

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, May 14, 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:

Ms. Vicki Stevens, Principal, Maury River Middle School, staff and students provided information on events that are cross-curricular and cross-grade level taking place at Maury River Middle School during the 2023-2024 school year.

- Ms. Gretchen Dowless, teacher, provided an overview of the sixth grade students attending the Career Feast which was held at the Virginia Horse Center and what the students took away from the event. She further explained how students prepare for the cross-curricular project "Tiny Houses PBL". There were many steps to the annual project.
- Ms. Courtney Diette, teacher, provided an overview of the March Madness Poetry Challenge, with the goal being to help students understand how and why authors use figurative language in their writing for the challenge. Poems were entered into The American Library of Poetry's Annual Student Poetry Contest. MRMS students Aaron Black and Addy Brown shared poetry that they had written for the event.
- Ms. Amy Woody, teacher, and Libby Johnson, student provided information on the development process of the first MRMS "Eagle News" newspaper. Twenty-seven students were part of creating the newspaper. The newspaper sold for .25 cents, with the profits being donated to SPCA as a benefit/community project.
- Ms. Tasha Polly, teacher, and Carson Slaydon, MRMS student, provided an overview of the "Go Red Gala" PBL, which was based on the PE classes, band, and Family and Consumer Science classes worked together to raise awareness of heart disease in the community. This was a cross-curricular, community event.
- Ms. Stevens echoed, "Every day is a great day at 'The River'!"

Mr. Paige Owens, Director of Technology and Career and Technical Education, presented information on the two recipients of the 2024 VSBA Business Honor Roll. Neither recipient were able to be present for recognition.

- Mr. Owens shared that Mountain Gateway Community College (MGCC) is an exceptional recipient of the VSBA Business Honor Roll for a multitude of reasons. MGCC is an instrumental part of the daily instruction at Rockbridge County High School (RCHS). RCHS has 229 dual enrollment students accounting for 43 total MGCC classes taught. RCHS students account for 47% of all MGCC's dual enrollment students. Our dual enrollment program is not the only way RCHS is partnering with MGCC. During the Rockbridge Innovation Center (RCHS CTE wing) renovation, MGCC has been generously allowing the RCHS Culinary Arts students to use the MGCC culinary lab in Buena Vista. This has been an amazing situation while our students have been displaced due to the renovation. As a result of being able to use the MGCC culinary lab, the RCHS Culinary Arts program has been able to continue moving forward with our standard Culinary Arts curriculum and provide our students with a quality educational experience. MGCC is also a consistent and active participant in many other educational events held for Rockbridge County Public Schools (RCPS) students. They are major partners in the CareerFest event for middle school students, which we have been hosting for the past several years. They also participate in the RCHS career fair, mock interviews, and college fair. MGCC's significant impact and meaningful partnership with RCPS is undeniable, allowing our students to thrive academically and develop essential life skills for their future endeavors.
- Mr. Owens shared that Ms. Kasey Potter, owner of Pure Eats Restaurant, is an avid supporter of the RCPS/RCHS CatCrew Works High Quality Work-Based Learning Program. She has participated in both of the CatCrew Works Career Fairs by creating and engaging vendor booth for students to visit. Her support the HQWBL program has led her to employ four RCHS interns this year as well as RCHS students upon graduation. While students are employed with her, she assists in furthering their training by ensuring they have their ServeSafe certifications. Ms. Potter is the incoming PTA President for RCHS.

Ms. Elise Sheffield, Boxerwood Education Director, provided information on the program “Waste Busters”, which is a Pioneering Partnership with the students and staff of Central Elementary School, Fairfield Elementary School, Mountain View Elementary School, and Natural Bridge Elementary School, and Rockbridge County Public Schools School Nutrition. She explained that of the benefits of the “Waste Busters” program are:

- Environmental: Create soil, protect climate, promote sustainable practices
- Economic: reduce landfill costs, generate carbon offsets
- Educational: Connect with curricula, promote SEL, build leadership

She offered the following highlights for the Boxerwood Education Association, which reflect support from the Rockbridge County Solid Waste Collection and Recycling Department:

- Owns & maintains the 4 RCPS EarthCube composters
- Collaborates with school leadership to design customized collection systems
- Offers no-cost classroom presentations and coaches students and staff
- Monitors each system weekly, encourages & troubleshoots.
- Manages data collection and project communications
- Secures and manages the funding for Waste Busting endeavors
- Prepares annual application to our local carbon offset marketplace, COREworks.

Ms. Sheffield provided highlights of model programs at each of our elementary schools, with recognition to Carson Richards, Custodian, (NBE); Ms. Kristin Bailey, School Counselor, and Carly Mears, student (MVE); Ms. Cathy Whitesell, Teacher (FES); Ms. Susan Mahood, Teacher, and Jaycee Strong, student (CES). Ms. Sheffield offered the following results of food waste diverted from landfill (composted pounds) for the 2023-2024 school year: Central Elementary School / 1,644; Fairfield Elementary School / 1,926; Mountain View Elementary School / 731; Natural Bridge Elementary School / 668. This reflects a total of 4,969 pounds. Mr. Dan Myers, Rockbridge County Solid Waste Collection and Recycling Department, presented certificates to each school representative for their work and dedication to the program.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) April 9, 2024[Regular Meeting]; 2) April 15, 2024 [Discipline Committee Meeting] 3) April 23, 2024 [Discipline Committee Meeting]; 4) May 9, 2024 [Discipline Committee Meeting]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Religious Exemption Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Madison Lloyd, Teacher, Central Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Benjamin Armstrong, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Kendall Ortiz, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Heather Higgins, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Angela Montague, School Counselor, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year

James Slagle, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Kari Bowser, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Brian Dietz, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, effective 2024-2025 school year
Kerri Arehart, Teacher, Fairfield Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year

Support Staff

Lorin Wilhelm, Bookkeeper, Fairfield Elementary School, effective 2024-2025 school year

Food Service

Whitney Snuffer
Brittany Beverley

Substitute

Maggie Moore
Kayla Freeman

Substitute Nurse

Mary Lloyd

Professional Staff

Resignation

Hannah Painter, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Sarah Leech, Librarian, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Stephanie Tyree, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Annika George, Teacher, Central Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

Teacher Assistants

Aligood, Patsy	Teacher Assistant
Ashcraft, Sherita	Teacher Assistant
Ball, Toni	Teacher Assistant
Bane, Tori	Teacher Assistant
Blackburn, Keller	Teacher Intern
Bolen, Deborah	Teacher Assistant
Branch, Loretta	Teacher Assistant
Burch, Clayton	Teacher Assistant

Teacher Assistants - continued

Byrd, Zachery	Teacher Assistant
Chaffin, Alesa	Teacher Assistant
Chavez, Ana	Teacher Assistant
Chittum, Reneda	Teacher Assistant
Clements, Emily	Teacher Assistant
Coffey, Stephanie	Teacher Assistant
Crews, Keeley	Teacher Intern
Crookshanks, Tiffany	Teacher Assistant
Cunningham, Crystal	Teacher Assistant
Day, Deborah	Teacher Assistant
Dongilli, Luann	Teacher Assistant
Early, Mary	Teacher Assistant
George, Catherine	Teacher Assistant
Harris, Amy	Teacher Assistant
Harris, Joyce	Teacher Assistant
Harris, Theresa	Teacher Assistant
Hattersley, Abigail	Teacher Assistant
Hostetter, Kimberly	Teacher Assistant
Irvine, Hailey	Teacher Assistant
Jarvis, Tricia	Teacher Assistant
Lawrence, Lisa	Teacher Assistant
Montgomery, Brandy	Teacher Assistant
Moore, Molly	Teacher Assistant
Nicely, Brooke	Teacher Assistant
Overton, Courtney	Teacher Assistant
Pufahl, Maria	Teacher Assistant
Ramsey, Carolyn	Teacher Assistant
Schrader, Ann	Teacher Assistant
Sheltman, Brian	Teacher Assistant
Snyder, Angela	Teacher Assistant
Staton, Brigitte	Teacher Assistant
Staton, Rebecca	Teacher Assistant
Teague, Deborah	Teacher Assistant
Waterman, Ashley	Teacher Assistant
Youngblood, Kristan	Teacher Assistant
Zafar, Zeba Naz	Teacher Assistant
Zickafoose, Amy	Teacher Assistant
Ziegler, Christy	Teacher Assistant

Custodians

Doremus, Bradford	Custodian
Eagle, David	Custodian
Eagle, William	Custodian
Hostetter, Jamie	Custodian
Hostetter, Michael	Custodian
Jenkins, Joseph	Custodian
Reed, Melissa	Custodian
Richards, Carson	Custodian
Riley, Jack	Custodian
Shanks, Gregory	Custodian
Smith, Calvin	Custodian
Staton, Karla	Custodian

School Secretaries/Bookkeepers/Clerifical Assistants

Cash, Phyllis	Bookkeeper
Chism, Donna	School Secretary
Coffey, Joan	School Secretary
Dunlap, Tracy	Transportation Clerk
Emrey, Karen	School Secretary
Funkhouser, Vicki	School Secretary
Jones, Elizabeth	School Secretary
McCaleb, Bonnie	School Secretary
Miller, Lisa	Bookkeeper

School Secretaries/Bookkeepers/Clerifical Assistants - continued

Montgomery, Brandy	School Secretary
Ramsey, Bridget	School Secretary
Rogers, Travis	School Secretary
Shafer, Tracy	School Secretary
Van Ravenswaay, Lisa	School Secretary
White, Morgan	Clerical Assistant

Maintenance

Beard, Kenneth	Maintenance
Bennett, Kurt	Maintenance
Byram, Dylan	Maintenance
Cash, Gary	Maintenance
Floyd, Edward	Maintenance
Hogge, Jeffrey	Maintenance
Lilly, David	Maintenance
Mahood, Todd	Maintenance
Runkle, David	Maintenance
Staton, Roy	Maintenance

Central Office Support Staff

Bane, Mallory	Receptionist
Burchfield, Abreena	Personnel Specialist
Church, Ana	School Nutrition Services Secretary/Finance Assistant
Cox, Kelly	Receptionist/Records
Dunlap, Tracy	Transportation Clerk
Hamilton, Kim	Secretary for Special Education
Humphries, Rhonda	Administrative Assistant/Clerk of the Board
Johnson, Carolyn	Secretary for Facilities
Loope, Dana	Accounts Payable Specialist
Sandifer, Jessica	Payroll Specialist

School Nurses

Hong, Cheryl	School Nurse
Marcum, Katina	School Nurse
Martin, Dawn	School Nurse
Sheltman, Heidi	School Nurse
Staton, Meagan	School Nurse

Technology

Coleman, Mark	Technology Specialist
Kerr, J.D.	Technology Specialist
Patterson, Mike	Technology Specialist
Staton, Cole	Technology Specialist

Food Service

Arthur, Mary (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Burch, Patricia (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Campbell, Gwen	Food Service
Coffey, Marlene	Food Service
Coburn, Shannon (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Crawford, Diane (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Cruz, Becky (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Emore, Kassandra (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Goad, Delores (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Hedrick, Dawn	Food Service
Kerr, Brenda	Food Service
Manspile, Catherine (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Manspile, Sarah (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Martin, Teresa	Food Service
Minter, Delores (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Skipper, Amber (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Skipper, Kathryn (Time Sheet)	Food Service

Food Service - continued

Smith, Charlie (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Smith, Kathryn	Food Service
Smith, Sharon (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Sorrels, Roxie	Food Service
Tomlin, Belinda (Time Sheet)	Food Service
Troxell, Angela	Food Service

Hansley, Lenya (Counselor)
Easley, Dan (21 Century Grant)
Newell, Makenna (21 Century Grant)

Support Staff

Resignation

Autumn Andrews, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year
Toni Ball, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective end of the 2023-2024 school year

- Business Items
 - Approved the debt service payment due June 1, 2024 to US Bank for Rockbridge County Public School VPSA bonds in the amount of \$159,375.00
 - Approved Monthly Financials for May 14, 2024 in the amount of \$6,145,765.59.

PUBLIC COMMENT:

One person addressed the board and shared that the SkyTree Book Fair will be held at the Rockbridge Breakfast Club Festival on June 23, 2024 at the Virginia Horse Center. The patron stated that SkyTree Books Fairs are a nonprofit organization that seeks to safeguard childhood innocence with trustworthy and wholesome content.

BUDGET PLANNING: None

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, provided information on schools in review: Rockbridge County High School and Natural Bridge Elementary School. He stated that there are four domains for each school: 1) academic supports; 2) staffing supports; 3) professional learning supports; and 4) school climate supports.

Mr. Martino cited the following focus for each school:

- Rockbridge County High School: 1) Chronic Absenteeism; 2) achievement gap in Math (economically disadvantaged, ELL, special education).
- Natural Bridge Elementary School: 1) Chronic Absenteeism

Mr. Martino stated that each school has plans in place. He further stated that all teachers and principals are working on the plans, as well as the division Instructional Team. The plans are due to the Virginia Department of Education on June 30, 2024.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that it is important to remember that there are still certain absences which are considered a “excused” but the VDOE still includes these absences for chronic absenteeism. He stressed the importance of making parents aware of the VDOE calculator for chronic absenteeism.
- Mr. Martino stated that chronic absenteeism should not count in division ranking because it is not a factor that can be controlled by school divisions.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that as VDOE is going through accreditation, it should be determined what role chronic absenteeism is going to count and noted that it should be small.
- Trustee Burant expressed her inquiry if parents realize the implications when their child misses school for appointments. She feels there must be a community-wide understanding about the repercussions when a child is absent.
 - Superintendent Thompson reflected that he and a couple of board members attended the Chamber of Commerce Government Roundtable last fall where he spoke with business leaders of different backgrounds who were unaware of the absenteeism issues within the school division and wanted to know how they can help. He stated that it is incumbent upon school division staff to try to educate the community on this issue. Avenues of education being used are social media sites and through our schools and what they are putting out to their parents to explain the importance of students not missing school for appointments. Doctor appointments and the like were once considered as an “excused absence” but now are factored into the chronic absenteeism data.
- Chairman Whitmore stated that chronic absenteeism in, of itself is a reflection of the community that the students come from and it shows, perhaps, the lack of support they are getting per lack of awareness at home, which trickles down and permeates many things.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that parents want good schools for children when they move into the area. He expressed his sentiment that the school division is still in recovery mode from the pandemic in regards to getting all students back in schools. Students are coming back and that attendance is getting better.

INFORMATIONAL ITEM:

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided pictures reflecting the ongoing progress at the Rockbridge Innovation Center. He stated that the project is still ahead of schedule with hopes that this will continue.

Superintendent Thompson presented the Early Retirement Incentive Program and stated that the program continues to retain great staff and utilizes their knowledge. He stated that the plan remains the same as was adopted on May 9, 2023 and will be presented as an Action Item at the June meeting.

- \$40 per hour for administrative duties for the first 200 hours
 - \$32 per hour after 200 hours
- \$30 per hour for teaching and other professional staff duties (teaching, counseling, library, etc.) for the first 200 hours
 - \$22 per hour after 200 hours
- \$20 per hour for clerical, janitorial, food service, and driving duties for the first 200 hours
 - \$16 per hour after 200 hours
- Participants under this plan may not hold over days from month to month and all ERIP days must be completed before working for regular substitute pay. ERIP participants may only bank up to 5 days from year to year with approval of the Chief Business Officer/Director of Personnel.

- Trustee Burant inquired if there has been feedback to confirm that employees are getting what they want out of the Early Retirement Incentive Program. She expressed her hope that building administrators and employees are all satisfied with the program.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that it remains a good deal for the employee and the school division.
- Chairman Whitmore stated that when he is in a building during the school day, there seems to always be an ERIP staff member present.

Superintendent Thompson stated that historically, there has been a vote to forgo the July board meeting as it is typically a slow time with employees taking vacation etc. This will be presented as an Action Item at the June board meeting.

Ms. Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, provided information on the Federal Grants process, which is due on July 1. She stated that the allocations used are based on the current year and that these are non-competitive grants. She stated that the final allocations will not be available until late summer or early fall. The grants will be amended at that time with those new allocations. She provided information on the individual and consolidated state and federal entitlement grants, which are Title I, Part A; Title, Part C; Title II, Part A – Title II; Title IIIA; and Title IV A. Federal Grants will be presented as an Action Item at the June board meeting.

- Mr. Martino stated that there will be seventy-four ELS next year.
- Chairman Whitmore inquired for confirmation and received from Ms. Hinty that funds typically increase.
 - Superintendent Thompson clarified that funds increase but are not proportionate to needs.

Ms. Hinty further clarified that these funds are considered extra funds that Rockbridge County Public Schools provide the basic funding.

Ms. Tracy Hinty, Supervisor of Federal Programs, provided information on the Title I Family Engagement Plan 2024-2026, which included the general expectations and objectives, and adoption of the plan. This will be presented as an Action Item at the June board meeting.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, the board voted 5-0, to approve authorization for the Superintendent/Designee to process GRANT payment and other accounts payables as necessary at the end of May 2024. A final report summarizing these actions will be provided at the next Board meeting. All transactions will require signatures of two of the following staff positions: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Business Officer, Chief Operations Officer, or Director of Financial Services. Authorization was also approved for the Superintendent /Designee to close out the current fiscal year. This authorization would include payment of remaining accounts payable and payroll expenses and the preparation of necessary expenditure transfers, budget adjustments, appropriations of additional revenues and requests for category transfers from the Board of Supervisors, if needed. A final report summarizing these actions will be distributed during the month of July. All transactions will require signatures of two of the following staff positions: Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Business Officer, Chief Operations Officer, or Director of Financial Services.

Superintendent Thompson stated in October 2023 the School Board set three priorities they felt strongly the needed to be addressed for the FY25 budget. The priorities are:

- Employee Salaries: Continue to work to hire and retain the best teachers and staff possible. This budget offers a minimum 4% raise for all RCPS employees.
- Health Insurance – Find a way to ensure that employees will be able to have health insurance options that will allow them to not lose additional money from their pockets as a result of the ever-increasing health care costs. Due to a nearly 20% projected increase in rates from our current provider Aetna, we were able to tap into the Local Choice market and reduce that increase to 10%. BC/BS and Delta Dental will be included in the cost of health insurance. Most employees will actually pay less for health insurance and dental insurance than they did last year.
- Inflation/Rising Costs of Supplies and Materials – We have been able to address many of these concerns in this current budget as well.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the General Assembly adopted the budget with the Governor having signed a budget on May 13, 2024. The calc tool has not yet been received but there is enough information available to proceed with our budget approval. Upon recommendation by Chairman Whitmore, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Ojure, the board voted 5-0, to approve the FY25 Line Item Budget in the amount of \$38,108,686, which includes a 4% increase for all employees.

- Chairman Whitmore stated that the 4% increase is good news and that the health care is great, as it will not impact employees' pocket.
- Trustee Berkstresser expressed his appreciation to Superintendent Thompson and the Central Office Administration for working quickly to have the budget ready to approve as the Governor just signed the budget last evening.

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Whitmore reflected that last week was Teacher Appreciation Week and that he and other board members enjoyed being in the schools to celebrate their dedication. He also noted that this is National Police Week and expressed appreciation to our School Resource Officers for keeping our students and staff safe and doing much more than what is in their job description.

Trustee Burant stated that she was appreciative for being invited to attend the RCHS Wildcat Inspiration Awards, which was representative of seventy students and forty-eight business partners.

Chairman Whitmore also reflected that there is a week and a half of school left and expressed appreciation to our staff knowing the impact they had on students.

Superintendent Thompson reflected that it is uplifting to celebrate when our teachers and staff further their education and announced that Dr. Daniel Fallen, Assistant Principal, Rockbridge County High School, graduated from the doctoral program two weeks ago from Liberty University.

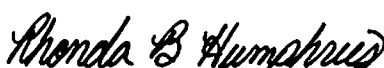
SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, August 13, 2024 / 5:30 PM / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:18 p.m.


Neil D. Whitmore, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board