockbridge Regional Fair and was glad to see so much student participation.

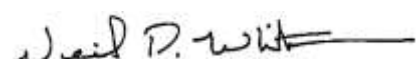
Trustee Berkstresser stated that a little over a year ago, Mr. Joey Jones addressed the board about the need for a middle school football team. He expressed his sentiments that the future looks bright as the team won their game last evening.

SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, November 12, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: Maury River Middle School, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:37 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman

Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board