

Gaston County Schools
Board of Education
Monday, September 15, 2025
Meeting 5:30 p.m.
Regular Meeting

MINUTES

The Gaston County Board of Education met in a regular session on Monday, September 15, 2025, at 5:30 p.m. in the Board Room, 943 Osceola Street, Gastonia, NC. The meeting was live on Spectrum Cable Channel 21 and The Gaston County Board of Education YouTube page. Those Board Members in attendance were: Chairman Josh Crisp, Vice Chairman Dot Cherry, Lee Dedmon, Tod Kinlaw, Robbie Lovelace, Brent Moore, Jeff Ramsey, Janna Smith, and A.M. Stephens III.

Additional attendees include: Superintendent Dr. Morgen A. Houchard, Attorney Sonya McGraw, Associate Superintendents Gary Hoskins and Tonya Kales, Chief Communications Officer Todd Hagans, and Board Clerk Cindy Beck.

Chairman Crisp called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m. and welcomed everyone.

Invocation

Dr. Chad Hovis led the invocation.

Pledge of Allegiance

Eder Acosta Uribe, Jeremiah Brumley, Johanna Cuthbertson, Emmanuel Daniels, Gabriel Daniels, Amari Greene-Rickett, and Jessi Villalobos Rivas from Grier Middle School led the Pledge of Allegiance.

Character Trait

August McDowell, a student at Lingerfeldt Elementary, reported on the Character Trait of Respect.

Agenda Adoption - Action

The Board considered Agenda Adoption – Action

Motion to adopt the Agenda as presented was made by Mrs. Janna Smith; seconded by Mr. Brent Moore motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

Good News – Information

Mr. Todd Hagans presented the Good News for September:

Mr. Hagans recognized South Point High School counselor **Erin Stokes, who received the 2025 Yale Educator Award**. She was nominated by James Dover, the school's Class of 2025 valedictorian, who is attending Yale University. The award recognizes outstanding educators who have made a significant impact on students' lives.

This award, sponsored by the Yale University Office of Undergraduate Admissions, honors educators from around the world who inspire and support their students to reach high levels of achievement and excellence.

Students entering the Yale Class of 2029 were asked to nominate outstanding educators who had a significant impact on their lives. Ms. Stokes was nominated for the honor by James Dover, a 2025 graduate of South Point High School and co-valedictorian, who is now a student at Yale University.

In his nomination, James shared how Ms. Stokes went above and beyond to support him and other students. She helped him design an individualized academic path, arranging advanced courses outside the school's usual offerings and encouraging him to take part in special programs that led to new opportunities.

James also noted that during a time of transition, Ms. Stokes kept the guidance department running smoothly while training new counselors and taking on extra responsibilities. He said she is a true student-centered educator who works with humility and grace.

Mr. Todd Hagans continued by honoring Ms. Stokes for this well-deserved recognition and thanked her for her outstanding service to our students at South Point High School.

Mrs. Janna Smith presented a Certificate of Recognition plaque to Ms. Stokes.

Mr. Hagans then recognized that the Gaston County Schools had newly established a Student-Athlete Advisory Council. The council is made up of 20 student-athletes (two from each high school with sports) who meet quarterly to share their insight and experiences about what it means to be a student-athlete.

The following students were recognized as part of the Student-Athlete Advisory Council: Israel Aladekoba of Hunter Huss High School, Isaac Aycok of Forestview High School, Rex Dover of South Point High School, Raylei Gidney of Cherryville High School, Brayden Moss of Bessemer City High School, Mattie Queen of Forestview High School, and Hayden Routhier of North Gaston High School.

Mr. Todd Hagans then recognized Mr. Chad Duncan, our County Athletic Director, who believes students involved in the Advisory Council will have the opportunity to grow as leaders, represent their schools, and have a voice in athletics.

At their first meeting, the students worked together to draft a code of sportsmanship. This message is being read over the public address system at athletic events and highlights the importance of sportsmanship for athletes, coaches, parents, and spectators.

Mr. A.M. Stephens III presented each student with a certificate of recognition.

Mr. Todd Hagans continued by recognizing the Gaston County Schools Finance Department and asked Associate Superintendent and Chief Financial Officer Gary Hoskins and members of the Finance Department staff to come forward, including James Beckford, Christina Ellis, Paula Medlin, and Kaitlyn Bohn.

Mr. Hagans reported that the Association of School Business Officials International has awarded Gaston County Schools the Certificate of Excellence in Financial Reporting for the 2024 Comprehensive Annual Financial Report. This prestigious recognition highlights the department's dedication to transparency, accuracy, and accountability in financial management.

This recognition is especially significant because it marks the 28th consecutive year that Gaston County Schools has received the honor. Earning the award year after year shows a long-standing tradition of excellence and professionalism in managing public funds.

Mr. Tod Kinlaw presented a plaque of recognition to the Finance Department.

Mr. Todd Hagans concluded with the Good News by listing three occasions to celebrate:

First, this week is North Carolina Arts in Education Week, and we are very pleased with the fine arts programs we have available for students in our schools.

Second, Constitution Day is this Wednesday, September 17th, and Gaston County Schools has provided suggestions to our schools about how to commemorate the signing of the U.S. Constitution in 1787.

And, coming up in October, we have National Principals Month, when Gaston County Schools brings attention to the leadership of our Principals and Assistant Principals.

Classroom Moment

Mrs. Tyler West introduced Mrs. Jonnecia Alford Simmons, Director of Instructional Coaching and Advanced Teacher Roles. Mrs. Simmons emphasized the vital role that Instructional Coaches play in providing guidance and support to educators. She also outlined the three primary goals of the Advanced Teacher Roles and Instructional Coach program.

Goal 1: Increase the number of highly effective teachers in our Innovation and Title 1 Schools

Goal 2: Attract and retain highly effective teachers.

Goal 3: Increase support, coaching, and professional development for all teachers in our Innovation and Title 1 Schools.

Mrs. Simmons thanked the Board for their continued support.

(View PowerPoint)

Public Expression – Information

Barbie Stokes
4013 Hanks Creek Ln,
Belmont, NC
RE: September 17th Constitution Day

Emily Judge
1005 Dan Maples Drives
Cramerton, NC
RE: Encourage and thank the board for considering the requirements of the First Amendment and NCGS 126-13.

Ann Doss Helms
316 Gaither Road
Belmont, NC

(Public Expression continued)

RE: 2025 Test Scores

Marlene Weinert

2330 Shannon Drive

Belmont, NC

RE: Free Speech of Gaston County Schools Employees

Roxann Rankin

P.O. Box 1

McAdenville, NC

RE: 75th Anniversary of McAdenville Elementary School

Teresa McFarlane

1139 Franklin Blvd,

Gastonia, NC

RE: GCS employee's inappropriate social media behavior concerning Charlie Kirk's assassination.

Terry Elliott

1226 White Lane

Gastonia, NC

RE: GCS employee's inappropriate social media behavior concerning the assassination of Charlie Kirk.

Emily Parker

2625 Birchwood Dr

Gastonia, NC

RE: Support of Holly Ackerman

Approval/Correction of Minutes – Action

Motion to adopt minutes of August 18, 2025, as presented was made by Ms. Dot Cherry; seconded by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

Operations Committee Report – Information

Brent Moore is chair of the committee, and members are Dot Cherry, Lee Dedmon, and A.M. Stephens III. Chairman Crisp recognized Ms. Dot Cherry of the Operations Committee, who provided a summary of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

Curriculum & Instruction Committee Report – Information

Mr. Jeff Ramsey is chair of the committee, and the members are Tod Kinlaw and Robbie Lovelace. Chairman Crisp recognized Mrs. Janna Smith of the Curriculum & Instruction Committee, who provided a summary of topics considered and discussed at the most recent meeting.

(View report)

2024-2025 End of Year Report - Information

Associate Superintendent of Academic Services, Tonya Kales, and Chief Accountability Officer, Kelly Cunningham, presented the official end-of-year results for the **2024–2025 school year**.

Ms. Kales and Ms. Cunningham provided an overview of the North Carolina Accountability Model and highlighted key data points from the State Accountability results. She noted that the information would be framed using the 3 C's: Clarity, Context of the Accountability Model, and Candor.

Chairman Crisp thanked Ms. Kales and her Team for all of the hard work and support.

(View PowerPoint)

Consent Agenda – Action

The Board considered the Consent Agenda:

- A. Recommended Personnel
- B. Budget Amendments & Budget Transfers
- C. Construction/Repair Change Orders
 - none
- D. Board Policy Updates
 - 3400-Evaluation of Student Progress
 - 3420-Student Promotion and Accountability
 - 4050-Closing Exercises
- E. Contracts
 - Emergency Responder Communications Coverage System
 - Trash Removal at all GCS Locations
 - Installation of Playground Mulch
- F. DEC Student Records Destruction

Motion to adopt the Consent Agenda as presented was made by Mr. A.M. Stephens III; seconded by Mrs. Janna Smith motion carried unanimously. (7-0)

Superintendent's Comments

Superintendent Houchard shared two events that the Board is invited to:

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the new outdoor mural at Rankin Elementary School in Mount Holly. It will be held on Monday, September 22, at 9:30 a.m. The mural was created by local artists, and it serves as a celebration of the school and the community.

On Saturday, October 11, McAdenville Elementary School will hold a celebration for the school's 75th anniversary. The McAdenville Historical Society and the school's PTO are coordinating the event, which will feature tours of the school, memorabilia, fun activities, and the recreation of a picture of the first kindergarten class, including the teacher (we understand that McAdenville was home to one of the first kindergarten classes before kindergarten was fully implemented across the state in the 1970s). The celebration is from 11:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m., and you are invited to attend.

Superintendent Houchard then acknowledged that Gaston County Schools is a partner in the "Rhino Run for Education" fundraiser on Saturday, September 27, at Gaston College. Participants can register for the 5K run or the 2K walk and fun run, and select "Gaston County Schools" when signing up so a portion of the registration fee goes toward supporting our schools.

Superintendent reminded everyone that October is “Countdown to College Month” when high school counselors encourage students to complete the necessary steps to get their college applications, financial aid, and other information completed.

We want our high school students and their parents to know that this is the time to start thinking about college and taking the necessary steps to make sure applications and other items are completed. Students and parents who have questions about the college process should contact their high school counselor, as we know that our counselors are happy to help.

Superintendent shared that Thursday, October 16th is our Parent-Teacher Conference Day. Students will be dismissed at lunchtime, and parent conferences will be held in the afternoon. Parents are encouraged to contact their child’s school to schedule a conference.

As a reminder, Superintendent Houchard shared that Friday, October 17th, is an Optional Teacher Workday, which means no school for students. And, report cards for the first nine weeks of school will be distributed on Thursday, October 23.

Superintendent Houchard concluded his comments by thanking everyone for a good first month of school. He expressed appreciation to our students, employees, parents, and the community for working to give us a great start. Superintendent Houchard expressed that our schools are focused on high-quality teaching and learning, and everyone is working hard to make this a successful and productive school year.

Closed Session

Chairman Crisp asked the Board to consider going into Closed Session under, N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(6) Personnel and N.C.G.S. §143-318.11(a)(3) Consultation with Attorney.

Motion to go into Closed Session was made by M s. Dot Cherry; Mrs. Janna Smith seconded, and the motion carried unanimously. (7-0)

The Board went into Closed Session at 6:50 p.m.

The Board returned to Open Session at 8:10 p.m.

Chairman Crisp read the following as Closing Comments:

Thank you for your attention tonight. It is good to come together as a community to celebrate the good things happening in our schools.

Our community has high expectations for our schools. So does this Board.

We want to assure our families, staff, and the community that when matters come to our attention that divert our focus from teaching and learning to lesser things, we take this seriously.

When personnel matters arise, this Board will respond in the most appropriate manner allowed by State and Federal law, such as NCGS (North Carolina General Statute) 115C-325.3 through .6. We will be as transparent as the law permits, and we will follow the legal requirements set forth for public school employees. Sometimes the procedures set forth in the law serve to frustrate those who would have us know more, tell more, and move more quickly. We understand that frustration, but we are committed to seeing things done in the right timing and the right way, following the law.

Our priority continues to be providing a safe, welcoming, and productive learning environment for all students. We are committed to upholding the public's trust and ensuring that the focus of our schools is high-quality teaching and learning.

Thank you for your continued support of this Board and our schools. We are so proud of our community.

Adjournment

All business having been conducted, Motion to adjourn was made by Mr. Jeff Ramsey; seconded by Mr. Tod Kinlaw, and motion carried unanimously. (9-0)

The Board Meeting adjourned at 8:12 p.m.

Approved:

Josh Crisp, Chairman
[Corporate Seal]

Morgen A. Houchard, Secretary

Date Approved: _____