

**Bamberg County School District  
Board of Trustees Meeting  
Bamberg County School District Office  
January 12, 2026  
6:00 p.m.**

**Members present:** Board Chair David Corder, Vice Chair Naomi Eckels, Secretary Cynthia F. Hurst, Trustee Gwendolyn D. Bamberg, Trustee Adrienne C. Blume, Trustee Jeni Bunch, Trustee Harriet H. Coker, Trustee Tonya A. Sanders-Govan, and Trustee Cathy Ayer Griffin.

**Absent:** None

1. **Call meeting to order:** Board Chair David Corder called the meeting to order.

**Notice to Media:** In accordance with the S. C. Code of Laws of 1976, as amended, Section 30-4-80(E), The Times and Democrat Newspaper, The Bamberg County Leader, WIIZ 97.9 FM, WBSC-LP 102.3 FM, and the Bamberg County School District website have been notified of the time, date, place, and agenda of this meeting.

2. **Pledge of Allegiance/Moment of Silence**

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited and a moment of silence was observed.

3. **Approval of Agenda**

**Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Cathy Griffin seconded, to approve the agenda as presented.** The motion passed 9-0.

4. **Approval of Minutes for November 3, 2025 and December 8, 2025**

**Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Adrienne Blume seconded, to accept the November 3, 2025 and December 8, 2025 meeting minutes as presented.** The motion passed 9-0.

5. **Bamberg County School District FY 2024-2025 Audit – Neal Crider, McGregor & Company, L.L.P.**

Mr. Neal Crider explained that the objective of the audit is to obtain reasonable assurance that the district's financial statements are free from material misstatement, whether due to fraud or error, and to issue an auditor's report that includes an opinion on those financial statements.

Mr. Crider reported that the district received an unmodified (clean) opinion on its financial statements for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025. He noted that while the auditors do not express an opinion on the effectiveness of the district's internal controls, certain deficiencies in internal control were identified, including one material weakness and one significant deficiency.

Mr. Crider referenced two additional auditor's reports issued in accordance with Government Auditing Standards, including the report on internal control over financial reporting and on compliance and other matters. He advised that these reports reflected an unmodified opinion, with no material weaknesses and no significant deficiencies that rose to the level of a material weakness.

However, Mr. Crider noted a finding of noncompliance material to the financial statements related to federal awards under a major program. Specifically, the finding involved the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) Program. While grant funds were obligated timely, ARP ESSER expenditures were liquidated after the required liquidation deadline, and no extensions were granted. As a result, the district is required to return \$655,285.07 of ESSER funds to the South Carolina Department of Education. The district has been notified of the finding, and a corrective action plan has been implemented to prevent future occurrences. Mr. Crider stated they will monitor the corrective action plan. Mr. Crider advised that this finding could potentially result in the district being placed under fiscal watch or fiscal caution by the State Department; however, it should not impact future federal grant funding.

Mr. Crider then presented the district's financial analysis. For fiscal year 2025, the district reported total revenues and other financing sources of \$41,639,705.00 and total expenditures of \$47,153,509.00, resulting in excess expenditures of \$5,513,804.00, largely attributable to construction costs and debt service principal and interest.

The general fund ended the year with a decrease in fund balance of \$1,416,843.00, bringing the total accumulated fund balance to \$6,794,931.00. Mr. Crider advised that \$3,000,000.00 of the fund balance has been designated to balance the FY 2026 budget, leaving an unassigned fund balance of \$3,788,988.00. The remaining unassigned fund balance represents approximately 52 days of operating reserves, which reflects a decrease compared to prior years.

6. **2026 School Board Recognition – Review of Ethical Principles**

The board was presented with the South Carolina School Boards Association's 2026 Ethical Principles for review. Board Chair David Corder read the Ethical Principles aloud. Each board member then signed the 2026 Ethical Principles poster, reaffirming their commitment and pledge as school board members.

7. **School Reports: Dr. Shannon Johnson, Harriett Davis, Dr. Deonia Simmons, Mandy Edwards, Denise Miller, and Jordan Smith.** [Board Packet Enclosures]

- Denmark-Olar High School – Principal Dr. Deonia Simmons
- Denmark-Olar Middle School – Principal Harriett Davis
- Denmark-Olar Elementary School – Principal Dr. Shannon Johnson
- Richard Carroll Elementary School – Principal Mandy Edwards
- Bamberg-Ehrhardt Middle School – Principal Mandy Edwards in the absence of Principal Denise Miller
- Bamberg-Ehrhardt High School – Principal Jordan Smith

8. **Review and Approval of Denmark-Olar Middle School's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)/Turn Around Plan (Action Needed)**

Denmark-Olar Middle School Principal Harriett Davis presented Denmark-Olar Middle School's Continuous Improvement Plan for board review and approval. Ms. Davis advised that the plan follows the South Carolina Department of Education's (SCDE) regulations for schools rated Unsatisfactory. Ms. Davis reminded the board of the school's Unsatisfactory rating and further advised that collaborative input was received from district

leadership, school administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and subgroup representatives. Ms. Davis stated that ongoing stakeholder engagement will include regular data reviews, progress-monitoring meetings, and plan revisions based on feedback.

Ms. Davis identified three goals to strengthen the school's performance and support opportunities for growth. These goals include: (1) improving resources and equity, including teacher retention, to support instructional continuity, teacher effectiveness, and a stable learning environment that promotes student academic success; (2) increasing English Language Arts (ELA) achievement by closing literacy gaps, strengthening Tier 1 instruction, and increasing intervention effectiveness through high-dosage tutoring, visible learning strategies, explicit direct instruction, i-Ready intervention blocks, and continued data monitoring; and (3) increasing overall mathematics proficiency by focusing on foundational math skills through structured tutoring, standards-aligned resources, explicit direct instruction, and i-Ready intervention.

Ms. Davis advised that progress will be monitored at the 45-, 90-, and 135-day intervals using benchmark data. Expected outcomes include improved instructional quality, increased teacher retention, higher ELA and mathematics proficiency, reduced achievement gaps, and transparent accountability throughout all instructional structures. Ms. Davis stated that the plan reflects a data-driven, student-centered approach focused on equity, instructional excellence, and sustainable improvement, with the ultimate goal of moving Denmark-Olar Middle School out of Unsatisfactory status and toward continued success.

After review of the plan, **Trustee Harriet Coker moved, and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded, the motion to accept Denmark-Olar Middle School's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP)/Turnaround Plan as presented.** The motion passed 9-0.

9. **Truancy Report/Update: Denise Robinson-Crosby**  
Truancy Officer Denise Robinson-Crosby reviewed the truancy report as presented for Bamberg County School District. [Board Packet Enclosure]
10. **Athletic Reports: Robert Williams**  
Athletic Director Robert Williams reviewed the athletic report as presented for Bamberg County School District. [Board Packet Enclosure]
11. **Student/Staff Recognition and Superintendent's Report**  
Interim Superintendent Ulmer noted the following:
  - a) Mr. Ulmer recognized and thanked each of the board members again for their time, dedication, hard work, and for everything they do for Bamberg County School District in recognition of board appreciation month.
  - b) Mr. Ulmer congratulated Ms. Alleyah Ransom of Bamberg-Ehrhardt middle school on receiving the Recycling Education Grant Award in the amount of \$1,450.00 to be used to promote healthy eating choices, foster sustainability, and build a sense of community within the school.

- c) Mr. Ulmer concluded his report with an update on district enrollment, noting a total of 1,761 students as of January 7, 2026.

12. **Request for Out of State/Overnight Trips:**

- a. EOC Success Students – Beat the Bomb – Charlotte, NC – January 23, 2026 (Zelda Douglas, DOHS Career Specialist)
- b. BEHS Wrestling Team – State Championship – Florence, SC – February 19, 2026-February 21, 2026 (Terrell Haynes, Head Wrestling Coach)
- c. Culinary ProStart Team – Competition – Greenville, SC -- March 1, 2026-March 3, 2026 (Kathy Summers, Culinary Arts Instructor)
- d. DOHS Agriculture Class – NYFEA AgPromise Training Program – Washington, D.C. -- March 8, 2026-March 10, 2026 (Bayleah Varnadoe, Agriculture Instructor)
- e. Professional Development Request – Federal Programs – Washington, DC – March 15, 2026-March 19, 2026 (Rhonda Ray, Federal Programs Director)
- f. BEHS Softball Team – Grandstrand Softball Classic – Myrtle Beach, SC – April 4, 2026-April 11, 2026 (Robert Williams, AD Director/Head Softball Coach)

Following a review of the requests for out-of-state/overnight travel, **Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Cathy Griffin seconded, to approve the following requests: the request of Ms. Zelda Douglas, DOHS Career Specialist, for Denmark EOC Success students to attend Beat the Bomb in Charlotte, North Carolina, on January 23, 2026; the request of Head Coach Terrell Haynes for the BEHS Wrestling Team to attend the State Championship in Florence, South Carolina, from February 19–21, 2026; the request of Kathy Summers, Culinary Arts Instructor, for the BEHS Culinary ProStart Team to attend a competition in Greenville, South Carolina, from March 1–3, 2026; the request of Agriculture Instructor Bayleah Varnadoe for the DOHS Agriculture class to attend the NYFEA AgPromise Training Program in Washington, D.C., from March 8–10, 2026; the professional development request of Dr. Rhonda Ray, Federal Programs Director, to attend the Federal Programs Conference in Washington, D.C., from March 15–19, 2026; and the request of Head Softball Coach Robert Williams for the BEHS Softball Team to attend the Grand Strand Softball Classic in Myrtle Beach, South Carolina, from April 4–11, 2026.** The motion passed 9-0. [Board Packet Enclosures]

13. **District High School Textbook Selection (Action Needed)**

Mr. Ulmer presented the board with a proposed textbook selection for the following high school elective courses..

• **Course: Earth Science**

**Textbook:** National Geographic Learning/Cengage: Earth and Space Science -- Author: Hendrix, et al, Student Edition Print-9780357650677 + MindTap eBook-9780357127308 Bundle, 6-Year Access (per student, per course) 9780357490624

• **Course: Agribusiness and Marketing Option**

**Textbook:** AgriScience: Agriculture, Food, and Natural Resources, 7th Edition -- Author: Jasper S. Lee; Diana Turner Student Edition-9780136620785 + Six Single use eText Access Code Cards- ISBN: 9780136620907 – Bundle, ISBN: 9780136906490

After reviewing the high school elective textbook selection, **Trustee Harriet Coker moved, and Vice Chair Naomi Eckels seconded, to accept the recommended high school elective textbook selections.** The motion passed 9-0.

14. **Update/Discussion of Proposal for moving 6<sup>th</sup> Grade from Richard Carroll Elementary School to Bamberg-Ehrhardt Middle School (Action Needed)**

Mr. Ulmer revisited the board's decision from the August 2025 meeting to table the proposal to relocate 6th grade until January 2026. He advised that there were no new updates and no additional funding available to support the project at this time. Mr. Ulmer reminded the board that architectural estimates for constructing a dedicated 6th grade wing ranged from \$4,000,000 to \$8,000,000.

Following the update, **Trustee Harriet Coker moved and Trustee Jeni Bunch seconded, the recommendation of Interim Superintendent Dennis R. Ulmer to remove the proposal from consideration until such time as the district's financial situation changes, at which time the matter may be reconsidered.** The motion passed 9-0.

15. **Proposal to Convert Denmark Schools to a K-12 Campus (Action Needed)**

Mr. Ulmer presented the board with a proposal to convert Denmark Schools to a K-12 campus in an effort to create savings for the district.

After in-depth discussion and a request for additional information, **Trustee Adrienne Blume moved and Trustee Tonya Sanders-Govan seconded, to table the proposal to convert Denmark Schools to a K-12 Campus until Interim Superintendent Dennis R. Ulmer can bring more information from the State Department regarding Pros and Cons.** The motion passed 9-0. [Board Packet Enclosure]

16. **Second Reading – BCSD Policy – Section E – Support Services**

**a. EEAG – Student Transportation in Private Vehicles**

Mr. Ulmer presented policy EEAG for second reading.

Following a brief discussion, **Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Cathy Griffin seconded, the motion to approve the second reading of Policy EEAG – Student Transportation in Private Vehicles as presented.** The motion passed 9-0. [Board Packet Enclosure]

17. **Second Reading – BCSD Policy – Section J – Students**

**a. JKE-R – Expulsion of Students**

Mr. Ulmer presented policy JKE-R for second reading.

Following a brief discussion, **Vice Chair Naomi Eckels moved, and Trustee Harriet Coker seconded, the motion to approve the second reading of Policy JKE-R – Expulsion of Students with proposed changes.** The motion passed 9-0. [Board Packet Enclosure]

18. **First Reading – BCSD Policy – Section D – Online Fundraising**  
**a. DDB – Online Fundraising**

Mr. Ulmer presented policy DDB for first reading.

Following a brief discussion, **Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Cathy Griffin seconded, the motion to approve the first reading of Policy – DDB – Online Fundraising as presented.** The motion passed 9-0. [Board Packet Enclosure]

19. **Approval of 2026 Board Calendar (Action Needed)**

Mr. Ulmer submitted the 2026 Board Calendar for review. [Board Packet Enclosure]

After a brief discussion, **Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Adrienne Blume seconded, to approve the 2026 Board Calendar as presented.** The motion passed, 9–0.

20. **Monthly Financial Report**

Chief Financial Officer Devon Furr presented the Financial Report for Bamberg County School District for FY 2025-2026 as of December 2025, for review. [Board Packet Enclosure]

Ms. Furr elaborated on the audit finding and further explained that the ESSER funds being returned to the South Carolina Department of Education (SCDE) represented only one percent of the total funds allocated and that the invoice was not received until after the liquidation deadline.

**Trustee Harriet Coker moved, and Secretary Cynthia Hurst seconded, the motion to accept and approve the Financial Report for December 2025, as presented.** The motion passed 9-0.

21. **Visitors' Comments**

Councilmember Ken Ahlin informed the board that County Council meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month at 6:00 p.m. He also expressed a willingness to work collaboratively with the board and encouraged continued cooperation with County Council for the greater good of the community.

22. **Executive Session**

**Board Chair David Corder called for a motion to enter Executive Session. Vice Chair Naomi Eckels moved, and Trustee Jeni Bunch seconded, the motion to enter Executive Session.** The motion carried 9-0.

Board Chair David Corder noted that the board would be moving into Executive Session to discuss Superintendent Matters Related to: Superintendent Search, Superintendent's Evaluation, Superintendent's Contract, Employment/Personnel Matters Related to: Personnel Recommendations for Hire, Personnel Recommendations for Resignation, Matters Related to Release of Students, and Evaluation of District Legal Counsel.

**Open session: Trustee Adrienne Blume moved, and Vice Chair Naomi Eckels seconded, the motion for the board to come out of Executive Session and return to the regular session of the meeting. The motion carried 9-0.**

**23. Action on Executive Session Items**

**Vice Chair Naomi Eckels moved, and Trustee Gwendolyn Bamberg seconded, the motion to accept and approve Agenda Item 22(a)(1)&(3) to Discuss Matters Related to Superintendent Search and Superintendent's Contract to continue the retention of Mr. Dennis R. Ulmer as Interim Superintendent for the 2026-2027 School Year. The motion passed 9-0.**

**Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Jeni Bunch seconded, the motion to accept and approve Agenda Item 22(b)(1) to Discuss Personnel Recommendations for Hire for employees a and b. The motion passed 9-0.**

**Vice Chair Naomi Eckels moved, and Trustee Cathy Griffin seconded, the motion to accept and approve Agenda Item 22(b)(2) to Discuss Personnel Recommendations for Resignation for employees a, b, c, and d. The motion passed 9-0.**

**Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Harriet Coker seconded, the motion to approve the issuance of a Request for Proposal (RFP) for legal counsel in connection with Agenda Item 22(d) Evaluation of District Legal Counsel. The motion passed 9-0.**

With respect to Agenda Item 22(a)(2) to Discuss Superintendent Matters related to Superintendent's Evaluation, and Agenda Item 22(c) to Discuss Matters Related to Release of Students, no action was taken.

**24. Board Member Comments**

- Secretary Cynthia Hurst remarked that it was a pleasant evening and expressed her appreciation to Vice Chair Naomi Eckels for her insight and contributions.
- Trustee Jeni Bunch thanked everyone for their hard work and congratulated the athletic department on a successful season.
- Trustee Harriet Coker expressed her appreciation to Interim Superintendent Dennis R. Ulmer and the district office staff for their continued dedication and thanked everyone for the board appreciation gifts.
- Board Chair David Corder thanked the district office staff, principals, and students for the board appreciation gifts and commended the district's athletic teams for winning three state championships in one year.

**25. Adjourn**

**Secretary Cynthia Hurst moved, and Trustee Caty Griffin seconded, the motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion passed 9-0.**

The meeting was adjourned at 10:24 p.m.

Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes

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Minutes approved:

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David Corder, Board Chair

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Cynthia Hurst, Secretary