

The Rockbridge County School Board held their regular meeting on Tuesday, October 14, 2025, at Maury River Middle School.

Present: Chairman Kathy Burant; Trustees Corey Berkstresser, Catie Brown, Lenna Ojure, Neil Whitmore; Superintendent Phillip Thompson and Deputy Clerk Timothy Martino.

CALL TO ORDER

Chairman Burant called the meeting to order at 5:30 p.m.

CHANGES TO THE AGENDA: None

STUDENT / STAFF RECOGNITION:

Ms. Lindsey Flint, Teacher and Coordinator for Gifted Programs, introduced Mr. Vincent Gattis, a sixth-grade Maury River Middle School student, who was selected for the Virginia Tech Summer Enrichment Experience (SEE). SEE VT is a one-week residential summer camp for rural middle schoolers at Virginia Tech, with enrichment courses in humanities and STEM. Mr. Gattis was chosen based on his academic excellence, teacher recommendations, and a video submission. Ms. Flint stated that the SEE VT program hosted fifty rural middle school students this year, the most competitive applicant pool to date. A brief video was provided which highlighted the program’s focus on connecting rural learners to STEM experiences at Virginia Tech.

Mr. Joe D’Urso, Education Team Leader at Project Horizon, provided information on the Prevention Education Program. Project Horizon was established in 1982 and expanded its services to include children’s programming in 2002 and opened a forensic center in 2022. Project Horizon conducted over one hundred school presentations, served sixteen children in shelter and four in transitional housing (totaling one hundred sixty-four nights), and facilitated forty-seven forensic interviews through the Children’s Advocacy Center between July 2024 and June 2025. Mr. D’Urso partners with Rockbridge County Public School counselors to tailor presentations that meet current student needs and align with Virginia SOL standards. He provides programming twice a year at each elementary and middle school and is exploring additional after-school support options for high school students.

CONSENT AGENDA

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

- Minutes: 1) September 9, 2025 [Regular Meeting]; 2) September 17, 2025 [Joint Meeting with Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors]; 3) September 29, 2025 [Discipline Committee Hearing]
- Field Trip Requests
- Fundraiser Requests
- Application for Use of Facilities
- Religion Exemption Request
- Appointments and Resignations

Appointments

Support Staff

Kristi Driscoll, Teacher Assistant, Fairfield Elementary School, effective October 15, 2025
Emily Lilley, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, effective October 15, 2025
Kimberly Tyler, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, effective October 15, 2025
Abigail Lynch, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, effective October 15, 2025

Brandy Seaman, 21st Century Grant Coordinator, Natural Bridge Elementary School, effective October 15, 2025

Devin Barbee, Teacher Assistant, Rockbridge County High School, effective October 22, 2025

Substitutes

Breanna Burden
Teresa Huffman

Substitute School Nurse

Tamara Grocholl
Shannon Vest

Custodian

Gina Jones

**Support Staff
Resignation**

Diane Hatcher, Teacher Assistant, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective September 15, 2025
Darleny Garcia, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, resigning effective September 30, 2025
Chelsea Clark, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 10, 2025
Angela Assaoui, Teacher Assistant, Central Elementary School, resigning effective October 10, 2025
Bradford Doremus, Custodian, Central Elementary School, resigning effective October 31, 2025
Lauren Wenger, Bus Driver, Transportation, resigning effective October 23, 2025
Jorja Ruley, Teacher Assistant, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective October 13, 2025
Kristen Skiles, Teacher Assistant, Mountain View Elementary School, resigning effective October 17, 2025

**Professional Staff
Resignation**

Christine Szarzynski, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective September 30, 2025
Joseph Salinetto, Teacher, Maury River Middle School, resigning effective October 10, 2025
Sommer Truslow, Teacher, Natural Bridge Elementary School, resigning effective October 24, 2025
Sarah Grimm, Teacher, Rockbridge County High School, resigning effective October 31, 2025

- Business Items
 - Approved appropriations to for Rec. Center and RCHS Renovations Study out of ESCROW in the amount of \$12,500.00
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for news grants in the amount of \$991,382.00.
 - Approved appropriations to Fund 50 for the following carryover grants in the amount of \$36,259.00.
 - Approved Monthly Financials in the amount of \$2,315,672.45.

PUBLIC COMMENT:
There were fourteen community patrons who addressed the board regarding concerns about the proposed 4 x 4 block schedule at Rockbridge County High School.

BUDGET PLANNING:
Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer, reported that departmental budget requests have been distributed. Meetings will be held with department leaders to review needs and priorities. Joint budget discussions with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors are scheduled for November and December, with the first budget work session anticipated in mid-November.

COMMITTEE REPORTS:
Trustee Brown reported that the Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation raised over \$5,000 at the 5th Annual Rockbridge County Public Schools Foundation Cornhole Tournament held on September 20, 2025.

INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT:
Mr. Timothy Martino, Assistant Superintendent, presented the annual accountability data. Rockbridge County High School was recognized as “Distinguished”, while Maury River Middle School, Central Elementary School, Fairfield Elementary School, and Mountain View Elementary School are “On Track”. Natural Bridge Elementary School is currently “Off Track”. The next steps include staff development around the new accountability system, continued implementation of “Multi-Tiered System of Supports” (MTSS), and unpacking of updated Standards of Learning.

INFORMATIONAL ITEMS:
Mr. Shaun Sparks, Principal, Rockbridge County High School, presented an overview of the proposed 4x4 block schedule, emphasizing the goal of improving student balance, reducing stress, and expanding course opportunities. The model would allow students to take four courses per semester (eight annually), with longer class periods to promote deeper engagement and more hands-on learning. He addressed frequently asked questions regarding AP and DE courses, elective availability, and attendance considerations. AP and DE classes would remain yearlong; some CTE

and elective courses may also extend the full year. Mr. Sparks noted the creation of a committee to examine scheduling impacts and announced a parent meeting on Monday, October 20, 2025 at 5:30 p.m.

- Trustee Whitmore stated that with the 4 x 4 schedule, it appears that there will be less contact hours and inquired how that will be addressed.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that overall, there will be less hours but expressed his sentiment that the value is that more time would be spent initially working with students. He stated that often times now during classes there is a start and end. That is mitigated by having more time with students than the natural block which will allow for more opportunity for a deeper level of engagement, projects, and activities or labs in the block format.
- Trustee Ojura stated that she feels a lot of people are concerned about band and theater and inquired if there will be some type of split like AP or Yearbook. She inquired if the committee will try to look at this and see what will make sense.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that part of the process is to look at running those in a “skinny” or “full-year” format, or reimagine the program. Both programs will still be offered in both semesters so that students can have the opportunity to take it for a full year.
- Chairman Burant stated that she was envisioning taking the course offerings catalog and see how many of those courses a student might be able to take with eight periods available rather than just seven periods.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that it would allow for more opportunity. He stated that the Independent Study program will continue. He stated that with the growing English Learners population, developing a native speaker course has been discussed to help with the immersion process. Their educational gaps and needs are a little bit different when trying to think about all of the learners who are served in the building, and what that could look like for students.
- Chairman Burant inquired if reimagining study halls would mean that these will now be resource times.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that they could, but because there will be a reduction in class, there would be less need for a study hall.
- Trustee Ojura inquired if most students take five, six, or seven courses.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that a majority of students take seven courses. He stated that some students who challenge themselves through AP classes, or combination of AP and dual enrollment, may take an elective, or they may take a study hall.
- Trustee Ojura expressed her sentiment that this would work well for dual enrollment since this would be a college schedule.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that the dual enrollment structure would be the natural sequence of semester to semester.
- Chairman Burant inquired about staffing.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that staffing will continue because the same type of opportunities will continue to be offered to our students, with the same amount of staff, and will continue to addressing staffing needs as is done annually.
- Trustee Whitmore inquired if an AB schedule has been looked at and what are the pros and cons of that schedule.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that one of the reasons for not looking at an AB schedule, or considering it at this time, is that for students and staff, students would still be taking their actual eight courses, but they would continue to take those eight courses across the year, which doesn’t provide the ability to reduce some of the things that students are dealing with. Students would still be focusing on more courses than what they currently are right now. Teachers would also not have a reduction per semester in the courses that they are doing. The AB schedule is also a full year format and some of the flexibility would be lost by being able to do things at a semester and recover or remediate differently.
- Trustee Whitmore stated that the word reduction has been used a lot in the presentation and inquired what it is in reference to. He stated that one of the concerns that he has is when you look at the performance categories, of all of the schools in the division, Rockbridge County High School is performing the highest and inquired why would we want to mess with that.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that it is in relation to stress, in looking at the burdens that staff and students have and trying to be mindful and looking at it differently. He stated that the high performance is a testament to the teachers and students. He stated that have a wonderful group of teachers and students, but part of what they are looking at is how we educate all of our learners. He expressed his sentiment that they can be highly successful in the model that is being proposed and that it will look a little bit different.

- Trustee Whitmore requested confirmation that if a student misses on day on a 4 x 4 schedule, it is the equivalent of missing two days of a seven-period schedule.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that it doesn't necessarily equate to that scenario and that any absenteeism is a concern, whether on a seven period day or a block when they are only focusing on four. It does allow for a reduction to only focus on only four classes when they are out. The recovery options for after-school will still be available. If for some reason, recovery is not worked out, the student will not have to wait until next year in order to start the recovery process.
- Trustee Ojure inquired if there is a plan to integrate some students into a committee, noting that there does seem to be some concern about journalism and yearbook. She inquired that as well as participation on the committee, would there be a chance to talk with some of the students who are participating in the programs now to see how it would look to do it in a "skinny format", after school, or some other format.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that those teachers are a part of the committee and process and that there is a need to have some conversations with students about questions they have. He acknowledged great presentations by students at this meeting who spoke during Public Comment.
- Trustee Brown inquired if the scheduling would happen in the fall.
 - Mr. Sparks stated that scheduling will take place the same as in the past, at the end of the school year, moving into the summer, with flexibility of change if needed.
- Chairman Burant expressed her hope that people in the audience will reach out to administration and ask questions.

ACTION ITEMS:

Upon recommendation by Chairman Burant, motion by Trustee Berkstresser, seconded by Trustee Whitmore, the board voted 5-0, to approve the Capital Improvement Plan 2026-2032, as presented.

NEW BUSINESS:

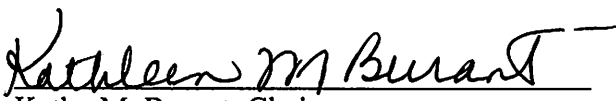
Chairman Burant offered closing remarks thanking the community for attendance and engagement. She congratulated participants in recent events including the upcoming Homecoming Week, the Rockbridge Regional Fair, and the RCHS Hall of Fame inductions. She also commended the success of school-based activities such as: Natural Bridge Elementary School Book Fair; Fairfield Elementary School Nature Trail Project; Central Elementary School visit from the Lexington Fire Department; Mountain View Elementary School Fall Festival; Maury River Middle School "Coffee with Counselors" event; and she expressed appreciation for the collaboration and effort that contributed to last Friday's successful Career Fair.

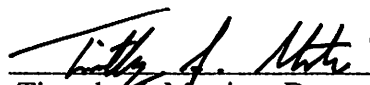
SCHOOL BOARD

The next regular meeting of the Rockbridge County School Board will be held on Tuesday, November 11, 2025 / 5:30 PM / Location: Maury River Middle School Library, 600 Waddell Street, Lexington, VA 24450

ADJOURNMENT

Upon motion by Trustee Whitmore, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 5-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 7:12 p.m.


Kathy M. Burant, Chairman


Timothy J. Martino, Deputy Clerk of the Board