

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, January 14, 2025, at the County of Rockbridge Administration Building.

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

CALL TO ORDER

Superintendent Thompson called the meeting to order at 5:31 p.m. and requested that everyone rise for the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the first order of business would be the Board’s re-organization for the year 2025 and asked for nominations for Board Chairman. Trustee Whitmore nominated Trustee Burant for Chairman and passed by a 5-0 roll call vote, with Trustee Burant being elected as Chairman.

Trustee Berkstresser – Yes
Trustee Brown – Yes
Trustee Burant – Yes
Trustee Ojure – Yes
Trustee Whitmore – Yes

Chairman Burant asked for nominations for Vice-Chairman. Trustee Brown nominated Trustee Whitmore for Vice-Chairman, and passed by a following 5-0 vote roll call vote with Trustee Whitmore being elected as Vice-Chairman:

Trustee Berkstresser – Yes
Trustee Brown – Yes
Trustee Burant – Yes
Trustee Ojure – Yes
Trustee Whitmore – Yes

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Chairman Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board appointed Ms. Rhonda Humphries as Clerk for the calendar year 2025, through January 31, 2026.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board appointed Mr. Timothy Martino as Deputy Clerk for the calendar year 2025, through January 31, 2026.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, and passed by a 5-0 vote, the Board named Mr. Timothy Martino as Superintendent’s Designee through January 31, 2026.

Upon recommendation by Superintendent Thompson, motion by Chairman Burant, seconded by Trustee Brown, passed by a 5-0 vote, Dr. Phillip Thompson, Superintendent; Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent; Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, and Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer were appointed as School Board Fiscal Agents with the authority to approve the payment of bills if the School Board is unable to meet, through January 31, 2026.

Chairman Burant asked for discussion of committee assignments and the following committee members were designated:

- Discipline Committee: Trustee Berkstresser, Trustee Brown, Trustee Ojure
- Ad Hoc Committee: Trustee Burant, Trustee Whitmore
- Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation: Trustee Brown

Chairman Burant announced that the Board will continue to conduct their regular meetings on the second Tuesday of each month beginning at 5:30 p.m.

Superintendent Thompson read the School Board Member Code of Conduct and requested that all School Board Members sign the document in agreement with the code of conduct.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA:

Superintendent Thompson stated that there will be an update on Rockbridge Area Community Services as Item 4B, under Recognition/Special Presentations.

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Superintendent Thompson stated that in honor of Principal Appreciation Week, he sent an email of appreciation to each principal for all they do for families of our students. Principals are more than leaders of the school buildings as they give fifty to sixty hours weekly and are pulled away from their families. Each principal works hard and is extremely dedicated to our students, staff, families and the county. He expressed his sentiment that he is grateful to call them his colleagues.

- Chairman Burant offered the following tribute in honor of Virginia School Principals' Week:
"Your vision, wisdom and passion for our schools is apparent in your daily interactions with our students, staff, and community. Your leadership turns challenges into opportunities. Students are your top priority. Your hard work is the foundation for their achievement. From my own experience, I know that being a principal is no easy job, but you handle it with grace and enthusiasm. Thank you for inspiring us every day. On behalf of all of us – this Board, our students, staff, parents, and our community – I want to extend our heartfelt gratitude to you all. Thank you for your leadership, your wisdom, and your vision for our schools."

The Rockbridge Area Community Services Board was represented by Breanne Rogers, Prevention Services Program Manager, Jenna Cline, Prevention Services Program Manager, and Samantha Hoke, Director of Community Based Behavioral Health and Prevention. Ms. Hoke provided an overview of the behavioral and mental health services that are school-based and available to Rockbridge County Public Schools. She stated that the school intervention program has restrictions per insurance and that there are mental health diagnosis criteria that must be met in order for a student to be eligible. Ms. Cline provided an overview of the "Catch My Breath Program" that is currently partnered with Rockbridge County Public Schools. She also provided information on other programs that could be available to RCPS, if desired.

- Trustee Whitmore inquired how many students are currently in the TDT program and inquired who identifies students. He received confirmation that the agency monitors a mental health assessment to determine student eligibility.
- Chairman Burant inquired what a student day resembles, if involved with the program.
 - Ms. Hoke stated that students receive development skills with a teacher and that it is scheduled daily. She stated that students also meet when not in crisis in order to gain preventative skills. Staff is also available during the school day for individualized times with students.
- Trustee Ojura inquired if the "Catch My Breath Program" is research-based.
 - Ms. Cline stated that it is evidence-based program. A student is given an evaluation via a pre-test; it is a four-week program; a student takes a post test at the conclusion. She further stated that the program is vaping prevention, not intervention.
 - Mr. Martino stated that RACSB has worked with RCPS for about six years and expressed his appreciation when they come to the schools to work with students, as it does not add to the teacher workload.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) December 10, 2024 [Regular Meeting]
- Field Trip and Bus Use Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Applications for Use of Facilities
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Professional Staff

Kaitlin Arnold, Teacher Intern, Maury River Middle School, effective January 15, 2025

Appointments

Support Staff

Katrina McNeil, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, effective January 15, 2025

Custodian

Fran Kennon

Gina Harrison

Substitutes

Jaydyn Clemmer
 Irvin Jones
 Paul Flagg
 Jordan Maney

Substitutes - continued

Erica Bisailon
 Richelle Seawright
 Jacob Seawright

Support Staff**Resignation**

Ana Chavez, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective
 December 20, 2024

Cory Stout, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective
 December 21, 2024

- **Business Items**

- Approve Monthly Financials in the amount of \$4,750,607.47
 Trustee Ojure stated that she was impressed how teachers and students are still going on trips and utilizing local sources and that she appreciates the extra work by teachers in preparation for field trips.

PUBLIC COMMENT: None

BUDGET PLANNING:

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, stated that the calculation tool was received last week from the Virginia Department of Education with the Governor's amendments to the FY26 budget. The school division is currently in the process of working with those numbers and finalizing the estimates for the joint meeting with the Board of Supervisors later this week. The calculation tool was received about three weeks later than normal, but he still feels the division is on track to meet all of the targets and deadlines. He stated that priorities that will be discussed with the Board of Supervisors include employee salaries, healthcare costs, and other non-personnel costs that have increased due to inflation. He stated that the House and Senate amendments to the FY26 budget may look different from what the Governor has proposed. He stated that the amendments generally come out in February and allow for a clearer understanding before the Categorical Estimate of Needs is due to the Board of Supervisors in March.

COMMITTEE REPORTS: None

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:

The Natural Bridge Elementary School One School One Book project was by Ms. Julie Morris, Ms. Kristie Funkhouser, and Ms. Beth McElroy of the NBE Title I Reading Team. They provided an overview of the book, "The Lemonade Crime", which is the focus book for this project. The kick-off assembly will be held at Natural Bridge Elementary School on January 27, 2025. The book will be read between January 27 and February 21, with a culminating event to be held on February 28, 2025.

- Mr. Martino stated that events such as this are fantastic as it involves the students, parents, and the community.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:

Mr. Randy Walters, Chief Operations Officer, provided a Capital Improvements Project update. He stated that for FY25, the Rockbridge County High School gym was completed prior to Winter Break and that the Natural Bridge Elementary School HVAC has also been completed. He stated that the Rockridge Innovation Center is just about complete with students entering the building this week. There are still items to be moved into the building from storage units outside of the school. Mr. Walters stated that there are no projects planned for FY26. FY27 will address athletic needs if plans stay on track.

Mr. Walters provided information on how winter weather decisions are made, while sharing that this is one of the most difficult decisions to be made. The weather conditions are monitored long before the weather event even begins. He participates on a morning conference calls November – March with the National Weather Service who has a lot of data available to monitor predictions.

He stated that on the day of an event, he begins communication around 4:00 AM with the National Weather Service, Rockbridge Sheriff's Department, and Virginia Department of Transportation. He communicates with surrounding school divisions and relays information to Superintendent Thompson around 5:00 AM. He emphasized that there are a lot of factors that influence the decision.

- Superintendent Thompson stated that our school bus drivers cover sixty-five routes and that administration relies on them for conditions in their area. Central Office administration are spread out with the decision to fall to Superintendent Thompson. He stated that he would rather err on the side of caution. He recognized that students are better off at school for the educational benefit, but also some because of nutrition and warmth. He stated that if a parent ever feels unsafe in sending their child to school, they can make the decision to keep them at home.
- Trustee Berkstresser inquired if students must attend 180 days.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that teachers are on a 200 day contract, per the Code of Virginia.
- Superintendent Thompson stated that Mr. Walters and his staff were phenomenal in getting ice off of the parking lots. The staff came in on the weekends and worked around the clock. He also expressed his appreciation to Mr. Walters for monitoring the icy roads at all times. Superintendent Thompson also expressed appreciation to Mr. Randy Hostetter and the Virginia Department of Transportation for their presence in the community in keeping the roads safe.
 - Mr. Walters expressed his appreciation to his maintenance staff in keeping the school lots clear.

Mr. Walters stated that the solar sign for Mountain View Elementary School will be installed in the future but that the traffic flow has been changed which has alleviated a lot of the traffic congestion at Mountain View Elementary School.

Mr. Adam Haynes, Athletic Director, Rockbridge County High School, provided an overview of the success of the fall athletic programs at Rockbridge County High School. He offered appreciation for the resilience of the athletes and coaches for a successful season. He offered his appreciation to Ms. Vicki Stevens, Principal, Maury River Middle School, and Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, for their support of the middle school football team, which met with excitement and success. He expressed his appreciation for the years of dedication that Coach David Miller has given to the Rockbridge County High School Golf Team and athletic department, as well as being a mentor to Mr. Haynes. Coach Miller plans to teach one more year but will not coach the golf team. He expressed appreciation to the school board for their part in support of new bleachers for the RCHS gym.

- Chairman Burant expressed her appreciation to Ms. Stevens for allowing the high school to share their gym during RCHS bleacher renovations.
- Chairman Burant expressed her appreciation to Mr. Haynes and his staff for how they handled the broken leg injury during the boys' basketball game. It was handled with discretion, medical treatment, and RCHS staff working with the team after the game.
 - Mr. Haynes expressed his appreciation to Ms. Courtney Simpkins, Athletic Trainer, and Mr. Travis Rogers, Assistant to the Athletic Director, both of whom do a lot for Rockbridge County High School and for the school community.
 - Mr. Martino expressed his appreciation to the high school administration on how they handle times of making difficult decisions and fielding resulting telephone calls.

ACTION ITEMS: None

NEW BUSINESS:

Chairman Burant offered the following memorial tribute for Mr. Rusty Crance:

"I was honored to attend the celebration of life of our own Russell Lee (Rusty) Crance who passed away on December 18. As a lifetime educator, Rusty impacted so many during his years as a teacher, principal, and coach of football, baseball and wrestling. His wife Cindy has also been a cherished member of our Rockbridge County Schools staff. Our sincere condolences are conveyed to Cindy, Matt & Jenny, Todd & Winter and all of Rusty's family and friends. We are so thankful to have experienced first-hand Rusty's passion for education and commitment to his students' success."

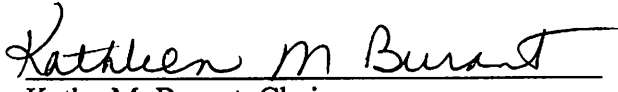
SCHOOL BOARD

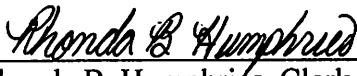
There will be a Joint Meeting with the Rockridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, January 16, 2025 / Location: Rockbridge Innovation Center, 143 Greenhouse Road, Lexington, Virginia.

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, February 11, 2025 / Location: County of Rockbridge Administration Building, 150 South Main Street, Lexington, Virginia.

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:38 p.m.


Kathy M. Burant, Chairman


Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special joint meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors on Thursday, January 16, 2025. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge Innovation Center.

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

Board of Supervisors Members Present: Leslie Ayers, R.W. Day, A.J. Lewis, D.E. Lyons, David McDaniel; Spencer Suter, County Administrator and Clerk to Board.

CALL TO ORDER

School Board Chairman Burant called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

Supervisor Ayers inquired how school was going after the extended Winter Break.

- Mr. Martino, Assistant Superintendent, stated that staff and students seem to be happy to be back at school. He stated that the Rockbridge Innovation Center is open and expressed two of his sentiments that the natural light is great for learners. He further stated that it was good to see more studying taking place in the Commons area of RCHS, and to see more students talking to one another and more students in the library. He feels this is a result of the new cell phone policy.
 - Supervisor Ayers inquired how the implementation of the cell phone policy has been going.
 - Mr. Martino responded that students may not have their cell phone on their person; the exception being if there are health needs or if a translation is needed. Most students put their cell phone in their book bag. He expressed that it will be interesting to hear from learners in five months as to what they think of the cell phone policy. He echoed Dr. Mike Craft, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, that in his tenure, the cafeteria is the loudest with students talking, than it has been in a very long time.
 - Chairman Burant stated that students knew it was coming and expressed that a big factor had to do with how staff reacted.
 - Trustee Whitmore stated that other school divisions had utilized other different level of approach. He stated that there will be a Summer 2025 re-evaluation to see how the process is working.
 - Trustee Brown stated that the feedback she had heard reflected that it had been seamless with no problems.
 - Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, stated that the students at RCHS are excited to be in the new building with CTE programs.

Supervisor McDaniel inquired how students who are not currently taking CTE classes are being made aware of the new building and programs.

- Mr. Kirby stated that the Curriculum Night is taking place on the evening of January 16, 2025. He also stated that core teachers are making information known and making it available for interested students to take tours of the programs.

FY26 BUDGET OVERVIEW

Mr. Suter stated that it is early in the budget process with the department budgets being due to him today. He stated that the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors adopted the Capital Improvement Projects Plan at their January organizational meeting. He stated that there may be changes in the budget and are required to have an adopted budget by the end of April.

- Supervisor McDaniel stated that the RCHS bleachers and NBE HVAC need to be removed from the FY25 CIP as they are now complete. He also stated that there has been discussion multiple times about a multi-purpose room that may be housed on campus and that the Board of Supervisors will move money from escrow to study the need.

Mr. Suter stated that the Governor's budget is still wrangling with the General Assembly. The county has a good software system in place, but that Tyler is being considered and is ranked at the top for the finance department software. He stated that they should have the first contract soon and will be subject for approval at their next meeting.

Supervisor McDaniel stated the FY27 CIP has the auxiliary gym for RCHS and CES as a multi-use gym. He suggested they come out and have the CES gym and RCHS auxiliary gym together and then break them out.