

Minutes of Barnwell County School District

Board of Trustees Meeting

Tuesday, June 24, 2025

(770 Hagood Avenue, Barnwell, SC 29812)

Board Members Present: Becky Huggins, Felicia Devore, Rosey Anderson, Catrena Hughes-Parker, John Melton, Jr.

I. Opening Business

A. Call to Order, Reflection, Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag, FOI Notice

Becky Huggins called the meeting to order at 6:00pm. Becky Huggins led the Reflection and the Pledge of Allegiance followed.

Becky Huggins confirmed the FOI Notice went out as required by the Freedom of Information Act.

B. Approval of Agenda – Becky Huggins

A motion was made by Rosey Anderson to approve the agenda as presented. The motion was seconded by Catrena Parker-Hughes. Hearing no objections, the agenda was unanimously approved.

C. Approval of Consent Agenda Items- Becky Huggins

- Approval of the May 20, 2025 Board Regular Meeting Minutes – Becky Huggins

The motion was made by Felicia Devore to approve the May 20, 2025 Regular Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

- Approval of the May 28, 2025 Board Work Session Minutes – Becky Huggins

The motion was made by Felicia Devore to approve the May 28, 2025 Work Session Minutes. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

- Approval of the May 28, 2025 Special-Called Meeting Minutes- Becky Huggins

The motion was made by Felicia Devore to approve the May 28, 2025 Special-Called Meeting Minutes. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

- Approval of June Personnel Report – Becky Huggins

The motion was made by Felicia Devore to approve the June Personnel Report. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

- Approval of April Financial Report – Becky Huggins

The motion was made by Felicia Devore to approve April Financial Report. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

D. There was no public participation.

II. Superintendent Report- Superintendent

A. Update related to the BCSD Facility Plan

Dr. Stapleton presented the following updates:

- SSOE has the district's data input sheets for all programs, and the SSOE design team is currently making revisions to the preliminary plans - as needed and as appropriate. The district has a meeting June 25th about the utilities being run to the new facility location.
- The FEMA Gym has made great progress. On June 11, 2025, the dome was inflated. Superintendent Stapleton showed photos and a brief video of the inflation process.

B. School and District Updates (Includes updates related to the BCSD Consolidation Plan)

- The summer programs have been underway since the regular school year ended.
- Dr. Stapleton shared about student groups on trips, such as athletic teams and FFA.
- Student athletes and student groups across the county have been meeting to prepare for the upcoming school year.
- BCSD departments at the district office and within the schools have been busy preparing for the 2025-2026 school year with numerous meetings, planning sessions, trainings, and more.
- There have been many facility projects underway across the district.
- Dr. Stapleton emphasized that the summer is a busy time for school districts.

III. Old Business

IV. New Business

A. Approval of the Final Reading of the 2025-2026 Barnwell County School District General Fund Budget – Action Item

Dr. Stapleton presented the Third and Final Reading and Public Hearing of the 2025-2026 Barnwell County School District General Fund Budget for approval. [Dr. Stapleton called CFO Holly Hutto who was sick the day of the board meeting but remained on speaker phone to answer any questions or speak on behalf of the final reading of the budget.]

- During the collaborative budget process, each department and school was given the opportunity to discuss their individual needs for purchase services and supplies. Those needs have been assessed and have been distributed appropriately based on student population, programs offered, special considerations, and overall needs.

Millage Rate

- The millage rate for the 24-25 school year was calculated and determined by the Department of Revenue based on the consolidation legislation. That rate was set at 253.1 mills once the allowed CPI rate was added.
- The consolidation legislation also states that the millage rate for the 25-26 school year must be the same as the 24-25 school year with exception of any millage determined by the Department of Revenue necessary to comply with educational mandates imposed by federal or state law.

CPI Millage

- The District received their letter from the Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office with the calculation of the millage rate increase limitations pursuant to S.C. Code of Law 6-1-320. This increase is allowed by all school districts based upon the average of the twelve monthly consumer price indices of the proceeding calendar year, plus the percentage increase in the previous year population of the entity as determined by Revenue and Fiscal Affairs Office.
- The 2025-2026 millage rate increase limitation for Barnwell County School District is 8 mills. This increase does not affect primary home owners – only non-owner occupied, commercial, and industrial properties.
- Because the current millage rate set by the Department of Revenue did not produce the amount of funds they anticipated, the District needs to include the 8 mill increase in the budget necessary to comply with educational mandates imposed by federal or state law.

Debt Service Millage Rate

- The current millage rate for our debt service is 39 mills.
- Debt service millage is used to pay off the bonds the district takes out each year to pay for capital improvements so that our facilities remain maintained and operational.
- This millage is set by the auditor each year to ensure enough money is generated to pay off the bonds.
- The millage for this year may be reduced up to 3 mills giving tax payers some relief in their tax bill from the school district. The auditor will make this final determination.
- Because the debt service millage is not part of the operating millage, this tax relief will affect both primary and non-owner occupied property.

State Revenues

- The state legislation has approved their budget.
- The biggest change in the budget as it went through the legislative process was the adjustment to the virtual charter school weighting to .50 from .65 in the funding formula.
- While this change did not provide a significant addition to our district, it showed the state's commitment to looking at the current funding formula and ensuring the formula is fair to traditional school districts.

Budget Highlights

- The budget includes the teachers' state minimum salary schedule with a \$1,500 increase in each cell and the state's bus driver salary increase. This has been included with setting teacher and bus driver pay in the proposed budget.
- The state eliminated the Bachelor's +18 level from the teacher salary schedule. Teachers and certified staff with that degree will now be paid on the Bachelor's level. Current employees on that level will still see an increase in salary even though they will now be paid on the Bachelor's level.
- An increase of 4.6% on the employer portion of insurance will be effective January 1, 2026.
- All eligible employees will receive a step increase on their approved salary schedules.
- The budget includes all supplemental contracts the district has in place for the 25-26 school year.
- As discussed in the board work session, a retention bonus will be given mid-year to all eligible employees in good standing in the district. This bonus will be determined and distributed mid-year.

Dr. Stapleton explained the slides for Recommended Revenues and Recommended Expenditures, both totaling \$45,003,150.00.

RECOMMENDED REVENUES		
Local (Taxes, etc.)	\$14,242,675.00	32%
State Funding	\$28,274,008.00	63%
Federal and Transfers	\$2,486,467.00	5%
TOTAL REVENUES	\$45,003,150.00	100%

RECOMMENDED EXPENDITURES		
Salary & Benefits	\$39,546,891.00	88%
Purchased Services	\$ 3,322,776.00	7%
Supplies & Other	\$ 2,143,483.00	5%
TOTAL EXPENDITURES	\$ 45,003,150.00	100%

(Action) Motion made for the Approval of the Final Reading of the 2025-2026 Barnwell County School District General Fund Budget. "I make a motion to approve the final reading of the FY 25-26 General Fund Budget of \$45,003,150.00. This approval includes the addition of the 8 CPI mills allowed pursuant to S.C. Code of Law 6-1-320 and changes the millage rate from 253.1 to 261.1. This increase is also approved knowing that the debt service millage should be reduced by up to 3 mills."

Motion made by John Melton, Jr. to approve the Final Reading of the 2025-2026 Barnwell County School District General Fund Budget. The motion was seconded by Felicia Devore. The motion was approved unanimously.

Dr. Stapleton publicly thanked Holly Hutto, Chief Financial Officer for her exceptional leadership and hard work in delivering a balanced budget for the upcoming year.

I want to take a moment to publicly thank our Chief Financial Officer for her exceptional leadership and hard work in delivering a balanced budget for the upcoming year. This was no small feat, especially considering the serious funding challenges facing school districts across South Carolina right now.

We've all seen the headlines. Districts across the state are grappling with budget shortfalls, program cuts, and tough decisions. Here in Barnwell County, we're not immune to those pressures. The expiration of ESSER funds has removed a critical layer of support that many schools had come to rely on. While the state did provide one-time consolidation funding to help with the initial transition costs of merging systems, that money is now gone—yet many of the ongoing expenses tied to consolidation remain.

In that context, passing a balanced budget isn't just a routine task—it's a significant achievement that reflects thoughtful planning, fiscal responsibility, and a deep commitment to protecting student learning and staff support. We are incredibly grateful for the expertise, diligence, and dedication our CFO brings to this work every single day. Her efforts ensure that we remain focused on students while navigating an increasingly complex financial landscape.

B. Approval of Recommendations from Student and Community Mascot Committees- Action Item

Dr. Stapleton presented the Recommendations from Student and Community Mascot Committees

Dr. Stapleton shared the following information:

- Mike Beasley, Chief Officer of Operations, facilitated the Mascot Committee Process and provided an overview and update at the May Board Work Session.
- This process was initiated after the district's former transition board determined that a mascot committee should be formed to help create a meaningful identity for the new high school. When the newly elected Board of Trustees came into office, they chose to expand this effort beyond just a community-based group. They called for a student committee to be formed with student representatives from each middle and high school in the county. It was also decided that school leaders would join the students to help facilitate the conversation and support the decision-making process.
- Mike Beasley facilitated a months-long, collaborative process with two distinct mascot committees:
 - A student mascot committee (also including school leaders)
 - A community mascot committee
- Committees reviewed and discussed feedback from districtwide student and community surveys.
- Mike Beasley has expressed how the level of passion, engagement, and pride shown by participants was truly inspirational. The shared vision consistently shifted toward creating something new together.
- The student committee, made up of two students from every middle and high school in the district, worked closely with high school administrators during multiple joint sessions.
- According to Beasley, students came prepared, shared ideas openly, and were energized by the opportunity to help shape the future identity of Barnwell County School District.
- They also considered mascots from schools across the state and region, wanting to ensure that Barnwell County High School would have an identity that was unique-not like any mascot our current schools compete against.
- The discussed values like strength, unity, and community. They wanted something that would honor our county's agricultural roots and something that reflected the resilience and fierce competitive spirit of their sports teams.

- The students demonstrated maturity and adaptability, debating and evolving their ideas over time, but ultimately reached unanimous consensus on their top choice. Their ideas were discussed with the community mascot group.
- According to Beasley, each meeting revealed a growing sense of pride and purpose.
- According to Beasley, one thing that stood out the most was the way the adults in the community group embraced the voices of our students. They shared their input generously, then stepped back and supported the students, recognizing that they would be the ones living this new school experience. They believed the students' voices mattered—and they were right.
- Mike Beasley presented the top mascot choices and color themes at the May board work session, where he also shared the rationale behind each recommendation. Although the Board originally asked for 3 recommendations, the committees felt there were only two options to bring forward: Bulls and Titans
- The students and community group ultimately reached unanimous consensus on their top choice:
Barnwell County Bulls
- While different colors were considered and presented as options, the recommended school colors— Navy and Vegas Gold —were also a top choice of both mascot committees.
- Following the board work session, Mike Beasley partnered with Varsity Brands to begin developing a comprehensive branding plan, which is still being worked on and will be presented at a later date.
- Students and committee members described the bull as a powerful nod to Barnwell County's agricultural history and a symbol of strength, resilience, and competitive spirit.
- Dr. Stapleton shared that tonight the mascot committees present their unified recommendation for the new mascot and school colors to represent our new Barnwell County High School that will open its doors in 2028: **Barnwell County Bulls**

(Action) Motion made for the Approval of recommendations from Student and Community Mascot Committees.

Motion made by John Melton, Jr. to approve the Recommendations from the Student and Community Mascot Committees. The motion was seconded by Catrena Hughes-Parker. The motion was approved unanimously.

C. Approval of the 2025 National FFA Convention Trip October 28-November 1, 2025 in Indianapolis, Indiana – Action Item

(Action) Motion made for the Approval of the 2025 National FFA Convention Trip October 28-November 1, 2025 in Indianapolis, Indiana.

Motion made by Catrena Hughes Parker for the Approval of 2025 National FFA Convention Trip October 28-November 1, 2025 in Indianapolis, Indiana. The motion was seconded by Felicia Devore. The motion was approved unanimously.

D. Approval of the First Reading of Policies

Dr. Stapleton reviewed the First Reading of the following policies:

- Policy KF- Community Use of Facilities- Dr. Stapleton shared that, during the second reading, the district will present the administrative rule which outlines the specific details from the facilities committee to support Policy KF. Their recommendations will be included in the rule.

- Policy GCCAAA- Sick Leave Bank- We do not currently have a sick leave bank for the new district. Current legislation has passed that all school districts implement a sick leave bank. This policy will initiate the district putting a sick leave bank in place for staff members in the 2025-2026 school year.

Motion made by Rosey Anderson for the approval of the First Reading of Policy KF- Community Use of Facilities. The motion was seconded by John Melton, Jr. The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Felicia Devore for the approval of the First Reading of Policy GCCAAA- Sick Leave Bank. The motion was seconded by Rosey Anderson. The motion was approved unanimously.

V. Executive Session

Motion made to go into Executive Session by John Melton, Jr. at 6:40 p.m. and seconded by Felicia Devore for the purpose of:

Discussion of employment, appointment, compensation, promotion, demotion, discipline, or release of an employee, a student, or a person regulated by a public body or the appointment of a person to a public body.

- *Student Non-Resident and School Choice Requests- Student A, B, and C*
- *Discussion of negotiations incident to contractual arrangements, specifically contractual agreements with outside organizations.* Dr. Stapleton stated this was in regard to First Steps of Barnwell County.
- *Receipt of other legal advice, as needed, in regard to contractual agreements and in relation to student requests.*

Any action as required by Executive Session discussion.

Motion made to come out of Executive Session at 6:54 p.m. Motion made by Rosey Anderson and seconded by Catrena Hughes-Parker. The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion made by Catrena Hughes-Parker for the approval of Student Non-Resident and School Choice Requests- Students A, B, and C. The motion was seconded by Felicia Devore. The motion was approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Felicia Devore for the approval to update the contractual agreement with First Steps and expand the space used by the childcare program at Kelly Edward Elementary School to include one additional classroom or the 2025-2026 school year. The motion was seconded by Catrena Hughes-Parker. The motion was approved unanimously.

VI. Adjournment

Chair Becky Huggins expressed her gratitude to the Chief Financial Officer, Holly Hutto, for her hard work on finalizing the budget. She also reflected on the motion that was approved for the new mascot and colors.

"I'd like to take a moment to reflect on the motion that passed to finalize the mascot and school colors for the new Barnwell County High School. This decision was made with unity, care, and compassion — especially from our students across each of our schools and with valuable input from our community.

No one took this decision lightly. In fact, I'll be honest — out of everything we've had to discuss related to the new high school, this was the one vote I personally didn't look forward to. But what's unfolded has

been truly inspiring. Just like with every major step we've taken together, we've approached this one with respect and collaboration, and we've come through it even more united.

As a Board, we are honored to be part of this process and all that it represents for our students, families, and future. The opportunities this new school will bring to our youth are exciting and full of promise. We look forward to finalizing our new brand and embracing the energy of our Bull mascot. We're excited for this new chapter — one that reflects strength, pride, and unity. We are charging toward greatness. Go Bulls!"

A. Announcement of Next Meeting

Chair Huggins announced that the next Regular Board Meeting was scheduled for August 19, 2025 at 6:00 p.m. at Barnwell County School District Administration Building.

B. Meeting Adjournment

Chair Huggins asked for a motion to adjourn. The motion was made by Felicia Devore and seconded by Catrena Hughes-Parker. There were no objections to adjourning. The meeting adjourned at 6:58 p.m.

Chair



Clerk

