

The Rockbridge County School Board held a special meeting on Tuesday, December 2, 2025. The meeting was held at the Rockbridge County School Board Office.

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

CALL TO ORDER

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

BUDGET WORK SESSION

Superintendent Thompson introduced Ms. Jess Wheeler, Supervisor of Fiscal Services. Ms. Wheeler is being trained by Dr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer.

Superintendent Thompson stated that the budget work session is held in November or December annually and the discussion evolves around what is known and the unknown. This is the last year of the current biennium and will begin budgeting for the new biennium. The goal of this meeting is to confirm priorities for the FY 27.

Mr. Jason Kirby, Chief Business Officer presented the following information on Fiscal Year 2027:

RCPS School Board Mission, Vision, and Goals

RCPS Local Composite Index (LCI)

The state determined Rockbridge County to have a slightly lower ability to pay for education when compared to the last biennium. Over the most recent biennia, the LCI for Rockbridge County has been as follows:

- 2016-2018 -- .4522
- 2018-2020 -- .4498
- 2020-2022 -- .4506
- 2022-2024 -- .4530
- 2024-2026 -- .4847
- 2026-2028 -- .4829

The RCPS School Board continues to advocate with our representatives in the General Assembly in hopes they would support revisiting how the LCI is calculated to ensure a more fair distribution of state funds to areas of true high need such as Rockbridge County. For this upcoming biennium, we have the 35th highest LCI of the 134 localities in Virginia.

RCPS Average Daily Members (ADM)

The RCPS FY26 budget is based on a projected ADM of 2200. The September 30, 2025 ADM for the current year is 2176. RCPS is currently looking at an ADM estimate of 2170 for the FY26 school year. The number of births in Rockbridge County has decreased from 242 in 2009 to 110 in 2024, which reflects the drop in student enrollment.

FY27 Budget Considerations

- Worker's Compensation: [Increase TBD] Much like health insurance rates, each year we must reassess and negotiate with worker's compensation carriers for favorable rates.
- Property & Casualty Insurance: [Increase TBD] Each year we also reassess and negotiate with our property and casualty insurance carriers for favorable rates.

RCPS FY27 Potential Priorities

- Employee Salaries
- Health Insurance
- Non-Personnel Expenses

Other Potential Priorities

- Recruitment and Retention of Classified Employees
We are still losing ground to other local employers who have already moved to \$17 per hour or more. While we were very excited to be able to move our classified employees to a minimum of \$15 per hour, we now have very flat salary scales for many positions. We are currently working through cost models such as shortened scales and skill based pay increases. We did shorten the scale for Food Service this year to allow for some separation in the scales which has been successful to this point.

Ex.- A Food Service employee who becomes ServSafe certified would be eligible for an increase in their hourly rate.

➤ Salary Increases for All RCPS Contracted Employees

As we plan for the 2026-2027 Fiscal Year, our analysis reveals that we remain behind in relation to our region. Teacher salaries must be maintained and improved in Rockbridge County in order to attract and retain highly qualified staff members. This is even more critical at this time due to the higher burnout rate and increased workloads for our staff. We will need to be ready to keep pace with surrounding school divisions as they will be prepared to continue to increase teacher salaries again this year. Each year that we cannot maintain pace with teacher pay, we will begin to fall farther behind other school divisions as we compete not only for the best teachers, but also to simply fill needed teacher and staff positions.

- Trustee Whitmore reflected that it is difficult to attract young teachers/employees with the high cost of land and housing in Rockbridge County.
 - Superintendent Thompson stated that on a positive note the decrease in LCI and it is the new biennium.

➤ Health Care Premium - Increase TBD

We are currently looking at claim data for the current year and have begun discussions with both The Local Choice and OneDigital to plan for the upcoming year. We are hoping to have a rate in place by February to help with budget planning.

➤ Non-Personnel Expenses

Our costs for items such as fuel, maintenance supplies and materials, technology hardware and software, and instructional materials continue to rise at substantial rates. We continue to look for ways to cut costs as well to offset these increases including negotiating costs, analyzing processes, staff analysis, and trying to maintain our equipment to extend its life, but it is difficult to cover these increasing costs.

Superintendent Thompson received consensus from the Board that they are in agreement with the priorities, as presented. The priorities will be presented at the next Joint Meeting with the Rockbridge County Board of Supervisors, which will be held in January 2026.

ADJOURNMENT:

Upon motion by Trustee Brown, seconded by Trustee Ojure, and passed by 4-0 vote, the meeting was adjourned at 6:06 p.m.

Kathleen M. Burant

Kathy M. Burant, Chairman

Rhonda B. Humphries

Rhonda B. Humphries, Clerk of the Board