

Hamlet, North Carolina
March 24, 2026

The Richmond County Board of Education met in a quarterly work session on March 24, 2026, at 5:00 p.m. The meeting was held at the Central Office in Hamlet, North Carolina.

The members present: Cory Satterfield, Chairman, Bobbie Sue Ormsby, Vice-Chairman, Jerry Ethridge, Ronald Tillman, Scotty Baldwin and Bess Shuler. Daryl Mason was absent.

The administrators present were Dr. Joe Ferrell, Superintendent; Dr. Julian Carter, Associate Superintendent of Operations and Athletics; Dr. Kate Smith, Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction; Dr. Tesha Isler, Executive Director of Human Resources; Melvin Ingram, Assistant Superintendent of School Safety and Support Services; Dawn Jordan, Executive Director of Finance; Cameron Whitley, Executive Director of Communications; and Eva DuBuisson, Board Attorney.

Meeting Commencement

After noting that a quorum was present, Cory Satterfield, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 5:03 p.m. Bess Shuler requested a Moment of Silence and led the Pledge of Allegiance.

2025-2026 Proposed Budget

Dawn Jordan presented information regarding the Richmond County Schools proposed budget for the 2026–2027 fiscal year, including an overview of capital outlay funds, lottery funds, state and local funding trends, and identified funding needs.

Dawn began with the 2026–2027 proposed capital outlay (sales tax) budget, which remains consistent at approximately \$2,005,500. She noted that the prior year reflected an increase due to additional sales tax funding designated for specific projects, including the completion of a baseball field and ongoing track improvements. She explained that these funds are expended as needed and reimbursed monthly by the county.

Budget Breakdown:

Regular Capital Outlay budget remains at \$423,500.00.

? Q (Ronald Tillman): Does the capital expenditures vehicle fund, include the purchase and replacement of district vehicles?

A (Dawn Jordan): No, the budgeted vehicle funds support maintenance, transportation, technology, school nutrition, and School Resource Officer vehicles.

? Q (Jerry Ethridge): How long does the district keep vehicles?

A (Steven King): There isn't a specific timeframe noting, the district currently has vehicles exceeding 100,000–300,000 miles.

? Q (Ronald Tillman): How are the School Resource Officer vehicles?

A (Steven King): They are all roadworthy.

Steven King emphasized that the district needs a strategic plan for vehicle replacement.

? Q (Chairman Satterfield): Does this fund pay for driver's education vehicles?

A (Dawn Jordan): No, it they are purchased with driver's education funds.

Dawn then provided an overview of the Public-School Building Capital Fund (Lottery Funds), outlining the various funding categories:

- The ADM (Average Daily Membership) fund is no longer active, though remaining funds have been utilized for projects such as roof repairs.
- The Public-School Building Capital Fund is currently used by the county for debt service payments.
- The Needs-Based Public-School Capital Fund includes recently awarded grant funding, with approximately \$27 million already deposited toward a larger capital project.
- The Repair and Renovations (R&R) Fund supports classroom-related improvements, renovations, and equipment purchases. Dawn noted prior usage of these funds to offset uncertainty in federal ESSER funding and identified planned requests for additional renovations at the Ninth Grade Academy and Rockingham Middle School auditorium.

? Q (Bobbie Sue Ormsby): Do we earn interest on the grant money?

A (Dawn Jordan): Yes, we should earn interest on that money.

Dawn reviewed the All-Funds Budget for 2024–2025 and 2025–2026, noting a decrease in total funding from \$112,216,749.50 to \$97,449,538.21, primarily due to the expiration of federal ESSER funds. She then provided the following funding breakdown for the 2025–2026 fiscal year:

- 60% from State funds
- 12% from Federal funds
- 12% from Local funds
- 6% from Child Nutrition funds
- 6% from Capital Outlay funds
- 4% from Other Local funds

Dawn shared state allotment information and highlighted a projected reduction in teaching positions due to declining student enrollment (ADM). She explained that the State has transitioned to a funding model based on prior-year enrollment, allowing districts to better anticipate funding levels but limiting flexibility if enrollment increases unexpectedly. It was noted that most districts across North Carolina are experiencing declining enrollment.

? Q (Bess Shuler): Why is enrollment declining?

A (Dawn Jordan): Several factors are contributing to the decline, including increased enrollment in charter schools, virtual academies, and homeschooling. The district currently has 105 students enrolled in charter schools, many of whom attend virtual charter schools.

? Q (Ronald Tillman): What is the total amount of funding the district pays for homeschooled students?

A (Dawn Jordan): The district does not pay for homeschooled students; however, enrollment decreases result in a reduction in ADM. The district is required to allocate a portion of local funding to students enrolled in charter schools, and these costs are increasing annually.

Dawn reviewed the local budget, including revenues, expenditures, and use of fund balance. She noted that 56% of local expenditures are allocated to salaries and benefits, 34% is purchased services, 9% is supplies and materials and a small amount in Capital Outlay.

? Q (Chairman Satterfield): Why is there a big difference between 2024-2025 and 2025-2026 licenses, fees, and equipment?

A (Dawn Jordan): We had to purchase some golf carts and get licensing for vehicles.

Dawn shared that last year's expenses were \$11,557,262.73, revenue was \$10,346,296.92 and fund balance used was -\$1,210,965.81.

Dawn then outlined identified funding needs for the 2026-2027 budget, including:

- Increase in local teacher supplements (5% or 10%)
- 3% payroll increase
- Phase 4 salary study implementation - teacher assistants
- Increases in fixed operational costs
- RSHS device replenishment – 450 devices

? Q (Ronald Tillman): Could we ask RC Education Foundation to help fund computers each year?

A (Bobbie Sue Ormsby): Absolutely, I feel certain they would help some. That was the basis of why they started the foundation. They purchased all the smartboards for classrooms.

Dawn concluded by asking Board members to prioritize the 2026–2027 identified funding needs for presentation to the County Commissioners, noting that not all requests may be funded.

The following reflects how the Board ranked the 2026–2027 identified needs for presentation to the County.

Ranked	Identified Needs	Amount
1	Implementation of 4th Phase Salary Study: Teacher Assistants	\$676,404.62
2	10% Local Teacher Supplement Increase	\$140,036.76
3	3% Payroll Increase	\$125,217.58
4	3% Fixed Cost Increase	\$211,556.59
5	RSHS Device Replenishment – 450 devices	\$207,000.00
	Total	\$1,360,215.55

On a motion by Scotty Baldwin, seconded by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, the Board voted unanimously to approve presenting the 2026–2027 identified needs to the County as listed above.

Facilities Optimization and Long-Range Planning

Dr. Ferrell opened the discussion by inviting Steven King to present the results of a third-party cleanliness inspection conducted across the district's 14 facilities. The evaluation assessed 13 areas, including entrances, offices, restrooms, classrooms, and overall safety check, using a 5 point A-D grading scale. Results included four A ratings, three B ratings, three C ratings, and three D ratings, with an overall district average of a C.

Steven noted the need for improved custodial oversight. The district currently employs 71 custodians (24 full-time and 47 part-time) who report directly to principals but lack a knowledgeable, experienced

manager. He noted that several months ago he shared with the Board the need for a Custodial Coordinator position to provide training, oversight, inventory management, and support to both custodial staff and principals.

Steven explained that maintenance department restructuring and unfilled positions have allowed approximately \$50,000 to be identified toward funding the proposed position. The estimated cost for a full-time Custodial Coordinator, including benefits, is \$60,000, leaving an approximate \$10,000 to be paid out of local funds. He expressed confidence that increased efficiency, improved training, and better resource management would offset this cost over time and improve facility cleanliness ratings.

? Q (Chairman Satterfield): Would cleaning be part of the Custodial Coordinator's responsibilities?

A (Steven King): Yes.

? Q (Chairman Satterfield): Will the Custodial Coordinator have full authority over the custodians?

A (Dr. Ferrell): The role will operate as a partnership between the coordinator and school principals.

A (Steven King): The coordinator will support principals by ensuring custodial responsibilities are completed effectively.

A (Dr. Ferrell): The coordinator may also assist during evaluations alongside principals or assistant principals to ensure accuracy and fairness.

? Q (Ronald Tillman): Who will be the Custodial Coordinator's direct supervisor?

A (Steven King): The position will report to the Maintenance Director and work closely with the department's administrative manager.

Board members discussed accountability, the role of principals, and the importance of clear expectations for custodial staff.

On a motion by Ronald Tillman, second by Jerry Ethridge, the Board voted unanimously to approve hiring a Custodial Coordinator as presented.

Dr. Ferrell began the second portion of the Facilities Optimization and Long-Range Planning discussion and presented a detailed review of the district's fund balance trends over multiple years to illustrate ongoing financial challenges.

He noted that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the district maintained a relatively stable fund balance of approximately \$3.1 million in both 2019 and 2020, using about \$110,000 in 2019 and approximately \$42,000–\$43,000 in 2020 to balance the budget.

In 2021, the fund balance increased significantly to approximately \$4.6 million due to adding \$1.5 million federal COVID relief funds into fund balance. This upward trend continued into 2022, when the fund balance reached approximately \$4.8 million, because \$210,000 federal COVID relief funds were added that year.

Beginning in 2023, financial pressures increased as costs rose and Covid relief funds began to phase out. Although the state provided temporary "hold harmless" funding protections, the district used approximately \$1 million to balance the budget, reducing the fund balance to approximately \$3.7 million.

In 2024, rising expenditures including insurance, retirement, and utilities continued to impact the budget, while ESSER funds diminished further. The district used approximately \$98,000 to balance the budget, decreasing the fund balance to approximately \$2.8 million.

By 2025, financial conditions had tightened further. With the expiration of “hold harmless” protections and continued increases in operating costs, the district used approximately \$1.2 million to balance the budget, reducing the fund balance to approximately \$1.6 million. Dr. Ferrell noted that auditors have cautioned the Board in recent years about this declining trend. While many districts are experiencing similar challenges, he emphasized concern about the district’s current financial position and the need for proactive planning.

Dr. Ferrell also outlined cost-saving measures already implemented across the district, including:

- Increased transportation efficiency through implementation of TIMS
- Reduction of 10 Exceptional Children positions
- Reduction of 2.5 program enhancement positions
- Elimination of 9 central office positions
- Reductions at the school level, including administrators, teachers, and support staff

Despite these efforts, he explained that the district continues to face financial challenges, including an additional \$705,000 reduction in state funding for the upcoming school year.

Dr. Ferrell presented findings from 2024 facility study conducted by Jim Watson, noting that the district has lost approximately 1,100 students over the past 10 years and that school capacity exceeds enrollment. He stated that Ellerbe Middle School has the smallest enrollment among the district’s middle schools. The district spends approximately \$1,700 more per student at Ellerbe Middle School than any other middle school in the district totaling an estimated \$330,000 annually due to declining enrollment.

He explained that closing Ellerbe Middle School and redistributing students could result in estimated annual savings of approximately \$1.6 million in staffing and operational costs, along with additional long-term savings by avoiding future capital facility expenses, and other site based contracts.

Dr. Ferrell also noted potential costs associated with such a decision, including one-time expenses such as student relocation, redistricting, building closure preparation, and moving costs, as well as an estimated \$40,000 annual increase in transportation costs.

He concluded by requesting that the Board authorize a formal study to:

- Conduct a full financial analysis
- Review academic programming and student opportunities
- Evaluate redistricting scenarios
- Identify transition costs and timelines

He stated that the study would provide accurate and comprehensive data to guide the Board’s decision-making process.

- ? Q (Ronald Tillman): How will community in Ellerbe be informed of the process to ensure full transparency if Ellerbe Middle School were to close?

A (Eva DuBuisson): State law requires both a formal study and a public hearing prior to any closure decision. The study would likely be completed first, followed by public meetings within the affected community to ensure transparency and input.

Several Board members shared concerns about extended bus ride times for students. Dr. Ferrell noted that transportation logistics, including travel time and routing, will be included in the study.

? Q (Bess Shuler): Could the study also consider redistricting at the elementary level?

A (Dr. Ferrell): Yes, redistricting considerations could be incorporated into the study.

? Q (Scotty Baldwin): What is the cost of conducting the study?

A (Dr. Ferrell): The study will be conducted by district staff and will not require a fee.

Ronald Tillman made a motion to approve moving forward with a facility study for Ellerbe Middle School. The motion was seconded by Bess Shuler. The Board voted 4–2 in favor of the motion.

Voting in favor: Chairman Satterfield, Jerry Ethridge, Ronald Tillman, and Bess Shuler

Voting opposed: Bobbie Sue Ormsby, and Scotty Baldwin

Motion to Enter Closed Session

Chairman Satterfield, citing N.C. General Statute 143-318.11(a)(1) and (6), requested a motion to enter closed session to prevent the disclosure of confidential personnel records and to discuss personnel matters.

On a motion by Bobbie Sue Ormsby, seconded by Bess Shuler, the Board voted unanimously to enter closed session at 7:22 p.m.

The open session was recessed at 7:22 p.m. to enter closed session, with no further open session business conducted.